Finally Belonging

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**Finally Belonging**

by YodelingProspector

Summary

What happens when a brain-damaged Loki who's been abused and unwanted his whole life lands on Tony Stark's tower?

Notes
This is the first time I've posted a story on this site, although I've been lurking for a while.

I've been writing this story and posting it on Fanfiction.Net since 12/31/15, and it's been a large part of my life for the past year. It spiraled beyond what I ever imagined. The chapters get steadily longer (and better, in my opinion). The first 38 chapters should be posted pretty regularly, since they're already written and total to over 450,000 words.

This story takes place around a year and a half after Avengers and ignores Iron Man 3. The Chitauri attack still happened, but Loki had nothing to do with it. This first chapter takes place on October 3, 2013.

I hope you enjoy!
Nobody had ever really wanted Loki around. After all, he was a Frost Giant, a monster. But for some reason, Odin had rescued Loki as a baby when he'd defeated Laufey, Loki's father and leader of Jotunheim. Apparently, Loki could make a good bargaining chip.

So everyone in Asgard put up with the Jotun, if only barely. Not that they were particularly nice to him. Loki was never loved. Even Frigga had been turned away by the coldness of his Jotun skin, before he'd been disguised to look like an Asgardian. But everybody knew what he was underneath that fake skin, and they bullied him relentlessly for being a Jotun monster. They claimed the fake skin was so they didn't have to look at his ugly blue form.

So Loki grew up alongside the royal family but never considered a part of it. He spent most of his life trying to avoid people as much as possible. But somebody always found him and tormented him for something. For being a scrawny weakling (by Asgardian standards), for being a complete failure at fighting. If they ran out of new reasons to bully him, they always fell back to the fact he was a Frost Giant.

When his magic started to show up, naturally but unwanted, things got even worse. Magic was frowned upon in Asgard, and Loki didn't have a good grasp of his magic in the beginning. When he'd accidentally turn somebody's hair pink or blow up a vase or have three illusions of himself running around, he would be punished.

Loki had received countless beatings in his life- often for no reason whatsoever besides boredom or annoyance from whoever was beating him- and had apparently suffered one too many blows to the head. Although his body healed quicker than anyone in Asgard (most likely because of his hated magic), injuries to the brain were different. They stayed. People started voicing the idea that damage to his brain had made him weird, and even more of an idiot than they already thought he was.

Eventually, everybody grew tired of Loki. They doubted he'd make much of a bargaining chip in his state. So why put up with him anymore?

Most of Asgard would have been just fine locking him away in the dungeons or just killing him, but Thor had convinced them to dump him in Midgard, where Thor himself was a member of a group called The Avengers.

So Loki had been sent off to Midgard, and the last Asgard saw of him was him reveling joyfully, semimaniacally at the sight of Heimdall's dome and the rainbow-colored Bifrost.
need for his suit. Tony closes the holograms he was working on and exits the lab. As he climbs the stairs leading to the roof, he has no idea what to expect.

Still, once he gets on the roof, he's surprised at what he sees.

Tony stares at the unconscious man lying in front of him in shock. He is almost absurdly pale, which contrasts with his black hair reaching just past his shoulders. The man's dressed entirely in clothes that would have easily fit into a renaissance festival.

But Tony's attention is drawn to something else, something freaky. The man's injuries are literally healing before Tony's eyes. The minor ones like bruises fade quickly. The changes in the more severe injuries are almost imperceptible, but they are there. But they're obviously going to take more time.

How is this even possible? People can't just heal like that. Not even Thor can, and he was once worshiped as a freaking god. Who the heck is this guy? Is he a mutant or something?

To cap it all off, the man's lying in a freaking crater that undoubtedly formed from his fall. Geez. This guy seems indestructible. Unfortunately, his roof isn't. He's going to have to get it repaired soon.

Tony can't just leave him lying on the roof like this. Besides, the scientist in him wants to figure out how the man is healing like this.

He stoops down to pick the man up but is unable to do so. The guy weighs a ton. Sure he's taller than Tony, but his weight is totally disproportionate to his body. He calls the Iron Man suit to him and finds he's able to lift the man. He carries him back into his tower. Walking downstairs in the suit while carrying him is more difficult than he'd thought. He manages to do it without falling and deposits the man on the sofa in his living room.

Tony's currently assuming the man is a god, since he shares a lot of characteristics with Thor.

He tells Jarvis to keep watch over the man and inform him when he wakes. Then he goes down to his lab.

"Jarvis? Do you have the camera footage of this man landing on the roof?"

"Of course I do, sir. Would you like me to pull it up?" The AI replies, polite as always. He's actually politer than usual right now. Jarvis' snark seems to be off for now.

Upon Tony's assent, the AI pulls up a holographic screen showing the sky. Tony watches the video. Some kind of green hole shows up and the man falls out of it before colliding with his roof. He rewatches the clip several times.

He then sets Jarvis to researching similar occurrences. The only one the AI finds is New Mexico. A.K.A. Thor's first appearance on Earth. That means this man's almost definitely from Thor's magic fairyland.

After that he tinkers with an arc reactor.

"Your guest is awake, sir." Jarvis informs him. Tony checks the time. It's only been an hour and a half. He wouldn't have been surprised if his guest had remained unconscious all day. But considering the mysterious man's rate of healing was faster than even Thor's, he shouldn't really surprised.
Walking into the living room, it's quite clear his guest is awake. The man is sitting up, though he's hunched forwards slightly and rocking back and forth. His head is turned away from Tony, towards the backrest of the couch. Long, pale fingers fiddle with the Rubik's cube Tony had left on the coffee table.

The man lets out a giggle as he turns the sections of the colorful cube, which unnerves Tony greatly. He's assuming this man has never seen a Rubik's cube before, but still. Giggling about it? There's something unnerving about the giggle itself too- it just sounds odd.

The man turns his head when he hears Tony coming, and Tony stops dead in his tracks. The man's eyes are a startling green, but what really catches Tony's attention is that they seem to be looking into thin air. They eventually focus on Tony- not on his face, but on his hands, as if the man expects Tony to lash out at him. Something about the man's eyes is just unsettling. They're just a tiny bit too wide and they look at him with a mix between wariness and curiosity as Tony sits down in a chair facing him.

"What's this?" The man says, gesturing with the cube. His voice sounds British and far too innocent for a grown man's.

"It's a Rubik's cube. You're supposed to get all the sides to be one color." The man cocks his head at an angle, and Tony elaborates. "So one side is all white, one's all blue, one's all green and so on."

"I like it. It's fun." The man giggles again and wriggles around in a way that reminds Tony of a puppy. Tony thinks *Something is wrong with this man*

"You had quite a fall," Tony says, not really knowing where to start. He'd felt a lot more comfortable with this conversation before, but now he's pretty sure something's up with this guy's mind.

Looking away, the man just shrugs, as if to say "It wasn't too bad." A beat passes, and Tony asks "How do your injuries heal so quickly?" The man looks blankly at him. Tony sighs. Maybe he didn't know. That would make two of them.

But then the man speaks again, in his soft voice. "In...jur...ees?" It was clear he's never heard the word *injuries* before. He sounds just like a little kid testing out a new word.

"Yeah. It's when you get hurt, like a cut or broken bones..." Tony's never really thought about how to explain a word like injuries. Jarvis then proceeds to rattle off the dictionary definition of *injury*.

The man nods. "Oh. That. I've had injuries before. They just go away."

"But how?" Tony asks. The man seems unwilling to answer, however. Tony sighs and moves on.

Tony notices the man doesn't look too perturbed by Jarvis' disembodied voice. Most people seem a little unsettled by it the first time they hear it. Tony wonders if he hears disembodied voices a lot. There's no way of knowing without asking.

Tony's probably the only person who would just blatantly ask such a thing. But the man just shakes his head. "Nope. Nope, nope, nope. I don't. Why? Do you?" The man asks it as if there's nothing wrong with hearing voices.

"Um, no." Is what Tony can think of at the moment. This conversation is getting very weird, admittedly because of him, and he tries to make it slightly normal.
"What's your name?" To be honest, he probably should have asked that earlier. Politeness, and all that. Plus he'll be able to stop thinking of this guy as The Man.

"Loki!" The man- Loki apparently- chirps brightly, clapping his hands.

"Loki...?" Tony prompts, waiting for a last name. Loki doesn't give one, and Tony sighs and moves on.

"So are you from Asgard?" Tony asks, trying to seem casual.

Loki nods and asks "This isn't Asgard?" His face lightens when Tony says it's not Asgard. Clearly, Loki's not too fond of the place. Why not? Wouldn't he want to be with all his fellow alien gods?

"Don't send me back! I can't go back!" Loki fearfully pleads, picking up the Rubik's cube again and fiddling with it, randomly twisting sections. Tony sits there, having no clue what to do. He's never been good with comforting people.

Tony wishes Pepper were here- he's not particularly good with people in general, let alone conversations like this.

He realizes that she could be here. He steps far enough away for some privacy but judging from the slightly glazed look of Loki's eyes, he's checked out and his mind is elsewhere.

So Loki is a god. Tony wonders what he's the god of. Weirdness? Maniacs?

Or maybe he's just crazy, he think as Loki giggles again for no apparent reason.

As he waits for Pepper to pick up, he glances back at the god. Loki is looking in his direction, but they aren't focused on Tony. He's not even looking at the Rubik's cube he's twisting in his hands.

"Hey, Pep," He says, turning away once Pepper answers the phone. "Can you come over and help me?" Much to his relief, Pepper agrees to. She doesn't even ask what he needs help with. He doesn't know how he'd answer. Oh, yeah. I have a man in here claiming he's from Asgard but he seems terrified of it. He's probably a god. He randomly fell onto my roof and I'm wondering if his elevator goes all the way to the top floor. That's not exactly something that sounds sane over the phone. Or in real life, but at least here she'd see Loki.

He hadn't noticed Loki walk up behind him, but now he's looming behind him- though not in a remotely threatening way. The man's eerily light on his feet. He slips something into Tony's free hand.

Tony looks down. It's the Rubik's cube- and it's solved.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone knows Russian, the first two chapters of this story were translated by Cat Leyran and can be read here
https://ficbook.net/readfic/4449774

Also, huge thanks to RenneMichaels for the awesome fan art!
https://archiveofourown.org/works/9603392
And Nessaiya

http://archiveofourown.org/works/10224191
Chapter 2

Tony stares at the cube in his hands. Loki had solved it in less than a minute. Most people couldn't do that, let alone on their first try.

He looks at Loki, who had wandered into the kitchen and is currently playing with a can opener. Either this guy has some sort of splinter skill with Rubik's Cubes or he's a lot brighter than he appears at the surface.

Being totally entranced by a can opener doesn't exactly portray the picture of intelligence, however. Loki has the thing up close to his face and is turning the crank and watching the sharp wheels that cut the cans spin. A strange smile is on his lips. He opens and closes the can opener multiple times as Tony watches.

Suddenly, Loki goes and sits on the countertop. His legs are long enough that he doesn't even really have to jump up. He still clutches the can opener, but is now turning the crank absentmindedly as he just stares at Tony with his wide green eyes.

Tony stares back at Loki as he goes into the kitchen so they're not staring at each other from different rooms.

"So, how did you solve this?" Tony asks, holding up the Rubik's Cube before adding, partially joking "You didn't peel the stickers off, did you?"

Loki looks at him blankly. "Stickers?"

Tony shakes his head. "Never mind." He looks back down at the cube. One of the corner green squares is still slightly crooked, just like it's always been. So Loki hadn't just peeled the stickers off and rearranged them.

The god doesn't seem to realize that Tony had implied that he could have cheated. Or maybe he did realize and just doesn't care? Anyways, he eventually answers Tony's question.

"I don't know. I just made all the sides one color like you said. It's fun!" Loki says happily, getting down from the countertop and bouncing on his toes, letting half of the can opener swing on its hinge as he clutches the other. Tony sighs. Sure he could describe the math behind how the cube is solved, but most people probably don't realize how they solve it. Still, Loki had done it quickly on his first time, without any hints or guides. It's pretty impressive, and Tony doesn't say that about many people.

At first, Tony had thought of Loki as a broken machine that didn't quite work. But if the Rubik's Cube is anything to judge by, Loki is more like a machine that works in a very different way, such a vastly different way that he appears not to work at first. Being the scientist that he is, Tony wants to figure out how.

"Sir, Miss Potts is at the door. Should I let her in?" Jarvis interrupts.

"Yes." Tony says as he heads towards the door to greet her. "Thanks Jarv."

"My pleasure, sir." The AI responds with a touch of snark as the elevator door slides open.

Emerging from the interior of the elevator is the tall reddish-blond woman who Tony admires so much. Pepper Potts. She and Tony had even been lovers once, but their relationship had eventually
turned sour and ended around half a year ago. The two have maintained a strong friendship, despite that. Tony's grateful to have her in his life, both as a friend and as the CEO of Stark Industries. She runs it far better than he ever could.

"Hey, Pep." He says. Letting her in, he offers her drinks. She declines and he pours himself a glass of scotch. He notices Loki is nowhere to be seen, having wandered off somewhere. He assumes Jarvis is keeping an eye on the god and decides to let him stay wherever he is. He still needs to fill Pepper in on what happened and it would be rude to talk about Loki in front of him.

"So, what did you call me here about?" Pepper asks. "Something work-related or personal?"

"Personal. And it might sound crazy at first. Just hear me out." Tony says, taking another swig of alcohol.

It takes him a couple minutes to explain everything. When he's done, Pepper asks "So he's a god?"

"I think so. He shares a lot of characteristics with Thor. He seems indestructible, and he weighs a ton."

"Okay." Pepper says, nodding slowly. "And you say he's... odd? How so?"

Tony sighs. How should he describe it? "I'll just let you two meet. I'll be back in a bit." He says before getting up.

"Jarvis, where's Loki?" He asks once he's out of the room. Hopefully Jarvis has prevented him from going somewhere he shouldn't.

"He is currently in your bedroom, sir." Jarvis responds, somehow sounding amused. So much for not going places he shouldn't.

"He is currently in your bedroom, sir." Jarvis responds, somehow sounding amused. So much for not going places he shouldn't.

"Why did you let him in there?" Tony asks, annoyed, once he gets over the initial shock.

"You left the door open, sir. Besides, I was unaware your bedroom is a private location. You have had many people in there. In fact, you have had exactly-"

"This isn't like that! People don't just randomly tour other people's bedrooms." Tony interrupts. "Now shut up, Jarvis."

"I had already shut up when you interrupted, sir." Jarvis quips, before wisely remaining silent as Tony growls under his breath.

He enters the bedroom and blinks at the sight. Loki is lying on the bed, his long hair splayed out around his head. His legs are straight up, resting against the wall and he's still holding the can opener.

"What are you doing on my bed? I wasn't aware we were at that point yet." Tony jokes. Loki seems to suddenly notice he's not alone. He blinks at Tony and says "It's yours?"

"Yes, it's mine. So get off." Tony replies, though he's surprised that his voice sounds gentler than usual. Loki nods and proceeds to just roll of the bed and fall to the floor, lying there instead and staring up at Tony.

"At what point?" Loki asks innocently from the floor, and it takes Tony a second to remember what he'd said. Wow. Loki must have even less experience with romance than Steve "Still-a-Virgin" Rogers, and that's saying something.
"Come on. Get up. I have someone for you to meet." He says, trying to pull Loki to his feet. Of course, Loki's far too heavy. Fortunately, he gets up by himself but then just stands there, looking down towards Tony.

"That's keeping you alive." Loki suddenly says in a dreamy voice, staring and pointing at the glow from Tony's arc reactor. The soft blue-white light reflects off the god's green eyes in an ethereal way.

Tony stares at him in shock. How the hell did he know that? He asks, but the god just says "I felt it. It told me that's what it's doing."

"You heard it speak?" Tony asks warily. No doubt about it. This man is definitely crazy. But Loki's looking at him as if he's the crazy one.

"No. It didn't talk." Loki replies, smiling at Tony in a "You're bonkers, but I'll pretend you're not" kind of way. "But if it could, that's what it woulda said." He nods, as if agreeing with himself and twirls the can opener around in his hands.

"Okay." Tony replies, deciding not to point out that saying it told him something indicates it talked to him. He really wants to know how that happened. "Well, there's someone for you to meet, remember?" He turns to leave, but Loki is just standing there watching, giving no indication he's going to follow.

Sighing, he grabs Loki's wrist and leads him out. Loki follows willingly, his eyes staring unfocused and a small smile on his lips.

"Sorry that took so long, Pep." Tony says, leading the god into the living room. "Loki, this is my friend, Pepper Potts. Pepper, this is Loki."

Loki flashes a million-dollar smile at Pepper and bows, leaving Tony to wonder why Asgardians seem so big on bowing. Not that Tony's met any Asgardians besides Thor and now Loki.

Then Loki giggles and says "That's a funny name," which kind of throws the politeness of bowing out the window.

Pepper doesn't say anything and doesn't seem annoyed about Loki's (most likely accidental) rudeness. She just looks at Loki for a bit, curiously. Tony figures she's evaluating what he'd said about Loki being odd.

Loki certainly looks odd. His hair is sticking out in random directions (thanks to Tony's bed) making his wide, wild-eyed look seem even more crazy. Not to mention he's clutching a can opener and bouncing on his toes.

"My real name is Virginia." Pepper tells Loki softly. If she's at all uncomfortable around him, she doesn't show it. Loki nods and perches on the armrest of the sofa, bouncing up and down and swinging the can opener.

"I'm Loki!" He introduces himself, somewhat unnecessarily seeing as Tony had just done it.

"I know. Tony just told me." Pepper says, smiling.

Loki stops bouncing and asks "Tony?"

Tony suddenly realizes he never told Loki his name, so he quickly says "That's me." Loki simply stares at him and Tony grins, a bit uneasily.
Suddenly grinning, Loki nods and singsongs "Tony! Tony, Tony, Tony Tony Tony..." He does his puppy-like wriggle and flicks his fingers a bit. Tony's too busy exchanging a look with Pepper, but he sees a green flash in the corner of his eye.

Sighing, Tony goes and leads Loki over to a seat on the sofa and then plops down on the space between Pepper and Loki. He hands Loki the Rubik's Cube from the coffee table, because it's still kind of strange seeing him fiddle with a can opener.

"I already did it! I made each side a color like you said." Loki says, handing the cube back to Tony. Tony scrambles the cube up and hands it back to the god, while gently taking the can opener from his hands and putting it on the coffee table.

"Think you can do it again?" Tony asks. The god nods and snatches the cube from him. He bounces in his seat on the couch as he solves it, his long hair getting even more wild as he moves.

This time around, Tony watches how Loki solves the cube. Instead of making each side one color at first, he makes the center square of each side a different color from the surrounding eight squares and then proceeds to make the centers the right color. It's a bizarre way of doing it, but it seems to work for Loki because he finishes in half a minute, tops.

"Done!" Loki practically squeals, handing the cube back to Tony before bouncing out of his seat and grabbing the can opener again.

"So, Loki, Tony tells me you're from Asgard." Pepper says.

"I wasn't born there." Loki announces, before looking as if he's said something wrong. Tony has no idea what would be wrong with not being born in Asgard, but Loki apparently doesn't want to elaborate, despite Tony's prompting.

"So, Loki, how old are you? You Asgardians live for a while, right?" Pepper asks, changing the subject once Tony's efforts at the other subject prove futile.

Loki cocks his head, thinking. "One thousand-something. No. Two thousand? I forget." Tony supposes forgetting isn't too odd. After that many birthdays, it would be easy to lose track. Do they even celebrate birthdays on Asgard?

"So you're a god, right? Like Point Break?" Tony asks. He doesn't think Loki's been mentioned in any Norse myths, which he'd only read when Thor had shown up. But just because he's not mentioned doesn't mean he isn't one.

Loki had gotten up and was wandering over to the bookshelf but he stops. "I dunno. I think so?" He shrugs, and then asks "Who's Point Break? That's a funny name!" He lets out a semi-maniacal sounding laugh.

"It's a nickname for Thor. You know, big guy with blonde hair and a hammer he carries around?" Tony says. To his surprise, Loki looks terrified. Then his brow furrows, upset, while the rest of his face still looks frightened. "Don't send me back!" He says, panicked.

"Why don't you want to go back?" Tony asks him. Loki had clammed up about this before, so he's not expecting a reply.

Loki practically shrieks something but Tony can't tell if it's "Thor hates me" or "Thor hits me!"

Judging from Loki's reaction, though, it could be either.
"Thor, like the Thunder God?" Tony asks in disbelief. That really doesn't sound like his fellow Avenger at all. He's certainly going to be asking the god about it the next time he sees it.

Loki just nods his head as his face crumples. Pepper's face softens and she goes over and wraps her arms around him. He leans into the embrace in a way identical to a small child, despite his height.

The embrace seems to open him up. "They never wanted me." He says in a strangled voice. "They just kept me around cause they had'ta. They hurt me and got rid of me as soon as they could."

Pepper just stands there, rubbing Loki's back as she hugs him. Her face is somewhere between sympathy and anger, presumably at whoever treated him horribly.

"Please don't send me back, okay?" Loki sniffles. How can a grown man sound that innocent, like a lost child? It's really not fair, how he's just automatically tugging on heartstrings right now without even trying.

Tony knows exactly what it's like to be unwanted and unloved. His own father, Howard, had made sure of that. He can't help feeling a wave of empathy for the god.

Tony guesses it's going to take a while to figure Loki out. Sometimes he seems like a child, sometimes a harmlessly crazy man. But there's what Tony's guessing is a razor-sharp intellect disguised under the baffling surface. He wonders exactly how strong that intellect is.

At that moment, Tony makes a decision. Without a second thought, he decides to let Loki into his life. What else should he do? He wouldn't send him back to Asgard if he could, and it doesn't feel right to dump him at a hospital or a homeless shelter or something. The guy may be odd, but he's grown on Tony a lot in the hour or so he's been awake. Tony's shocked to realize how much Loki's grown on him in such a short time, especially since he'd been slightly uneasy around him less than half an hour ago. Normally people don't have such an immediate effect on him.

Tony and Pepper exchange a glance, and he can tell Pepper knows what he's thinking. The look she gives him is asking if he's sure, and reminding him that he often doesn't even take care of himself.

But Tony's mind is set. He has way more than enough money and room to house another person. As for taking care of Loki, he's not even sure the god needs to be taken care of or if he's capable of looking after himself. But it doesn't matter. If he's not, Tony has Dum-E and Jarvis to help.

Decision made, he turns to Loki. "Well, Loki, welcome to my humble abode." Not that it's really humble, but whatever.

He's completely caught off guard when the god, grinning a mile wide, throws his arms around him and crushes him into a hug.
Loki’s probably the happiest he’s ever been in his life as he throws his arms around Tony.

He doesn't know where he is, but it's not Asgard. Though it's a city, like Asgard, but the buildings here aren't gold. He can see a pretty amazing view of it out the window. Wherever he is, it's a lot better than Asgard.

Or, rather, Tony and Pepper are a lot nicer than anyone on Asgard ever was to him. Neither of them have tormented him for being a frost giant or for his magic. He has no clue why, though. After all, being a frost giant and doing magic are both bad, which mean's he's bad. So why aren't they tormenting him like everyone else?

He's already slipped up once with his magic- he's still far from perfect at keeping it hidden, which has resulted in countless beatings- but it hadn't been more than just a little green smoke around his fingers when he flicked them.

Fortunately, Tony and Pepper didn't seem to notice. Maybe they don't know about it? He tells himself he has to try extra hard to hide his magic from them. Otherwise they might find out and then they won't like him. He hopes that doesn't happen, ever, but he knows it probably will. He never wants to lose this nice feeling he has right now. That someone might actually do more than barely tolerate his presence while belittling and tormenting him at every opportunity. That someone might actually care about him, unlike anyone in Asgard.

Pepper gives really good hugs, he thinks. He doesn't remember anyone ever comforting him like that in Asgard. Normally they'd just make fun of him more. Really, the only time anyone ever touched him was when they were hitting him or kicking him or throwing him to the ground or into walls... He freezes, and then shakes his head furiously, trying to get the memories out of his head. He almost hits Tony in the face with his long hair, but Tony leans far enough away that he misses. The man looks more amused than upset, which is really odd.

Tony isn't as good with hugs as Pepper, though. Right now, he's awkwardly hugging Loki back. But it doesn't matter if he's good with hugs or not- though maybe he's secretly good and just holding back, Loki thinks.

Tony had just welcomed Loki into his home, which meant maybe he could stay here. The thought is too good to be true, and Loki can't help but worry that maybe he'd misunderstood the man and he really isn't getting a new home.

"I can live here? You're not sending me back to Asgard?" He finally asks Tony, needing to know if it's true. He can hear the hopefulness in his own voice.

"I wouldn't send you back to that magic viking land if I could. And, yes, you can live here. As long as you don't blow the tower up with lightning or anything."

Loki smiles. He doesn't have to worry about that. What a ridiculous thought! He's not Thor; he can't control lightning.

Maybe he'll get to live with Tony forever! A joyful laugh leaves his throat at this thought, and he rolls his head back ecstatically without even thinking about it.
Suddenly, his hug with Tony is over. Tony has stepped out of it. The man's looking at him strangely, as if he's strange. Tony's given him that look a couple times but it makes sense. He is strange. He's been told that- and worse- his whole life.

He wonders if Tony already knows he's a Jotun. He stares at the man's face, trying to figure out his thoughts, absentmindedly fiddling with the... thing in his hands. Not the colorful twisty cube thing- what had Tony called that? A Roo bix cube?- but the thing with the handles and the crank. Turning the crank on that thing is fun, and it keeps his hands busy.

"How do you know Thor?" Loki asks, staring at Tony curiously. This wasn't Asgard, so it's not like Thor was their prince or anything. Though Thor was known outside of Asgard.

"He's a friend," Tony says, and Loki's mind suddenly panics. He dives back on the couch and fiddles with the thing in his hands anxiously. No. Friends of Thor's were sometimes worse than Thor himself. The Warriors Three delighted in tormenting Loki at every opportunity. Lady Sif did too, though to a slightly lesser extent.

But Tony and Pepper haven't been like that, he reminds himself, and he relaxes slightly.

His mind is mostly consumed with his own thoughts, but it vaguely registers that Tony is still talking, and he catches the word avengers.

"Avengers? What?" He sits up on the couch and tries to piece together what he missed, but it's impossible with just one word.

"The Avengers. You know, Earth's mightiest heroes." Tony is saying. Loki nods. He's heard Thor mention the Avengers- most of Asgard knows of them. Thor's apparently part of them and he's told loud, long winded tales during many dinners (for reasons unknown to many Asgardians and Loki himself, Loki was allowed to eat at a lot of celebratory dinners in Asgard, though he was mostly shoved off to a corner and ignored during them. Or he was picked on, which was even worse). Loki's not entirely sure what the Avengers do aside from beat people up. From what Thor's told his friends, the Avengers don't sound too different from Thor's friends who torment Loki all the time.

"Thor's an Avenger?" When Loki says it, it comes out sounding like a question even though he knows it's true.

"Yeah. So am I. I'm Iron Man." Tony replies.

"You're the Man of Iron?" Loki's mind freezes for a second and he stands, wringing his hands anxiously. No. Tony can't be an Avenger. Avengers beat up bad guys and monsters. Loki's a frost giant, automatically labeling him as both. Plus he has magic, making things even worse.

Surely Tony, being both a friend of Thor and an Avenger, will hate him when he finds out what Loki is. And Loki knows all too well that being hated always leads to pain.

How have things gone from being wonderful to being horrible so quickly?

Panicking, he turns and flees the room.

Tony stands there, utterly confused. One minute, Loki had been hugging him like he was his favorite person in the world (which had been rather awkward) and the next, Loki had seemed terrified of him and ran out of the room.

Loki's reaction probably had something to do with their talk about Avengers, but what would make
him react like that?

He looks over at Pepper, hoping she'll take care of this. But she just gives him a flat look and says "Anthony Stark, he's going to be living in your tower, so don't look at me. Go figure it out yourself."

She's right, but Tony's not going to admit that to anyone but himself. Sighing, Tony turns and follows the god. Where did he go now?

"Jarvis, where's Loki?" He asks for the second time that day.

"He's in your bedroom again, sir." Jarvis sounds even more amused than he did the first time. It's like deja vu from earlier today.

Letting out an annoyed huff, Tony enters his room, expecting to see Loki splayed out on his bed again. Only he doesn't see the god anywhere.

"Uh, Jarvis? Are you sure your cameras aren't malfunctioning or something?" He asks. Before Jarvis responds, he hears a shuffling sound. He's not entirely sure where it came from, and he pauses, hoping to hear it again.

"I'd check under the bed if I were you, sir." Jarvis says. Tony squats down and lifts the cloth covering the gap between his bed and the floor. Sure enough a figure is huddled there in the shadows. It's never even occurred to Tony that there's enough space for someone to hide under there until now.

"Hey, do you want to come out of there? Or are you going to try to scare me after I go to sleep?" Tony's surprised when Loki's only response to this is scooting so he's in the middle of the space under the bed. Now Tony can't see him without putting his head to the floor.

Well, that answers the question about wanting to come out from underneath the bed. Tony sighs. Why had he signed up for this again?

"I'm not a monster..." Loki says softly, though he sounds unconvinced as though he doesn't believe it himself. It takes Tony a second to realize this is actually a response to his statement instead of a random remark.

This conversation is already out of Tony's comfort zone, but he feels like he has to do something. He supposes he should start with actually being able to see the god properly, and Loki's obviously not going to come out and join him. He can't believe he's doing it, but he gets down and army crawls so his torso is under the bed. The blue-white light of his arc reactor acts as a flashlight once he props himself up on his elbows, making everything appear slightly blue.

"I've met my share of monsters, Loki. I've only known you for about an hour, and you don't seem like one to me." Tony tells the god.

Loki looks at his hands, and for a brief second a look of horror spreads on his face. But then he seems to realize the light from Tony's arc reactor and he relaxes. Still, Tony files that information away for later. Loki seems to have something against blue hands, though he can't fathom why.

"What's wrong?" Tony asks "One minute it seemed like you couldn't be happier and then you looked like you'd seen a ghost."

Loki looks at him for the first time since he joined the god under the bed and asks "Are you going to hurt me?"
"Wasn't planning on it." Tony replies, taken aback for a second. "Why would I hurt you? Sure, it's a little annoying that you keep going in my bedroom, but why would that mean I'd hurt you?"

"The Avengers beat up people they don't like." Loki says, and it suddenly clicks in Tony's mind that Loki thinks the Avengers are going to hurt him. Though he has no idea why Loki thinks that. He's pretty sure it's not about going into his bedroom though.

"Have you committed any crimes recently?" Tony asks teasingly "Have you gone on a killing spree or tried to take over the world?" Loki just looks at him seriously and shakes his head.

"Then you have nothing to worry about." After a bit, Tony asks "Does Thor talk about the Avengers fighting people a lot?" Loki nods, and Tony rolls his eyes. Figures Loki would think that's all the Avengers did if that's all Thor ever talked about.

"Well, our main goal is to save people, not to beat the crap out of them for no reason." Tony tells him. Loki's eyes are reflecting the arc reactor light, but they don't look quite as scared as they did a couple minutes ago, and he's uncurled himself slightly.

"What are they like?" Loki asks quietly, obviously referring to the other Avengers. Tony hesitates briefly, but what's the harm, really. Most of the world knows about the Avengers.

"Well, first there's the Capsicle. Though he's officially known as Steve Rogers, or Captain America..." Tony begins.

For the next fifteen minutes, he describes each of the Avengers to Loki- though only telling him what the general public knows about them- often going off to tell a random story. It feels sort of weird doing it under a bed by the glow of his arc reactor, though it's not really a bad weird.

Loki's almost completely relaxed by the end. He seems pretty happy actually, and he's asking questions instead of just listening silently like he had in the beginning. He seems quite taken with the idea of the Avengers now, but he keeps asking for clarification that they save people instead of hurt them.

"...And then there's Thor." Tony says, before he can stop himself. Great, he thinks as Loki stiffens at the name.

"I don't like Thor!" Loki exclaims. "He's mean and he hates me."

Tony frowns. There it is again. Something's clearly up between Thor and Loki. When Loki describes Thor, he makes the thunderer sound like a different person than the one Tony knows.

"Why does he hate you?" Tony asks.

"Because I'm a fr-" Loki clamps a hand over his mouth as if he was about to say something horrible and he looks at Tony with worried eyes. Tony stores this away in his mind with Loki's reaction the the blue tint on his hands.

Hoping they didn't just go back to square one, Tony doesn't say anything so he won't accidentally make it worse.

"Promise you won't hurt me?" Loki asks suddenly. Tony rolls his eyes and said "Loki, we've been over this. I'm not going to hurt you unless you try to take over the world or something. The other Avengers won't either."

"Thor will." Loki whispers so softly that Tony almost doesn't hear it. He's definitely going to be
having a long talk with the God of Thunder the next time they meet.

"Thor's not here," is the first thing Tony thinks of. Then he adds "And I wouldn't let him if he was." Loki doesn't say anything, but he visibly relaxes. About three seconds of silence pass, and Tony says "Hey, it's getting late. Are you hungry?" Loki nods, and much to Tony's relief, slides out from under his bed. Finally.

Loki seems back to his usual self again, almost as if nothing had happened. Tony shakes his head, nonplussed. Honestly, Loki could easily be the god of mood swings or something. In an hour, he'd gone from normal (or as normal as he ever was) to crying to overexcited to terrified, and now seemed relatively calm.

Tony leaves his bedroom and starts to say something, only to realize that Pepper is nowhere to be seen. Maybe she's in the bathroom or something.

"Sir, I thought you'd like to know that Miss Potts left to pick up hamburgers for everyone while you were occupied." Jarvis tells Tony, who silently thanks Pepper for thinking of that. Again, Tony notices that Loki looks completely unfazed by the disembodied voice of the AI.

"Thanks, Jarvis." Tony says. Loki cocks his head to the side with a questioning look on his face. Before he can ask, Tony starts to answer.

"Jarvis is my AI creation." Tony says, though Loki just looks even more confused now. "AI means Artificial Intelligence" doesn't seem to help either, and when he explains Artificial Intelligence, Loki doesn't respond. Sighing, Tony ends up saying. "Never mind. He's Jarvis. You don't really need to know what he is."

"That introduction was truly heartwarming." Jarvis says sarcastically.

"Oh, shut up. You don't have a heart." Tony retorts, and Loki giggles. Tony continues "Anyways, Jarvis, this is Loki. Loki, meet Jarvis."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, sir." Jarvis tells Loki, back in his polite mode.

To Tony's surprise, Loki just turns to him and says "I thought you already knew each other." This is another time Loki's totally confused Tony. Tony's already lost count of how many times that's happened.

"He was talking to you." Tony tells Loki.

Loki looks confused but nods. "Why'd he call me that? It's what he calls you."

"Because I've been programmed to be polite." Jarvis inputs.

Loki shakes his head. "I don't like it. I don't know who you're talking to. Just call me by my name. Loki" There's a silence, and Tony knows Jarvis is looking at him, probably wondering if he should do as Loki says or stick to being polite. Jarvis never calls people by their first names. Tony shrugs. It's Loki's choice, really.

"How about Mr. Loki?" Jarvis asks, and Loki nods, uncertainly at first but then enthusiastically, bouncing on his toes.

In order to keep Loki from wandering off while waiting for Pepper to return, Tony picks up the Rubik's Cube again. He twists it twenty times, hiding it from Loki's view.
When he turns back, Loki is lying down on the backrest of his sofa, like a certain beagle on his doghouse. Tony sighs. Why can't Loki use furniture normally, instead of perching on armrests and lying on backrests? "Hey, Snoopy, that's not how you use a sofa." Tony says, gently pulling him off and repositioning him. The nickname just rolls off his tongue because of the position Loki's in, but he likes it for the god. Both Snoopy and Loki are very unique.

Tony hands him the Rubik's Cube, asking if he can solve it in twenty moves. Loki nods, but then he stares off into the distance with a vacant look on his face. Just when Tony's about to say something, Loki nods to himself and twists the cube insanely fast. After twenty twists, he tries to hand the finished cube to Tony, but Tony doesn't take it. He doesn't like being handed things, and the only reason Loki had gotten away with it the first time is he'd taken Tony by surprise.

"Dang, you're good at this, Snoopy." Tony says, picking up the cube. Surprisingly, Loki doesn't object to Tony's nickname for him, and Tony's compliment puts a huge grin on his face. Tony guesses that, like him, Loki didn't receive many compliments from his family.

They keep doing this until Pepper comes back five minutes later. Tony leads Loki to the table and seats him in a chair. Pepper pulls out some hamburgers and hands one to Loki. Loki's apparently never had one before, and he looks at it skeptically. He watches Tony take a large bite out of his own cheeseburger. Loki giggles slightly and cautiously puts his own in his mouth. But judging from the happy sound and wriggle he makes during his first bite and the way he's devouring it without talking, it seems to be a hit with the god.

Tony pours himself a beer. He offers Loki one, which earns him a disapproving look from Pepper. But from what he's heard, they drink a lot in Asgard, and Loki's over a thousand years old, so he's almost certainly had it sometime. Admittedly, he often seems like a child, so maybe it's not a good idea.

Loki shrugs. "I've had that kind of stuff, but it's gross." Tony looks at him in mock horror. How could anyone say that about alcohol?

Oh well. That means there's more for him.

Loki ends up just drinking water, after Tony's attempt at introducing him to soda. he nearly spewed it out across the table with a disgusted look on his face.

Pepper leaves after dinner, and Tony asks Loki if he wants to watch a movie. It's what Tony does basically every night he doesn't hook up with someone. Loki looks at him blankly and asks "What's a movie?"

"Okay, we're having a movie night." Tony decides, interrupting Jarvis, who is providing the definition of a movie. "You can't go through live without movies." Tony says. Okay, well, he couldn't anyways. Loki had already gone thousands of years without them, but that's about to change.

Fifteen minutes into some random sci-fi action movie, it's clear that Loki's bored out of his mind. He's wandered off twice already. Action movies probably aren't his cup of tea, then.

Tony stops that and scans his humongous DVD collection. Finally, he spots something that could catch Loki's interest. He slips The Lion King into his DVD player.

Loki is transfixed from the beginning of the Circle of Life song. Compared to Loki's complete apathy about the first movie (after he'd gotten over his awe of the TV, that is) Loki's reactions to this movie seem almost over the top. He often laughs (and bounces in his seat) at things that aren't
meant to be funny, such as a random shot of a giraffe, but he laughs at the humorous parts too. Tony wonders if Loki would like musicals in general, as he seems extra excited during all the songs.

Loki gets almost too involved in the movie. Tony has to try to stifle his laughter when Loki starts yelling at Scar about how terrible he is after he kills Mufasa.

"So, what did you think, Snoopy?" Tony asks once the credits roll, already knowing Loki loved it. He looks over to find the god, who had been awake during the end of the movie, curled in a ball next to him, asleep.

Chapter End Notes

The Lion King is going to be fairly big in this.
Tony does some research. Jarvis and Loki bond.

Tony looks at the sleeping figure next to him. Loki had nodded off really quickly. He gently shakes the god, but apparently his sleep is deeper than he'd thought.

He can't possibly lift Loki without the aid of the Iron Man suit. He'd figured that out when the god had been unconscious earlier that day.

It doesn't seem worth it to call the Iron Man suit just to get Loki to bed. His sofa's comfortable enough to sleep on, at least. He's done it himself occasionally. Besides, how would Loki react if he happened to wake up when getting picked up by a metal suit he's never seen before?

So Tony goes and gets some blankets and pillows. He manages to place the pillows underneath Loki's head. Then, he drapes a blanket over Loki's body. Loki snuggles down with a small smile on his lips, and Tony denies that the corners of his own mouth have crept upward.

Once Tony's in his lab, Jarvis speaks. "That was really sweet," the AI says in what Tony interprets as a mocking tone, "perhaps I should post pictures on the internet."

"Don't you dare." Tony says, glaring at where he knows one of Jarvis' cameras is.

"Whatever you say, sir." Jarvis seems to sigh. "I suppose it would be a pity if the world found out about this side of you. Even if it would help your PR."

Tony simply flips Jarvis the finger as Jarvis asks "Should I keep an eye on Mr. Loki?"

"Do you need to ask? I thought I programmed you to be smarter than that." Tony answers, before adding "Now stop wasting both of our time."

Today's events have left him with a boat-load of questions and few answers. Right now, he intends to find some.

He takes a swig of scotch and opens up a holographic internet page. He goes to a database and taps in 'Norse mythology Loki.' Nothing comes up with the word "Loki" in it. He even runs a search through an electronic copy of the myths. Still nothing.

Figures. He hadn't remembered seeing the god mentioned in them back when he read them after meeting Thor. But that would've been almost too easy. His research on Norse myths when he met Thor hadn't been too thorough.

He realizes he's humming to himself. He hadn't noticed what he's humming, but now that he's paying attention, he identifies it as *Hakuna Matata*.

"Jarvis, switch on some music." The AI complies and Tony nods his head along to the AC/DC that's blasting out of his speakers. Hopefully that'll get his head to stop repeating "*Hakuna Matata, what a wonderful phrase*" over and over.
He scrolls through the myths floating in front of him and starts to read. He could just have Jarvis do it, as he would often do, but he wants to figure this out by himself.

He finds something about the nine worlds. He's heard Thor mention Asgard (obviously) and he recognizes Midgard as what Thor calls Earth. He only vaguely remembers the others. Loki said he wasn't born in Asgard, so maybe he's from one of the other worlds.

Drinking some more scotch, he opens a separate tab and just searches for summaries of the other worlds. He starts with Vanaheim, home of the Vanir. Not finding anything noteworthy, he moves on to the others.

Jotunheim catches his attention, because it's the home of the blue-skinned Frost Giants. That fits two of his observations about Loki- that he'd seemed terrified of his blue-tinted hand under the bed, and he said he was something that started with an Fr sound. Admittedly the Fr part could have been something entirely different- freaky, friendly, frat boy, maybe even afraid.

For a moment, Tony wonders if maybe Loki's from Jotunheim.

But the rest doesn't fit at all. Loki's tall, but he's no giant. Plus Loki doesn't have the blue, frigid skin that's described on the hologram in front of Tony. The Frost Giants, or Jotuns, are apparently enemies of Asgard, so perhaps Loki hated the blue glow on his skin because it reminded him of them.

Tony sighs. He has a feeling he's missing a few key pieces to the puzzle. He came down here for answers and he hasn't found any, which is really annoying. In fact, he has more questions now, and he hasn't even started trying to figure out a logical explanation for how Loki healed so quickly after falling hard enough to make a crater on his roof. It's not like it just magically happened.

"Jarvis, arrange to have the roof fixed sometime." Tony says. He'd been so preoccupied with Loki that he hadn't even thought of that until now.

After a couple minutes, Jarvis asks "Would the day after tomorrow be all right?"

"Sure," Tony replies offhandedly, not really caring. Running a hand through his hair, he switches off the hologram. Downing the remainder of the scotch, he goes to his room and gets into bed.

"Sir, you need to wake up."

Tony doesn't respond, hoping maybe this is a dream and he isn't awake. It's a very flimsy hope.

"I'm afraid you must get up immediately, sir." Jarvis' voice makes that hope fly right out of the window.

Tony rolls over and grumbles something into his pillow. Whatever ungodly hour it is, it's way too early to be up. Warily, he looks at the clock to see it's six in the morning.

"Director Fury says he needs to speak with you immediately." Jarvis tells him.

Tony groans. This can't be good, whatever it is. "Let's see what he has to say."

He's greeted by Fury's usual charm. "Stark, you need to get your ass to Pennsylvania immediately. Doom's sent a bunch of Doombots there."

Tony sighs. Why do maniacs bent on world domination always attack cities at the most annoying
times? Maybe they plan it as part of their evil schemes or something.

He throws on some clothes and leaves his bedroom. Then he sees Loki sleeping on the couch. Great. In his sleepy state, Tony had forgotten about the god until now. Well, guess that means Loki's going to be alone in his tower. He doesn't really have a choice in the matter.

He's glad he made it so Jarvis could operate in his suit and the tower simultaneously. At least this way someone will be able to keep an eye on the god. He's not sure what Loki would do if left to his own devices.

Once an Iron Man suit attaches around him, he fires up the repulsers and takes off. He has Jarvis do the actual flying, since he hasn't had any coffee yet. At least he's not in his Malibu house- the flight from there would take a lot longer.

After about half an hour, he arrives in Philadelphia to chaos. Doombots are running rampant, and Natasha and the Hulk are the only other Avengers there.

Figures. When he needs to talk to Thor, the thunderer isn't there.

Tony takes control of the suit just in time to roll out of the way of a blast coming his way. He has no need for coffee now. Nothing wakes you up quite like almost being shot out of the sky.

Loki isn't very happy to wake up. He'd been having a wonderful dream. A man named Tony had let him live in his tower, and had even promised to not let Thor hurt him anymore. If that wasn't good enough, both he and Pepper seemed to actually like him.

He wishes he could sleep forever so the dream would never end.

Reluctantly, he eventually opens his eyes and blinks in confusion. Even in the dim light, the ceiling looks different than normal. It's white. Usually it's not. He looks around and realizes he's on a couch, and a blanket is draped over him.

Looking around the room, he realizes it looks exactly like the place he'd been in in his dream. The rectangular thing he and Tony watched last night that showed other worlds is there, and the colorful cube and the other thing he fiddled with are on a low table by the couch.

Then he realizes it wasn't a dream. He lets out a shriek of joy, jumping up from the couch and bouncing ecstatically. It was all real! He really wasn't in Asgard anymore, and Tony and Pepper really did like him and Tony said he'd protect Loki from Thor. Tony could probably hold his own against Thor, too, since he was another Avenger.

For a minute, Loki just stands there, laughing. It's a completely involuntary release of emotion. Once he's paying attention to the world again, he notices another Loki standing beside him, grinning broadly.

It's not really another Loki. He knows that. As soon as something touches the other Loki, it will disappear. That's what always happened before, anyways.

That means he just did magic. No! Closing his eyes, he swipes a hand through the other Loki. When he opens his eyes, the other Loki is gone.

He'd decided to try extra hard to keep it hidden after that first screw up, and he's already messed up again. Yesterday, it had only been a bit of green smoke, but this is much worse. Everyone in Asgard said it was bad enough having one of him around, so he was always punished for making
more of himself.

This isn't Asgard, but Tony probably hates magic too.

But, to his relief, Tony's not anywhere to be seen. So he probably doesn't know. That's good. As long as he doesn't find out, everything should be fine.

Where is Tony, anyways? He goes to Tony's bedroom door, but it doesn't open.

"I'm afraid Mr. Stark has requested that you not go in there, Mr. Loki," A voice says. Loki cocks his head to the side. He knows that voice. He heard it yesterday, but it's not Tony's.

"...Jarvis...?" Yeah, that's it. "Who's Mr. Stark? Where's Tony?" Loki asks in rapid succession, more concerned about the second part. Did Tony just ditch him or something?

"Mr. Stark is a genius, billionaire, playboy and philanthropist." Jarvis says, and Loki frowns at all the new words. He doesn't think he ever ran across those words in Asgard.

"I believe you think of him as Tony, Mr. Loki, and currently he is out saving a city." Jarvis adds. Loki nods. Stark is a cool name. It's a lot better than Laufeyson.

Loki likes Jarvis, even though he only had a short conversation with him yesterday. Jarvis called him "Mr Loki." Originally he called him "sir," but that's what he called Tony. Besides, it sounded too weirdly formal and impersonal to Loki, so he didn't want to be called that. But Tony called him "Snoopy" and he had no idea why.

"What's a Snoopy?" He asks. Hopefully it's not something bad.

"One moment, Mr. Loki" Jarvis responds. After a couple seconds, he says "Snoopy is a fictitious beagle from the comic strip *Peanuts*, created by Charles M. Schultz." Loki wrinkles his brow in confusion. That explanation didn't really help at all.

"I've prepared breakfast for you in the kitchen," Jarvis says. Loki is pulled from his thoughts and he heads over to the room where he ate last night. Once he's there, Jarvis directs him to a weird metal box with two circular things sticking out of the slots on top.

He looks at the circular things curiously after pulling them out of the slots as Jarvis tells him to. The circular things have a grid of lines sticking out of them, so it looks like there are a bunch of little indented squares in them. Are these food?

Jarvis says they're called *waffles*, which is a really fun word to say. Loki singsongs it to himself for a bit, going faster and faster until it becomes a tongue twister and he messes up.

Giggling, he continues to follow Jarvis' instructions. He gets a jug of sticky stuff out of a big box that's cold on the inside. He carefully pours a bit into each square of the waffles and then forgoes looking for utensils. Instead he just picks one up and bites in. It's really sweet, and he instantly loves these waffle things. The food here has been really good so far.

"Jarvis, Tony said you're not real." He's been thinking about Tony's description of Jarvis from yesterday as he eats.

"If you are using 'real' to mean 'alive', then you would be correct." Jarvis responds, but Loki shakes his head. He's not finished yet.

"You seem real to me. Even though I can't see you. It's like you're hiding behind a wall or
something. But I don't hear you walking in the walls or anything. I can't smell you either. But you're here." He retreats to his thoughts for a couple minutes, staring at the air in front of him, and then asks "Are you just a voice?"

Before Jarvis can answer, the topic abruptly changes as he blurts out something else that's on his mind. "Are you my friend?"

"I am if you want me to be, Mr. Loki." Jarvis answers, and Loki rocks back excitedly, a huge grin spreading across his face.

"Are Tony and Pepper my friends too?" He asks excitedly, getting up and skipping around the table. Jarvis says they are, and Loki claps his hands gleefully. He always liked the idea of having friends.

But nobody's friends with a worthless Jotun monster. His face falls and he stops skipping. What will happen when they find out what he is? How long will it be before they catch him using magic?

The magic one is inevitable, especially since he's already screwed up twice. But maybe he can keep the Jotun part a secret. If Tony doesn't know about that yet, he probably won't find out unless Loki shows his true (and shameful) form.

Feeling marginally better, he goes out into the living room and picks up the colorful cube before lying down on the floor. After solving it twice, he twists the sections around aimlessly, and eventually just ends up pushing it around on the floor.

He starts humming one of the songs Simba sang in that thing last night. Jarvis asks him if he wants the song to be played, and he shrugs. Suddenly, the words "I'm gonna be a mighty king, so enemies beware..." blasts out of... somewhere. He's not sure where.

Loki looks over at the box thing the animals had been in last night, but they're not there. How odd. Maybe they became like Jarvis, and are now just voices in the walls. Loki's glad he's not just a voice in a wall. Actually that might have been nice in Asgard. You can't hurt something that's just a voice.

The song ends, and Jarvis asks if he'd like to hear it again. Loki nods and the song starts up again. Loki wiggles his feet in time with the music.

After the song ends and restarts again, he asks "Jarvis, what's Snoopy again?"

Instead of an answer, a clear picture is suddenly floating in front of him. Curiously, he puts his hand behind it. He can still see both the picture and his hand. But he can move it around in the air.

Is this some kind of magic too? If it is, maybe Tony wouldn't hate him for using magic. But everyone hates his magic, so why would Tony be any different?

He shakes his head furiously and tries to turn his attention to something less confusing and upsetting.

Looking at the picture floating in front of him, he sees it's a drawing of a white dog with black ears and an oddly-shaped head. It's standing on it's hind legs, like a person.

"This is Snoopy?" He asks. Jarvis confirms it, and Loki smiles. He likes the way Snoopy looks. Suddenly, there's another picture floating in the air- this time of Snoopy with a round-headed boy in a shirt with a zig-zag stripe. Loki grabs it, giggling. Whatever these clear floating things are, they're really fun. He can swipe them around the air and spin them around while they're floating.
"Where's Tony?" He asks another time. Jarvis had said he was off somewhere, but what if Tony decides to just leave him here?

"I could show you if you'd like, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says, and suddenly the rectangular thing Loki and Tony had watched last night lights up. But it's not Simba on it this time. Instead, it's a bunch of weird metal creatures in a city, sort of like the stupid thing they'd been watching before *The Lion King* last night.

He wrinkles his nose. Why would he want to watch this?

Then he notices a huge green thing destroying the robots. Wait. Tony had told him about a green guy yesterday. What was he called again? Hul? Holk? No, Hulk. That was it.

Suddenly more interested, he watches the Hulk smash the metal things. One of the things fires at a woman with red hair, but its head suddenly explodes, and a red and gold thing flies through the picture.

"That was Iron Man." Jarvis tells him. Loki cocks his head to the side. *That's Tony?*

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Almost two hours after Tony's arrival in Philadelphia, the last Doombot is turned into a worthless scrap of metal. The city block had suffered during the battle. The street is torn apart in one place and some of the buildings haven't fared too well either. One has a hole in it from when one of the Doombots dodged Tony's repulser blast.

Although the city block had suffered, there had been surprisingly few injured citizens- seven to be exact- and none of them were seriously hurt.

This had been a rather mild skirmish compared to other things the Avengers had done.

Once the Hulk becomes Bruce Banner, Tony approaches his "Science Bro." They hadn't done science together in a while, actually, which was a pity. Working with Bruce was like intellectual ecstasy. But that's not what he's approaching Bruce about right now, although Bruce could help figure out how Loki had healed so quickly.

Tony's been thinking it might be a good idea for Loki to actually meet some of the other Avengers. Perhaps that would help drive the point home that the other Avengers wouldn't treat him like how Thor supposedly did. Besides, it would be nice to have Bruce on his side when he confronts Thor about his treatment of Loki.

He briefly tells Bruce about Loki, but doesn't give much information. He's not even sure how to describe the god anymore. Bruce says he can't come over today, but that he'll come over as soon as possible.

Once Tony's back in the sky, Jarvis speaks up. "Sir, you might want to have a look at my camera in the living room. It seems to have malfunctioned briefly. I ran diagnostics but found nothing wrong with it."

Wondering where this is going, Tony looks at the holographic video Jarvis has just pulled up. He watches as Loki wakes up and inexplicably laughs. Maybe that's what Jarvis thought he should see. Suddenly, there are two Loki's.

Wait, what? Had he blinked and missed something? "Replay that bit." He says. The video replays, and it's the same thing. Another Loki just randomly appears out of thin air.
"Does Loki have a twin or something?" Tony asks.

"I'm sorry, sir. I do not know. However, my scanners only detected one person in the room." That's weird. Then again, what about Loki isn't abnormal in some way?

Maybe someone hacked into Jarvis' videos and digitally added another Loki? That idea doesn't even sound plausible in his head. For starters, Jarvis says that nobody had tried to hack into anything. Very, very few people are capable of hacking into Jarvis. Besides, if someone were to hack into Jarvis, why would they waste their time with something stupid like adding another Loki into a video for five seconds?

When he arrives back at his tower, he still doesn't have a reasonable explanation for this.

After landing on the balcony, he walks into the living room to find Loki sprawled on the floor, surrounded by at least a hundred holographs, while *The Lion King* soundtrack plays quietly from the speakers. Clearly, Loki doesn't share his love of loud rock.

Loki looks his way at the sound of Jarvis extending the arms that will remove the Iron Man suit. The god watches in fascination as the suit is pulled away to reveal Tony. Even after the suit is whisked away, Loki stares at Tony. Tony's noticed he does that a lot.

"Well, I'm going to take a shower." Tony informs Loki, stretching. "You might want to as well. Here." He has to move the holograms, which turn out to be *Peanuts* strips, out of the way to reach the god. Once he does, he leads Loki to one of the Tower's many bathrooms. After making sure there are towels for Loki, he realizes Loki doesn't have any other clothes besides the ones he's wearing.

"Come on Snoopy, let's go find you something else to wear after you shower." Loki takes a moment to pull himself away from making faces in the mirror, but he turns and follow Tony without being pulled along by the other man.

Tony enters his room and goes to the closet. He scans through his clothes. Most of them are probably too small for Loki. And as entertaining as the mental image of the god wearing the shirt with the words "god of sex" on it is, Tony's not actually going to have Loki wear that.

Eventually, he picks out a light blue t-shirt and a pair of white sweatpants, which still end above Loki's ankles even though they're the longest pair Tony owns. Clearly, Loki needs his own clothes. Even if he wasn't too tall for most of Tony's, it just doesn't feel right to give him old hand-me-downs. Especially since Tony's not lacking in money or anything.

"Hey, Snoopy, are you up for shopping later today?"

As they exit Stark Tower later, Tony glances over at Loki through his sunglasses. It's odd how different the god looks now that he's not wearing those dark leather clothes. He's still wearing the heavy-looking boots from his previous garb, though, since none of Tony's shoes fit him.

Loki pulls the Stark Phone Tony had give him out of his pocket and turns it around in his hands. Tony had just set it up so that all Loki had to do is press the number 5 and it would call him. Tony just gives up on having Loki keep it in his pocket. This has been the fifth time in five minutes.

There's a definite spring in Loki's step. He's basically skipping alongside Tony, singing *I Just Can't Wait to be King*, which he apparently has memorized now. He doesn't seem to be listening to Tony, who's making up for the lack of conversation with an endless monologue about whatever's on his
mind. Like how the restaurant they're passing once gave him unwanted pickles in his sub sandwich or how he'd once caught someone pickpocketing an old lady right at the very spot they're on.

Tony asks Loki what types of clothes he likes, but the god just shrugs as he sings "I think it's time that you and I arranged a heart to heart. Kings don't need advice from little hornbills for a start..."

Tony sighs. Maybe he should just pick a random store and buy stuff for Loki. Though he won't resort to that quite yet. Instead, he starts asking Loki his opinion on every store they pass, but the god doesn't seem interested in any of them.

Suddenly, Loki stops and stares across the street. "That one!" Tony follows his gaze to see a store with bright, graphic shirts in the windows. They'd already passed five similar stores, and Loki had barely glanced at those. Well, at least he finally decided.

The inside of the store is filled with clothes of every color, most of them in very bright shades. A lot of them have some kind of graphic on the front. Loki giggles and says "This place looks like the Bifrost." Whatever that is.

There aren't too many other people shopping, so they'll probably be left alone.

Tony intercepts Loki, who's started to wander towards the women's department, and guides him towards the men's section. Just to test the size, he picks up a pair of pants that look like they could be tall enough for Loki.

"Here, try these on." He takes the phone out of Loki's hands and hands him the pants. Loki looks down, surprised, as if the pants had suddenly materialized in his hands. Then, to Tony's shock, he starts to pull down his pants right there.

Tony quickly yanks them back up and says "Not here." He glances around, hoping nobody saw that. That would be fun to explain. Don't mind him. He's a Norse god and I forgot to tell him about changing rooms. What's that? Why is he hopping up and down like that and singing 'Hakuna Matata'? I honestly don't know but it's none of your damn business.

He gently pushes Loki into a changing room and stands guard in case something else should happen.

Something catches his eye and he steps away for a moment. He can't believe he's never seen pajamas made to look like the Iron Man suit before. They even have a hood. He debates about getting a pair. Really, if anyone should wear Iron Man pajamas, it should be the actual Iron Man.

"That looks like your metal skin." Loki's voice is right behind him and Tony nearly jumps out of his skin.

"I like those." Loki says, nodding to himself before wandering off. Tony grabs a pair for Loki and decides to get one for himself, just because it would be funny. Iron Man in Iron Man pajamas.

He realizes that he hasn't even known Loki for a full day and they're already getting matching pajamas. But it's not too weird, he tells himself. They didn't plan to get matching stuff. They just both know awesome pajamas when they see them.

Later, they head up to the register with a cart full of clothes, including a Snoopy shirt Tony saw and immediately grabbed, given his nickname for Loki and the fact Loki had been reading Peanuts comics earlier that morning.

The cashier, a pimply teenage boy, gives Loki a weird look as the god stares into thin air and sings
to himself. Tony comes up behind Loki, and the teen freaks out when he discovers who Tony is, gushing about Tony's performance in Philadelphia a couple of hours ago. Loki finds something about this hysterical. He bounces up and down, laughing, and says "He's Man of Iron."

"It's Iron Man, you retard." The teen sneers, looking at Loki like he's a slug or something.

"What did you just say?" Tony demands angrily, although he'd heard the hateful word.

"He's with you?" The teen looks shocked, even though Tony had gone to the register with Loki. His face asks all too clearly How is someone like him with someone like you?

"He lives with me." Tony replies, hating this jerk more by the second. Sure he could be an asshole himself, but there were lines even he wouldn't cross, and making fun of people with disabilities was one of them. Especially when it was Loki. He doesn't even really know what Loki went through in Asgard, but he still knows the god has already been tormented more than enough in his life. And now it's happening here, by some snooty teen.

"Why does he live with-

Tony silences the jerk with a glare. "You're starting to piss me off, and trust me, you don't want to deal with me when I'm pissed off. I'm not as bad as the Hulk, but that's like saying fire isn't as hot as lava." The cashier looks suitably frightened, and he mumbles an apology.

"Not to me, to him." Tony continues, although honestly Loki doesn't look like he cares. He's still staring into space and seems to be totally ignoring them. Though he had been watching earlier.

"Sorry man." The teen says. He sounds more sorry about Tony Stark being annoyed at him than about what he said about Loki. But that's probably the closest thing to an apology Loki's going to get from him.

Tony just glares at him as he swipes his credit card before standing around impatiently as the teen bags the stuff. When the teen finishes, he grabs the bags and heads off.

As they're leaving the store, Loki trots up beside him. Quietly, Loki says "Thank you for sticking up for me." So Loki had been listening. Tony has a hunch that nobody's ever defended him before. It was horrible, really, that Loki seemed to think telling someone off for making fun of him was going above and beyond the call of duty instead of just doing what was right.

"Don't mention it," Tony replies, still angry at the idiotic cashier. They exit the store into the bustling streets of New York.

Tony doesn't say a whole lot as they walk, which is uncharacteristic. He doesn't know why the incident bothered him so much, but it did. Heck, it seems to have bothered him more than it bothered Loki.

As he pushes through a particularly thick crowd, he looks over to see how Loki is doing and freezes.

Loki's not there.

He searches around frantically for a blue shirt, pale skin, a flash of long black hair. But there's nothing.

Suddenly, he remembers the phone he gave Loki. He reaches into his pocket to grab his own
phone, only to realize he never gave Loki the phone back after sending him to the changing rooms.

He clenches a hand around the phone. He had stupidly ruined his plan to prevent something like this from happening.

Loki’s gone, and he has no idea if he’ll be able to find the god.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

How do you find a lost god in New York City?

Loki finds a friend.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Loki giggles as he watches a bird walk around on the first he thought it was Huginn or Muninn, the Allfather's ravens. They hadn't liked him much and got him in trouble a lot, but this bird is a lot smaller than they are. It walks in a funny way. Its head bobs back and forth as it walks, and it starts pecking at something that's been left on the ground. He turns to ask Tony what the bird's called, but the space next to him is empty. He blinks. Tony had been right next to him mere moments ago. Hadn't he?

He looks around frantically, but there are too many wheeled, metal things and people moving around him and there's no sign of Tony. He doesn't notice the annoyed looks people are giving him as they go around him on the sidewalk.

Maybe Tony turned around and went the other way. Loki turns back and begins to work his way through the crowd he'd just left. But there's no sign of Tony on the side the'd come from, either.

Wringing his hands together, he rocks back and forth anxiously. Tony's gone. Tony's gone. Tony's gone. His mind repeats this over and over, each time more frantic than the one before.

How is he supposed to get back to Tony's place? He doesn't know his way around here at all. But he needs to go back. That's where he lives now.

"Where does Tony Stark live?" He asks to nobody in particular in a loud, panicked voice. Two women who happen to be passing him just shoot him disgusted looks—maybe they know he's a Jotun—and don't answer.

He frowns. Aside from Tony and Pepper, people here don't seem very friendly—though he's only run into a few. Like that boy in that place they got the clothes. The one who called him retard.

Which was something he'd never been called before today. It just means "to make slow." But if the boy's tone and Tony's reaction were anything to go by, it was some kind of insult.

Loki knew not to stand up for himself, since all that ever accomplished was making his tormentors stick around longer to put him in his place. So Loki hadn't said anything.

But Tony had.

He's only known Tony for a day, but Tony's shown him more kindness in that day than anyone in Asgard had in thousands of years. Tony hasn't hit or insulted him once. Quite the opposite. He'd (somewhat awkwardly) returned Loki's hug and actually said he was good at something. Tony had promised to protect him from Thor, and had even gotten him new clothes. And he'd stood up for Loki.
At first, Loki hadn't even believed his ears when Tony confronted the boy about what he'd said. Nobody had ever done something like that before. Nobody had taken Loki's side on anything, let alone challenged someone for how they treated him.

He doesn't know why Tony did it, why he defended a worthless Jotun. Although Loki's pretty sure Tony doesn't know about him being a frost giant, so maybe that's why he defended him? Tony certainly wouldn't have stood up for him if he knew what he really was, though. Not that Loki could blame him. Who would knowingly stand up for a monster?

But Tony had said, under the bed yesterday, that Loki wasn't a monster. Even though Tony doesn't know about his true form, Loki liked hearing that.

He'd been happy with Tony, and now Tony is gone.

Dimly, he hears someone next to him asking "Are you okay? Do you need help?" But they're probably not talking to him. Why would anyone care if he's okay?

Sure enough, the person eventually goes away.

Loki realizes he's been standing in the same spot since he noticed Tony was gone. He shakes his head. Standing there isn't going to get him to Tony. He starts walking, though he doesn't know where he's going.

He bumps into some guy, and the guy curses at him angrily. He backs away, frightened, and then hurries away before the guy can start hitting him. Running rarely does anything, since his tormentors often just catch him later, but this time he's lucky. The guy doesn't follow him.

Once he can no longer see the guy through the crowd, he slows down. He has even less of an idea of where he is now, but it's not quite as crowded here.

As he looks around the city, it sinks in that he's totally lost. He has no idea how to get back to Tony's building. That tower has felt more like home in a day than Asgard ever did.

He paces back and forth, flapping his hands. He doesn't even notice the green tendrils of magic forming around his hands until he unconsciously releases an explosive gust of wind around him, blowing away any litter on the ground in a ten foot radius.

He notices several people watching him, and his stomach drops. They just saw him doing magic, and doing magic in front of people never ends well. There are at least ten of them, which means it's going to hurt a lot when they beat him. He looks around. Maybe he'll be able to escape like he had from the guy he'd bumped into. But these people are totally surrounding him. He stuffs his hands, still with green magic around them, into his pockets.

His anxiety, which had already been really high after losing Tony, skyrockets. Loki screws his eyes shut and rocks back and forth. He just wants to be back in the tower, back with Tony. What he doesn't want is to be lost in a city surrounded by people who just saw him do magic. But it's not like what he wants ever mattered to anybody.

He's still waiting for the blows and insults to rain down on him, but they don't. Maybe they've left. Loki opens his eyes, but they're still there- in fact, there are more of them now.

Loki looks down at his hands. He can see the green glow emanating from his pockets, and he clenches his hands shut, trying to get rid of it, but it only gets brighter.

No! He can't do more magic in front of so many people. They'll all want to punish him for it and
there's no way he can escape from them all. He wishes he were invisible. That was one of his best ways of hiding from Thor and his friends, but he can't always get his magic to do what he wants. Right now, it's completely out of his control.

Another gust of wind, stronger than the last one, explodes outwards. Some of the people surrounding him are actually knocked over.

Loki takes the opportunity to bolt. He darts around a corner and heads off, weaving through the crowd.

Suddenly, he sees the exact person he's been looking for.

Tony.

Loki grins and hurries after Tony. He's really glad the other man is here now. But Tony doesn't seem to have noticed him.

He calls out Tony's name repeatedly, practically singsonging it, but Tony doesn't turn around. Frowning, Loki tells himself that maybe Tony can't hear him. Still, he can't help but think, in the back of his mind, that maybe Tony can hear him and he's just ignoring him.

But Tony's his friend, and friends don't do that. At least, Loki's pretty sure they don't just ignore each other. As he darts across the street to follow Tony, he barely notices that one of the metal things almost hits him.

He basically sprinting after Tony now, but still isn't managing to catch up even though Tony's only walking. He remembers Tony seemed kind of mad before they got separated. Maybe he'd just decided he didn't want Loki around anymore?

The thought sends a shiver of dread down Loki's spine. Even though he was never wanted in Asgard, the thought of Tony not wanting him somehow seems far worse. Probably because Tony's been so nice to him. But all that will change when Tony finds out about his magic, and the thought of losing his friend makes him want to cry.

Suddenly, Tony turns into a building. Loki follows him in without hesitation, but blinks when he doesn't see Tony anywhere. Then he looks around in awe at the room he's in.

This place is packed full of the most random stuff. Furniture, books and completely unrelated knickknacks and objects fill up every available space. Maybe it's someone's treasure trove, or maybe people just dump stuff they don't want anymore in here. But he likes that it's cluttered with random things. There are probably so many amazing things in this place, hidden in the clutter.

If his head were a room, it would probably look like this, he thinks. He smiles at the silly thought. Heads don't look like rooms.

He snaps out of it, remembering that he should be looking for Tony, who is still nowhere to be seen. Is he hiding? This would be a really good place to play a hiding game in. Ordinarily, Loki would love the idea. But right now, he doesn't want to play games. He just wants to find Tony and go home.

He starts wandering through the store, looking for Tony, but he often stops, distracted, to glance at something on the shelves before remembering to look for Tony again. There are a couple of boxes with glass parts on the front, kind of like the thing they'd watched stuff on last night, as well as some odd looking figurines and a spinning chair.
He calls out Tony's name, but Tony doesn't answer. Though if this is indeed a hiding game, it makes sense Tony's not answering. Loki hopes Tony won't do this sort of thing all the time. Not when he actually needs to find him, at least.

He goes past a table with vases, careful not to knock them over. He's gotten punished for that before, too.

Then, in between two bookshelves, he sees Tony in front of him and his eyes widen. Letting out a happy shriek, he runs up and throws his arms around him. Finally, this is over and he's not lost anymore, he thinks laughingly.

But his arms hit nothing but air. He blinks in confusion. How did Tony just disappear like that? Eventually it dawns on him that it had been an illusion like the other Loki's he sometimes makes. He's pretty sure this is the first time there's been an illusion of someone else, but that's not the important part.

The important part is that he hadn't found the real Tony at all.

After seeing no sign of the god for about a minute, Tony shakes his head, mentally berating himself. Why is he standing here instead of doing something?

He can't believe it. Loki's missing in New York City, and it's only the first full day the god's been living under his roof. What would Loki do on his own in New York? Would he look for Tony, or would he just wander around aimlessly, perhaps becoming a target for muggers (not that Loki has anything for anyone to steal).

His initial thought of wondering how he'd find the god was stupid, he tells himself. He's Iron Man, he's a freaking Avenger. Finding a missing god should be a piece of cake compared to other stuff he's done. Heck, it should be a piece of cake compared to Philadelphia earlier this morning. Yet, for that first moment he'd noticed Loki was gone, he'd been too caught up wondering about the god to do anything.

Any number of things could happen, and Tony hates the thought of something bad happening to Loki more than he expected he would. What if Loki gets hit by a car? (Although when Tony thinks about it later he realizes that probably wouldn't affect the god too much, considering he'd left a crater in Tony's roof and had been healed hours later).

If anything bad happens to Loki, it's going to be on his conscience. He should have been paying more attention. He should have checked more often to see if Loki was following him, instead of mulling over what that stupid teenager had said. Several times since yesterday, Tony had needed to guide Loki because the god wouldn't go somewhere on his own accord. But, on the way to the store it hadn't been an issue so Tony had stupidly dropped his guard on the way back.

Why had he thought it would be a bright idea to walk there, anyways? He could have taken a car. If he had, this probably wouldn't have happened, he thinks as he waits impatiently at a crosswalk for the pedestrian signal.

Pulling his own Stark Phone out of his pocket, Tony accesses Jarvis as he hurries back to the tower. "Jarvis, have the suit ready when I get back." He orders. He then records his location so he can go back without thinking.

Tony keeps an eye out for Loki, but he's not too optimistic about seeing the god. He doesn't of course. Other than that, he barely notices anything on his way home, too wrapped up in thinking
about where he should look for Loki first. Loki can't have wandered too far, right?

He tries to remember the name of the store he and Loki had gone to, but he really hadn't been paying attention. He tells himself it doesn't matter. He knows where it is and should be able to find it easily once he's flying.

It takes him around seven minutes to get back to his tower. Once he's in, he jams the elevator button, wishing it went faster.

"Welcome back, sir. Your suit is ready, as requested." Jarvis says. There's a pause, and the AI begins to ask "Where's-" but Tony cuts him off.

"Loki's missing, Jarvis. That's why I need my suit. Now lets suit up." Tony tosses the shopping bags with Loki's clothes on the couch and walks out onto the balcony. As the suit attaches itself around him, Tony asks "Do you have the location I recorded on my phone."

Jarvis takes a couple seconds to respond, no doubt retrieving the information. "Yes, sir. It will take under a minute to fly there. Shall I man the ship, so to speak?"

Tony grins slightly and nods. The suit blasts off, and surely enough, less than a minute later he's hovering over the spot where he called Jarvis. But that hadn't even been where Loki went missing. Where did Loki go missing, anyways.

He notices several people staring and pointing up at him, and he gives them a quick thumbs up before flying higher, scanning the crowd. The HUD inside his helmet is really helpful with this, bringing up magnified images of the scene below, but it's still pretty tedious. It's like a huge "Where's Waldo?" except everyone's moving around.

He bites back a groan. This is starting to get really annoying.

Loki stares at the empty spot where the illusion-Tony had been. He knows it wasn't the real Tony, but he can't help hoping that maybe the real Tony will materialize there. It's a stupid thought but it sticks around in the back of his mind, even after he tries to get rid of it.

He looks around. He's not going to find Tony in this place, whatever it is. He's still not sure if it's a treasure trove or a place people dump stuff.

He turns around and starts heading towards the door, but he stops as he sees something familiar, something that briefly makes him forget entirely about looking for Tony.

It's Simba. At least, it looks exactly like young Simba. He blinks, and Simba's still there.

It's odd, Loki thinks. First, Simba had been in the thing he and Tony watched last night and Loki could see and hear him. Then, this morning, Loki could hear him as a voice from the walls, like Jarvis, but couldn't see him. Now, Simba has an actual body- he's not flat like a picture- but he's not talking.

Then he notices the toys surrounding Simba and Loki laughs at himself. Of course. He's not the actual Simba, he's a toy Simba. Thor had owned all sorts of cool toys when they were children and Loki hadn't gotten any. But now he gets Simba, and Simba's better than any of Thor's were.

Bouncing excitedly, Loki goes and picks Simba up. He's smaller than Loki thought he'd be. Though Simba's skin is soft, his body is really stiff and he's not squishy like the toy next to him. Really, the only squishy parts of his body are his ears, and sort of his face. He squeezes Simba's
"We'll always be pals, right?" Simba asks as he moves his head and tail. Loki shrieks out an excited laugh. He talks! He definitely beats Thor's childhood toys.

"Right," Loki answers, hugging Simba tightly.

"Cool! My dad taught me how to pounce! Did you learn anything today?" Simba responds, moving his head and tail again.

"Yeah! I learned what a waffle is! Waffles are really good. But I gotta find Tony now." Giggling, Loki adds "And you're coming too!" Loki knows Simba's not real but he ignores that fact. It's more fun pretending he is, and finds himself almost forgetting that Simba's really not real.

Hugging Simba to his chest, he walks back outside, not really registering whatever somebody inside says about paying something called dollars and stealing stuff.

He quickly realizes that, since he'd been so focused on following the Tony illusion, he doesn't even know how to get back to where he'd accidentally done magic. He keeps getting more and more lost, so maybe he should just stay put.

He seeks out the least crowded place he can find, which isn't too far from he found Simba. He only had to cross a couple streets, (he wishes those metal things would stop almost running into him) and he didn't even make any turns.

Loki fiddles around with Simba's left ear and discovers, to his delight, that Simba sings snippets of the songs I Just Can't Wait to be King and Hakuna Matata (Jarvis had told him the names of the songs when he'd been listening to them earlier).

But then his thoughts return to Tony, and his brief period of happiness is gone. He wonders where Tony is. Does Tony know he's gone? Unless there's an illusion-Loki with Tony, the man's almost certainly noticed Loki's missing by now.

Does Tony care he's gone? Loki cares a great deal that he's not with Tony, but he's not sure Tony feels the same way.

He starts to fidget and rock back and forth. He clutches Simba fiercely, which helps him calm down a little bit, but his worry overrides that small comfort by far.

What if he never gets back to Tony's tower? Then there'd be no more colorful cubes, moving pictures or waffles. He'd never be able to have conversations with Jarvis (who's a better conversationalist than Simba, he thinks) or wear those new clothes like the Snoopy shirt. Worst of all, he probably wouldn't see Tony or Pepper ever again.

He bounces on his toes, but it's in an anxious, panicked, manic way instead of the usual happy way.

If he never gets back, then he'll just be stuck out here in this city, which seems even worse than Asgard in his opinion (since he'd end up being tormented in either place, most likely). His life in Asgard certainly wasn't pleasant, but at least he'd been in a castle instead of lost alone in a city with nowhere to sleep and no food. He'd probably end up like the filthy guy he'd seen slumped against a wall earlier, and he'd only have Simba as a reminder of last night, the only night he can remember falling asleep truly happy (even though he'd gotten Simba today, Simba reminds him of last night since he's connected to The Lion King).

Loki's only vaguely aware that he keeps squeezing Simba's ear but he doesn't even hear Simba talk.
now, and the city noise has been reduced to a distant roar as his mind fills with horrible images of bleak futures. Contradictory thoughts tumble around in his head. Tony wouldn't leave him out here. Tony's his friend, right? That's what Jarvis said, and Tony wouldn't have gotten clothes for him if he was just going to ditch him. So Tony's probably looking for him.

This is quickly replaced by another horrible thought entering his head. What if he ends up going back to Tony's house but then Tony hates him so much for his magic that he ends up kicking Loki out onto the streets? He knows Tony's not going to like him once he finds out, but will he actually decide not to keep Loki around any more?

That's what the Asgardians had done, eventually.

Even the thought of Tony doing that to him is too horrible to stand, and Loki lets out an anguished scream.

Tony doesn't even bother holding back a groan now. He's been searching for at least half an hour and has gotten nowhere. Plus, his eyes are throbbing more than they ever have before. Clearly, his initial reaction had been more accurate than when he'd been telling himself this would be a piece of cake. He hates it when he's right like that.

It would be nice if he weren't the only person looking for Loki among the countless people below him. Maybe he should call in the other Avengers. He mentions this to Jarvis, who replies "Sir, might I suggest getting the people to help?"

Tony doesn't normally like the idea of being handed solutions, but it's not like he's being handed the solution to something thought provoking, like a technical problem he hasn't fixed yet. It's just a visual search. Besides, it would be nice to not be the only one looking for Loki. If he can get a people to look around them for Loki, it will probably go a lot quicker than the "Where's Waldo" type of thing he's doing now.

He swoops down low over several streets, gaining the peoples' attention by firing some repulsor blasts into the sky. Then, he flies up a bit, and says to Jarvis "All right, time to go into megaphone mode."

"Can you all hear me?" He asks the people below him, wincing at how loud his voice comes out, but it has to be loud to be heard over all the background noise. Some people have completely stopped while others go about their business. There's a roar of assent from the people paying attention to him, though.

"All right, I'm looking for a man. He's over six feet tall. He has pale skin and shoulder length black hair, and he's wearing a blue shirt and white sweatpants." Tony pauses. Maybe Loki's within earshot. "Hey, Snoopy, that's you. Are you out there? Loki?"

He sees people looking around for someone of that description, and eventually one part attracts his attention by waving their arms and screaming at him.

"You found him?" He asks. He zooms in on the area with his HUD, and scans the crowd, but he doesn't see any sign of Loki. There's another guy who fits the same description, mostly, but he's obviously not Loki. He has a beard and he's wearing red, instead of blue like Tony specified.

Then, another section of people try to get his attention. He zooms in on that area. He knows he scoped all around it before. But this time, he sees a familiar figure standing there. He rockets down, wondering why Loki's just standing there.
He lands dramatically, slamming into the sidewalk beside Loki. Several onlookers jump and a few actually scream, but Loki is unfazed, and he doesn't seem to be aware of what's going on around him. In fact, Loki seems to be in the middle of a panic attack, judging from his shaking body, and a wave of sympathy rolls through Tony. He knows all too well what that's like.

He approaches Loki, but the god doesn't seem to notice him. His eyes are completely unfocused and he's clutching a toy- is that Simba?- like it's his only lifeline keeping him from spontaneously combusting. Where had he even gotten that? Tony shakes his head. Right now, that doesn't matter.

"Loki!" He says, trying to get the god back to reality. Is this just the god's reaction to being lost in a city in a strange world, or is it something else? What's going on in that mind right now? Is he reliving a memory? If he is, it must be pretty awful, and that's coming from someone who was tortured in Afghanistan.

Tony grabs Loki's arm, which gets a reaction out of the god, though not a good one. Loki lets out something between a yelp and a whimper and sinks to the ground, curling into a tiny ball with his arms covering his head. He's still clutching the toy Simba by one of its back legs, though.

Tony crouches down next to Loki, and Jarvis speaks up. "Sir, Mr. Loki's body temperature is dropping rapidly, and is currently at negative ten degrees Celsius." What the heck? That's below freezing. How is that possible?!

That doesn't matter now. He'll think about it later. With a grunt, Tony picks Loki up. Loki's body is contorted in a way that makes it a lot more difficult to get a firm grip on him. He manages to carry Loki into one of the more secluded stores (a high end tuxedo store) away from too many prying eyes. He ends up going into one of the changing rooms, telling the camera in the corner that if this is every made public he will personally buy out the company and destroy it.

He gently lays Loki on the ground and starts telling him that he's safe, and whatever's going on in his head isn't happening to him right now. All the stuff he wishes someone would say to him during his own panic attacks and night terrors.

At some point along the line, Loki's thoughts switch from potential horrible futures to horrible memories, though the seem like they're happening in the present moment.

"I'm sorry!" Loki says. He's young, just a boy. "So sorry, so sorry, so sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry..." He just wants the pain to end, he wants the Allfather to stop whipping him. He doesn't even know what he'd done wrong. There'd just been some weird flash of green light, and he'd felt something in his body that he couldn't explain, but apparently was something really bad (as bad as being a Jotun) because he was being punished just as harshly. The Allfather is punishing him personally, which is bad in of itself, but Odin never punished him for being a Frost Giant. He left that to everyone else.

Loki dimly hears someone shouting his name. What has he done wrong now? The voice grows louder and louder, but it's sounds like it's from somewhere else, not where Odin's whipping him.

Gradually, the voice gets more pronounced and the sound of the whip, his own screams, and Odin telling him he's an argr fade into the distance.

He knows he's heard the voice, but he can't place it.

Odin's throne gradually fades and is replaced by a glaring light. Something's blocking out part of it. It's a head, but it appears as a silhouette in the light.

"Loki, it's okay. It's not real." The head is saying, but the words still sound distant as he lays there
shaking and crying.

Two arms which feel rather hard and metallic compared to normal arms, lift him up and pull him close to an equally metallic body and he's no longer staring at the light or the head. "You're safe." The voice says softly.

For a while after that, it's silent except for his own shaking breaths. The embrace is surprisingly comforting, even if whoever's hugging him is made of metal.

Finally, when he's calmed down, he looks up and sees who it is. "Tony?" This isn't another illusion, is it?

The man gives him a cocky smile and says "The one and only,"

He nods and fiddles with Simba's tail. He hadn't even realized he'd still been holding the lion, but he shows him to Tony. Tony asks where he got Simba and he shrugs. "In some building with a lot of stuff two streets away."

Tony says something about buying stuff that sounds a lot like the comment that followed Loki out of his building he'd found Simba in.

Then, Tony says something that Loki hadn't been expecting to hear but is glad to. "I think it's time to get you back home, don't you?" Loki can tell he means the tower.

He hopes the tower will always be his home, but he's honestly not sure why Tony bothers with him.

Chapter End Notes

The Simba is a real toy that my cousins had. I remember playing with it at their house when I was like eight. It was a 2002 Hasbro My Singin' Simba (the things you can find on the internet!) For some reason, one of my first ideas for this fic was Loki having one.

I actually have one now. I bought it in May of 2016, but I originally posted this chapter on FF.Net before I got him.

He's gonna stick around in this story...
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Some fun fluffy moments... and then nightmares.
And magic.

Tony’s leaning casually against the wall, but Loki’s bouncing up and down excitedly next to him, as he often does. They're riding the elevator up Stark Tower, and Tony's filling the silence with whatever's on his mind. He's not sure if Loki's listening, but he's never really sure of that, so he just talks as if he is.

He'd been very surprised when Loki had confidently led him to where he had unknowingly shoplifted Simba. The employee at the store claimed to have seen Loki walking out, so it was apparently the right place. It had been kind of inconvenient for Tony to get his wallet out, but he'd done it.

Yes, Tony had bought Simba for Loki. It had been obvious Loki wasn't going to part with the toy unless it was pried from his fingers, and Tony wasn't about to do that. Tony had thought it would be weird to see Loki holding a stuffed animal (he was a grown man, after all, even if he seemed childish a lot of the time), but after seeing Loki clutch a can opener yesterday, this really didn't seem that strange in comparison. Loki had had such a contagious grin on his face when he'd heard he'd be able to keep Simba that Tony had found himself grinning too.

The employee had been shocked that Iron Man was buying a toy for "some random guy" as they put it, but they had actually been really nice to Loki, not even holding a grudge that he'd wandered off without paying earlier. The employee had even struck up a conversation with Loki about The Lion King and honestly smiled at Loki’s enthusiasm. After that jerk at the clothing store, this person had restored Tony's faith somewhat in random store cashiers.

Tony had made sure to keep a hand either on Loki's shoulder or lightly gripping his arm at all times as they'd walked back to the tower. He's rather surprised that Loki never objects to his touch, especially since there have been many hints that he'd been physically abused. Most people from his situation would probably flinch away from any sort of contact, but Loki had only done that during his panic attack. Is that a sign that Loki trusts him?

He's going to have to keep an eye out for more panic attacks from the god. Right now, though, Loki seems to have bounced back to being happy, and Tony finds himself sort of jealous that Loki's able to do that.

As they ride the elevator, Loki starts curiously poking all the buttons for the different floors, but Jarvis overrides the commands and takes them directly to Tony's (and now Loki's) quarters without making a million stops along the way. Tony gives a small grin to the camera in the corner but doesn't say anything. Words aren't needed, really. He knows his AI knows that he appreciates not wasting an hour for the elevator to slowly crawl up the tower, stopping at every floor.

Once the elevator doors open, Loki lets out a very unmanly squeal and dashes around the living room, laughing, before turning back and looking at Tony, who's quirking an amused eyebrow at him. It reminds Tony of the scene near the end of Monsters Inc. when Boo returns to her room.
(Dum-E loves that movie, and yes, Dum-E watches movies. Tony definitely does not watch animated movies by himself a lot of nights, thank you very much. It's all Dum-E. Really).

"Welcome back, sir." Jarvis greets them now, even though he'd been watching them during the elevator ride. Mechanical arms remove Tony's suit as Loki watches, as fascinated as he'd been when seeing it a couple hours ago. "It's good to have you back, Mr. Loki."

"Jarvis!" Loki says cheerfully, as if bumping into an old friend he thought he'd never see again. He's looking around as if he'd expected to never see the tower again, either. Both of those had probably seemed like real possibilities when he was lost in the city, though.

"Jarvis, look, it's Simba!" Loki chirps. He introduces Jarvis to Simba as if the toy can hear him, and Jarvis surprises Tony by humoring Loki and greeting the toy as Mr. Simba. Huh. He'd have bet money that Jarvis would've told Loki that Simba wasn't real, Tony thinks as he heads over to the bar.

Tony definitely deserves a drink, not that he ever really needs a reason to drink aside from feeling like it. But he has a better reason now, anyways, which is that this morning had been freaking stressful. He gulps down some scotch as he leans against the bar, watching Loki interact with Jarvis.

Loki giggles and says, referring to Simba "He's not a Mister."

"I believe it's better than Ms. Simba." Jarvis replies and Loki lets out a wild giggle. The god then demonstrates Simba's talking ability. Tony doubts Jarvis is impressed with Simba's handful of prerecorded phrases, but the AI politely doesn't say anything of the sort. Loki squeezes one of the toy's ears and Simba roars playfully and starts a roaring contest.

Loki roars back and Simba urges "Louder!" Suddenly, a loud roar that sounds like it's straight out of Jurassic Park fills the room, and Tony's glad he hadn't been holding his scotch glass at that moment or he probably would have dropped it.

"Wow! That's really loud!" Simba says cheerfully, obviously not sounding as shocked as it should have if it had actually heard it.

"I believe I won," Jarvis says in what sounds like a mock-smug tone. Loki, far from being startled or scared of the roar, has collapsed on the floor in hysterics.

Once Loki's calmed down enough to speak, he does. "Jarvis," He stage whispers, as if sharing a big secret "You know Simba's not really real, right? Not like you."

"Yes, I was aware of that, Mr. Loki," Jarvis replies, and Tony manages to muffle his snort. He has a feeling the AI would be laughing if it was possible for him to do so. "But it was clear you wanted me to pretend he is real like you were doing." Jarvis continues. That alone seems like pretty good proof that Jarvis isn't just some unfeeling machine, for all the doubters out there. AI's aren't supposed to be able to pretend. Jarvis had even referred to Simba as he and not it and Tony can tell he'd done that on purpose, to appease Loki. Jarvis isn't snarky to Loki like he is to his creator, kind of like how Tony himself isn't very snarky to the god.

Tony finishes the remainder of his glass of scotch and goes over to Jarvis' camera in the living room. He has to stand on a chair to reach the camera, which is hidden in the wall near the ceiling. He really should just put that thing on an extendable arm sometime. He unplugs it and takes it out of the wall, essentially leaving Jarvis blind from that angle.
He wonders if there's something seriously wrong with Jarvis' sensors, because this morning there had been two Loki's showing up on the camera, and Jarvis had read Loki's body temperature as below freezing, but now it is apparently back to normal.

He hears rustling in the background but he's not really paying attention. He goes over the innards of the camera, but everything seems to be fine. That doesn't make sense; something has to be malfunctioning for there to be two Loki's in the video.

He turns around to see Loki has pulled practically everything out of the shopping bag. At least thirty articles of clothing are laying on the floor, including the blue shirt the god had been wearing. Loki had swapped it for the Snoopy shirt and is now just standing there, holding Simba and staring at Tony and the disassembled camera.

"Jarvis, can you tell Dum-E to come here? And tell him not to bring any fire extinguishers or anything." Tony says and Jarvis sends the elevator down to the lab to pick up the robot.

A couple minutes pass, during which Tony tinkers with the camera and Loki just stares at him. It's starting to get a little creepy, to be honest. It gets really creepy when Loki smiles while staring, and Tony tries to ignore it. Then the elevator doors open and Dum-E rolls out.

"Pick those up, would you?" Tony says to Dum-E, gesturing to the clothes. However, Loki stoops down and neatly folds one of the shirts, far better than Tony or Dum-E would have been able to do.

Tony stares for a second, rather surprised. "I wasn't talking to you, Snoopy. Dum-E can do it." He gestures towards the robot, who waves at Loki with a happy beep. Loki seems completely unfazed that a large, unfamiliar robot is rolling up to him, similar to how he'd barely blinked the first time he'd heard Jarvis.

"Dum-E? That's a kinda weird name. Is Dum-E your slave?" Loki asks, and Tony winces. Yes, Dum-E's a robot but the idea of being a slave owner- even a robot-slave owner- doesn't sit well with him.

"No, he's not. He's my helper. Wait- do they have slaves where you come from?"

"Yeah." Loki answers, like it's no big deal. "Servants, too. They'd make me help them with chores a lot." Tony doesn't know who "they" are, but he doesn't like them. Thor always talks- boasts- about how magnificent Asgard is, but if they haven't grasped the concept that slavery is wrong, how great can it be? The way Loki talks about Asgard, it doesn't sound great at all. Especially to Loki himself.

Loki returns to folding shirts but Tony stops him. "Seriously, just let Dum-E do it. He likes being helpful." Tony says and Dum-E nods enthusiastically, clutching a shirt in his claw. Loki soon realizes that Dum-E's completely hopeless at folding shirts, though to be fair it's a difficult task to do with one claw. After 5 minutes, Loki takes pity on the robot and folds them when he thinks Tony's not looking, and Tony decides not to call him out on it as he reassembles the camera.

Tony hears Loki talking to Dum-E in the background, but he's not really listening until *Hakuna Matata* starts playing. He turns around and sees Loki holding Simba out to Dum-E so Dum-E can squeeze the toy's ear and make it sing and dance.

Tony sighs. He'd just gotten that song out of his head yesterday and now it'll probably be stuck in there again. Loki's Simba doesn't even sing the whole song, which makes it even easier to get one short verse stuck in his head.
He finishes putting the camera together and reconnects it to Jarvis before putting it back in the wall. Tony sighs, watching Loki play a hand (or claw) game with Dum-E. Taking apart the camera had gotten him basically nowhere, since Jarvis had said earlier that there didn't seem to be anything wrong with the camera. Why does he never find answers about things relating to Loki?

Tony heads towards the kitchen to grab something to eat. Loki immediately gets up and follows him, one hand holding Simba by a hind leg and the other leading Dum-E along by the claw. Dum-E rolls along behind Loki with a happy robotic squealing sound.

"I'm just going to the kitchen," Tony says, but Loki seems to want to keep him in sight at all times, as if Tony will vanish if he leaves the room.

Tony gets a Pop Tart and offers one to Loki. Loki lets go of Dum-E and looks at it curiously before taking a bite.

"So, was there another one of you here this morning? Jarvis saw one. What's the deal with that?" Tony asks conversationally, raising an eyebrow at the god. "Do you have an evil twin or something? Are you some kind of epic magician?"

Suddenly, Loki's happy mood is gone, replaced with a look of horrified realization. The god looks away from Tony and doesn't say anything. His hand clenches, reducing the Pop Tart to crumbs that rain down on the floor. Dum-E lets out a worried beep and tries to pick them up.

Tony bites back a sigh. "Hey, what's wrong?" Is Loki on the verge of another panic attack? The god seems to have retreated into himself.

About two minutes of silence pass as Tony, Dum-E and Jarvis wait for Loki to say something. It's probably a record for the three of them to all remain silent for that length of time. "Are you gonna kick me out?" The god finally asks in a scared voice.

"Of the tower? No, wasn't planning on it. I thought we went over this yesterday. Unless you try to murder me in my sleep or something, you're welcome here." Tony replies, somewhat confused. "What does this have to do with the other one of you?"

Loki doesn't answer the question about the other Loki the next three times Tony asks.

"I don't wanna talk 'bout it, 'kay?" Loki finally speaks in one big rush.

Well, now Tony's positive that there's something about Loki that he doesn't know yet. Well, okay, there are countless things he doesn't know about the god- he's only known him for a day- but he has a feeling this is something vital. Something Loki's keeping from him.

Tony sighs and runs a hand through his hair. He's disappointed- he wants to know what's going on- but Loki's remaining stubbornly closed-lipped about the subject. Tony can't really judge- he has his own secrets after all.

He holds up his hands in a placating gesture. "All right, we won't talk about that if you don't want to." However, he makes no promises about trying to figure it out anyways.

Loki looks even more relieved than Tony expected, but Tony can't figure out what the fuss was about to begin with. What's so bad about another Loki?

"Sir, Mr. Loki is requesting to come down." Jarvis tells Tony, who's in his lab. Jarvis sounds exasperated; Loki's apparently been asking about Tony nonstop. It's evening, and this is the first
time Loki and Tony have been in separate rooms since returning to the tower, aside from bathroom trips (and Tony had needed to lock the bathroom door during those, just in case).

Whenever Tony had left the room, Loki had followed him. Even when the god was lethargic during the early afternoon, he'd still followed Tony around in an almost zombie-like way, Simba loosely held in his hand. Tony wasn't sure where the lethargy had come from, or why it hadn't started until a couple hours after returning to the tower. Maybe it was just Loki being tired after the stressful morning. Or maybe it was an extended period of Loki being "out of it." Given that the god had briefly tuned out of the world many times in the past day and a half, it seemed like a good guess. Now, however, Loki is back to being energetic and (mostly) lucid. As lucid as he ever is, at any rate.

Right now, Tony's looking over Norse mythology again. Like last night, he's drawn to Jotunheim. Loki had fit the freezing skin description earlier today, according to Jarvis. Tony had checked that sensor too and, like the camera, found nothing wrong with it.

When he'd gone down to the lab, Tony had left Dum-E in thepenthouse with the god, and Jarvis is focusing most of his attention up there. Even though Loki seems to love Jarvis and Dum-E, he's still asking about Tony. Jarvis had turned on The Lion King, but even that doesn't totally distract the god, nor do holographic Peanuts comics or Jarvis and Dum-E themselves. Loki hasn't put Simba down once since Tony went to his lab, and Tony's not sure if the toy's been more than ten feet away from the god since he found it nearly twelve hours ago. He doubts it.

Loki keeps getting up and going to the elevator, asking about Tony, and the AI and robot keep temporarily distracting him for a minute or two before he's back at the elevator. Tony has a feeling that Loki would be having a full-out panic attack if Dum-E and Jarvis weren't there.

Is it really too much to ask for a couple of hours alone? Obviously, the answer seems to be yes. The god had seemed fine on his own this morning, so is this some kind of reaction to being lost? Tony has a feeling it is, and thinking of it that way makes him start to feel kinda crappy. Loki seems to think he's been abandoned.

Hopefully Loki won't be like this during the night, because there's no way in hell Tony's going to let the god in his bedroom while he's sleeping. They're going to have to work on this in general, because he can't possibly be with Loki 24/7, nor would he want to. People need breaks from each other, after all.

"All right, let him down Jarvis." Tony sighs, transferring all the holographic internet pages on Norse mythology to a non-holographic tablet so he'll be able to hide them from Loki. Tony's work will probably be a lot more efficient once Jarvis stops updating him about Loki.

"Thank you sir." Jarvis says, sounding relieved. "I'm sure Mr. Loki will be glad to see you." Tony snorts. That has to be the understatement of the year.

A minute later the elevator door opens and Loki dashes towards Tony, a huge grin on his face.

"Whoa, slow down there, Snoopy." Tony says "There are some rules you need to follow if you're going to be allowed to stay down here. First of all, don't touch anything. Second, I work down here so don't pester me. Got it?"

Loki nods. He looks like an overgrown child in his Iron Man pajamas, and he's holding Simba, of course.

"Wait there for a second," Tony says, rolling his chair over to the desk he'd been working at
earlier. He grabs the device he'd been working on- a tracking bracelet that will give him Loki's location when he wears it, working the same way as a GPS.

He puts it around Loki's wrist and the god wrinkles his nose. "It's tingly. And it feels like a handcuff." Tony's not sure he wants to know how Loki knows what handcuffs feel like. He can't imagine a situation with Loki where they would need to be used on him.

Tony looks at the screen of his Stark Phone, which is showing the bracelet's location. Suddenly the little dot representing the bracelet blinks out.

After it doesn't reappear for half a minute, Tony takes the bracelet off Loki's wrist. He's about to start tinkering with it when he realizes it's showing up on the map again. What the hell?

He puts it back on Loki's wrist, and this time the dot stays there. But seriously, what is it with Loki and all these weird technological glitches? Tony removes the bracelet and puts it aside for now.

It would be better for everyone if they avoided another incident like today. Hopefully the bracelet will work, and maybe he'll tie a Stark Phone to Loki the next time they go out. Tony's been debating about going back to his Malibu mansion (Loki probably couldn't get lost there) but the tower's a lot more convenient for the whole Avengers aspect of his life. None of the other Avengers have moved into the tower yet, but he has a feeling it'll happen sometime. Thor's not going to be allowed to live here, Tony decides, if what Loki says about him is true.

"Give me some space, will you?" Tony tells Loki. Dum-E leads Loki to an open space and Tony pulls up the Norse mythology stuff on his tablet.

Half an hour goes by as Tony reads on his tablet. Really, the only criteria Loki's missing to be a Frost Giant is the blue skin and the size. Though those are sort of major factors. He could just ask the god, but for some reason he holds back.

He watches, amused, as Loki plays a pretend version of *The Lion King*. Loki's even roped Jarvis and Dum-E into playing with him, something Tony wouldn't have believed possible yesterday. Loki already has those two completely wrapped around his little finger (with Dum-E, that's not much of an accomplishment, but it certainly is with Jarvis). Tony tells himself that he hasn't succumbed, and won't.

Dum-E seems to be cast as Pumbaa. He doesn't do a whole lot other than dance during *Hakuna Matata* (performed by Loki and the Simba toy), but Dum-E's certainly enthusiastic about it. Tony's not sure if Loki's playing Simba or if he's having his toy Simba act out the part. Loki seems to switch between the two. He also plays Timon. He's bouncing from scene to scene, so it really makes no sense whatsoever- Mufasa's death comes after the adult Simba seeing him in the stars.

Occasionally Loki will stop and stare into the distance, seeming to drift into his own little world. Dum-E will gently nudge him when this happens and he'll snap out of it.

"My Dad just showed me the whole kingdom. And I'm gonna rule it all." Loki says, either as Simba or for his toy. Tony still can't tell.

"Yes. Well, forgive me for not leaping for joy. Bad back, you know." Jarvis says snarkily, and Loki breaks character and laughs. Jarvis has been assigned the role of Scar, and Tony knows the AI has a script pulled up somewhere. Jarvis does a lot better at reading the lines than Tony would have guessed, though. His AI's surprised him a couple times today.

Loki, on the other hand, doesn't have a script, yet he's rattling off lines from the movie. Had he
memorized the whole thing after one viewing? (Tony's not sure if tonight's viewing counts since Loki hadn't been paying attention and he'd come down to the lab twenty minutes in). It sure seems like he has it memorized.

It could be some weird knack but, like with the Rubik's Cube, Tony has a feeling it's a sign of intelligence. Especially since, rather than just having the dialogue memorized, Loki seems to have processed the movie and has a good grasp of the characters. He'd actually done a pretty good job picking roles for Dum-E and Jarvis. Not that Jarvis is evil like Scar, but somehow the role suits the AI.

Tony's not sure if Loki's just good at mimicking the characters, or if he's actually a decent actor. Well, voice actor. The god's left hand is playing with his long hair, which kind of ruins the whole physical acting aspect and makes him look a tad crazy.

"Shh! Zazu!" Loki says, now rather close to Tony, before switching roles and replying "Right. So how are we gonna ditch the dodo?" Loki's speaking for both Young Simba and Nala, but the toy Simba seems to have the part of Simba at the moment since Loki's speaking to it rather than just holding it loosely by his side.

Loki's looking at Tony expectantly, and Jarvis pipes up "I believe you've been given the part of Zazu, sir." Loki giggles and nods.

"Sorry. No can do. I'm too awesome to be anybody but Mufasa, and you killed him off a while ago, so I'll just sit this out." Tony shrugs, sort of apologetically. He has to draw the line somewhere. Loki looks very disappointed in him, but eventually just uses his hand for Zazu, shaping it like a beak. He casts a look at Tony that seems to say "You see this? You got replaced by my hand. How does that make you feel?"

Tony rolls his eyes, but he does it when Loki's not looking before going back to work.

Later that night, he lets Loki pick a room. Loki seems amazed that the room is all his. He bounces on the bed joyfully until Tony stops him in the fear it will break. "Can Dum-E stay in here?" Loki asks hopefully. Dum-E had followed them upstairs and seems rather taken with the idea too.

Tony's going to say no, but he realizes that he won't have to worry about the robot messing up anything in the lab if he stays in Loki's room. He's not sure if he's going to do that every night, though.

He's not at all surprised that Loki keeps Simba with him when he climbs into bed, and Dum-E clumsily tries to pull the blankets over him before Loki grabs the robot's claw.

"Okay. Dum-E can stay in here for tonight. But that means you should stay in here, too. Don't just wander around the tower, and no going in my room. Dum-E, don't leave the room until I say you can. Got it?" Loki nods, and Dum-E beeps. Tony sits on the edge of the bed. Now for the harder part about the whole separation anxiety thing.

"Look... You don't have to worry when I go to a different part of the tower. Or even when I leave the tower." Tony's really not comfortable with this type of conversation, but he has to let the god know this. "...I'm not going to abandon you or anything."

"You're not gonna abandon me?" The god repeats, as if he's not sure whether to believe it.

Tony barely refrains from rolling his eyes. "We've been over this, Loki. No, I'm not going to abandon you. I wasn't here when you woke up this morning, but I came back, right? And I found
you in the city, right?" Under his breath, he mumbles "How much more proof do you need?"

Loki nods and Tony grins. "See? Nothing to worry about. So you'll stay in here and I'll be somewhere else in the tower, and we'll see each other tomorrow."

He looks over to see that, like last night, Loki had conked out in what seems like seconds. How does he even go from being lively to asleep that quickly? It's like there's no middle ground of being sleepy and winding down.

Shaking his head, Tony leaves the door open a crack, and Jarvis turns out the lights.

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**His suit isn't responding. He can't fire his repulsers at the Chitauri invaders. He can only lay there, buried in the rubble.**

He'd failed. He's Iron Man. He's supposed to be able to stop this kind of thing. But right now, he can't even avenge the world, let alone stop it from being taken over. He watches uselessly as the Chitauri destroy the city and obliterate innocent citizens. The noise is deafening. Cars are flipped and smashed to the ground and weapons are fired, but even that doesn't drown out the screams.

Tony's not sure where the other Avengers are. Not until he hears tortured screams behind him. He watches in horror as, one by one, the other Avengers fall. Their lifeless faces seem to stare at him, telling him he's the only one of them left. He struggles under the rubble, but it's too much, and he eventually stops, exhausted, staring up at the sky filled with Chitauri ships.

Then he sees Pepper. She's covered in scrapes and bruises but she has a determined look on her face. "Pepper! Get out of here!" He screams, but voice isn't even getting through his helmet.

She's joined by Loki, who's holding a mangled, headless Simba and asking "Where's Tony?"

Tony screams at them to get out of there as Chitauri soldiers come up behind them, but they don't notice him amid all the rubble. They turn and see the alien soldiers. "Tony will find us, right?" Loki asks Pepper in an unsure voice.

Tony tries everything to get out of the rubble. He tries harder than he's ever tried on anything in his life but he can't do it.

"No. He won't. Not this time." Tony hears Pepper say, and he doubles his efforts, even though by now he knows he'll get nowhere. He's failed. Completely and utterly failed.

The Chitauri soldiers aim their weapons, and in an instant, Pepper and Loki are no more.

Tony wakes up yelling and drenched in sweat. He doesn't know where he is. The dead faces of everyone he cares about flash before his eyes. No. No. They can't all be dead. He tries to lunge out of bed, still gripped by his nightmare, but he's tangled in the blankets and he falls to the floor. His breath catches in his throat, and he struggles to breathe as he lays there, shaking.

Dimly, he hears Jarvis urging him to breathe.

"In... Out... In... Out... Very good, sir." Jarvis' voice is calming. Slowly, the pressure on his chest lightens and Tony's breathing slows down.

He's not sure how long it takes, but he's eventually calm enough to function. He untangles himself from the blanket and leaves it half laying on the floor. He's not getting any more sleep tonight, that's for sure.
He checks the time. 1:42 AM. He's gone on less sleep than this before.

"Sir, if you want to talk about-" Jarvis begins, but Tony cuts him off.

"I'm fine Jarvis." Tony declines, as he always does after an episode. Sometimes he wishes he had someone to comfort him, but in the end his pride always wins over that part.

He leaves his room in his boxers, not bothering to put on any other clothes. He finds himself outside of Loki's room, and he silently pushes the door open. The god's hair is splayed around his head, and he holds Simba close. Dum-E has his claw resting on the back of Loki's hand, and the robot greets Tony with a soft beep.

Loki has a soft smile on his lips. At least one of them is having nice dreams.

He's kind of surprised the god had featured so prominently in his dream, next to Pepper. But somehow, in less than two days, Loki has managed to worm his way into Tony's heart, quirks and all. He's become one of Tony's few really good friends, someone Tony truly cares about. He hadn't really realized it until the nightmare.

"Keep watching him, all right?" Tony murmurs to both Jarvis and Dum-E.

Still in his boxers, he goes down to the lab and blasts some music. He loses himself working on an Iron Man suit until Jarvis interrupts him.

"Mr. Loki appears to be having a severe nightmare, sir." Severe nightmare. That sounds like what he'd just had. Loki had seemed so peaceful in his sleep. Then again, like Tony, he apparently has panic attacks, so nightmares aren't out of the question. Tony drops what he's doing and heads for the elevator. After it carries him to his penthouse, Tony dashes towards Loki's room.

He can hear what sounds like Loki pleading with someone, but it's in some other language. He bursts through the door and stops dead in his tracks.

There's a Loki in bed in the Iron Man pajamas, and his hands have some sort of glowing green mist around them. It almost looks like green fire around his hands. Then there's another Loki in black clothes trying to comfort him, speaking softly in another language as he lays next to the sleeping god and runs a hand through Loki's hair.

Tony stares. What the hell is going on?

The sleeping Loki is tossing and turning in bed, his face showing his terror all too clearly, and he's talking in his sleep. This seems much worse than his panic attack had been. Dum-E is whirring around, beeping nervously, and the robot's arm passes through the Loki in black clothes. That Loki shimmers out of sight.

Dum-E worriedly prods Loki, and there's an explosive gust of wind, blowing both Tony and Dum-E backwards. Tony's back hits the doorframe, and the jolt of pain tells him this isn't some weird dream, throwing out his current guess that he'd fallen back asleep in his lab.

For a bit he just leans there, wondering if he's gone insane.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Tony and Loki talk about what happened.

Loki meets another Avenger.

Tony pushes away from the door and heads towards Loki. Thankfully the wind is gone, because it had been freezing, especially since he's just in his boxers. Where on earth had the wind even come from? And where had the other Loki come from?

Tony has no idea what had been happening, and he hates the feeling of not knowing something.

At least he knows Jarvis' camera isn't messed up, since he'd seen the other Loki there. Of course, that adds a completely different question about who the other Loki was and what he was doing there, and how he just disappeared.

Tony shoves those thoughts out of his mind. He'll worry about them later. Right now, he needs to focus on Loki. The god's muttering has gotten louder, and the nightmare seems to be getting even worse. He thinks the language Loki's muttering might be Old Norse, but he's not sure. That's just his guess, considering Loki's from a place in Norse mythology.

"Dum-E! Get out of the way!" He snaps at the robot. Dum-E had recovered from the gust of wind is back by Loki's side. The robot moves out of the way as ordered and Tony makes his way towards Loki.

The green mist around Loki's hands is getting brighter. That mist and Tony's arc reactor are providing most of the light in the room, casting a strange mix of blue-green light on things. Another Loki appears out of thin air, scaring the living daylights out of Tony. This Loki has his hair slicked back and looks different from the first other-Loki.

This Loki takes over where the Loki that had vanished left off, trying to comfort the sleeping Loki, but it doesn't seem to be working too well.

Tony needs to get Loki out of this nightmare. He places a hand on Loki's shoulder, ignoring the other Loki lying on the other side of the bed for now. Loki's skin is cold, but it's not freezing yet. Though it's steadily getting colder.

"Loki!" Tony shouts, shaking the god frantically, but not roughly. It's hard to tell when the god's thrashing around, but he thinks Loki stirs a bit.

He shouts Loki's name again, but the god doesn't show any further signs of waking.

"NAAAAAANTS!... INGONYAMA BAGITHI BABA!" The opening to Circle of Life blares out of the walls at a ridiculous volume. Tony practically jumps out of his skin, but Jarvis had done the trick. Loki's eyes fly open, and Jarvis stops the music.

Not that Loki waking up is the end of the issue, of course.
Loki seems to have no idea where he is as he sits there, shaking. His terror intensifies when he sees
the green stuff that's still around his hands, and he squeezes his eyes shut as if he wants to stop
seeing it.

When Loki sees the other Loki, he lets out a horrified moaning sound and swipes a hand through
the other Loki, making that one disappear like the first.

"Loki?" Tony asks, cautiously putting a hand on his shoulder again. He quickly yanks it away with
a sharp intake of breath. It's so cold it actually hurts. So Jarvis' sensors are indeed fine, and Loki
definitely fits the 'cold skin' requirement of Frost Giants. For a couple seconds, Tony just looks at
his hand in shock before looking back at Loki.

Loki is rocking back and forth, staring at his hands. He has them clenched into fists like he's trying
to smother the green smoke. Said green smoke is reflected in his eyes in an eerie way.

"Loki, calm down." Tony urges. The god's almost manic in his attempt to get rid of the green stuff.
Tony sighs and sits halfway down the bed, while Loki sits near the pillows.

For a second, Loki seems like he wants to flee, but the fight seems to leave him as he huddles
against the headboard, frightened.

Loki looks at Tony with wide, terrified eyes. He probably just realized Tony was there. The god's
staring into Tony's eyes as if he's trying to read his mind. Tony doesn't break the eye contact as he
keeps trying to calm Loki down with quiet, reassuring words.

For a while, Tony just keeps repeating himself in his calmest voice possible. Loki slowly relaxes,
so slowly it's almost imperceptible. Tony's not sure how long it is before Loki speaks.

"You saw it..." Loki mutters (in English). He sounds terrified and crushed at the same time.

"How could I miss it? You had glowing green stuff around your hands and you had these two
clones that just appeared out of thin air and disappeared without a trace." Apparently that comment
is too much since it sends them back to square one.

"No! Don't hit me! Please!" Loki sobs, curling into an even smaller ball.

"...I'm not going to hit you." Tony replies, taken aback slightly. He makes sure not to mention what
happened for the next fifteen minutes, as he calms Loki down a second time. Eventually, Loki's
shaking subsides, though Loki's still not completely calm. He's staring at Tony as if Tony's
suddenly going to bite his head off or something.

Tony sighs. As much as he wants answers about about all that weird stuff that just happened, he
knows if he brings it up now they'll just go back to square one again. Loki's still too jumpy, but the
weird green stuff is finally gone. Tony picks up the Simba toy, which he's just noticed is lying on
the floor, and hands it to Loki. The god hugs the toy but continues to watch Tony warily.

Loki needs to be more relaxed before Tony can ask him about what happened.

"Hey, Jarvis, we have the ingredients for hot chocolate, right?"

Ten minutes later he's sitting at the table with Loki. Both of them have a mug of hot chocolate in
front of them (without marshmallows, since there apparently aren't any in the tower), because who
doesn't feel better after drinking hot chocolate? Normally, Tony would turn to alcohol or coffee, but
there's something nice about hot chocolate.
Loki doesn't know about Tony's nightmare, but Tony can't help thinking that this is like some kind of nightmare support club between the two of them. Loki relaxes slightly as he drinks the hot chocolate, but he still casts worried and slightly suspicious looks at Tony.

They don't sit in silence for long. Tony blurts something out, something that thankfully doesn't make Loki panic again. He's still not going to mention the elephant in the room just yet.

"So, Snoopy, I didn't know you spoke another language."

Saying Loki is confused is an understatement.

He'd been having a nightmare where he had to return to Asgard, where Thor and the Warriors Three were all too delighted to resume their treatment of him.

Then he'd woken up and discovered he'd been doing magic in his sleep, which happened whenever he had a bad dream. This was his fourth screw up already, and this time there was another Loki and the green stuff around his hands. If that wasn't bad enough, he could feel his body getting colder and he knew that was the start of showing his horrible Jotun form. Thankfully that part had stopped, though.

Needless to say, it had been a pretty horrible way to wake up. But then he'd realized Tony was there. Which meant Tony had seen his magic. There's no doubt about that, as Tony had mentioned it. He'd even said there were two other Loki's.

Yes, Loki had known that Tony was bound to see his magic soon, but he didn't think it would be this soon. He'd waited for Tony to tell him he was a freak, an Argr. Because that was what everyone would do, right? It was the only logical thing to do in the situation.

But for some inexplicable reason, Tony hadn't done that, nor had he hit Loki.

Now they're at the table, and Tony's given him a mug of some warm brown chocolaty drink. Loki likes it immensely. It helps calm him down a bit, and he sips it as he stares at the mesmerizing, glowing circle in Tony's chest. He remembers commenting on it in Tony's room.

"So, Snoopy, I didn't know you spoke another language." Tony says. Loki looks at him, confused. Where had that come from? "You were talking in your sleep." Tony clarifies.

"It's... Allspeak. That's when you can talk to anyone and understand anyone, I think." Loki says, glad they're at least not talking about magic.

"So do you know every language?" Tony asks, intrigued "Or is there some kind of translator between you and the world?" Loki shrugs. He's not really sure how the whole thing works.

"I dunno. I think it's kind of like a translator? But it doesn't work quite as well for me as it does for others. 'Cause I don't know some words." Loki says. Some words here he just didn't encounter in Asgard. Like waffle. Also, his mind will sometimes just completely blank on a word, like it had with injuries the first day.

Tony says something in response, but Loki's stopped listening. When is Tony going to bring up the dreaded subject of magic? What is Tony going to do to him when he does? It's silent for a bit as Loki's lost in his thoughts. Loki considers lying about the magic, but he can't think of another explanation for the stuff that happened. Before Loki can stop himself, he blurts out fearfully "You hate me, don't you?"
"No. I don't hate you. Why would you think that?" Tony asks, confused. Loki furrows his brow and strokes Simba. Why wouldn't Tony hate him? There are so many reasons to, and magic is only one of them.

"You saw me do it." Loki's mouth doesn't seem to be checking in with his brain first. How had he even managed to avoid this conversation earlier? He wanted to avoid this topic now and his treacherous mouth just brought it up.

"So? Why would that make me hate you?"

"Everyone hates me 'cause it's bad! Magic's bad! I'm bad!" Loki realizes too late that he'd practically shrieked this thought aloud as he kneels on his chair. He freezes before his face crumbles and he sinks down to the floor under the table.

It's over. Tony finally knows that secret, and despite what Tony said, he surely hates him now. He's lost one of his only friends, and Tony will probably start tormenting him like everyone else. Now it's just Jarvis, Dum-E and Pepper, but they'll undoubtedly hate him when they find out too. So then it'll just be Simba as his friend, and he doesn't even totally count.

He hugs Simba to his chest as he sobs under the table. He hears Tony shift out of his chair and join him under it. Loki squeezes his eyes shut. The blows are going to start soon, and Tony's probably going to taunt him for crying too. It'll be Asgard all over again. Loki covers his head and waits fearfully for Tony to start hurting him.

How could he have thought it would be different? He knew the nice times would end when Tony found out about his magic. But he hadn't wanted them to end, ever.

"Hey." Tony says softly. "I don't hate you, remember? And you're not bad." Tony's using the same tone of voice that he used when he'd found Loki yesterday, and when Loki had woken up not long ago. As if nothing has changed. Loki just shakes his head, not wanting to say something that'll make it even worse for him. Tony keeps talking in that reassuring tone.

After a bit, he looks at Tony, but the man doesn't seem angry. If anything, he's looking at Loki with concern. It doesn't make any sense. He has every reason to hate him for doing magic. Why is Tony still being so nice? Doesn't he understand that Loki had just done something horrible and demented?

But Tony doesn't seem to care.

To Loki's surprise, Tony puts an arm around his shoulders and pulls him into something sort of like a half embrace. Tony's body is really warm, and Loki can feel the thing in Tony's chest when he's this close. It's giving off its own sort of energy and rhythm. Loki slowly finds himself relaxing to the touch, leaning into it even. This was the last thing he expected, but he likes it. Tony wouldn't do it to someone he didn't like, right?

Loki's pretty sure that this is the first time he's ever been comforted after a nightmare.

As inexplicable as it is, it seems like nothing's changed, and Tony really is still his friend. Unless Tony hadn't processed it yet? Loki really hopes that's not the case.

Sniffling, he wraps his arms around his favorite person ever.

It feels just as awkward when Loki hugs him as it did two days ago. Actually it's even more awkward, Tony decides, but that's probably because he's still in his boxers. He gently extracts
himself from the embrace and looks at Loki, who's fiddling with Simba. The god still doesn't seem entirely back to normal.

Tony never thought he was able to comfort someone, but he's done it multiple times with Loki. He'd just done it three times in less than an hour, for crying out loud. He's as surprised about it as anybody else would most likely be. Normally he was the one who caused the problem that made someone need comforting.

Somehow, though, he can comfort Loki. He's even done it both under a bed and under a table, he thinks, shaking his head slightly.

That whole conversation had gone by quicker than he'd expected, and he hadn't expected Loki to actually bring it up. Though if the look on the god's face had been anything to go by, he hadn't meant to. Loki had still clearly been nervous, so perhaps he wasn't thinking clearly when he blurted it out. Still, Tony's rather thankful for that accidental remark.

Tony had definitely heard Loki mention magic, but as a scientist he's obviously not going to buy into that yet. Maybe he'll be able to run some tests while Loki's doing that... stuff he'd been doing while asleep. The weird green smoke around his hands had to be some sort of energy. And the other-Loki's could be some kind of advanced hologram that's not transparent. Though where those would come from was anyone's guess. Did they come from Loki?

"You're still my friend, right?" Loki asks in a strangely doubtful tone after staring into space for a bit. "Even though...?" The god trails off, but it's obvious what he's referring to. His tone makes it sound like the other-Loki's and the green mist are monstrosities. Like that's some kind of taboo subject. It probably is, in Asgard at least.

Tony hadn't missed the way Loki looked at him, as if he expected to be hit after all that weird stuff happened. Loki had actually begged not to be hit. No, not hit, he amends, even though that's the word Loki had used. Judging from the way he'd curled up on the floor, Loki had expected to be full out beaten, like a dog that's peed on its abusive owner's floor. Unfortunately, given even the little bit he knows of Loki's past, that was probably a reasonable expectation. Tony's blood boils at Asgard, which had undoubtedly been the cause of it.

"Hell yeah I'm still your friend." Tony reassures him. Loki smiles the tiniest bit, which seems like a good sign.

"Why?" The god asks incredulously, smile dropping as he stares at Tony like he's crazy.

"If you think you can get rid of me with some green light, some wind and a couple clones, you're sorely mistaken." Tony answers "Now how about we get out from under here before our hot chocolate gets cold?" Loki nods and they both crawl out from under the table. Finally.

Turns out the hot chocolate has already gotten cold, Tony had basically finished his anyways and Loki is drinking his, apparently not caring about the change in temperature.

"Are Jarvis and Dum-E and Pepper still my friends?" Loki asks.

"My favorable opinion of you has not changed, Mr. Loki." Jarvis speaks for the first time since Tony had made the hot chocolate. His voice actually sounds warm and affectionate. Loki looks very shocked at Jarvis' words, but it's a pleased sort of shock.

"I doubt you could manage to get Dum-E to dislike you if you tried." Tony adds, smiling slightly. "And Pepper will undoubtedly still be your friend, too."
"Considering she puts up with you, sir, I'd be very surprised if Miss Potts didn't remain friends with Mr. Loki." Jarvis snarks.

"Don't push it, Jarvis." Tony grumbles halfheartedly. Though, to be honest, he's amazed he and Pepper have remained friends after breaking up.

A grin is spreading over Loki's face, and he bounces on his toes, laughing.

Although things seem fine now, Tony doubts this whole issue is the sort that can be completely resolved after one small conversation like that. He has a feeling it's going to take a while for this issue to totally be resolved. They still haven't really gone over what actually happened, because all that had really happened was Loki had implied it was magic.

He doubts Loki's going to suddenly stop panicking whenever this so-called magic stuff happens, especially since Loki's used to being treated like crap thanks to a couple thousand years too many in Asgard.

Over the next several days, Tony and Loki fall into a loose routine, which basically consists of them eating together and then Tony working and Loki doing his own thing. In the evenings after eating dinner together, they'll watch a movie, or Tony will continue working and Loki will just keep entertaining himself.

The first two days, Tony relents and lets Loki in the lab whenever he's down there himself. The people fixing the roof are audible from the penthouse, and the sound of them moving around gets annoying.

When he's in the lab, Loki will sometimes just sit and stare at him, which starts to get irritating. When Tony finally asks him to stop staring, Loki usually ends up playing games with Jarvis and Dum-E. Tony quickly learns that Loki and Dum-E playing tag is not a good idea, though they haven't managed to destroy anything playing hide-and-seek yet. Loki also plays pretend occasionally. Tony had smirked when he'd heard Loki mention "Man of Iron" in one of his games.

Tony only notices the weird stuff happening around Loki four or five times in the course of several days, and the majority of those are during nightmares. Both Tony and Loki continue to have them, though Loki has them more often than Tony. A couple times, Tony is actually sleeping peacefully before Jarvis awakes him to inform him of Loki's nightmare.

Tony asks, once, what Loki's nightmare was about. Loki mutters something, and Tony catches the words "Asgard" and "hurts."

Their hot chocolate sessions after their nightmares have become sort of a routine (though Tony's switched to drinking coffee) though it obviously would be better if they didn't have to have those sessions in the first place. One time, Tony vaguely tells Loki that he has bad dreams too, but he doesn't elaborate. He's rather surprised he's even told Loki that small bit of information.

The couple times the strange things happen when Loki's awake and in Tony's line of vision, Loki will freeze and look at Tony anxiously. But Tony will just shoot him a quick grin and say something along the lines of "That was cool!"

Not that saying that has really affected Loki's reactions much. Loki's reactions to the incidents haven't changed at all, really. Tony doesn't react negatively to any of these occurrences, not even when the lamp on Loki's bedside table blows up (which is the only dangerous thing that has happened during these episodes, and Tony can't even really pin that on Loki). But Loki still will
curl up on the floor, clearly expecting some kind of horrible reaction on Tony's part, and Tony will have to go calm him down.

Really, Tony thinks, it is pretty cool when he sees a flash of green around Loki's hands, and he's still itching to know what it is. But until Loki's not terrified of it, he probably won't find out, since Loki certainly wouldn't let him run tests on it.

Once, there had been another Loki-clone when Loki was awake, but Loki had gotten rid of it quickly with a panicked look at Tony (Tony's seen plenty of them when Loki's having nightmares, though. It hadn't taken long to deduce that, whatever the other-Loki's are, they're not real). It obvious Loki's been taught to fear these occurrences, and it's understandable that that reaction isn't going to go away quickly. But Tony wants him to know that he's not going to be punished for it here.

Tony tries to bring up the subject a couple times, but Loki either tunes him out or shrieks that he doesn't want to talk about it. He probably wants to avoid another slip up like when he'd said it was magic.

On the bright side, after about four days, they've gradually worked their way back up to Loki being in the penthouse without Tony for a couple hours. The fact that Jarvis is always there is an enormous help, and he manages to keep Loki occupied like he did the time Tony went to Philadelphia. Sometimes Tony sends Dum-E up there to help Jarvis keep Loki company, but that's somewhat rare.

A lot of times, Loki will wander aimlessly around the penthouse. One day, he kills time by inspecting random cases of Tony's huge DVD collection. Tony ends up getting him paper and a bunch of art supplies so he'll have something to occupy his time with, after finding a sheet of paper covered with messy doodles on Loki's desk in the god's room. However, Tony doesn't just leave Loki in the penthouse the whole day. He lets him down in the lab periodically.

Even with the nightmares, life seems less hectic than it had the first couple days.

Loki's drawing a picture at the table, his tongue sticking slightly out of the corner of his mouth in concentration. It's really hard, but he didn't draw or paint much in Asgard due to lack of materials (or rather, his lack of access to the materials. They certainly had paint somewhere, with all the paintings on the castle walls. And someone had to draw the pictures in books).

But here he has all the paper he could want, as well as markers, crayons, colored pencils and even paints, though he hasn't used the paints yet. He's not sure if Tony got them for him or if they'd been laying around the tower somewhere, but they showed up somehow, and Tony had said to make good use of them.

Simba's standing in front of him on the table, and Loki glances between Simba and the paper. He pauses for a bit to make Simba sing, which never gets old, before going back to his drawing.

"Can I have brown, Dum-E?" He asks, and Dum-E beeps before hunting through the box of markers for the right color. Sometimes Dum-E's in the lab with Tony, but right now isn't one of those times. Once Dum-E hands it over, Loki carefully makes two little dots for eyes and giggles. Perfect.

He sits back and studies his drawing. Something's missing. "Yellow, Dum-E?" He requests, putting the brown down on the table. He takes the yellow marker from Dum-E and carefully draws a sun in the corner.
"Mr. Loki, your presence is requested in the lab." Jarvis says. Loki looks up, excited. That means he gets to see Tony! He's not sure why Tony doesn't let him down in the lab sometimes, but he loves it when he can go down and visit (or, even better, spend the whole day there).

He grabs Simba and his drawing and sprints, giggling, towards the elevator, Dum-E following with a happy beep. Loki practically slams straight into the back wall of the elevator but he manages to stop himself in time. He turns around and waits for Dum-E, who's considerably slower.

Loki bounces in anticipation as he and Dum-E ride down, and the elevator doors finally open.

"Tony! Tony! Tony! Tony!" He singsongs, running towards him and practically flinging his drawing down on the table in front of the man. "Look!"

Tony looks at the drawing, and he clears his throat before speaking. "Let's see. It's a devilishly handsome bearded man and a tall pale man with black hair. Now, who do I know who looks like that?"

"It's us!" Loki can't contain it anymore, so he shrieks it out, laughing. He's pretty sure Tony had known that and was just messing with him, but then he hesitates. "Do you like it? I asked Jarvis and he said he thought you would. But he can't know for sure, 'cause he's not you. Dum-E helped me pick out the colors." He strokes Simba anxiously. What if Tony hates it?

"Jarvis was right-" Tony begins.

"As always," Jarvis interrupts, and Loki laughs. Jarvis is always right.

Tony continues "-I do like it. Though how come you're in my suit? Oh, wait, those are your pajamas, right?" Loki nods, and Tony smiles at him. "What do you say we hang it later?" Loki grins. This is going better than he could have imagined. His drawing's going to be displayed!

He doesn't even notice the other man in the lab until then. The other man, like Tony, is shorter than Loki. He has brown hair and glasses. The man introduces himself as Doctor Bruce Banner. Loki cocks his head to the side. That name sounds familiar, but he can't place it. The word doctor is something that's never used on Asgard, but for some reason he's pretty sure that's not actually part of the man's name.

"I'm Loki! That's Tony- sometimes he calls me Snoopy- and that's Dum-E and Jarvis is here, except you can't see him 'cause he lives in the walls and he's just a voice." Loki nods, and then adds "And this is Simba. He sings." He holds Simba up and squeezes his ear for Bruce to see.

"I already knew Tony, Jarvis and Dum-E, but it's nice to meet you, Loki." Bruce says, smiling kindly. He speaks in a rather quiet voice. With a glance at Simba, he adds "I take it you like The Lion King."

Tony snorts. "That's an understatement. He had the freaking thing memorized after the first viewing." Loki frowns in confusion. Why did Tony think that? It had taken him at least four times of listening to I Just Can't Wait to be King to remember all of that. He'd remembered some snippets from the movie when playing his game, but not the whole thing.

"Actually, sir." Jarvis pipes up. "Only 37% of the lines Mr. Loki spoke were verbatim. The rest were paraphrased slightly, though they were fairly close to the original lines."

"Ok, sort of memorized." Tony says. "Well, you still really like it, don't you, Snoopy?" Loki nods. Bruce smiles slightly and says "Nice job, Loki. You've fooled Tony Stark. Not many people are
"Hey, I wasn't fooled!" Tony huffs, annoyed. "It sounded like he had it down to me. How am I supposed to know if a line is slightly off if I don't have the movie memorized myself?"

"So why were you so convinced he had it memorized, if you didn't know for sure?" Bruce questions, and then turns to Loki and asks "So how do you like living with Tony?"

"I love it!" Loki squeals, unable to contain his enthusiasm. A jolt of joy makes his body wriggle. "Tony's the nicest person ever!"

"Is he, now?" Bruce asks with a smile, exchanging a look with Tony for some reason. Loki nods happily, flicking his fingers a bit.

"Yes! We watch moving pictures and drink hot chocolate, and he got clothes for me. And Simba. He got Simba too." After a bit, he adds. "He's really smart. Did you know he actually made Dum-E and Jarvis?" Loki's still amazed that Tony had somehow made his too other friends who live in the tower, and he's not sure how it was done.

Loki sees Tony and Bruce exchange another look, but he continues rambling. "Hey, you've got brown eyes, just like Tony!" He tells Bruce. "I've got green eyes. Green's my favorite color. Do you like green?"

Bruce shifts uncomfortably at that and quietly says "No. Not really."

Wait a second! Loki suddenly remembers where he'd heard Bruce's name. It was under the bed, when Tony was telling him about the Avengers. The Hulk is green. That's probably why Bruce doesn't like that color.

His eyes widen in understanding. "You're the Hu-" Then, Loki cuts himself off, suddenly remembering that Tony had said Bruce didn't like talking about the Hulk. He quickly clamps a hand over his mouth so he doesn't accidentally blurt it out.

Wait, so that means Bruce is another Avenger, like Thor. Tony's an Avenger, but he's nice, unlike Thor. But what if the other Avengers think of him more like Thor does? It would't be surprising, even if Tony had said fairly positive things about them that time under the bed.

Even though Bruce has been nice so far, Loki can't help starting to feel a little nervous. After all, it's odd enough that Tony and Pepper are friends with him. There probably aren't too many more people who would actually like him, right?

Besides, Thor had said that Bruce hated monsters, and since Loki's a monstrous frost giant, that means he probably really hates Loki. Maybe he's just disguising that hate.

Loki can't help moving so that Tony's in between him and Bruce, shielding him from the other Avenger. Because he's pretty sure that, if someone attacked him, Tony would protect him.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Bruce gets angry, so Loki meets Hulk. It's not what anyone expects.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At first, Tony doesn't even realize that Loki's shifted behind him. It's not obvious immediately. Loki moves around a lot, after all. But when Tony shifts to the side, Loki does too, so that he remains behind Tony. He turns around, but doesn't see Loki until he looks down.

For some reason, Loki is squatting down and prancing Simba around on the floor. His long hair falls down and obscures his face, but his body looks like it's faintly tensed up, and he's slightly rocking from side to side. Tony looks at the god quizzically. Loki suddenly seems a bit... worried? Nervous? Suspicious? Tony's not sure which word is the best descriptor. The god eventually raises his head enough for Tony to see his face and notice the worried look he casts at Bruce, like he might suddenly attack.

Tony frowns. What had brought this on? Loki had seemed perfectly happy talking with Bruce. Then, there had been what seemed to be a lightbulb moment, and Loki had started saying "You're the Hulk." before, to Tony's surprise, clamping a hand over his mouth. At least, that's what it seemed like the god was about to say

As soon as he thinks that, Tony realizes that's what it had to be. So Loki now knows Bruce is an Avenger, even though Tony had told him that under the bed on the first day. He remembers Loki had been worried the Avengers were going to hurt him.

Looking at the god now, he seems to be thinking along those lines. But Tony had told him that the Avengers weren't going to hurt him that time under the bed, and Loki had seemed to get that. Besides, Loki had seen that Bruce is a nice person- Bruce had certainly been nice when they were talking just moments ago, and he's still talking kindly to the god, who's currently answering him with clipped responses in a nervous tone. Why is Loki acting like this again?

"Mind giving us a moment alone?" Tony asks Bruce. Bruce nods acceptingly, not questioning the reason for it, and moves some distance away, pulling up a hologram to keep himself occupied. Tony squats down next to the god.

"Is anything the matter?" Tony can't help noticing that Loki has relaxed slightly now that Bruce is further away. Going on a hunch, Tony asks in a quiet voice "Are you worried about the Other Guy coming out?"

"Other Guy?" Loki asks, loudly but innocently. Tony winces slightly, casting a quick look at Bruce, who's probably pretending he didn't hear it.

"The big, green rage machine." Tony clarifies, lowering his voice. He can tell Loki knows he's referring to the Hulk. He doesn't think Loki's the type of person who would stop liking Bruce just because he's the Hulk, but maybe he's wrong. Tony hopes Loki's not that type of person, though.
Loki shakes his head quickly in the negative, and Tony's glad that Loki apparently isn't prejudiced against the Hulk. The Hulk doesn't seem to be on Loki's mind at all. "What if he hates me like Thor?" Loki emphasizes the thunderer's name in an anxious voice as he bites his lower lip and points towards Bruce. Tony's pretty sure he's asking about Bruce and not the Hulk.

"Didn't we go over this already?" Tony asks "Trust me, Bruce is nice. He won't treat you like that."

"But..." Loki trails off, simultaneously sounding as if he's stopping himself from saying something and sounding slightly confused. Tony just quirks an eyebrow at him and gives a gesture to continue.

Instead, Loki asks "...So he's a nice friend of yours like Pepper?" Tony still hears the unspoken "Instead of a mean friend of yours like Thor?"

Somewhat exasperated, Tony replies "Yes. There's no reason for you to fear him." After a bit, he adds "Well, unless you make him mad, but I don't think that will happen."

Loki looks unsure, but he cautiously nods, looking down at Simba. His body relaxes slightly, but it still looks sort of tense.

"Tell you what. How about you go back up to the penthouse with Dum-E and take a break from talking to him and I'll stay here with him?" Tony suggests, trying to disguise the fact that he wants to talk to Bruce alone.

Loki nods and calls out to Dum-E, who happily follows the god to the elevator.

Meanwhile, Tony stares at the drawing Loki had given him, which shows him with his arm around the god, smiling and standing under the sun. It's rather childishly drawn, but judging from the way Loki holds a pencil (or crayon or marker) in his fist most of the time, he probably hadn't drawn or written much in Asgard. But the two people in his drawing are instantly recognizable, even if they are rather simple renderings.

The silence is broken by Bruce. "He seems quite taken to you." As if that isn't a painfully obvious observation. "Though I wouldn't have guessed that you're the 'nicest person ever.'" Bruce says, smiling slightly. Tony puts the drawing down on the table and turns to face his Science Bro.

"You wound me!" Tony replies in a mock-insulted voice. Though, to be honest, he'd been rather surprised to hear that description of himself. It's certainly a new one, that's for sure. Most people wouldn't consider him particularly nice, even with the whole Iron Man gig. Heck, even Tony himself doesn't consider himself nice on the surface. But Loki had obviously meant what he said about Tony being the nicest person ever, and Tony has to admit that hearing that was, well, nice.

"Seriously, why wouldn't he like me? There are so many reasons to like me. I'm just that awesome!" He continues, and Bruce's lips quirk upwards again.

"You're different around him." Bruce observes. He doesn't sound at all judgmental though.

Yeah, Tony knew that, but having someone point it out is just... weird. He's pretty sure most people would be very surprised to see the way he acts around Loki. He's not even that sarcastic with him. Really, he actually is nice to Loki- on the surface, too. That's a weird thought. It certainly doesn't fit the paparazzi's view of him. Most people think of Tony Stark as a narcissistic playboy and alcoholic, but that isn't quite as accurate as it once was. He'd kicked the whole playboy gig when dating Pepper, and never really got back to it after breaking up. While he still drinks a lot, he's rarely completely inebriated these days.
Tony doesn't reply to that comment, instead saying "Well, there you go. You've met your second god. What do you think of him?"

"I like him." Bruce answers. "Though how did he end up living with you?"

"Oh, the usual way people find roommates. Or tower-mates in our case. He fell out of a portal, hard enough to make a crater in my roof, and his injuries healed in hours." Bruce looks at him skeptically, probably thinking he's joking. As proof, Tony has Jarvis pull up the footage from that first day and play it in fast-forward.

Bruce watches with interest. Giving Tony a level look, he says "Just making sure, you didn't edit this, right?" Tony confirms that he didn't, but really it was a pretty reasonable assumption.

"He came from Asgard, hence the portal." Tony explains, and Bruce nods, still apparently thinking about how the injuries could heal that quickly. Tony gives his two-cents worth (though in his case it should be worth a billion dollars) "My current theory for the insanely-fast healing is it's some sort of perk of being a god. Loki's said he wasn't born in Asgard, though- otherwise I would've said it's an Asgardian thing. But he heals even quicker than Point Break."

Bruce nods. "That would make sense. Though why would he heal quicker than Thor?"

"Maybe Thor's below average in that regard." Smirking, Tony adds "Sort of like how he is in terms of brains." It suddenly occurs to Tony that he hasn't been insulting Loki, whereas he makes jabs about everyone else. Though Loki might think he's being totally serious if he did jokingly insult him. Perhaps he'd realized that subconsciously.

"Though of the things Loki's done, that's fairly low on the freaky-shit-o'meter." He waits a bit, just for dramatic effect, and Bruce looks at him expectantly.

"He has these... powers." It briefly crosses Tony's mind that Loki's powers might be a private topic. But he needs to tell someone about them, just to stop feeling like he's going crazy. Besides, Bruce won't tell anyone. Maybe he can even help Loki to stop fearing them.

"What sort of powers?" Bruce asks, pushing his glasses up his nose.

"Whenever he's using them, there's some sort of green stuff around his hands. Sometimes it looks like smoke or fire, and sometimes it looks like some kind of energy. He claims it's magic, but people believe all sorts of weird stuff." Tony notices Bruce looks surprised about this, and to be honest, Tony doesn't really have any idea what it is. "I'd love to be able to run some tests on them, but I don't think he's ready for that. He's terrified of them."

Bruce folds his arms and asks "Are they dangerous?" Tony can get why Bruce would feel sympathetic towards the god if that were the case.

"No. Not that I've seen, anyways." Tony pauses and adds "Well, sometimes there's a really strong wind, but that's not really dangerous. A lamp broke, once, but that's the most that happened."

"Maybe he's scared of them because he doesn't understand them." Bruce suggests.

"No, I think it's something else." Tony mutters darkly. He has a very good idea of why Loki fears his powers. It hasn't slipped his notice that Loki's nightmares are apparently about Asgard, and that he acts like he's expecting to be punished whenever an incident occurs. It doesn't take a genius to put the two together (although a genius ended up doing it).

Bruce waits for him to elaborate, but Tony's not sure he should. It's very likely Bruce would hulk
out when hearing about how the god had been treated.

"Asgard wasn't very nice to him." Tony says, while thinking that's a very mild way to put it. Fortunately, Bruce doesn't start turning green, although he does look like he's forcing himself to remain calm.

"...I see." Bruce replies extra quietly, and Tony's positive Bruce had figured out that it was more severe than that already. Maybe if he doesn't provide details, Bruce won't go all green on him.

After a bit of silence, Bruce asks "So is that all that he does with these... powers?" Tony's perfectly fine with changing the subject, because he's still slightly worried that Bruce would hulk out again if he dwelled on Loki's horrible treatment for too long, especially since he had needed to force himself to calm down.

"Let's see... other versions of him keep cropping up, but they're intangible. Those seem like some kind of advanced hologram, one that's not transparent, but I have no idea where they're coming from. Jarvis hasn't detected any new technological presence, though."

"That's interesting." Bruce replies. "Do they do anything?"

"Not really. They're just there. Sometimes they'll try to wake him up, but it never works. He seems to hate seeing them though, even though they haven't done anything to him. Well, not here, at least. Maybe they did something to him in Asgard."

Bruce changes the topic, so Tony doesn't have too long to think of what they could have done. "So what does he do all day?"

Tony shrugs and lists off some stuff. "Draws. Plays made up games with Dum-E and Jarvis. Hangs out down here. Reads Peanuts comics. Carries his toy Simba everywhere." The last one he says with a roll of his eyes, before he continues. "He's actually a lot smarter than he seems at first."

"I never said he wasn't." Bruce replies. For some reason, Tony doesn't like the idea of people thinking of Loki as an idiot, even though he himself had thought that in the very beginning. He'd learned he was wrong, though.

Tony's sure that Bruce is already on his side, even though he hasn't told him about what Thor did to Loki yet. Hopefully the other Avengers will accept Loki as easily as Bruce has.

Loki tries drawing some, but he's too distracted. He gets up and wanders around the penthouse, humming to himself, before eventually stopping and sitting on the counter-top. Tony's down in the lab, talking with Bruce. Although Loki feels safe with Tony, just being away from potential danger makes him feel safer. Right now, he's alone with his thoughts, since neither Jarvis or Dum-E are interrupting him.

Everything is just so confusing. He'd heard from Thor that Bruce hates monsters, so it would make sense that Bruce would hate him. But Bruce hadn't seemed to hate him, and Tony had said he wouldn't treat him like Asgard did.

He's not sure why Tony's been treating him so nicely, given he knows about his magic. Magic is bad enough to merit harsh punishments every time it's used, but Tony hasn't laid a hand on him or taunted him once. He actually comforts him after his nightmares and acts like the magic is no big deal. After every nightmare here so far, he'd woken up and thought he was on Asgard until he eventually noticed Tony. He still expects Tony to react like anybody else would, but Tony's reaction is so different. It's taken him by surprise every time. Because it just doesn't make sense
His thoughts cycle back to the other Avenger he'd just met. He's not sure what to think of Bruce. He'd liked him at first, until he'd realized this was the monster-hating Bruce that Thor talked about. So Bruce hates him (or he would if he knew what he was), but Tony said he didn't. Loki shakes his head and flaps his hand angrily. This is so contradictory and confusing.

Is the Hulk a monster too? Loki's not sure about that. He sort of looks like one, but Tony had said the Hulk helped save the world, which was a good thing. Not something a monster would do, really. A monster would be the one trying to take it over. Or just anyone with blue skin and magic.

Maybe the Hulk's a nice monster, like that movie he'd watched with Tony a couple nights ago with Sulley and Mike and Boo. Before watching that, it had never occurred to him that there could be nice monsters. Loki wouldn't mind being a nice monster, but he's not sure he can. He is a Frost Giant, after all.

"Do you like him, Jarvis?" Loki asks.

"Who are you referring to, Mr. Loki?"

"Bruce. Tony said he's nice, but he doesn't like me."

"I have a favorable opinion of Dr. Banner." Jarvis replies, and then his voice becomes somewhat sharp "Why do you think he doesn't like you, Mr. Loki?" Then it gets calmer and more reassuring "I didn't detect any hostility in his actions, and as Mr. Stark said, Dr. Banner won't hurt you."

Loki relaxes a bit. Both Tony and Jarvis had said that Bruce won't hurt him, and they're always right, so even if it doesn't make sense, it's probably the truth. Besides, Tony wouldn't let anything bad happen to him here, right? So even if Bruce didn't like him, he wasn't going to get hurt.

"Tony said they're not gonna hurt me." Loki says.

"Are you referring to the other Avengers, Mr. Loki?" Jarvis asks, and Loki nods, barely whispering "Except Thor."

"Mr. Stark was once again correct. You do not need to worry about them hurting you, Mr. Loki. Besides, I have numerous weapons and security measures under my control that I could use should someone attempt to harm you. Anyone attempting to cause you harm would need to get through both myself and Mr. Stark."

Loki blinks. He didn't know that, but it feels nice, knowing Jarvis is looking out for him. It's still a new feeling for someone to actually care about him and what happens to him.

"Even Thor?" He asks quietly.

"I can assure you that Mr. Stark and I will do everything in our power to make sure that Mr. Odinson- or anyone else- will not harm you again." Jarvis actually seems to spit out Mr. Odinson in the same icy, disgusted tone someone would say Jotun or Frost Giant. It's weird, hearing someone talk about Thor in that tone and not him.

It still doesn't make any sense that Jarvis and Tony are being so nice to him, since they've seen that he's a magic-using freak by now, but he's not complaining. He certainly doesn't miss being punished for his magic.

Loki doesn't feel nearly as worried about Bruce now. Both Tony and Jarvis had said he's nice, and
they'd both promised to protect him. Besides, Bruce really hadn't acted mean. Thor had said Bruce hates monsters, but he probably doesn't know he's a Frost Giant. Even Tony doesn't know that, and Loki hopes it stays that way forever. Because while, for some incomprehensible reason, Tony hasn't reacted to Loki's magic, surely even he would hate Loki upon finding out he's a monstrous Jotun. But as long as that doesn't happen, he should be fine.

Feeling better, he plays a chasing game with Dum-E, and they manage to not knock anything over.

Tony and Bruce ride the elevator up together. Tony's describing one of his more recent projects, both to fill the silence and because talking about science with Bruce is always amazing. Bruce inputs every now and then, but Tony does most of the talking.

Jarvis had told Tony a couple minutes ago that he'd had a talk with Loki, who is doing better and doesn't seem worried about Bruce now. So Tony figured they could try having Loki and Bruce in the same room again.

Tony's glad to hear that Loki doesn't seem as worried about Bruce, since one of the goals of having them meet was to show Loki firsthand that not all Avengers are like Thor.

The elevator doors open and he and Bruce step into the penthouse. At first, Loki is nowhere to be seen, but then he comes out of the kitchen. His eyes seem to be looking into thin air, as they often do, but then they focus on Tony and the god grins. "Tony!" He greets enthusiastically, clapping his hands with Simba hugged to his chest. "Did you bring my picture up?"

Tony shows him the paper and Loki hops up and down. "You said we're gonna hang it, right?"

Loki eagerly follows Tony to the kitchen where he hangs the drawing on the otherwise bare fridge with a magnet. "Hmm. You know what I think this fridge needs?" He asks the god, who just waits expectantly. "More drawings." Loki grins and does his happy, puppy-like wriggle.

Tony notices Bruce standing in the doorway. His Science Bro smiles and gives him a look that says "What did I tell you? You are different around him."

"Look Bruce! Tony hung my drawing!" Loki exclaims in an overexcited voice, pointing with one hand and holding one of Simba's legs in the other. It's he'd never been nervous around the man. Whatever talk Jarvis had had with him, it had apparently done the trick.

"I see." Bruce says, smiling at Loki's enthusiasm.

"Tony and Jarvis said you're not gonna hurt me." Loki says bluntly, before asking "Are you?"

"I won't, but I can't make any promises if the Other Guy decides to come out." Bruce answers. Loki accepts the answer surprisingly easily. He just nods and flicks his fingers a bit, while still staring into Bruce's eyes. Bruce is the one to break the prolonged eye contact.

They end up going back down to the lab, where Tony and Bruce work on a project. Loki watches them as he moves around, alternating between sitting on tables, sitting under them, and moving around on the floor. Tony often makes side comments to Loki. Tony always talks to Loki when he's got enough attention to spare on talking and the god's in the lab. He'd done the same thing to Dum-E and Jarvis before Loki got here; Tony just talks a lot. Even Tony himself can't deny it.

Bruce starts explaining what they're doing to the god, though it seems like he's really only listening half the time. He doesn't ask any questions, but Tony's pretty sure he doesn't understand most of it, if not all of it. They probably don't teach anything science related in Asgard. Even here on Earth,
most people would be totally lost with this stuff. But Loki seems to appreciate Bruce talking to
him, anyways. Sometimes he'll pipe up with an unrelated comment but mostly Loki remains quiet.

A couple hours later, they're back in the penthouse, seated around a tower of blocks.

Eventually they had decided to play a game, mostly for Loki's benefit, and Tony had dug around
his rarely-used game closet until he'd found Jenga. Loki had suggested that Dum-E play too, and
while Tony knew what would happen, he decided to just let Loki see for himself that Dum-E
knocked the tower over as soon as he touched it. Loki had then agreed that maybe Dum-E shouldn't
play. So the robot had gone back down to the lab.

They're playing the game on a glass coffee table, and Loki keeps sliding under it to stare up at the
blocks and Tony and Bruce through the transparent tabletop.

Loki isn't actually holding Simba when he plays, but the toy lion is still right by his side. Really,
Simba is probably one of the most-used things that Tony has ever bought and he'd only paid $10
for the toy. He's spent hundreds on stuff he barely uses.

Loki has a look of intense concentration as he carefully tries to wedge a block from the
precariously stacked tower. Eventually he just yanks it out quickly. However, it's clear the tower's
going to topple. His eyes shoot wide and they all wait for the crash and explosion of blocks.

But nothing happens.

Bruce and Tony stare at the tower. There is no way the thing should still be standing. Even a
toddler would be able to see that it should be falling over. But it's not.

Tony looks over to see Loki in a fetal position on the floor, which is unfortunately a familiar sight
after the other incidents. Sure enough, there's the green energy stuff around his hands, and Tony
notices Bruce is looking at it with interest.

So Loki's powers apparently can make things defy the laws of physics. Loki had described it as
magic, but it couldn't be that, right?

Then again, he had just done the impossible.

Tony goes over to comfort Loki, not even caring that Bruce is watching. Bruce is looking at the
god with a rather sympathetic and pitying expression on his face. But there seems to be something
a little bit darker under it. He gets up and leaves the room, and Tony, who has his attention on Loki
at the moment, doesn't notice.

Bruce goes in the elevator and hits the lobby button as he tries to contain his emotions.

Seeing Loki huddled on the floor like that had brought forth some unwanted memories from his
childhood, of doing the same thing whenever his father had gotten angry. Loki had clearly been
abused, and the idea of abuse makes his insides boil with rage.

He pounds the emergency stop button. He's only managed to go down two floors, but staying in the
elevator as the Other Guy would only break it.

He tries to fight it, but his skin is turning green and he knows the Other Guy is going to make an
appearance very soon.
"Sir, you might want to get your suit on." Jarvis says, bringing it up in the circular frame that he uses to remove it or put it on. Tony is still focused on trying to calm Loki down.

"I highly recommend suiting up, sir." Jarvis urges him, and adds "Doctor Banner is going to transform soon."

Tony jumps his feet, and goes over to the circular frame. Shit shit shit shit! This is bad. His body is tense as the suit snaps into place around him. Bruce hulking out in his tower isn't something he'd want on any day, but now he has to worry about more than just damage to his tower. He was to worry about Loki, who is still curled up on the floor.

Once he's fully in the suit, he sprints towards the elevator, asking Jarvis which floor the Hulk is on. He slams the button for the floor two levels below them. A loud roar from below tells him that Bruce has already hulked out. Lovely.

The elevator doors open and he flies towards the Hulk, who is already in the process of jumping through the freaking ceiling. A piece of rubble hits Tony and he falls to the floor. He blasts it to pieces, gets back up to his feet, and fires his repulsers, looking through the hole. There's another hole in the floor above this one.

Damn. That means the Hulk is heading right towards Loki.

Loki hears crashing and roaring below him and he curls into a tighter ball. It's probably Thor or some other Asgardian who's going to punish him.

But then a huge green thing jumps through the floor. Loki blinks. That's definitely not an Asgardian. "You're big." Loki blurts out, as it's the first thing on his mind.

He stares at the green creature in front of him. He knows he's seen it before. He bites his lip until he remembers. That's right. It was on that thing he and Tony watch sometimes. He'd seen it when Tony was gone on his first morning here.

It's the Hulk. He's angry, but that anger seems to be directed at the chair he's smashing to bits instead of Loki. The Hulk stops smashing the chair to look at him, and Loki just looks back at him curiously.

For some reason, he's really not scared. Somehow the Hulk just isn't very scary, even though he's huge and angry. Loki knows anger leads to pain, but the fear that usually materializes when someone's angry is mysteriously absent. Maybe it's because Tony and Jarvis said he wasn't going to get hurt? Or maybe it's because the Hulk is another monster, like him? He's never been hurt by someone who's huge and green before, which is reassuring.

"Hulk big." The Hulk agrees, and Loki nods.

"Yeah. You're really big. Like, bigger than Tony. Or Dum-E. Or the box in the kitchen that's cold on the inside that my drawing's on."

The Hulk just grunts, which isn't very helpful.

"You have really, really big hands." Loki says, still stuck on the fact that the Hulk is huge. "They're probably bigger than Simba!" He giggles and looks at his lion.

Loki gets up and walks towards the Hulk, who's just standing there, watching him and holding a bit of the smashed chair.
Loki just holds out his hand, and eventually the Hulk holds his out. Loki wraps his hand around one of the thick fingers and pulls the hand towards him. It's so thick, it feels more like grabbing an arm than a finger.

The Hulk makes another grunting sound, and Loki giggles again. Simba is a better conversationalist than the Hulk, and he can only have one conversation! He holds up the lion, and sure enough, Simba is dwarfed by the Hulk's massive hand. Letting go of the Hulk's finger, Loki holds up his own hand against the Hulk's. It's like a baby's hand next to an adult's.

"How come you jumped out of the floor?" Loki asks curiously, looking into the Hulk's green eyes, which remind him a lot of his own. That had certainly been a new sight.

"Hulk angry! Hulk smash!" is the reply, and Loki shakes his head.

"Don't smash." Loki admonishes "It's bad to break other people's stuff. You already broke Tony's floor." He looks at the hole in the middle of it. It's really ugly. He notices a familiar red and gold figure hovering above it and he grins and waves.

Tony stares in complete shock at the sight in front of him, which is literally the last thing he'd expected to see. Loki- who had been worried about the other Avengers hurting him- has just befriended the Hulk as if it's no big deal. He's laughing, even. Then again, he'd taken to Jarvis and Dum-E really quickly. Maybe it's only human Avengers he's unsure about, since Asgardians and humans look the same, really.

Even odder- the Hulk isn't going on a destructive rampage anymore. Admittedly, he had wrecked two of Tony's floors and a chair, but that was a lot less damage than there could have been.

Seriously, why is the Hulk suddenly so passive? It's not like it's mind control or anything. Tony just hovers there, gaping, as Loki leads the Hulk by one finger into the kitchen, where he show him his drawing. The Hulk doesn't comment, but Loki keeps chatting happily to him as he leads him back to the living room. Tony's eventually works out that Loki's talking about Philadelphia when he tells the Hulk "I saw you smash a bunch of metal things with Man of Iron- he's Tony."

"Hulk smash!" Hulk says again, sounding proud. It looks like he's about to give a demonstration.

Tony snaps out of his shock and carefully flies over to them.

"Okay, big guy. I think it's time to go now." He says to the Hulk in a calm voice.

Thankfully, the massive green form shrinks down to a rather confused-looking Bruce Banner.

Chapter End Notes

The day I posted this on FF.Net marks the day I got my first Iron Man action figure. He talks, and even has some sayings that are Jarvis, and there are levers on the backs of his shoulders that make his arms swing up and make repulsor sounds.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Sometimes things are worse the second time around.

Tony's really glad that Bruce has those stretchy pants that don't rip when he hulks out, because he really wouldn't want a naked Bruce in his living room. He vaguely wonders how Loki would react to that, but it's probably best he didn't find out. Currently, Loki is staring at Bruce with an unreadable expression on his face. Tony lands but remains in the Iron Man suit, although he lifts the faceplate up.

Bruce looks around the living area, obviously assessing the damage the Hulk had done. Of course, his attention is first drawn to that nasty hole in the floor. He seems surprised that the wrecked floors and the smashed chair are the extent of the damage, but he's clearly still feeling guilty. He starts to apologize, but Tony cuts him off.

"It could have been a lot worse. Trust me, I can pay for it. Hey Jarvis, arrange to have the floors fixed sometime, will you?" Tony says, and Jarvis replies that he's already on it. Tony flashes Bruce a grin, which Bruce reluctantly returns. Admittedly, it is sort of annoying, Tony thinks, but considering he'd expected to find Loki smashed into the floor, it doesn't seem too bad in comparison. Besides, he's lucky enough that even major floor repairs like this won't put a dent in his finances. Being a billionaire has its perks that way.

"Did anyone get hurt?" Bruce asks.

"We're both still alive and kicking." Tony says, and then reassures Bruce with "I don't think either of us got as much as a scratch." Which was quite surprising, really.

Despite what he'd said, Bruce is still looking them both over for injuries. Though if the Hulk had attacked them, it's not like their injuries would have been hidden. They would have been painfully obvious- literally. Taking a beating from the Hulk would hurt even gods (Thor had learned that the hard way), and it would probably kill humans.

Loki most likely would have recovered from a Hulk attack, but the idea of him being hurt like that makes Tony's stomach twist, the same way it would when he thinks about something happening to Pepper or Rhodey, or even Jarvis and Dum-E. Why hadn't Loki tried to get away? What if something had really happened?

"You could have gotten hurt." Tony says to Loki. Sure, Loki had healed within hours of landing on his tower, and he'd started out covered in numerous injuries, but a Hulk attack would have been worse.

Loki shakes his head. "Nuh-uh! Jarvis said he'd stop anyone trying to hurt me. He said you would, too." He looks at Tony, as if expecting him to challenge that statement. Tony confirms it instead, and then addresses his AI.

"Jarvis, why didn't you do anything while all this was happening?" He says in a rather accusing voice. Jarvis is supposed to protect the tower and those in it, after all. Besides, he obviously likes
Loki a lot, and Tony thought he'd be really quick to protect the god.

"I had several weapons aimed and ready, sir. Unless he was about to harm Mr. Loki directly, attacking the Hulk would have been counterproductive as it would have only increased his rage. Given his proximity to Mr. Loki, it could have easily done more harm than good." Jarvis responds calmly. That does have a certain logic to it, Tony realizes, and Jarvis goes on. "Besides, the situation did not merit using them yet since the Hulk made no move to harm Mr. Loki."

"Seriously?" Bruce asks, looking very surprised. "He was out of my control."

"Yeah. He wasn't gonna hurt me. Nope nope nope." Loki shakes his head with each nope and his hair flies out around his head. Loki's confidence that the Hulk wouldn't hurt him is very odd, since anyone would have thought the Hulk would have been the most likely candidate to hurt him. Besides, Loki still worries about being hurt a lot.

This is getting more confusing. While Bruce had enough control over the Hulk when transforming on purpose to not hurt allies or friends, this had been one of those accidental transformations where Bruce had very little control over the Hulk. So why hadn't the Hulk just attacked Loki, like he would have attacked anyone else, friend or foe? Maybe the Hulk hadn't viewed Loki as a threat? But he'd attacked other people who weren't threatening him. "Actually, he really didn't seem like he was going to hurt Loki." Tony speaks up. Startling as it was, that did seem to be the case.

"What makes you so sure of that?" Bruce asks quietly, obviously thinking along the same lines.

"Here, have a look." Tony has Jarvis bring up the footage. He pulls Loki over to the couch and plonks down next to him. Bruce sits on Tony's other side. Loki sits on the edge of the seat and bounces slightly.

Bruce watches the holographic video with an uneasy expression at the part where he transforms and jumps through the ceiling. When they watch some of the rubble hit Tony, Bruce and- somewhat surprisingly- Loki, turn to look at Tony until he once again tells them he's fine. Bruce then watches the Hulk interacting with Loki with great interest and a good deal of puzzlement.

Loki, meanwhile, seems to be very confused that he's actually watching himself, though he shrieks "That's me!" when he shows up at first.

Tony also watches with interest, as he'd missed the very beginning of the interaction in real life. Just seeing the whole thing a second time helps, but it again brings home the point of how docile the Hulk had been acting.

He turns to the god. "Seriously, Snoopy, are you some kind of Hulk-whisperer or something? Because if you can calm the Hulk, you'd be one killer animal-tamer. You could have your own act and everything. 'Loki's Lovable Lions' or something. What do you think?"

Bruce looks vaguely amused. Loki seems rather unimpressed and just asks "Aren't all lions lovable? Simba is!" As an afterthought, he adds "Scar isn't, though."

"Not in real life. They're dangerous." Tony replies. Loki looks rather disappointed.

Bruce has an odd expression on his face as he turns to Loki. "Weren't you at all worried about the Other Guy?"

Loki shrugs. "He wasn't scary!"

Going on his hunch, Tony asks "Is it because he doesn't look like an Asgardian?" Loki looks
startled, as if he hadn't expected that to be mentioned. He doesn't actually confirm or deny it, but Tony has a feeling that's the case, judging from the look on his face.

Loki doesn't say anything for a bit, but then says "He doesn't talk much, though. But Dum-E doesn't say anything and I like him." He pauses, and chirps brightly, referring to the Hulk "I like him!"

"You do?" Bruce sounds very surprised, but rather pleased. He glances at Tony, who's one of the few people not scared of the Hulk. It looks like Loki's one of those people too. But still, not being scared of someone and liking them are two very different things. Tony can't exactly say he likes the Hulk- he's a good teammate, but not exactly a great houseguest or drinking companion or anything. The Hulk wouldn't be his first choice of who to hang out with, to say the least.

"Yeah. He's really big but he's kinda funny too, 'cause he was all like "ROAAWWR!" Loki practically screams the last part and laughs as he thrusts Simba outward, though Tony has no idea how that's funny. "He was nice and he might have liked me. I dunno. I think maybe he's even my friend?" Loki sounds a little unsure of this part.

Bruce nods, obviously really liking what Loki's, saying, which Tony can understand. Not many people accept the Hulk. Bruce then asks Loki "What would you say a friend is?" Tony's actually rather curious to hear what Loki's answer will be, though he hadn't thought of asking the question.

Loki bites his lip and cocks his head to the side, thinking. Eventually, he seems to decide on an answer and says "A friend doesn't hurt you."

That was a rather basic explanation. In Loki's mind, is the only requirement for friendship that you don't get hurt? It would explain why he thought of the Hulk as his friend.

"Is that all?" Bruce asks, before suggesting "Is a friend someone you like being around?"

Loki grins and nods, suddenly seeming struck with inspiration. "Yeah! Someone you like spending time with. And they like being with you." At first, Tony thinks that's all, but Loki goes on.

"Friends... friends don't make you feel bad about yourself. Like how everyone was to Thor." Loki nods to himself. His eyes aren't focused on anything so they have the same glazed but dreamy look Tony's seen in them countless times. Despite that look, Loki still gives the appearance of being deep in thought. "And they like you for who you are. They don't try to change you." That was actually a rather astute answer, Tony thinks.

Bruce asks Loki who he considers his friends. Loki claps his hands excitedly and replies "Tony! And Jarvis and Dum-E and Pepper... and Simba." Looking Bruce over, Loki adds "And maybe you and the Hulk... Yeah. I think you guys are, too." Bruce replies that he'd gladly be Loki's friend, and Loki flashes a million-dollar smile at him. At least he doesn't seem nervous around Bruce anymore.

"Did you have any friends in Asgard?" Tony asks cautiously. Even if most people there apparently treated him like garbage, there had to be some nice people there, like how he'd had Yinsen in Afghanistan. But Loki's looking at him as if he'd just asked if he's related to an alpaca.

"No! They hate me!" Loki's voice is upset, but he makes it sound like he's describing the most obvious thing in the world. "They'd never like someone like me. They just hurt me! Just hurt, hurt, hurt. They sewed my mouth shut!"

That last sentence was really unexpected. First of all, it came completely out of the blue, and second of all, what the hell was up with that?! Tony sincerely hopes he'd heard that wrong. But
when he asks Loki to repeat himself, Loki once again says his mouth was sewn shut.

"What the hell?! Why would they do that to you?! Why would they do that to anyone?! Seriously, that is so messed up!" Loki watches Tony, looking surprised at his outburst.

"I lied to them. I said it wasn't my fault the statue of Buri broke but they found out..." Loki says, as if that's a perfectly reasonable explanation. The event had clearly traumatized him, which was perfectly understandable. Loki looks like he might end up going into a panic attack. Tony puts an arm around Loki's shoulder and pulls him close, somehow managing to talk in a calm voice even though his insides are churning at Asgard, and Loki's breathing slows down. At least they'd avoided that.

Now that Tony thinks about it, there had been some very messed up forms of punishment in the Norse myths he'd read, but he'd hoped they'd just been invented for the stories. Tony takes a deep breath and tries to force himself to calm down completely, but with limited success. If he has to do that, Bruce undoubtedly has to do it, too.

Sure enough, Bruce looks like he's struggling to contain his emotions. Maltreatment and abuse seem to be topics that lead to him hulking out, and the conversation had inconveniently gone in that direction.

Tony really can't blame him in the slightest. If he could hulk out, he probably would be doing so now, too. Though he's glad he hadn't taken his armor off since Bruce's eyes are already green and his skin is steadily becoming the same color.

Even so, the Hulk's really going to come out two times in under an hour? How much more damage will his poor tower have to endure?

He pushes Loki into a corner and stands in front of him protectively. Even though the Hulk hadn't made any move to hurt Loki last time, Tony sure isn't going to take any chances.

Hearing what Loki said about the Other Guy had been really nice, Bruce thinks. Nobody ever actually liked Bruce's other form. Tony is really one of the only people who accepts it and doesn't treat Bruce any differently because of it, but Bruce doesn't think that Tony actually likes the Other Guy. Considering all the damage the Other Guy has done to Tony's tower- this hadn't been the first incident- Bruce is still somewhat surprised he's welcome here.

Loki's apparently another person who completely accepts the Other Guy. But Loki claims he actually likes the Other Guy, too. Getting acceptance is hard enough, and before this whole conversation he was completely convinced that having someone like the Other Guy was impossible. Apparently it's not. Ironically, Loki had seemed more nervous around him before the Other Guy's appearance than after, which was the complete opposite of practically everyone else.

Being in a room with two people who don't treat him like a monster or a bomb that could go off at any second is a really amazing feeling.

But then Loki talks about his treatment in Asgard, which is horrifying and disgusting, and Bruce's mood starts to change. He seconds Tony in wondering why anyone would ever think such a thing as sewing someone's mouth shut was merited. At first, his emotions are shock and revulsion, but he can tell anger is lurking under the surface. Anger at whoever would do such a sick thing.

Bruce thinks that he really should have left a while ago. But he hadn't thought the Other Guy would be clamoring to make another appearance. It hasn't even been half an hour since his first
appearance here ended. Today's been horrible in that regard.

His anger rises steadily and the Other Guy gets more persistent to come out. At this rate, he won't even make it to the elevator before he transforms.

Seeing the Hulk transform into Bruce, and then later seeing Bruce transform into the Hulk- both on that transparent moving picture, and in real life, right now- is a very odd sight, Loki thinks. Yes, Tony had said that Bruce was the Hulk that first day, under the bed, but seeing him transform reminds Loki of himself.

Like Bruce, he has another form hidden under his skin. At least Bruce's other form isn't a detestable monstrosity, though. Being the Hulk is probably a lot better than being a Jotun.

When Bruce started to become the Hulk, Tony, still as Man of Iron in his metal skin, had shoved Loki into a corner and is standing in front of him so that he can't go anywhere. He tries to edge around Tony but the man pushes him back, muttering "Stay put."

He's not sure why Tony's acting like the Hulk is dangerous. Maybe they hate Hulks here, like they hate Frost Giants back in Asgard. If that's the case, though, why wasn't Tony acting like he hates Bruce? He hasn't even acted like he hates the Hulk. So maybe that's not the case.

After all, hating the Hulk doesn't really make sense. He helped save the world, right? Tony and Bruce still seem to think he's dangerous, though. But unless you're a chair or the floor, he doesn't seem that dangerous, since those were the only things he wrecked the first time. Although right now he's smashing the thing that plays moving pictures (the non-transparent ones, anyways) and Tony swears in annoyance. Loki wonders why the Hulk likes breaking things so much.

He remembers Tony telling him that the Hulk comes out when Bruce is angry, but he's not sure why he'd come out now- or earlier, for that matter. This time, Tony and Bruce had just been asking him about friends, for some reason. Bruce asking him to say what a friend is had been sort of odd, but he'd thought about how the Warriors Three and Lady Sif acted around Thor. Then, Loki had switched to thinking about how Tony, Jarvis and Dum-E acted around him.

Then, he'd been talking about Asgard and had blurted out that he'd had his mouth sewn shut, which had easily been one of the worst things that had ever happened to him. It had been when he had accidentally broken the statue of Buri, who had been like the Allfather's uncle or something. Or maybe it was his grandfather? Anyways, he'd known that breaking the statue was bad.

He'd thought nobody had seen him, so when questioned about it, he lied and said he hadn't been near it. He'd actually thought he'd convinced them- his lie came out really well- but, to his horror, it turned out a servant had seen him break it with his magic. He hadn't seen the servant though.

The punishment for lying, as well as the beating that had followed after, had easily been the worst in his life. His tormentors had delighted in the fact that his cries were muffled by his lips being sewn together.

Loki shakes his head furiously and tries to get the memories out of his head. He gladly returns to the present moment, where he's standing in the penthouse behind Tony in his Man of Iron suit.

He wishes Tony wouldn't block him like this, since he wants to go see the Hulk again. He doesn't mind the Hulk being here a second time. The Hulk's his friend too, after all- Loki had decided that not long ago. He's nice, in a weird sort of way, even though he's angry all the time.

"Hulk! You're back!" Loki greets happily, grinning when the Hulk turns around to face them.
Tony, however, doesn't seem too thrilled. As the Hulk turns towards them, Tony mutters something that Loki doesn't hear.

As the Hulk heads towards them, Tony holds a hand out in front of him for some reason. "All right, big guy. I think it's time for you to go now." Tony's voice is calm, the same tone he uses to calm Loki down. Loki likes that tone a lot. The Hulk just gives a sort of snort.

"I mean, you just shattered my new TV, that's gotta count for something. Don't worry, I'll be lenient and won't bill you for it. So what do you say? Can we go back to talking to Bruce?" The Hulk lets out a loud roar, which is very different to Tony's casual tone, and Loki hears Tony mutter "Right. Don't mention puny Banner."

The Hulk doesn't stop heading towards them and Tony says quickly "All right, forget I mentioned that. Seriously, though, I think it's time for you to go. You've had your little rage fest." The Hulk doesn't give any indication that he cares what Tony thinks, even though when Tony had said that before he'd changed back into Bruce.

Loki frowns. The Hulk is still heading towards them, and he's angry. "Why are you so mad?"

The Hulk stops briefly and smashes a fist into the floor, yelling "Hulk MAD!"

"Yeah, we get that. I don't think you could make that any clearer. Now how about you go now?" Tony mutters. He's still holding his hand out for some reason unknown to Loki, and he tells the Hulk to stand down, which the Hulk doesn't seem to like.

Loki manages to slip past Tony now, and he barely even hears Tony calling for him to come back. He runs up to the Hulk, pausing briefly to look up at him. He still doesn't find him scary, though he seems angrier than the first time he was here. Loki thinks for a bit. Maybe he needs a hug. Cautiously, Loki wraps his arms around the huge green creature's stomach, which is as high as he can reach. His arms don't even go all the way around the Hulk's body.

The Hulk gives a weird grunt. Loki looks up to see the Hulk looking down at him with a very confused look, but he doesn't seem as angry, which is good. Loki feels a hand envelop his back and he smiles slightly.

"I like you." Loki whispers to him. "You and me, we're the same, really. We're both monsters." He hadn't consciously decided to say that last part, it had just come out. But the Hulk would understand, right?

Suddenly, Loki finds himself lying on the ground. The Hulk had pushed him away and he'd fallen. Loki frowns in confusion. Why had the Hulk just pushed him? Friends aren't supposed to push each other. Maybe the Hulk doesn't actually like him, and isn't his friend? The idea hurts, even though he's not sure if it's right or not.

"Hulk not a monster!" The Hulk says angrily, but he doesn't roar it. Oh. So it had been what he said. Clearly, the Hulk hadn't liked being called a monster. Loki starts to try to explain he meant the Hulk's a good monster like Sulley and Mike, but he's interrupted.

"Hey! Hands off him!" Loki turns to see Tony hovering in midair with fire coming out of his gloves and boots. The Man of Iron mask is up so Loki can't see his face, but Tony sounds angry, even though he's not actually shouting. Loki's glad Tony's not using that tone with him.

Loki sees Simba lying on the floor a little bit away from him, and he crawls over to his beloved toy, picking him up. There's a twinge of pain when he first moves, but that's it. The Hulk hadn't
Pushed him too hard—it hadn't even seemed like a full out shove, more like a *get away from me* kind of thing, he thinks. It was certainly nothing like what he'd endured in Asgard, although a servant had shoved him similarly once. But still, he's not entirely sure what to think of the Hulk shoving him like that.

Growling, the Hulk takes another step towards Tony, and Loki starts to ask the Hulk for confirmation that he's not going to hurt them when some weird energy blast flies from the palm of the metal glove of Tony's suit, hitting the Hulk in the chest. Loki blinks in confusion. What was that? Whatever it was, it just seemed to make the Hulk angrier.

The Hulk roars and charges at Tony, who flies out of the way. The Hulk turns and heads towards where Tony is now,

Loki wonders if this is like those sparring sessions in Asgard. Right now, it kind of just looks like a chasing game where the Hulk is pursuing Tony. He hopes that's the case, anyways, and that they aren't actually trying to hurt each other.

Well, this really isn't how he wanted things to turn out, Tony thinks as he flies out of the way of the charging Hulk. It's a closer call than he would have liked.

Things actually hadn't looked too bad when Loki had gone to hug the Hulk. In fact, when the Hulk had—astonishingly—put a hand on Loki's back, everything seemed like it was going to be fine, since the Hulk seemed pretty calm. Tony doubts the Hulk has ever been hugged before. He needs to show Bruce the video footage of that later.

But then Loki had whispered something, something about monsters if the Hulk's response about not being a monster was any indication. It had apparently been the wrong thing to say. The Hulk's reaction made that obvious when he'd shoved Loki away. Okay, so Loki can't completely tame the Hulk, since he had gotten angry at the god. Still, Tony realizes, he hadn't pounded Loki into the floor or anything. Which is odd, given the Hulk is back to his usual enraged self.

"Loki! Get out of here!" Tony calls to the god, who's sitting in the middle of the floor as he hugs Simba with a confused and worried look on his face. Loki crawls off to the edge of the room. Tony hears the god shriek "No! Don't hurt him!" but he's not sure who the god's talking to. Technically, neither of them are getting hurt at the moment.

The Hulk turns and heads towards him again, but Tony once again evades him, and the Hulk roars in annoyance.

This continues, like a high-stakes game of cat and mouse. Evading the Hulk is made difficult by the fact he's so freaking fast, but his attacks aren't thought out at all and are just done in a blind range. So Tony flies in purposely confusing ways and manages to avoid getting hit.

Tony refrains from firing his repulsers again. He knows he can't actually overpower the Hulk (he really needs to make a suit to fight the Hulk with, he tells himself) so he remains strictly defensive so as to not enrage the Hulk further. He's talking almost nonstop, trying to calm the Hulk down and coax him to transform. The results aren't exactly stellar.

At least he's keeping the Hulk from getting angrier, Tony thinks, before being immediately proven wrong when the Hulk ups the ante. The Hulk seems annoyed that he can't catch him and compensates by throwing an armchair at Tony while simultaneously charging at him. Tony had been glancing over to make sure Loki was out of the way, and he reacts a moment too late. The force of the impact knocks him to the ground.
Tony lays there, briefly stunned. That certainly hadn't gone the way he'd hoped it would.

Thankfully, Jarvis informs him that the suit hadn't sustained any damage aside from a couple minor dents. Jarvis urges him to get up as the Hulk approaches, with a sofa raised above his head.

Tony can hear Jarvis' voice coming from the speakers in the walls, too. "Step away from Mr. Stark, or I will be forced to taser you." Jarvis informs the Hulk. The Hulk doesn't stand down, and a bolt of electricity hits him between the shoulder blades. The Hulk lets out an enraged roar.

It doesn't even come close to harming the Hulk, of course. He's way too strong for that. It just makes him angrier. Tony's betting Jarvis had thought that the Hulk's attention would be redirected long enough for Tony to get to his feet. Heck, he'd expected that too. But alas, there's no such luck. The Hulk hurls the sofa in his direction before he can get up.

Tony braces himself for the impact, but it doesn't come. Suddenly Loki is standing protectively in front of him, their roles reversed. With his free hand- the other is holding Simba- Loki knocks the sofa aside as if swatting an inflatable beach ball, and Tony finds himself momentarily shocked. Oh, that's right. Loki probably has superhuman abilities like everyone in Asgard. He certainly has the superhuman healing and durability, and apparently the speed, given how quickly he'd moved in front of Tony.

"You tried to hurt him..." Loki says to the Hulk in a betrayed voice. Tony climbs to his feet and is now able to see Loki's face. Despite the situation, he pauses momentarily. Loki's sporting quite the impressive glare, and Tony's seen a lot of glares in his lifetime. This is the first time he's seen Loki angry, and to be honest, it's nothing like what he expected. Loki actually looks rather formidable, yet somehow at the same time he doesn't seem too threatening. Though Tony's not sure how much of that is because he's holding a stuffed animal and dressed in bright, cheerful colors. Is this really the same Loki who curls up on the floor in the most vulnerable way imaginable?

The glare isn't the end of it. In the suit, Jarvis informs Tony that the room has suddenly dropped drastically in temperature, though he thankfully doesn't feel it in his suit, which remains an optimal temperature.

As he reflects on this, Tony sees there's a chest of drawers flying their way, and he gets ready. Loki beats him to it, knocking the incoming furniture away like he had with the sofa.

"No! No! NO!" Loki screams at the Hulk, jumping up and down at each word. Despite the situation, the sight is actually kind of funny. Nobody hears Tony chuckling in his suit, fortunately.

Loki's body is rigid and his hands, despite not being balled into fists, still somehow look angry. He continues howling words at the Hulk. "No! You don't hurt Tony! Don't ever hurt him!"

The Hulk actually pauses briefly, probably more out of shock than anything else. He's still nowhere near calm, but he seems slightly less angry. Or maybe that's just his imagination, Tony thinks. The Hulk takes a step towards them and Loki lets out an earshattering shriek that still clearly gives the message Stay back.

Loki's outburst has done nothing in improving the Hulk's mood. The Hulk charges at them, and something weird happens. Some kind of force field shimmers into sight and the Hulk bounces away.

Tony blinks. What the...? Where did that come from? Then, he sees the green energy around Loki's hands. Of course... It's always that, isn't it? Loki's eyes are shut. He doesn't seem to have noticed it the green stuff around his hands, which is probably a good thing.
Tony's not sure if it's the force of the blow or if the force field's a one-time-use kind of thing, but it's clearly dying. It flickers a bit before it's extinguished, leaving no trace that it was ever there. The green energy is still around Loki's hands, but nothing weird is happening right now.

The Hulk stares uncomprehendingly at them, probably wondering what had knocked him back, and his lips curl in a snarl. Loki walks forward, seeming completely unconcerned that the Hulk is snarling. When he's a couple steps away from the Hulk, he starts to say something, reaching out a hand, but he freezes when he notices the green stuff. Predictably, he sinks to the floor.

Tony can't help but notice that this time, his reaction is a tiny bit different. Instead of laying curled in a ball on his side, Loki is sitting as he curls in on himself, rocking back and forth. Tony's not even sure if this is an improvement or not.

Well, this is really inconvenient timing, Tony thinks. He readies himself to fight the Hulk and defend Loki, but, oddly, the Hulk isn't doing anything violent. He's just looking at Loki rocking back and forth with what seems like puzzlement. Maybe Loki's weird calming effect on the Hulk is taking effect again?

So, the Hulk's suddenly pretty calm, like he'd been around Loki the first time, which doesn't make any sense. After all, seeing Loki curled on the floor was what made Bruce hulk out the first time. But then again, that was Bruce. Maybe the Hulk doesn't understand, and that's why he's not getting angrier?

Tony holds his breath, ready to fight, but for the moment he doesn't do anything, since the Hulk is just peering down at Loki. The Hulk's usual violent rage would probably flare up again if Tony so much as moved, and Tony doesn't want to invoke that rage when the Hulk's so close to the god. What's going on here, though? Why is the Hulk acting so calm again?

Right now, the Hulk seems to have forgotten entirely about Tony, and is solely focused on the god curled in a ball at his feet. Tony frowns thoughtfully. Wait a second. What if that's it? Loki and the Hulk had essentially been alone that first time, when Tony had been hovering in the background, and the Hulk had been, well, not very Hulk-like. He'd been pretty peaceful when Loki had been hugging him the second time he appeared.

But then he'd shoved Loki away, Tony tells himself.

But now that he thinks about it, shoving is pretty mild for the Hulk. Normally he'd hurl someone across the room or something. Loki hadn't actually seemed very hurt, though maybe that had been because of his superhuman abilities.

The Hulk reaches out a massive hand, and Tony is about to intervene and risk setting him off, but the hand's moving really slowly, almost cautiously. All the Hulk does is nudge the god.

Loki has especially bad memories regarding those magical shields. He hasn't used them in so long that he'd almost forgotten about them. They only ever showed up when he tried to defend himself, and he learned long ago what a bad idea that is. His tormentors are always stronger than him and they had made sure to teach him not to try to stop them.

Yes, the shields are nice when they protect him, but after about a dozen blows they fizzle out. After a shield shows up, he's always punished more than he's punished for anything else (aside from that one incident he'd mentioned), because it's two crimes- defending himself as well as using magic. So the brief respite the shields grant isn't really worth it in the long run.
Loki eventually feels a huge hand on his back, and he looks up to see the Hulk looking down at him. At first, he thinks the Hulk is going to beat him for the magic, but that doesn't happen, and Loki eventually realizes the Hulk isn't going to.

He's not entirely sure what to think of the Hulk anymore. He sort of wants to still be his friend, but the Hulk had thrown stuff at Tony. Loki hates the idea of someone trying to hurt Tony. Actually he just hates the idea of Tony getting hurt. Tony's the nicest person ever; he shouldn't get hurt. So Loki had rushed in, even though Tony had told him to stay away. The Hulk had shoved Loki earlier, but Loki doesn't care about that as much.

He hears clanking metal footsteps behind him. He turns, and sees that it's Tony. The Hulk stares at Tony too, and his lip curls up.

"You tried to hurt Tony." He mumbles to the large green form. "Tony's my best friend, so don't hurt him, 'kay?" The Hulk grunts, and it sounds sort of affirmative. Tony sits down next to Loki puts his arm around his shoulder. The Hulk doesn't attack Tony, at least.

Loki sits there for a bit as he leans into Tony's metal suit, enjoying the comfort of it and the feeling the metal thing in his chest gives off. The Hulk keeps a hand on his back. The Hulk's not hurting Tony. Maybe he'll be able to forgive the Hulk for throwing stuff at his favorite person.

It's silent for a bit, and then Loki quietly says "I think you should go now," like Tony had earlier. It works, this time. It hadn't worked a little bit ago. He watches as the Hulk shrinks back down into Bruce. It's almost like going back in time to earlier today, Loki thinks.

Bruce once again looks around at the damage in the tower and apologizes. Despite Tony trying to convince him to stay, Bruce leaves soon after, leaving Tony and Loki alone in the no longer pristine penthouse.
I almost skipped over this because the document expired on FF.Net, and I'm copying/pasting from the doc manager there. I keep renewing the chapters even though they only normally last 90 days on that site.

Tony looks around the penthouse in a mix between annoyance and disappointment. There's that gaping hole in the floor that sticks out like a stain on a blank sheet of paper, but there are also a couple craters in the floor with cracks forming spider-web-like patterns around them. They're a lot like the lovely crater Loki had left in his roof, only smaller since these had just been caused by the Hulk pounding his fists into the floor during his mega-tantrum.

His poor TV lays in a forlorn, broken heap of scrap metal that doesn't even seem useful enough take down to his workshop. Shards of glass litter the space around it. It had been one of his largest screens, too. Though he has one that's the same size in his bedroom, and there are slightly smaller televisions in practically every other bedroom. Oh, and he has his own theater, too. So it's not like it's the end of the world. He's really not lacking in big screen TVs.

At least the Hulk hadn't come across his well-stocked alcohol cabinets (yes, plural. Tony, for one, believes it's impossible to own too much alcohol). To put things into an even bigger perspective, at least nobody had gotten hurt. He asks Jarvis to arrange to have the room fixed sometime soon, and the AI politely replies with his usual "Certainly, sir."

To be honest, despite the damage, Tony's rather disappointed Bruce didn't stick around; he'd left right after apologizing for the damage the Hulk had caused. Tony had protested a bit, but in the end let him leave, since Bruce seemed set on that. He figured the guy needed some alone time (there, see? Nobody can say he's a total jerk who doesn't do nice things for people. Though anyone who sees him with Loki would have a hard time arguing that anyways).

Given all the confusion following the Hulk incidents, Tony hasn't thought much- until now- about Loki's most recent incident, where Loki had made that weird shield thing. At least, he's pretty sure it was Loki- he'd had the green stuff around his hands, and where else would it have come from? And then there had been that time earlier when he made a bunch of Jenga blocks defy the laws of physics.

Tony's even more intrigued by Loki's... powers. Even though Loki had done the impossible, Tony has still been hesitant to call it magic. It could have been some weird fluke, he tells himself, although he doesn't really believe it. The blocks were obviously supposed to fall, and the shield is hard to pass off as a fluke. But that still doesn't mean it's magic. Because there has to be some scientific explanation for it, and magic is basically just a way to avoid explaining things.

Then again, it's not like he has any great explanations for the weird green energy that looks like fire, the random gusts of wind and the intangible-yet-totally-real-looking-other-Loki's than he does for the new things that happened during today's two incidents. He's been thinking about those repeated phenomena occurring during Loki's nightmares for a while and he still hasn't come up with anything beyond vague speculations, which is really annoying.
Whatever these occurrences are, Loki's still obviously terrified of them. Or maybe he's more scared of people's reactions to them? It's a fair assumption that a lot of reactions to it in Asgard consisted of violence, given the way Loki curls up on the floor as if trying to make himself as small a target as possible. But Tony knows he hasn't reacted violently at all, yet Loki still seems petrified.

Yes, Tony knows that switching your reaction to something can take a while if you've reacted one way for a long time. But he wishes he could speed this up a bit. Loki's reactions haven't really changed at all, even though Tony's reaction to these incidents is undoubtedly very different from Asgardians' reactions.

He sighs and looks over at the god next to him, who he still has an arm around. Loki is tracing a long finger along the little embroidered patch on Simba's paw, which strongly resembles the picture of Simba that Rafiki had painted in the movie. Tony hadn't even noticed it until now.

Loki looks over at him with wide, curious eyes and suddenly asks "Why's it a triangle?" The question is completely irrelevant and Tony has no idea what Loki's talking about until he adds, while tapping Tony's armored chest "Normally it's a circle... Are there two now?"

Oh. The arc reactor, that Loki had somehow known the purpose of, and now can tell there are two of them. "Yeah, there are two of them. They're miniaturized arc reactors. This one's in my suit. But some of the suits have circular ones, and some don't have them at all." Tony replies vaguely, not exactly wanting to go into why he needs one in his chest, even though Loki somehow knows it's keeping him alive. He doesn't even say why they're in some of his suits (the reason being that some suits use enough power that they would strain the one in his chest).

Loki accepts the vague answer and replies "I like the circles, 'cause they're more you. But the one in you is the best." He nods to himself, but best certainly isn't the word Tony would use to describe it. When he asks Loki why he thinks that, the god gives him a look and replies matter-of-factly "Well, 'cause it's keeping you alive, of course!"

Tony again asks Loki how he knows this, but like that first day, Loki's answer isn't very helpful. Loki basically says the same thing- that if it could talk, that's what it would say- but adds that it "likes helping" Tony. Why does Loki always anthropomorphize the arc reactor? Tony decides to steer the conversation away from this particular subject.

"So, Snoopy, I didn't know you could be that fierce. Not many people would stand up to the Hulk." Tony changes the subject, before adding "I'm impressed." It's not something he says to many people, but he honestly was impressed that Loki had done it, especially since his usual reaction was to curl into a ball instead of confronting people. Besides, anyone who yelled at the Hulk had guts and Loki had held his own against the big green rage machine. But it had contrasted so greatly from Loki's usual demeanor...

"He tried to hurt you!" Loki exclaims loudly, going from sitting to kneeling, flapping his hands anxiously and looking at Tony with wide eyes. "He shouldn't have done that! Hurting people is bad! I dunno if I like him anymore..." He finishes quietly, almost sadly.

"Why would that stop you from liking him? You don't need to hold a grudge against him. I'm perfectly fine." Tony tells him, before elaborating. "He's wrecked my tower and thrown stuff at me before, and I still like him." Okay, maybe like was a bit too strong of a word for his feelings for the Hulk, but he certainly still likes Bruce, and he doesn't have anything against the Hulk. Long story short, this incident hadn't changed his feelings. Bruce hulking out was a given- it had happened for less important things than discussing abuse on other times he visited. Like when Tony had rigged the toaster to blow up in his face as a joke one morning when Bruce had ended up crashing in the tower for the night.
But he can't help but notice that Loki hasn't even brought up the Hulk shoving him, even though he'd said hurting people was bad. Sure, it didn't look like the shove hurt that much, but Loki seems a lot more concerned with the Hulk hurting Tony than himself.

Loki nods, seeming to understand, and says "So he can still be my friend?" Tony confirms it and it seems that's the end of that. Tony suspects a good deal of Loki deciding not to hold a grudge against the Hulk has to do with Tony saying he shouldn't.

"Hey, thanks for having my back." Tony says, but Loki just stares at him, confused. Tony smirks slightly and rephrases it "Thanks for keeping those things from hitting me when I was down. I didn't know you could do that, but hey, you learn new things about people all the time."

Unfortunately with Loki, those things often hint to a horrible past.

"Maybe you can be my new bodyguard, now that Happy's been promoted." Tony says jokingly. Hopefully Loki knows he's not being serious. "I mean, you just knocked those things away as if they were nothing. And whatever that shield thing was, it was awesome!" Although Loki would be qualified, in terms of strength at least, his personality doesn't exactly fit, even if he does seem protective.

Seeming to totally ignore the stuff about bodyguards, Loki flinches violently when Tony mentions the shield. Tony mentally slaps himself as Loki curls up defensively, saying "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to!"

Tony tells him it's not a problem and that there's nothing to apologize for, but Loki obviously disagrees. He hugs his legs to his chest with a terrified look on his face and exclaims "No! It's demented! It's messed up! I'm a freak!" Loki screws his eyes shut and his voice changes, taking on a sneering tone.

"You stupid, worthless freak! I can't believe we have to put up with you. You shouldn't even be here. He should have left you to die."

"Who told you that?" Tony growls, wanting to have a nice little chat in his Iron Man suit with whoever had. There are just so many things wrong with that statement. While Tony's said a lot of really inappropriate things in his time, that's going to far, even for him. Because whenever he'd said something wildly inappropriate, or even when he threatened Dum-E, he'd never actually been serious like that. He'd always been joking with a very crude sense of humor, or just blowing something off.

"Volstagg." Loki is looking worriedly at him, and Tony realizes he probably thinks the anger is directed at him, which definitely isn't what he's going for. Tony mutters where Volstagg can stick his opinions. He knows he's heard Thor mention the other Asgardian. Of course, the thunderer talked very highly of him, but apparently Thor wasn't nice to Loki either. He wonders if Thor said those sorts of things to Loki.

"You know that's not true, right?" Tony sincerely hopes the answer is yes. However, given the fact that Loki doesn't respond, he's pretty sure that means that Loki's answer is no. He hates that Loki seems to have such a low opinion of himself. Nobody's self esteem should be that low. Honestly, if anyone needs an ego-boost, it's Loki. Tony can practically hear Clint's quip about how he should find a way to transfer some of his own ego to Loki.

"Look at me," Tony urges, rather gently, and tips the gods head so they make eye contact. "You are not stupid, or worthless, or a freak. And you certainly as hell shouldn't be dead." He stares intently
at the god. "And I actually think the stuff you do is really awesome, so you don't have to worry about being hurt for it."

There's a flicker of something in Loki's eyes for an instant, but it's gone before Tony can identify it. Loki doesn't seem to believe it. Tony sighs. He can say it as much as he wants, but if Loki doesn't believe the words, they're not going to get anywhere. He knows if Loki's been taught otherwise his whole life, it will take more than a couple days and a couple words to change his mind, but Tony really hates that they're not getting anywhere with this.

"Now what was this about someone leaving you to die?" Tony refuses to put should anywhere in that sentence.

"I'm adopted." Loki says, and he quickly covers his mouth as if he'd said something wrong. Tony's about to ask Loki if he's perhaps from Jotunheim, but for some reason he has a feeling asking right now wouldn't be the best idea.

Besides, Loki's still missing the blue-skin requirement.

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_Loki stares fearfully at the man pinning him down by straddling him and practically sitting on Loki's torso, making it hard to breathe. Loki can't move his arms, which are squeezed against his sides by the man's knees. Loki tries to wriggle free and kicks his legs desperately, but someone presses those into the floor and holds them down as well._

_Odin stares back down at Loki. Loki knows he's in for it, given that Odin is the one who's going to be punishing him. The Allfather's uncovered eye is really scary, since instead of its usual cold, impassive look, it now looks angry and dangerous. He'd been furious about the statue of Buri being broken._

"Loki Laufeyson." Odin starts, and the crowd around them jeers at the mention of Loki's heritage. "For your attempt to deceive us..." Odin starts a rather long speech, but Loki barely hears it, too busy worrying about whatever is to come.

A servant bows and presents the Allfather with a small, plain wooden box. From this, the Allfather produces a bone needle and a long leather cord. Loki wrinkles his brow and frowns in confusion as Odin threads the leather cord through the needle. What's all this about?

His confusion very quickly morphs into worry as the needle moves towards him. He tries to twist his head away and is rewarded with a sharp blow on the side of his head that makes stars dance in front of his eyes and his ears ring. Then, whoever hit him holds his head still so he's staring up at the Allfather and the needle again, and Loki realizes that it's Thor.

Although he desperately wants to, he can't pull his eyes away from the needle approaching him. He tries shutting them but instead they continue to watch, horrified.

The needle pierces through his upper lip and Loki screams as the cord is dragged through the hole. Briefly, his world is reduced to nothing but the agonizing pain, but his senses return and he feels something warm and wet around his lips, and he knows it's blood.

Then he feels the needle prodding his lower lip before it's stabbed through there, and Loki screams again. He struggles, not even thinking about how he's always punished later for it. He just needs to get away. But he can't even move, since he's being held down by Odin, Thor, and whoever's at his feet.

This process repeats, sending Loki's world into nothing but agony again and again. Between these
periods, Loki realizes he can't even scream any more. It gets harder and harder to open his mouth due to the stitches Odin is sewing, until he can't open his mouth at all.

Loki lays there, his crying muffled by his closed lips, as Odin cuts the extra length of cord and gets off him. He curls into a ball as he tries to wipe the blood from his face, but touching the area sends new waves of pain, so he leaves his mouth surrounded by blood.

And then, they start on him for the whole magic bit. They kick, punch, and smash him, hurling him around like a doll and laughing at his muffled cries. They're even harsher than usual, and they go at it for longer. Loki knows he deserves this—he'd been bad in multiple ways by using his magic and lying—but he wishes he didn't. He wishes he wasn't a monster that has to be punished constantly, that he wasn't a demented magic-using freak.

He tries to tell them he's sorry, so sorry, but he can't get the words of his mouth. His tormentors cease hitting him, instead asking him what he's trying to say. He screams but it comes out as "mmmphh! Mph! mmmphh..." They continue to taunt him, telling him to "use his words" and not grunt like the savagely stupid monster he is, although one of them switches to sneering at him to stop making inarticulate sounds like a baby.

Then they continue with his beating, but they stop to tell him to speak up whenever he begs them to accept his apology and leave him alone. Loki screams in a mix between frustration and pain as he flaps his hands furiously. It's not like anyone ever listens to him and they never leave him alone when he begs them to, but it's still awful to not be understood at all. Sometimes when he apologizes, the beatings won't hurt quite as much as when he doesn't, but then again, sometimes they don't change at all after his apologies.

At last, they leave him alone, a broken heap on the floor. Gradually, his injuries heal, though it hurts almost as much when his bones shift back into place as when they were broken. The cuts in his lips have already healed around the stitches when he grabs the end of the cord that's holding his lips together. He pulls and it hurts so much he wants to throw up, but the cord doesn't budge.

Squeezing his eyes shut, he yanks on it, despite the explosion of pain it causes, but the cord remains as is. He tugs and tugs, but all it does is send fire through his lips. The cord still doesn't budge. He scrabbles at the cord furiously even though it brings even more pain. He needs to get them out!

But the more he scratches at the stitches, the tighter they seem to get. They start pulling his mouth shut so tight that his mouth seems to be getting smaller and smaller.

Suddenly, his mouth is gone, and in its place there's just a stitched line on smooth skin, like on a rag doll.

Loki wakes up screaming as someone grabs him.

Tony's been insomniac this whole night, which isn't exactly a new occurrence, and he'd given up on sleep hours ago. He's lounging on the couch in the Iron Man pajamas he'd bought along with Loki's. Loki had asked when he was going to wear them, and Tony figures that there's no point sitting around in his boxers if he's not going to sleep, so once he'd given up on sleep, he'd changed into them.

Since Tony's up, Jarvis doesn't even need to wake him up to speak with him. "Sir, Mr. Loki is having another nightmare." Tony had actually been expecting this report for a while. There's only been a couple nights during Loki's time here that he hasn't had nightmares, one of which was the
first night.

Tony sets aside his tablet, where he'd been going through blueprints, and gets off the couch, stretching, before heading to Loki's room. He swings the door open and his shadow is cast along the strip of light coming from the hallway.

He stops dead in his tracks when he sees the child staring at him. The boy is small and looks as if he'd just lost a WWF match. Tony is about to tell Jarvis to alert social services when he sees one of those intangible Loki's trying to calm Loki down, and it dawns on him that the child is probably intangible just like the other Loki's that have shown up, or Jarvis would have alerted him earlier.

Looking back at the child, he can definitely see a resemblance. The child has the same green eyes, but he seems different than Loki. Does Loki have a son or something? Tony turns his attention to the god. He's muttering in his sleep, and it gets loud enough for Tony to discern the words, which are in English this time. It's a heart-wrenching combination of "No", "Stop", "Please!" and "I'm sorry!"

That green fire-like stuff is around his hands, but nothing weird is happening, aside from the two apparitions, which Tony ignores. Loki's begging gets louder until it abruptly stops.

Tony's on his way over to the bed when it starts. Loki begins clawing at his own mouth with a violence that shocks Tony. Loki scratches himself hard enough to draw blood which runs over his face in little rivers. Tony has a feeling he knows what Loki's nightmare is about, and his stomach lurches at the thought.

He rushes over and grabs Loki's hands to try to stop him from scratching himself, and the adult other-Loki disappears when he brushes against it. The energy stuff feels sort of weird, but soon all his attention is focused on struggling to pull Loki's hands away from his face. He's instantly reminded of how strong Loki is when his pulling at the god's hands produces almost no result.

Soon after he grabs Loki's hands, the god wakes up with an ear-splitting scream that completely startles Tony, although he's already denying it.

Loki struggles briefly as he screams, and Tony barely manages to keep holding on to Loki's hands as the god makes a move to scratch his own mouth again.

Tony's not going to lie- trying to hold back an insanely-strong god is freaking exhausting. He's breathing heavily and sweating rather profusely.

Loki of course notices the green stuff around his hands, and the fight leaves him almost instantly. Tony cautiously releases the god's hands, ready to grab them if Loki moves to harm himself again, but it seems there's no need.

As usual, Tony pulls Loki close and murmurs softly to him until Loki finally calms down. It takes at least fifteen minutes. When Loki's calm, Tony takes him to the bathroom to wash the dried blood off his face.

However, when Loki catches sight of his reflection with the dried blood around his lips, he freezes. Tony's not sure if it's another panic episode, but he seems completely checked out and his eyes are unfocused.

Tony sighs and grabs a washcloth and a bottle of disinfectant from the medicine cabinet, and starts to wipe the blood from Loki's face. However, he soon realizes the disinfectant is unnecessary since Loki's cuts have healed already.
Once the god no longer looks like a vampire who's just had a feast, he guides Loki out. Fortunately, Loki follows him, even though he still seems elsewhere mentally. Tony deposits Loki on the sofa and goes to make some hot chocolate for Loki and coffee for himself, which he'd been doing anyways the past couple nights but especially needs tonight (he certainly couldn't pull an all-nighter without caffeine).

Loki seems to be mostly present when he hands the god his mug of chocolaty warmth. Jarvis had ordered marshmallows that were delivered two days ago, but Loki just plays with them and shows no interest in actually eating them- he ended up picking them out of the hot chocolate with his spoon the first time. So Tony has left them out since then.

He sits down next to Loki and sips his coffee while Loki sips his hot chocolate and looks at him with wide green eyes.

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The nightmare Loki'd been having is unfortunately one he's very familiar with and it always starts like how it actually happened in real life, but occasionally it's Thor holding the needle instead of the Allfather. The pain in the dreams always seems as real as the actual pain had been.

Sometimes he just wakes up when the beating starts, and sometimes, like this time, it's when it gets even more nightmarish and his mouth becomes a stitched line. That part is even scarier than the rest of it, because it shouldn't happen and it's so freaky.. It's worse than the nightmares where his disgusting blue skin is showing and he can't hide it and then even people he's somehow positive have never seen him or heard of him before immediately know he's a monster and automatically hate him.

Of course when he'd woken up this time, his horrible magic had been showing as it always does, although he hadn't seen any fake versions of himself. He'd woken up trying to pull the stitches out, but someone had been holding his hands and he'd eventually realized it was Tony. Then he'd realized he'd been screaming, which had to mean he still had a mouth and it wasn't sewn shut.

Tony had been there to make him feel better, which helped a lot. Now that Tony comforts him after his nightmares, Loki's not sure he could return to how it was in Asgard, where he'd lay there, shaking, terrified and still gripped by his dream, until his body would calm only out of sheer exhaustion. It took a while.

He's not sure why Tony bothers to comfort him, but it's a really nice feeling. Tony had even helped clean the blood off his mouth. When he'd seen it, he'd frozen. It was too familiar. Loki doesn't know how the blood got there. Wait, it was from the stitches, right? He frowns. No, that happened a while ago, and this isn't even Asgard, so it couldn't be that, could it? It had just been a dream, though he'd only realized that once Tony calmed him down. This is so confusing.

Right now, he's sitting on the couch sipping hot chocolate (Tony has some other drink called 'cough-y' that smells really good but tastes awful- Tony had given him a mug of it once in the morning).

"We're wearing the same thing!" Loki exclaims, suddenly noticing that Tony's wearing the Man of Iron pajamas.

Tony looks down at himself and says "Huh, so we are. What do you think? I bet I still look really hot in these things." He looks at Loki, smirking, but Loki's confused. It's not like it's that warm in these pajamas. Tony says a lot of weird things people in Asgard never said. But that's okay, because Tony's a thousand times nicer than anyone in Asgard and some of the stuff he says is funny.
"Never mind." Tony rolls his eyes at the ceiling. "It's too bad I didn't get these in a larger size, so that I could wear them over an Iron Man suit." Loki giggles slightly at the mental image.

The man's looking at him with concern in his brown eyes, though Loki has no idea why it would be there. Tony, for some reason, asks him if he has a son, and Loki shakes his head no. Where had that come from? He asks, and Tony starts saying something about a boy, but he trails off, fixing an assessing gaze on him.

"Did the Asgardians always hurt you?" That question's a no brainer, Loki thinks, although Tony doesn't seem to pleased with Loki's answer. Maybe he'd said the wrong thing? Loki hopes Tony's not mad at him.

Tony stops sipping his drink and asks quietly "Were you dreaming about the incident you mentioned earlier?" It takes Loki a bit to figure out he's asking about the lip-sewing incident. He nods slightly, and Tony puts an arm around his shoulder, a gesture Loki greatly appreciates.

Tony exhales for a bit and says "That's what I thought." Loki wrinkles his brow, wondering how Tony could guess, but Tony goes on.

"You know they were wrong to do that, right?" Tony's voice is firm, but his arm is still nice and comforting.

Loki's not sure he heard the words right at first, and now he's not sure what Tony's talking about. He cocks his head to the side, confused.

"They had no excuse to do something like that to you. Hell, that's torture." Tony says, staring intently at him. Loki frowns. Maybe Tony's crazy or something. Tony hadn't seemed to like the idea earlier, either.

"Earlier, you said hurting people was bad. The Asgardians hurt you, so aren't they bad?" It sounds more like a statement than a question.

"I was bad!" He explains. Looking down at his lap, he mumbles "I d'serve it. When they hurt me. Hav'ta be punished." Even if Loki hadn't liked it one bit, he had deserved it. Frost Giants deserve anything anyone does to them. How could anyone not make sense of that? Surely Tony will understand, since he's really smart.

But Tony gives him a rather sharp look and says "That's no excuse. They had no right to hurt you like that. Nothing you could possibly do would deserve something like that." Tony gently tips Loki's head up. Fixing him with an intense stare, Tony asks urgently "Do you understand?"

Loki doesn't, really. Why would he not deserve it, when he's bad in so many ways? He's bad for simply existing, and he's even worse when he does magic or lies. But then again, Tony had said some weird things earlier, about how he wasn't wasn't a worthless freak. Loki wanted so much to believe those words, but he knows Tony's wrong for once. Tony had also said something about liking what Loki does, and for a brief moment Loki had thought he'd been referring to his magic, and he'd almost laughed at how stupid he was. There's no way Tony meant that. He was probably talking about his drawings or that colorful cube thing he'd said Loki was good at that first day.

Loki looks at Tony, who's clearly expecting a reply from him. It still seems like there's concern in those brown eyes. Loki's pretty sure he knows what answer Tony wants to hear, even though it doesn't make any sense. So Loki cautiously nods.

Tony continues to look at him with a level gaze as Loki goes back to sipping his hot chocolate.
The workers come mid-morning to start the repairs on the penthouse. Clearly, Jarvis had set out to find a service that didn't have a waiting list. Or maybe he'd bumped them to the top. If that's the case, Tony's not sure whether Jarvis had hacked in or bribed their way up with money- both methods had been used by the AI in the past.

The workers seem awed that they've actually stepped foot in the living quarters of the famous Tony Stark. Tony has, of course, experienced this sort of celebrity worship for a good deal of his life, and it inflated once he became Iron Man. So it's nothing he isn't used to.

He gives the workers a witty greeting and indicates what he wants fixed, although that part is pretty obvious. Still, it never hurts to make things clear. Then, on a whim, he slips a crisp hundred dollar tip into each of their hands, since he's feeling generous. Besides, that sort of thing usually makes the service even faster, although some of the workers seem like they're about to faint with happiness.

Tony goes to Loki's room. He'd sent the god to change out of his pajamas and Loki hasn't reemerged, although the door is open now. Loki, now in a sleeveless purple shirt and sweatpants, is sprawled on the floor, scrolling through holographic Peanuts comics. He watches Loki flick his fingers as he laughs, pointing at the strip with his other hand.

He knows he hadn't convinced Loki of anything regarding Asgard being wrong during either of their conversations. It's horrible that Loki seems to think he deserves having his freaking mouth sewn shut. Tony's not entirely sure how to get him to believe the truth- that he doesn't deserve that, that he's not a worthless freak- but he's going to make sure Loki believes it sometime.

It takes a little bit for Loki to notice Tony's even there since he seems absorbed in the comics, but when he does, he looks over at Tony curiously. Tony leans casually against the wall. "Hey Snoopy, are you up for coming down to the lab with me?" He knows the god won't say no to that, and to be honest, he wasn't planning on leaving Loki here with the workers, since he'd probably get in their way.

Loki gets up and hugs Simba to his chest with his arms while fiddling with his own hands. He skips over next to Tony and grins excitedly, and Tony's struck with how different Loki is in normal life than he is after an incident or nightmare. They leave Loki's room, and Tony returns the construction people's stares until they look away. He notices Loki looking at them apprehensively, and he pulls Loki along quickly to the elevator.

Once they're in the elevator, Loki relaxes and grins again, bouncing on his toes like he does a lot. When they reach the lab, Loki cheerfully calls out to Dum-E, who beeps and waves at the god with equal enthusiasm. When he hears Jarvis greet them, Loki looks even happier, and he randomly says "Guess what? Tony wore his Man of Iron pajamas last night and I wore mine, so we were both Man of Iron! 'Xcept he's actually Man of Iron."

"Yes, I am always aware of what Mr. Stark is- or isn't- wearing." Jarvis says dryly, and Tony snorts, although it seems to fly right over Loki's head.

"Hey, Jarvis, create a new folder." Tony says as Loki goes over to Dum-E.

"Starting another project, sir? What would you like me to name it?"

Tony thinks for a moment until he comes up with a suitably awesome-sounding name.

"Call it Hulkbuster."
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Loki finds another thing to do in Tony's lab.

Also, the other Avengers (minus Thor) show up for a visit.

There's rock music playing in Tony's lab, but it's quiet enough to easily hear what someone's saying over it.

Tony has Jarvis pull up the blueprints for the other Iron Man suits and he surrounds himself with the holograms. He's going to need to design a new type of suit to fight the Hulk, but that doesn't necessarily mean he needs to start entirely from scratch.

The basic idea he has right now is pretty simple- that it would be harder for the Hulk to pick on someone his own size. Tony flicks through the blueprints and 3D models hovering before him and drags a copy of one next to the original.

To be honest, most of this stage- the making of the 3D model and the calculations- is done by Jarvis, although Tony does some things manually. Tony's main part of the suit-building process comes in later with actually making and putting all the electronics and weapons in the suit- in other words, making it more than just a metal shell.

Tony notices Loki sitting on one of the tables, swinging his legs and watching him with fascination. Quirking an eyebrow, Tony quips "Don't you have anything better to do than sit there and watch me? I mean, I know I'm attractive, but still, it's a little extreme, don't you think?"

"What are those things?" Loki asks, pointing at the holograms surrounding Tony and ignoring the last part of what Tony'd said. Tony explains that they're models of the suits, but Loki shakes his head.

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"What are they floating? And see-through? They're like Snoopy." Loki looks at them curiously, and Tony works out that by Snoopy, he's referring to the holographic Peanuts strips and he's asking about holograms in general. Tony hadn't really thought about Loki not knowing what a hologram is, but he suddenly wonders why Loki hadn't asked until now, given he's been exposed to them a lot (although mostly in the form of Peanuts comics).

"They're holograms." At Loki's blank look, he elaborates "They're formed by light beams from a laser or other coherent light source." Loki looks even more lost at the technological explanation.

"What're you doing with them?" Loki seems extra inquisitive today.

"Making another Iron Man suit." Tony answers vaguely, hoping that will be enough of an answer for the god. He turns his attention back to the suit, but still notices that Loki continues to watch him.

Loki stares in fascination at the things surrounding Tony, which Tony had just said are called holograms. These 'holograms' in front of Tony are a lot like the Peanuts strips in that they're
floating and transparent, but some of these things are three-dimensional, which is amazing. A lot of
them look like miniature, floating Man of Iron suits, including the thing Tony's working on right
now. Tony's changing what it looks like, so it resembles a cross between the Man of Iron suit and
the Hulk. Or maybe it's changing itself?

With the Peanuts strips, Loki had figured out he could swipe them around and spin them, but
Tony's doing so much more. First of all, he's making something with them, which is really neat.
But he's zooming in on parts and sometimes when he drags something it simply moves but
sometimes there are suddenly two of the thing he just dragged.

It's entrancing to watch as the small suit floating in front of Tony changes more and more as parts
stretch out and change size. Sometimes Tony's grabbing them but sometimes it seems like it does it
by itself.

Tony looks up at him again and quirks an eyebrow. "Still watching me, huh?"

"How are you doing that?" Loki changes the subject. "It looks fun!"

"What, this?" Tony gestures to the holograms and Loki nods.

"It's simple, really, and Jarvis is doing a lot of it now anyways. Would you like to try it?" Loki
didn't expect this question at all, but the answer is definitely yes. He nods again and claps his hands
enthusiastically.

"Jarvis, would you mind finishing this while I give Loki a tutorial on holograms?" Tony asks as if
he already knows the answer.

"Not at all, sir." Jarvis replies politely before turning somewhat snarky "It's not like you were doing
much, anyways."

Tony mutters something that Loki doesn't catch, before calling out to him. "All right, Snoopy,
come over this way." Loki follows Tony eagerly, though he can't help glancing back at the
hologram that's forming.

"Is that suit for the Hulk?" Loki asks, since it looks a lot like the green creature he likes.

Tony looks up and says "No. Actually, it's for me."

"For you?" Loki wrinkles his brow, confused. "Why would you want a Hulk suit?" Maybe Tony
wants to be the Hulk? But he's already Man of Iron, so why would he want to be the Hulk, too?

"Well, if I have to fight him again, hopefully this will help me keep the Hulk from hurting anyone
or destroying my tower in the future." Tony explains.

"You're gonna fight him in it?" Loki doesn't want his friends to hurt each other. Aren't the Hulk and
Tony friends with each other, too? Why would they fight if they were friends?

Loki stops thinking about the suit when Tony starts teaching him about holograms.

The lesson on holograms is rather short and pretty easy. Loki had seen Tony do all of these things,
and he'd even noticed some of the movements Tony teaches him for working with holograms.

When Tony compliments him, a rather unfamiliar but pleasantly warm feeling spreads through
Loki's body and he claps his hands and laughs.
Loki is actually a really quick learner, Tony realizes, rather impressed. He'd shown Loki a lot of the basics of using holograms- resizing, copying and pasting and so on- and Loki seemed to have it down after one demonstration. Once, he'd even seemed to know the gesture beforehand. When Tony asks him how he'd known how to resize holograms already, Loki responds "I saw you do it." Watching Loki flick through holograms now, it would seem he'd been doing it for years.

Tony had even gone into some of the basics of 3D modeling with holograms, which Loki had seemed really interested in.

"I'm gonna make something, like you!" Loki informs him happily while creating a bunch of random holographic shapes. Tony's glad he'd thought to have Jarvis give Loki his own folder so this stuff doesn't clutter up his files.

Maybe he shouldn't have taught Loki how to have things scanned, Tony thinks, as Loki scans himself, a bunch of tools, and then Simba, telling the toy to be still as if it was alive.

Tony goes back to his own work, and a couple hours pass. Tony glances at Loki periodically and gives the god little side comments. Loki talks to Jarvis a lot, but Tony's not exactly listening to what they're saying. Loki keeps glancing at the Iron Man suit holograms while fiddling with some basic holographic shapes, and the god's yellow shirt appears slightly green behind some of them.

Tony pauses. Hadn't Loki been wearing purple earlier? Maybe he changed clothes? But Tony's almost positive he hadn't left the room...

Grabbing a non-holographic tablet, Tony has Jarvis pull up the last ten minutes or so from his camera in the lab. Sure enough, Loki had been wearing purple earlier. Then, in the footage from about five minutes ago, there's a sort of shimmer around Loki and his shirt abruptly becomes yellow. There had even been a green shimmer around Loki's hands, but it had only been present during the split second his shirt had changed color. Loki's hands had been at his side at the time, and he hadn't seemed to notice.

Tony blinks. Of all the strange things Loki's done, this somehow seems like one of the strangest. But Tony decides to keep things low-key.

"Nice shirt." Tony says casually. Fortunately, Loki doesn't freak out.

Jarvis has watched Sir comfort Mr. Loki nightmare after nightmare. If he had a body, Jarvis thinks, he could perhaps do the same thing for Sir that Sir does for Mr. Loki- holding him close while reassuring him. He quickly switches his processing to something else- he doesn't have a body, so there's no use thinking about what it would be like if he did.

Mr. Loki's nightmares are clearly a problem since they interrupt his sleep. Mr. Loki has had nightmares over ninety percent of the time he's been here. It reminds Jarvis of when Sir first came back from Afghanistan when he'd had nightmares almost every night. Sir still has nightmares years later, although judging from Sir's mutterings, some of them seem to be about the invasion he helped stop a year and a half ago.

Whenever Mr. Loki has nightmares, there are the instances that Jarvis can't explain. His sensors pick up something he can't make sense of, and occasionally his heat sensors detect Mr. Loki's body temperature dropping to well past what would be dangerous for a human, yet Mr. Loki seems entirely unaffected. Additionally, Jarvis has been unable to find a source for the non-transparent holograms that show up during Mr. Loki's nightmares.
Jarvis had always noticed worrying signs about Mr. Loki's past, ever since the first day where Mr. Loki said he didn't want to go back to Asgard. These signs have hinted to a more and more horrific past. Most of these signs were somewhat vague in how horrible Asgard was to Loki, but sometimes it was abundantly clear how much Mr. Loki had to go through, such as when Mr. Loki mentioned having his lips sewn shut.

Jarvis likes Mr. Loki a lot- not nearly as much as Sir, of course, since liking someone as much or more than his creator would be impossible for the AI- but still, he likes the tower's new resident a great deal more than any other person. Mr. Loki is his second favorite person after Sir. Especially since Mr. Loki, like Sir, truly seems to consider him real. A lot of people treat him like a machine that, while advanced, is incapable of real thought or feelings.

Although Mr. Loki seems happy a lot of the time, it's clear he's far from healthy. Physically, he appears to be in good health, and although he's a bit on the skinny side, he's not underweight. Mental health, however, seems to be an entirely different matter.

"Sir? Do you have a moment?" Jarvis asks, perfectly polite.

"Sure, Jarv. What's up?" Tony asks, not looking up from his tablet. Loki had conked out really early tonight- it's only 7:45 pm. Maybe the lab had tired him out.

"Have you considered finding Mr. Loki a therapist?" Jarvis asks. Tony's eyebrows rise in surprise. Although he probably should have expected the AI would recommend that. He switches the tablet off and sets it aside before staring at Jarvis' camera.

"What, like a shrink?" Tony asks skeptically, wrinkling his brow slightly. Jarvis had repeatedly recommended that he go to see a therapist, both after Afghanistan and after the whole alien invasion and Battle of New York. But Tony had refused every time the AI had brought it up, not really wanting to go over childhood issues to some stranger while laying on a couch; how would that help, anyways? He can't exactly picture Loki doing that either- for one thing, Loki almost never stays in one spot for long unless he's asleep. Even when watching movies, he moves around a lot.

"I think it could be beneficial for Mr. Loki's health to see a trained therapist." Jarvis stresses the last part, as if correcting Tony for his word choice. "While you are many things, sir, you are neither a therapist nor a psychologist. Mr. Loki's issues are not something you can fix on your own. While your efforts with him have been valiant, I think it would be best for Mr. Loki to get professional help." Jarvis finishes gently.

Of course he's not a therapist. Hell, Tony's still amazed he can actually calm Loki down. Though he's made literally no progress with Loki's nightmares or convincing him that the Asgardians were wrong to treat him horribly.

Jarvis presses on, clearly trying his hardest to convince Tony of this. "I have observed numerous instances of Mr. Loki expressing signs of a very low self esteem, possibly self-loathing." A bunch of holographic videos spring up around Tony, and one of them begins playing from Loki's conversation with Bruce and Tony, where Loki is saying "They'd never like someone like me."

Tony blinks. He had been so concerned with the whole part about Loki's mouth being sewn shut that he'd forgotten entirely about that. But geez, there was a sort of disgust in his voice when he'd said that, a tone which certainly shouldn't be there.

Other holograms play, showing a lot of instances Tony does indeed remember, though there's one
he doesn't remember at all, which turns out to be the conversation Jarvis had had with Loki when Tony had been telling Bruce about Loki in the lab. He watches the Loki in the video asking Jarvis what his opinion on Bruce was, and asking for confirmation that Bruce won't hurt him.

Jarvis speaks up again. "Furthermore, it is perfectly clear that Mr. Loki was not treated right in Asgard, and he seems to believe he deserves that treatment. With the help of a psychologist, he might be able to move on from that."

Tony sighs. Loki has barely been here two weeks, so it's not like they could have expected to make much progress (although Tony's still annoyed that they haven't). But still, Jarvis is right. He's not a therapist, and as much as Tony hates to admit it, he really can't do this on his own. Loki's situation is too big for that.

But there are some issues with the idea. "What about his... powers? How can we trust someone not to spread word of them to the public?" Tony counters.

"Well, sir." Jarvis says patiently, though he sounds as if he's explaining the obvious. "There is this nice little thing called professional secrecy, which should prevent them from revealing Mr. Loki's powers."

"Yeah, but that's one hell of a secret to dump on someone." Tony runs a hand through his hair.

"Not that I'm committing to anything, but if we do this, we'd probably have to fake some documents to even get him in." Tony says. Faking the documents would be pretty easy, though. Tony holds up a hand to keep Jarvis from speaking before continuing "However, they'd undoubtedly find out Loki is from Asgard at some point, and then they'd know they were faked, which could be messy."

"Perhaps if they knew ahead of time that Mr. Loki is from Asgard, it might not be an issue. Faking documents may not be necessary if they know." Jarvis suggests, though Tony's not too sure.

"Even if that doesn't become an issue, can you really picture Loki laying on a couch spilling his guts to a doctor?" Tony asks. "I mean, he acts like a child a lot of the time..."

"That is not the only type of therapy, sir." Jarvis sounds somewhat amused before becoming serious again "I want what is best for Mr. Loki."

"I'll think about it." Tony sighs, not wanting to totally agree. But he's actually not just saying that. He really is going to think about it. Loki's too important for Tony to try to heal with his lack of experience.

Over the next couple days, almost all of Tony and Loki's time is spent in the lab- sometimes they even eat in there. Tony continues to work on the Hulkbuster armor. Jarvis, meanwhile, runs large calculations and helps Loki with whatever he needs while Tony carefully designs the innards of the suit and the weapons it will have. This suit is definitely going to need its own arc reactor to power it.

When the model for the hulkbuster armor is done, Tony makes it life size- it's going to be about the size of the Hulk. When he sees it, Loki lets out a happy shriek and runs up to hug the model.

By the second day, Tony's realized that Loki's not just aimlessly fiddling with holograms, although it had seemed like that for a while. Loki had asked to use some of the "Man of Iron" holograms. Tony eventually decides to copy some of the armor models (without any of the innards) to Loki's folder for the god to fiddle with. Loki's folder is as secure as Tony's, and giving him the models for
the outside of the suit- which anyone can see and thus model- doesn't seem like a problem. It's basically like giving him a model of a toy Iron Man. Loki seems to love tweaking them, and Tony realizes there's a method behind Loki's seemingly random tweaking.

It turns out Loki is indeed trying to make something- it appears to be an Iron Man suit for his Simba toy. It's a pretty ambitious first project, but it seems Loki's up for it. Loki models the holograms around his toy. He'll take a foot from one of the Iron Man models and carefully sculpt it so it fits around Simba's foot. Loki does almost all of it himself- the only thing Jarvis does is smooth it out. It actually looks pretty decent, Tony thinks. Loki grins when he tells him that.

Tony's glad Loki's found something fairly productive to do, though Loki doesn't work on it all the time- he still plays games, sometimes by himself and sometimes with Jarvis and Dum-E.

Simba still goes everywhere with Loki. Loki even brings the toy to the bathroom when he goes to take a shower or a bath (judging from the splashing sounds Tony hears on some days and the sound of a shower running on other days, Loki seems to switch between the two). Considering that Simba's voice box still works, it seems Simba hasn't actually gone in the water with Loki.

Tony thinks Loki might be a bit too attached to Simba. Tony's not even sure if little kids carry around beloved toys this much (not that Tony can claim to know much at all about kids). Jarvis gently points out that carrying around a stuffed animal is a healthier calming mechanism than turning to drugs or drinking. The AI manages to say this and still sound completely nonjudgemental of Tony's love of alcohol.

Loki continues to have nightmares and panics whenever he realizes he's used his powers. Tony keeps telling him that it's not a problem, but he's not sure his words are getting to Loki.

Although Tony's still really interested in Loki's powers, they're currently on a back burner as he works on the Hulkbuster suit. But he still keeps an eye out for them and has Jarvis inform him (when they're alone) if he missed anything.

Nothing else changes colors, but that incident had given Tony a lot to think about. If Loki can change the color of his shirt, maybe he can change the color of other things... like his skin. If he could do that, maybe he really does have blue skin. But at the same time, changing the color of a shirt seems different than changing the color of your skin.

Tony tries to subtly bring up the topic by talking about things changing colors, but as soon as the conversation gets less subtle and hints about his powers, Loki curls on the floor, muttering "no, no, no." With that, Tony's suspicion that Loki's from Jotunheim grows, though the god hasn't actually answered any of his questions about it. Theoretically, he could just be freaking out about his powers.

Besides, if Asgardians hate Frost Giants as much as they seem to, maybe suggesting that Loki secretly is one might not be a great idea. At least, not without more proof that he might have blue skin underneath.

Tony's out doing something as Man of Iron, leaving Loki alone on a different floor in the tower. Loki's not sure why he's here- they still use the bedrooms in the penthouse during the night and avoid the holes in the living room, but Jarvis isn't letting the elevator go up there. Right now, when he uses the elevator, Jarvis only lets him go to a couple different floors. Loki's not allowed in the lab when Tony's not there, either.

Loki decides to explore. He's always liked exploring. He'd never really thought about what was on
all the other floors of the tower. There are several floors that seem to be living areas, though he and Tony are the only people who live here. At least, he thinks they're the only ones living here. These floors aren't nearly as fancy as the penthouse.

The floor he's on is actually pretty interesting. It starts out with a living room, but when he wanders around other parts of the floor, there are things he's never seen before. There's a room with a bunch of comfy seats facing a huge white thing hanging from the ceiling. Jarvis explains it's like the screen he and Tony watch, only the image is actually projected onto it instead of coming from it. Loki frowns. If screens show other worlds, how does that work?

Loki has worked out that Jarvis seems to be everywhere in the tower, which he really likes, since it means he can talk to Jarvis wherever he goes.

There's also a huge room one floor below with a huge pit full of water that he assumes is a public bath, like they have in Asgard, though it's a pretty deep pit of water for bathing in. Not to mention it smells really weird. Jarvis doesn't let him in there, so he just looks at it through the huge window it has instead of a wall. He holds Simba up so the lion can look, too.

There's another room full of all sorts of strange equipment, which also has a glass wall allowing people to look in from the hallway. Jarvis says it's a training room, and the equipment helps people be physically fit. The machines look fun to goof around on, but Jarvis won't let him in there, either. Loki sighs and moves on.

Finally there's a door that Jarvis lets Loki through, and Loki doesn't know what's on the other side of it until he goes through, since there aren't any glass walls.

His mouth drops open when he sees what it is, and then he grins and flaps his hands. It's a library! Or maybe it's just a huge collection of books, but that's sort of the same thing. Loki loves libraries. The Asgardian library had been a good place to hide from Fandral, Volstagg, Hogun and Thor. Loki had found it when they were still children. At first, it had just been a good place to hide, but soon it was both the safety and the allure of books that drew him in.

Sadly, even the library hadn't remained a safe haven forever. People still came across him more often than he'd liked. At first they ignored him, which was just fine with Loki. But after one day when Fandral had followed him in to keep tormenting him (it turned out he'd been unable to shake him on the way there), these encounters had grown more unpleasant. While he rarely got beaten up in there, he had been told to get his filthy hands off the books and stop infusing them with dark magic. In some ways, that hurt even more than getting a beating. Sometimes he'd have to stay away for a while before venturing back.

Loki looks around at all the books surrounding him in awe, and whispers "Whoa" to Simba. He trails a finger along the books' spines. Unlike Asgard, these books aren't bound in plain leather-they come in all different colors and some have pictures on the covers. A lot of them have really weird titles like Quantum Computing or Moby Dick.

He eventually finds a book with tiny white dots all over the cover, almost like stars, and realizes it's actually about stars and something called "Outer Space." He carries it out to the living room and plonks down on the ground.

He flips open the book and sees a chart of stars. Some of them form little pictures with names like Sirius. Loki always liked stars- in Asgard, he often stared at the night sky, wishing he could fly away to somewhere he wasn't hated. The stars had looked especially beautiful from the Bifrost. The Bifrost had been really awesome, since it was so colorful and it was literally surrounded by stars. It wasn't just the sky that was starry there.
Loki wishes he had his crayons and paper so he could trace this chart, but they're still in the lab and Jarvis won't let him go there. He mentions this to Simba, and Jarvis speaks up. "That could be arranged, Mr. Loki." A couple minutes later, Dum-E arrives with the materials and Loki hugs him before starting to trace the picture.

"Mr. Stark is returning now, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says and Loki grins. Finally! Maybe now they'd get to go back in the lab and continue working on their separate projects. Tony's been gone for hours, and Loki finished tracing the chart a long time ago. He'd started reading the book but it's full of unfamiliar words like *thermonuclear astrophysics* that weren't used in Asgard. He'd never run across the weird words in any of the Asgardian library's books, either. This book doesn't explain them in a way that makes sense and even Jarvis' explanations are rather confusing.

He's ended up just drawing different constellations for the stars while Jarvis explains more basic astronomy concepts that make more sense, especially since they don't require him to already know a lot of weird vocabulary. It's really interesting, though he's rather sad to learn that stars die. Sometimes Jarvis will show a holographic moving picture of something like a star forming or a model of a galaxy. When the hologram of the galaxy comes up, Loki spins around in the middle of it, laughing in awe and holding Simba up in the stars.

Once he's told that Tony's coming back, Loki grabs his star drawings and Simba and waits eagerly for Tony to appear.

The elevator door opens and Loki squeals Tony's name before running up and hugging the man tightly, laughing. Tony makes a strangled sound and Loki lets go of him worriedly. Did he hurt Tony?! How could he live with himself if he hurt Tony, who's never done anything to hurt him? When he can speak, Tony says "Don't hug me so hard. I swear if I wasn't in my armor, that would've cracked my ribs or something." Seeming to sense Loki's worry, Tony adds, as his armor is removed "I'm fine. Just go a bit easier on me, okay? Not all of us have god-like strength and durability."

"There's only one god." Somebody says, sounding vaguely annoyed. Loki suddenly notices the other people behind Tony.

There are four other people who got off the elevator with Tony- three men and a woman who looks vaguely familiar though Loki has no idea why. Loki stares at the people surrounding him slightly anxiously and he can't help moving so he's slightly behind Tony. At least there's another familiar face besides Tony's. "Bruce! Guess what Tony and I did today!" He grins at Bruce, who smiles back.

"Hmm. Tony locked himself in his workshop for hours on end?" Bruce asks, and Loki giggles.

"Kind of. But I was with him, and I worked on my project while he worked on his project! And when he was gone, I drew stars!" Loki holds up his drawing but ends up showing Tony first. Tony seems to know right away that Loki made the constellations up- apparently he knows there's not a Mike Wazowski constellation- although he says there really should be an "Iron Man" constellation. A Man of Iron constellation would be really awesome, Loki thinks. One of the other men says something about being surprised that Tony hasn't made that a reality by now.

Moving so that Loki's next to him rather than behind him, Tony says "Loki, these are the other Avengers."

Loki freezes for a second. "Is Thor here?" He asks, and even he can hear the fear in his own voice. Tony assures him that he's not, and Loki relaxes slightly. He bows slightly the other Avengers,
since that's what you're supposed to do when you meet someone. Not that anyone ever really did it to him, though.

A blonde-haired man approaches, holding out a hand for some reason and introducing himself as Steve. He has the same build as Asgardian warriors, which makes Loki really uneasy. If this man grew a beard, grew his hair out, and changed his weird red, white and blue suit for some armor, nobody in Asgard would give him a second glance. With long hair and a beard, Steve would probably look a lot like Thor, actually. Loki instinctively moves away from him as he gets closer, retreating behind Tony again and hugging Simba tightly.

Loki watches warily as Steve stops, looking somewhat confused. Tony, on the other hand, is smirking slightly. Loki looks at the other people.

The woman is looking at Loki with calculating eyes that make him a little nervous, so he avoids looking at them. She continues to study Loki with her arms crossed and doesn't say anything, but Tony introduces her as Natasha.

"What's wrong with Thor?" The last man, who Tony says is Clint, asks. He has brown hair and blue eyes and doesn't make Loki as nervous as the other new people. Loki remembers Tony's descriptions of the other Avengers from that first day. This must be Hawkeye, Natasha is the Black Widow and Steve is Captain something-starting-with-Am. Loki suddenly realizes where he'd seen Natasha before- she'd been on the screen with the Hulk and Tony on Loki's first morning here.

"Let's just say Thor's got a lot to answer to the next time I see him." Tony says, somewhat darkly. Loki's not sure what bone Tony has to pick with Thor, but he's glad when Tony changes the subject. "All right! So, any preferences for dinner?"

"Anything but Shawarma." Clint says. Loki has no idea what Shawarma is, but Tony seems to like it, since he gets somewhat defensive.

"What's wrong with Shawarma?" Tony raises an eyebrow, and Clint says they eat it too much. "Oh come on. We have to eat it a lot. It's practically the official food of the Avengers." Tony exclaims, and Loki giggles at the expression on his face.

The word Shawarma is really fun to say- even more fun than the word waffle. Loki begins sing-singing it to himself under his breath and he starts laughing because it sounds so funny. Actually, Shawarma might be the word that's the most fun to say, ever.

"You know, I think we might have to get some Shawarma just so Loki knows what he's singing about." Tony says, and Clint groans.

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Tony ends up ordering a pizza for those who don't want Shawarma, which turns out to just be Clint and Steve.

While they're waiting for the food to arrive, Steve asks "How did you two end up living together?" Tony's a little surprised when Loki answers the question.

"I fell on his roof. At least, that's what Tony says. I was un...con..scious." Loki seems to struggle a bit with pronouncing that word but he gets it out. Tony casts a glance at Bruce. This conversation could easily stray into the topic of abuse, which is hulking-out territory.

It's rather funny that Steve, who is commonly regarded as the nicest Avenger, seems to be the one Loki's the most unsure around.
Steve asks Tony for a word in private. Slightly confused, Tony goes into the hall with the captain. "Are you sure this is best for him?" Steve asks. Tony frowns. Does he actually mean...? He realizes Steve is indeed referring to Loki living here. Over the year and a half they've known each other, Steve's made it pretty clear that he doesn't approve of some of Tony's lifestyle choices, but this is taking it too far.

"It's a hell of a lot better than where he was before." Tony says icily, smirking at the offended look on Steve's face at the use of the word hell.

Much to Tony's annoyance, Steve keeps talking. "I mean, you don't always look after yourself. Is he really getting the care he needs here?" Tony is starting to get really pissed. What right does Steve have to ask this sort of stuff anyways? Besides, Loki seems pretty capable of looking after himself, except for the fact he can't order food. Heck, Loki takes better care of himself than Tony does of himself- Jarvis never needs to remind Loki that he should get some sleep or take a shower. Steve doesn't seem convinced when Tony tells him this.

Although it's not what Steve intended, the super-soldier's comment does remind Tony about what Jarvis had said about therapy and how Loki might not be getting the help he needs, help Tony can't provide. Tony makes a mental note to talk to Bruce later.

"You know, I'm not sure he is getting the right care. I'm sure a homeless shelter would do loads better than a billionaire who actually cares about him and can give him individual attention. Oh, and having Jarvis watch him when I can't totally isn't helpful at all. You know, prevent him from wandering off and getting run over in the street or something." Tony smirks triumphantly when Steve can't seem to think of a response, and he walks off knowing he won.

The food arrives, and it's not long before they're sitting around the table in the kitchen on this floor, which is slightly less extravagant than the kitchen in the penthouse. The reason they're not the penthouse is because Tony doesn't want the others to ask questions about the holes in the floor. Loki is sitting in between Bruce and Tony, though Tony's not surprised that Loki has scooted closer to him than Bruce.

This certainly isn't the first team dinner they've had. Team dinners and movie nights end up happening a lot after missions (the Avengers- except for Thor- had just finished a mission earlier today before coming here). But this is the first time a non-team-member has been a part of them.

As usual, Loki puts Simba in front of his place on the table. Steve asks him about this, but Loki doesn't answer. Tony had asked Loki about it the first couple times he'd done it and had never gotten a clear answer either. In the end, he'd just let Loki do it, after a couple failed attempts at having Loki eat without the toy there. It's not like it's a big deal.

Tony had noticed some of the other members giving Loki odd looks when he had started singsonging the word shawarma. Natasha had almost completely hidden hers, but Clint and Steve had been rather obvious. Tony probably would have given Loki a similar look if he hadn't seen the god do the same thing for the word waffles on a hologram Jarvis had shown him once.

Loki gets some more odd looks when he offers Simba a bit of Shawarma and pretends to feed him. At this, Tony does raise an eyebrow. "You know Simba doesn't eat, Snoopy." Tony sighs.

"Yup! I know that!" Quietly, he says "I'm not that dumb." He sounds as if he expects to be told he's wrong about that.

"You're not dumb at all." Tony murmurs to him, going with his new(ish) approach of trying to
boost Loki's self esteem. But really, Loki has proven that he's very smart, especially in the lab.

Tony notices the surprised looks some of his team members are giving him. They'd probably expected him to leap in with an insult. Admittedly, that's what he most likely would have done with anyone else. He notices Bruce giving him a small smile, though.

Loki hums to himself as he eats, which is yet another thing that Tony has gotten used to but gets some more glances from the other Avengers. So far, this dinner has been rather quieter than some of the other ones they've had. Some of the other Avengers still seem a little unsure around Loki and vice versa. Tony hopes that will change soon.

Maybe they just need a little more time to warm up to each other.

Bruce strikes up a conversation with Loki and Loki responds rather enthusiastically, sitting sideways in his seat to look at him. Natasha joins in, asking Loki some questions. Loki answers some of them but doesn't totally look at her when he does.

When Natasha starts asking Loki about his past and what he has against Thor, and Steve and Clint second her questions, Tony glances at Bruce. The conversation is once again getting dangerously close to hulking-out territory. Bruce begins to excuse himself, obviously thinking the same thing, and Tony figures that now's as good a time as any to ask him for a conversation in private.

Bruce accepts, and Tony glances at Loki, who has grabbed Simba and stood up expectantly. "Come on, Snoopy." Tony says. After all, this is going to concern Loki and Tony can't just make decisions for him.

Still, he can't help noticing that Loki looks relieved to be going with them instead of staying with the other Avengers.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Tony wonders about therapy for Loki, and tells the other Avengers about his god friend.

There are also lessons to be learned from Aladdin.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony hadn't even been sure if Bruce was going to join the rest of the team and Loki for dinner, thinking that maybe Bruce would be too worried about Hulking out again. Tony had actually tried calling Bruce once a couple days ago, inviting him over again, but Bruce hadn't answered. Tony's glad Bruce had joined them today, because he really wants his opinion on something. Besides, Bruce is one of the few people he truly enjoys spending time with.

Tony keeps a hand on Loki's upper arm as he leads him out of the kitchen. Bruce is already in the living room, looking as if he's trying to think about something other than where the conversation had almost ended up.

Although he can't make out the words, Tony can still hear the other Avengers talking in the kitchen. Maybe they should go somewhere even more private, he thinks, watching as Loki squats down and begins flipping through a book on the floor.

Tony suggests going down to the lab to ensure total privacy (given he hasn't actually started making the Hulkbuster armor, there's nothing for Bruce to see). Loki doesn't move until Tony calls out to him, and then he gets up, hugging Simba, the book and his star drawings to his chest.

As they ride the elevator, Bruce asks somewhat awkwardly "How are the floors? Do they still have the holes in them? I'm really sorry about all that, by the way."

Loki seems to be tuning them out and is poking the buttons for the different floors, and Tony can tell Jarvis is overriding the commands again. Though Loki doesn't seem to care that pressing them doesn't have any effect. Tony turns towards Bruce.

"They're still getting fixed, but it's all good." Tony leans casually against the wall and smirks slightly "They actually add a bit of pizazz. Holes are in, these days. They've already been putting them in clothes, you know, with those ripped jeans you see a lot of people wearing. I guess I'm starting a trend of having them in floors. They do force you to be more aware of your surroundings." The corners of Bruce's mouth twitch upwards, and the mood lightens somewhat.

The elevator doors slide open and Loki rushes out, placing the book and papers on a table before going off to greet Dum-E. He's already halfway across the lab by the time Tony and Bruce get out of the elevator.

"Before we start, you need to see this." Tony tells his Science Bro, pulling up a video from the other day Bruce had been over. He hits play and watches Bruce's reaction.
When the footage shows Loki hugging the Hulk, Bruce has an almost awed expression on his face, which quickly turns into shock when the Hulk rests a hand on Loki's back.

"I remember that." Loki announces, right behind them. Tony hadn't heard him come up, but he's already paused the video. Bruce is still staring at the paused frame as if it's a priceless painting. Considering how most people react around the Hulk, Tony thinks, seeing something like this must feel really nice. Bruce is starting to look somewhat emotional.

"Is Hulk-y going to come out?" Loki asks. Tony glances incredulously at Bruce, who's giving him a similar expression- apparently he hadn't misheard the Hulk-y part. Tony quips that they should make that the Hulk's official name for the Avengers, which earns him an exasperated smile from Bruce, though Bruce says he doubts the Hulk would approve. When asked why he'd called the Hulk that, Loki offers no explanation, instead sing-songing "Tony, Hulk-y! Loki, Hulk-y! Tony, Loki, Tony, Hulk-y!" Oddly enough, that actually seems to answer the question.

"Do you still like the Other Guy?" Bruce asks, obviously trying to keep his voice neutral. He probably thinks the second incident had ruined Loki's good feelings towards the Hulk. To be honest, it sort of had for a bit until Tony had that conversation with Loki after Bruce left the other day.

"Yeah. Except when he threw stuff at Tony, 'cause Tony shouldn't get hurt. Nope nope nope! But Tony said it was fine and I should still like Hulk and he can still be my friend." Loki grins. "So he is!"

"I'm glad to hear that." Bruce smiles slightly, glancing at Tony. His eyes say thank you for telling him that.

Tony screenshots that frame of Loki hugging the Hulk before putting it on a flash drive. He hands the flash drive to Bruce saying "Feel free to use it as your wallpaper or for an Avengers promotional poster. Maybe you could stick it on a coffee cup or a t-shirt." He's not exactly serious about those suggestions, though. He's not sure how he'd feel about the picture going public. People would undoubtedly try to figure out who Loki is. Although Loki's face is turned away in the picture so it would be hard for anyone to identify him, that doesn't mean it's impossible. Tony can tell Bruce gets that.

Bruce looks somewhat surprised at this gift but gives Tony a very sincere thanks, tucking the flash drive into his shirt pocket.

Tony figures they should probably move on to the actual topic he'd wanted to discuss.

"Jarvis suggested that I find you a therapist, Snoopy." Tony says without further preamble, looking at Loki. This doesn't get any sort of reaction from the god for about five seconds, and then Loki's face takes on a confused expression.

"What?" Clearly he has no idea what they're talking about. Tony's not sure if they even have therapists in Asgard.

Jarvis speaks up. "A psychotherapist is a trained professional who helps a patient overcome psychological problems through the use of psychological methods."

"Or tries to." Tony mutters. "There's no guarantee they'll succeed."

Bruce gives Tony a bit of a sharp look, although Tony thinks it's an important thing to mention. However, Loki's wandered off again and his showing Dum-E the constellations he drew.
"What do you think about it?" Tony turns to Bruce. Bruce doesn't answer immediately.

"It could help him," Bruce begins. "There are therapists that specialize in helping people who have been through... traumatic situations." He's still clearly trying not to think too much about Loki's past to avoid Hulking-out, but he still adds, in a detached, clinical sort of way "Clearly, Loki's life has been very traumatic."

Even a moron would be able to see that, Tony thinks. Loki's obviously been through some traumatic experiences. Actually, he's pretty sure Loki has PTSD.

"If I end up doing this, finding the right therapist is going to be tricky. They need to be someone who won't care that Loki's not a citizen and is instead a thousand-year old god from another world, and they need to keep his powers a secret. And that's on top of actually being a specialist in trauma." Tony groans and runs a hand through his hair. "You don't happen to know anyone like that, do you?"

"I'm not that kind of doctor, Tony." Bruce sighs. "I mean, I can ask around but I don't think I'll have much luck." There's a bit of a pause before Bruce continues "About his powers being a secret, it's not like he's the only one on Earth who can do strange things." Ok, so that's true, Tony admits, but this still seems different since Loki isn't actually from Earth. Besides, revealing Loki's powers (or Loki himself) to the public still doesn't seem like a good idea.

Tony looks over at the subject of the conversation. Loki is holding Dum-E's claw and singing as he stares into thin air. Even if they manage to find a therapist who meets all of those qualifications, what if Loki doesn't want to be with them and refuses to talk with them?

"I really do think he should see somebody." Bruce remarks, also watching Loki. Bruce and Jarvis certainly seem to be thinking along the same lines, and Tony has made up his mind. Tony decides they should at least give it a shot, since he has no idea how to help people get over traumatic experiences (although he knows all to well what it feels like to experience them and their aftereffects).

Tony calls out to Loki and Loki's eyes eventually focus on him. Loki trots over to them, pulling Dum-E along behind him. Tony fixes the god with a look and asks "How would you feel about seeing a therapist?" Tony's not entirely sure what to do if Loki says he doesn't want to.

"What's that?" Loki asks. Jarvis doesn't rattle off the definition this time. "It's someone who would try to help you work through your past." Tony offers, although that might not be the best explanation. "You'd talk with them and hopefully end up feeling better about things eventually. Would you be up for that?"

"I dunno." Loki shrugs at first and unexpectedly asks "Do you think I should do it?"

Jarvis pipes up. "It could have a positive effect on your well-being, Mr. Loki."

Loki nods cautiously, and since that's the most they get out of him on the subject, Tony decides to go for it. He sets Jarvis to trying to find a good therapist for the god. Tony has no idea how long it'll take Jarvis to find someone, but at least price isn't going to be an issue. Tony can pay whatever.

Tony suddenly realizes they've been away from the other Avengers, and the other three still don't actually know anything about Loki. He probably should tell them without Bruce or Loki there. Bruce could Hulk-out and Loki clearly hadn't wanted to talk about it when Natasha had been questioning him earlier. "Well, I guess that's settled. The others are probably wondering where we
Bruce gives him a knowing look and says "Go fill them in. I'll stay down here with Loki."

Tony nods. "See ya, Snoopy." He says over his shoulder as he heads to the elevator. "Don't blow anything up when I'm gone. I wouldn't want to be excluded."

Loki watches anxiously as the elevator door closes and Tony disappears from sight. He'd followed Tony at first, but Tony had told him to stay here. Loki clutches Simba tighter. "Where's Tony going?"

"He's going to talk to the others." Bruce explains gently. That doesn't explain why they're still down here, though. Loki's never been in the lab without Tony before, since Jarvis won't let him in unless Tony's there (and sometimes he's not allowed in even when Tony's in the lab).

Loki likes Bruce, really. After all, Bruce is his friend. But he can't help wishing that Tony was still down here. Although it sort of goes without saying that he'd rather be with Tony than without him.

At least Dum-E and Jarvis are still here. Dum-E rolls up to him with a supportive beep as Loki looks at Bruce. Loki slips his free hand into Dum-E's claw while hugging Simba in his other arm.

"Jarvis, where's Tony?" Maybe Bruce is wrong about where Tony is. Or maybe he's lying, though Loki's not sure why he'd lie about that.

"Mr. Stark is with the others, as Dr. Banner said. He has not left the tower, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says in a reassuring tone. Loki nods and relaxes. Jarvis is always right, so that has to be the truth. If Tony's still in the tower, it's not that bad. After all, he'd been alone with the Hulk for a bit, he reminds himself, and that had been fine. It had actually been sort of fun. This isn't really different from that, even though Bruce is different from the Hulk. So he should be fine now, too.

"So what have you been doing down here in the lab? You said you had a project you were working on." Bruce's voice is quiet, as usual, which Loki likes a lot.

Nodding, Loki says "Yeah... I'm making a suit like Tony's! But it's for Simba, not Tony."

Bruce smiles and asks "Would you be willing to show it to me?"

Loki grins as the holograms suddenly appear before him. Bruce watches patiently as Loki shows what it looks like on Simba. Bruce says it looks really good, which makes that warm feeling spread through Loki's body, like when Tony had said that, too.

They continue to talk, and Loki remembers Tony had said to keep the Hulk-like Man of Iron armor a secret. Loki can keep secrets, sort of. Admittedly, he hadn't kept his magic a secret for long (he'd done it and accidentally blurted out that he had magic), but he hasn't let it slip that he's a Frost Giant yet. He really hopes that continues.

Loki wishes the Hulk would come out, too, but when he asks Bruce, Bruce says it wouldn't be a good idea and promptly changes the subject.

When Tony returns to the floor the other Avengers are on, he finds Steve, Clint and Natasha still eating in the kitchen. Tony starts pouring himself a glass of scotch (his stash of alcohol isn't just limited to the penthouse, after all). He offers the others some though only Clint accepts, which is pretty typical. Clint is always willing to get his hands on the good- and incredibly expensive-
drinks that Tony owns, though Tony can't blame him in the slightest.

Steve gives him an annoyed look and starts criticizing his alcohol consumption. Tony returns his glare, not in the mood for a lecture. Thankfully, Steve stops when Natasha asks about the two people who are currently missing. "Where are Bruce and Loki?"

"In the lab." Tony says. "They can't really be here for this conversation unless you want the Hulk to make an appearance. So, you guys were wondering about Loki..." The others seem surprised at his lack of sarcastic comments. He doesn't have to wait long at all before the three of them start asking questions about Loki again.

"How did he end up here?" Steve asks, even though they'd already gone over that earlier.

"It's like he told you. He landed on my roof about two weeks ago, and he's been here ever since." Tony pauses a bit to down some scotch and then says "He's from Asgard."

"So why is he here? Are you just waiting for Thor to come pick him up?" Clint asks. It's been a bit over a month since Thor's latest visit to Midgard, though to be honest, Tony's glad he's not here right now.

"Loki's not going back there." Tony makes his voice firm. He's already decided this isn't up for debate. Steve starts to ask rather accusingly what gives Tony the right to decide that and Tony snaps "It's what Loki wants."

A holographic video pops up, courtesy of Jarvis, though it remains paused. Tony recognizes the scene and plays it. It's from the first day Loki had been here- actually, from Tony's very first conversation with the god. The video shows Loki begging Tony to not send him back to Asgard, the fear in his voice clear as day.

Jarvis is brilliant, Tony thinks as he pours himself another glass of scotch. Showing them is so much better than him explaining it. After all, he hadn't actually told Pepper or Bruce that much about Loki- it had been Loki's actions more than Tony's words that brought the point home. Steve certainly looks more convinced now.

"Jarvis, pull up all footage relating to Loki's past, would you? And don't start playing anything. Leave that to me." Tony says, deciding to start over. After a bit, dozens of holographic videos spring out in front of him, all paused like he'd requested. Tony glances over them, recognizing most of the events just by the one frame each is showing.

Tony flicks through the videos, trying to decide what to show them.

"I don't know a whole lot of details, but it's painfully obvious he was treated horribly in Asgard. Horribly enough to have nightmares about it almost every night." Tony says darkly and he decides not to show any clips of the nightmares. That might be a bit too personal.

The other three are starting to look somewhat sympathetic. It's not like any of their lives have been filled with meadows and butterflies. Life's not fair, and they all know that firsthand. But Tony feels like it's been ridiculously unfair to Loki.

Considering what Loki's been through, Tony thinks, it's remarkable he hadn't turned into one of those sociopaths that the Avengers end up fighting. Or, slightly less extreme, that he hasn't just given up on people and withdrawn into himself. Tony's not sure how Loki manages to be so happy, despite his terrible-sounding past.

"This will give you a good idea of how bad it was." Tony plays the video of when Loki had
exclaimed that everyone on Asgard hated him and how he'd had his mouth sewn shut. Steve looks horrified, Clint looks repulsed, and Natasha's face doesn't betray her emotion.

Steve launches into a tirade about all the ways that is so wrong. For once, Steve's ranting about morals doesn't grate on Tony's nerves. "How could they do that to someone?" The super-soldier asks, rhetorically.

Natasha speaks up. "Have you considered that Loki could have Post-traumatic Stress Disorder?" Natasha had connected the dots pretty quickly, but that's hardly surprising. Tony's already been thinking Loki might have PTSD for a while, while ruthlessly shoving down any thoughts that pop up about the possibility he might have it too. Sure, he also has nightmares, but Tony doesn't want to consider that his nightmares and Loki's might indicate the same thing.

"I'm pretty sure he does, and given what he's been through, it wouldn't be surprising. I have no doubt Loki was physically abused, and emotional abuse seems pretty likely too. The only bright side is there hasn't been anything to suggest sexual abuse." That would just be icing on the cake, wouldn't it? Although that metaphorical cake would have to be revolting to truly represent Loki's situation. Something poisonous and filled with fingernails, maybe, with pus for icing.

The others seem to have worked out what Loki has against Thor and what Tony had meant when he said earlier that Thor had a lot to answer to, but they bring it up anyways. Tony frowns. "Loki's mentioned Thor and his friends, but I'm not actually sure how much of it was them and how much was other Asgardians. From what it sounds like, everyone hated him."

"Did they have any motivation?" Natasha asks.

"They just seemed to hate him on principle." It isn't a lie, but Tony has a feeling Natasha knows he's not saying everything, what with her being a spy and all. Besides, Tony doesn't exactly know. Sure, they seemed to hate Loki's powers, but he's not sure why they hated them.

"That doesn't sound like Thor at all, though." Steve frowns. Tony had thought the same thing at first.

"Well, Loki's clearly terrified of him, so maybe there's something about Point Break that we don't know. Loki's mentioned Thor hurting him, though." Maybe Thor was a lot more of a jerk for the first couple thousand years of life than he was during the year and a half Tony's known him. Or maybe Thor just doesn't show one of his uglier sides here. The former doesn't sound nearly as bad as the latter, but it's still pretty bad. Not that Tony can really point fingers in that regard. He'd been a complete asshole before Afghanistan.

Clint brings up that Thor had changed since his stint in New Mexico a couple years ago, but that still doesn't give any indication of how he was to Loki. Clearly there's more investigating to be done.

"Loki was really worried that we were going to hurt him since we're also Avengers." Tony amends that statement "Actually, I'm pretty sure he's still worried about that. I doubt he trusts you three farther than he could throw you." He smirks slightly. "No, that's not true since he could probably throw you pretty far, with his super-human strength and all."

"So he has the same powers as Thor?" Clint asks.

"Well, not the thunder part, but he's still got super-human strength, ridiculous speed, insanely-fast healing, All-speak. Basically the whole package, really. Although he has some extra powers." Tony frowns. He hadn't planned on saying that last part, but he supposes that since Bruce already knows
about Loki's powers, it wouldn't hurt for the others to know too. They're clearly expecting him to elaborate now.

"He has these powers that he's terrified of. Everyone in Asgard hated them, and he was punished for using them." Tony takes another swig of scotch to try to ease his mind. "He described them as magic."

"Like Dr. Doom?" Natasha asks in an emotionless voice. Tony's eyebrows shoot up. That is not the comparison they should be going for. To be honest, Tony hadn't even thought of it. He's never actually run into Victor Von Doom himself, just his stupid robots, so he's only heard of Doom's abilities.

"No. It's not like Doom's." Tony replies quickly. "From what I've heard, Doom teleports and shoots stuff out of his hands. Loki doesn't. So Doom's a lot higher up on the freaky-shit-o'meter."

Admittedly, he's not sure what the extent of Loki's powers are (nor is he sure what Doom's powers are) but comparing Loki's powers to Doom's is like comparing the Iron Man suits to Doombots.

Tony proceeds to give a brief description of Loki's powers, and the others don't interrupt, even when he gets sidetracked trying to think of explanations for them.

Natasha sits there with her arms crossed, and Tony wonders if maybe this was a mistake. If for some reason S.H.I.E.L.D. decides to take an interest in Loki and try to drag him into their less-than-hospitable care for experimentation or something, well, shit's really going to hit the fan. But Tony's not going to let that happen.

"Loki's not going to be taking over the world with his powers soon. Or ever, really." Tony hopes this will dissolve any potential problems. Not that there would be a reason for anything to happen, but S.H.I.E.L.D can be really paranoid. And it has a history of being grabby, like the biggest kid on the playground taking all the toys they want, no matter whom they originally belonged to. So if Natasha decides that Fury should know about Loki, and Director Cyclops decides to drag him in for testing...

Thankfully, it seems like Tony's fears are unfounded. Natasha says she doesn't see a reason that S.H.I.E.L.D would need to know about Loki right now, since he doesn't seem to be a threat (although, she adds that if she's proven otherwise, she won't hesitate to call them in). But Tony seriously doubts that's going to be an issue. Aside from defending Tony from the Hulk, Loki seems like the least-threatening person on the planet- and even with the Hulk incident, he'd only defended. He'd never actually attacked.

There's not much else to tell them about Loki, so Tony tells Jarvis to inform Loki and Bruce that they can come back up. Then he turns to the others and says "By the way, don't mention Loki's powers around him, and try to stay away from the subject of Asgard." As long as they do as he'd just said, Loki might actually start to like them.

Finally, Jarvis tells Loki and Bruce that they can go back up to where the other Avengers are. Being with Bruce had been fun. After showing him the suit he's making for Simba, Loki had gotten Jarvis to pull up that huge hologram that made it feel like you were floating in the stars. Loki hadn't been able to resist spinning around delightedly in the middle of it again.

But still, Loki can't wait to get back to Tony. He bounces on his toes in anticipation as the elevator takes him and Bruce up (Dum-E had stayed in the lab, to Loki's disappointment).

When he elevator doors open, Loki makes a beeline for his favorite person. Tony looks up and
“Hey, Snoopy. What were you and Bruce up to? Tap-dancing? Kickboxing? Building a time machine?” Loki’s not sure what tap-dancing and kickboxing are (again, he’d never heard of them in Asgard), but he's almost positive they're not at all related to what he'd actually been doing.

"I showed him the stuff I'm making. But I remembered you said not to tell him about the Hulk suit!"

Oops.

Once again his mouth blurted something out before he could stop it. He clamps a hand over his mouth, but it's already been said. That has to be one of the worst ways to accidentally reveal a secret though, since he'd been talking about not revealing it.

"Hey! If you're going to reveal all my secret projects, maybe I shouldn't let you in the lab anymore." Tony's giving him an annoyed look, which Loki really hates. He doesn't want Tony to be annoyed at him. Maybe Tony's going to start disliking him, like everyone in Asgard. Loki switches from holding Simba by one of his legs to hugging him close.

"I'm sorry!" Loki stares into Tony's eyes, nervously trying to work out Tony's thoughts. "I didn't mean to!"

"What Hulk suit?" Bruce asks, though Loki can't tell if he's annoyed or not. Hopefully he's not, because that annoyance would probably be directed at him, like Tony's is already. Being annoyed isn't too far away from being mad, and when people are mad around him he almost always gets hurt.

Tony turns away and sighs before addressing Bruce. "I'm building a suit that will hopefully keep Hulk from hurting anyone." Bruce's face is unreadable, but he says softly that that's not a bad idea.

"Do you hate me?" Loki interrupts worriedly before Bruce gets anything else out. Now Tony's giving him a strange look while asking why he'd hate him. It seems obvious to Loki, but he explains anyways. "'Cause I told when you said not to."

"No. I don't hate you." Tony says, sounding much less annoyed. "I mean, I didn't really want you to tell anyone, but that doesn't make me hate you."

"Technically, he didn't actually tell me." Bruce says quietly. "He just told you about not telling me while I was in earshot."

"Why were you even trying to keep that armor a secret?" Clint asks. "We would have found out when you used it, anyways."

"Are you really not gonna let me in the lab anymore?" Loki changes the subject again, looking at Tony. He doesn't really like that idea. Tony spends a lot of time in there, and if he couldn't be there too that means he wouldn't see Tony as much, or Dum-E for that matter. Plus, he wouldn't be able to work on Simba's Man of Iron suit.

"No, I'll still let you down." Tony eventually says, and Loki grins. "Just keep your lips sealed about my projects-"

Loki freezes at the words keep your lips sealed. Tony's still talking, but whatever he's saying, Loki's not making it out. It's become a distant noise as images flash through his head. Odin looming over him. A sharp, scary needle coming towards his face. Stabbing through his lips, sewing them together. White-hot pain exploding in his mouth. Nothing but agonizing pain. PAIN, PAIN, PAIN! His mouth's stitched shut and he can't open it, so he can't talk as the Warriors Three descend on
Loki distantly hears someone talking to him, and he feels something touch his shoulder and he flinches away. Slowly, the voice grows louder. His breath is caught in his throat as he's shaking and crying, clinging to Simba desperately and curled into a ball on the floor.

It's Tony, he realizes eventually. Tony's speaking in that calming tone, and the man pulls him close. "Loki, you're safe. You're with me, in my tower. You're not there anymore."

Meanwhile, he can hear Jarvis gently telling him to take slow, deep breaths, and he tries to comply. Eventually, his body stops shaking and he wipes his eyes.

Loki eventually looks at the Avengers he'd just met tonight. He's still nowhere near comfortable with the three new Avengers, especially since they're all looking at him and he'd just freaked out. But they're not looking at him with disgust, but something else. Concern, maybe? Loki's not entirely sure, but the looks they're giving him are similar to what he gets from Tony.

Jarvis and Tony had said the other Avengers weren't going to hurt him, but that didn't mean they'd like him, either. Having a handful of people like him already seems too good to be true, so more people liking him is probably too much to ask for. He squeezes Simba's ear and Simba starts to sing and move his head and tail, and Loki smiles down at him.

Loki notices Bruce isn't in the group. Maybe Hulk's come out to play. But the Hulk's not anywhere either, which is kind of disappointing.

After a stretch of silence, Steve starts talking to him. Loki eyes him warily, expecting him to lash out or start mocking him like anyone in Asgard. He inches closer to Tony, leaning into the man's embrace for comfort. "Do you like living here?" Steve asks, and Tony is giving the man an annoyed look. Loki's not sure why he's asking, but it's a no-brainer.

"I love it here! I don't wanna live anywhere else, ever. Nope nope nope." Loki smiles a bit as he thinks about how much he likes being here. Where instead of being made fun of, he's actually comforted. Where he's told he's good at things, where people actually seem to like him, as illogical as that is. "It's best here, 'cause Tony's here and Jarvis is here and so is Dum-E..." Loki nods to emphasize this, since he's too tired to jump up and down.

He's really, really glad he ended up here when he'd been thrown out of Asgard.

Tony feels incredibly stupid for his comment about lips being sealed. He'd known as soon as it left his mouth what effect it would have on Loki. Of course, Loki had been reminded of when his lips actually were sealed shut. Loki had gone into some sort of flashback, like he'd seemed to have done after Tony lost him in the bustle of New York. Loki had started clawing at his lips again, and Tony had struggled to hold him back.

When he'd gone to comfort Loki this time, Tony had almost forgotten the other Avengers were there until they'd helped with trying to hold Loki back. He had noticed that Bruce had suddenly been absent, although his Science Bro his back now. Apparently he'd hulked-out a couple floors down, which means more repairs, but there at least hadn't been a fight this time. Maybe he should try to build a Hulk-proof room for the Hulk to vent his anger and throw tantrums in.

Thankfully, nobody has mentioned Loki's flashback or his powers, which Loki might not even know that they know about. Although nobody really seems to know what to say now. There'd been some rather awkward small talk.
Tony actually apologizes for what he'd said, but Loki just shrugs it off. He seems to be back to his regular self, which no longer surprises Tony, though he's still sort of jealous Loki can go back to being happy relatively quickly. He's still not sure how he does it.

Tony suggests that they watch a movie. The Avengers have movie nights often anyways, and it might help avoid any more situations without Tony actually booting the others out of the tower. Things have been kind of awkward since Loki's flashback, so it might help alleviate some of that awkwardness. Plus a movie could help distract Loki from his flashback. So they all head into the tower's private movie theater, which is on the same floor they're currently on.

When they enter, Loki points at the huge white screen and says "Jarvis says the moving pictures don't come from that. Something shines them on it instead." Tony supposes that Jarvis had told him that when he was alone today. Although Tony seriously doubts Jarvis would have used the word *shine* to describe it.

Loki walks through every row of seats before choosing one in the middle of the front row. Tony turns to the others and says "Whatever we watch, it's going to have to be animated if we want Snoopy to stick with us." Tony had tried exposing Loki to live-action stuff, but he'd never made it through a live-action movie. He'd either fallen asleep or wandered off.

"How many movies have you guys watched?" Steve asks.

"Five or six, probably." Tony answers. "And they've all been either Pixar or Disney flicks." He'd watched a couple action flicks without Loki, technically.

"Disney's coming out with a new movie soon." Clint says, "*Frozen*. It's about an ice princess or queen or something." He shrugs, and Tony stares at him and asks how he knows that. Clint rolls his eyes and says "There are these things called movie previews, and they sometimes play during commercial breaks. I thought Steve would be the only one to not know of those." This gets a somewhat annoyed protest from Steve.

Tony notices that Loki's listening in, clearly interested. Maybe they should watch it when it comes out. Tony makes a mental note to look into it later.

Eventually, they decide to watch *Aladdin*. Tony plonks down in the seat next to Loki.

Loki had been less energetic right after his flashback, but his usual energy seems to have returned now. The movie's certainly distracting him, like Tony hoped. Loki is just as into this movie as he was with all the others. As always, he bounces in his seat and laughs- both at the funny parts and parts where the humor is known only by him. Sometimes he even gets up and goes to a different seat for a couple minutes before going to sit next to Tony again.

If the others are at all annoyed by Loki's outbursts, they don't say anything.

During the part where Genie sings *Friend Like Me*, Loki's mood seems to change to confusion as he watches Genie create a bunch of magical Genie-illusions, and he blurts out "Why don't they hate him?"

Tony turns slowly to look at him, knowing the reason Loki's asking, and Jarvis pauses the movie. "Because there's no reason to hate him." Tony says

"Yes there is." Loki replies bluntly. "He's doing magic. It's messed up." Tony's rather surprised Loki's so open about this. Maybe it's because the focus is on Genie and not Loki himself, even though they're discussing Genie making other-Genies? Thankfully, the others seem to remember
not to mention Loki's powers, though they still join the conversation.

"I think it's pretty cool." Clint says from the row behind them, and Loki turns to look at him as if he's crazy. When Tony agrees with Clint, Loki gives him that look too, and says "But it's bad! Why aren't they showing him that?" The implications of the words showing him make Tony really uncomfortable, and despite the fact Loki's not panicking, he puts an arm around the god's shoulder anyways. Loki curls up slightly and leans into Tony's arm.

"None of them seem to think it's messed up." Bruce says quietly, referring to the characters. This seems close to Hulking-out territory, but Bruce seems to have a lid on it for now. Perhaps he's also focusing on Genie to avoid dwelling on Loki. Bruce continues "So it's not bad there, is it?" Loki doesn't look very convinced.

"Is that the only reason you think they'd hate him?" Natasha asks, looking at Loki with a rather assessing gaze, although her voice sounds gentler than usual. Loki shakes his head in the negative but doesn't actually give another reason. Tony tries to think of what it would be, and he thinks about how Genie has blue skin, just like the Frost Giant enemies of Asgard. If it weren't for the fact he's only seen Loki with ridiculously pale skin and green eyes, Tony would be positive that he's a Jotun. But missing the blue skin and red eyes characteristic of Jotuns means he can't be sure. Tony sighs. Maybe he should just ask sometime anyways. But now certainly isn't the time.

"Why aren't they moving?" Loki asks suddenly, pointing at the screen and effectively ending the conversation. Jarvis apparently takes that as their cue to resume playing since it starts up again. Despite his confusion as to why Genie isn't hated or punished, Loki seems to still really enjoy the movie, and it's clear that Genie is his favorite character of the lot.

Tony has surprised Steve many times tonight, Steve thinks as he watches the billionaire say something to Loki as they're watching Aladdin. Whatever he'd said makes Loki giggle and wriggle around in his seat.

When Steve first learned about Loki living with Tony, he had thought that Tony was being his usual impulsive self, jumping into a decision before thinking it through. Really, he hadn't thought Tony was responsible enough to look after someone else.

When he'd brought this up, Tony had been annoyed. But he hadn't only been annoyed about the suggestion that he wasn't responsible, he'd also been annoyed about the idea that Loki should be somewhere else.

During dinner, Loki had been acting rather odd. To be honest, Steve's still not entirely sure what to make of him. Loki's certainly a strange character- something about him is just off. It's in the distant look in his eyes, the way he bounces and wriggles, his innocent-but-slightly-crazy-sounding laugh. It's in the way he talks, as well as the way he treats Simba as if he were real and carries him everywhere.

But hearing about how Loki had been treated was horrible, and watching his flashback was even more so. How could anyone do that to anyone, let alone someone as seemingly gentle as Loki?

Okay, so Tony hadn't been perfect. He had still been drinking, which Steve feels is only one of the man's annoying habits. But he hadn't ended up completely drunk like he had so often before.

When discussing Loki's past, though, Tony hadn't made a single inappropriate remark or ill-mannered joke. The abuse Loki apparently went through isn't a joking matter by any means, but Steve thinks it was really surprising how serious Tony had been through that whole conversation.
Watching Tony and Loki interact is not at all what Steve thought it would be like. He was certain that snarky remarks were going to fly from Tony's mouth. But they haven't. Astonishingly, he'd actually complimented Loki instead of putting him down. But the most astonishing part was watching him comfort Loki during his flashback. Before he saw it with his own eyes, Steve couldn't imagine Tony hugging someone and speaking soft, reassuring words.

As if all that hadn't been enough, Tony had kept Loki in mind when picking a movie instead of just choosing what he wanted to watch. Apparently, this wasn't a new occurrence, if his remark about only watching Disney or Pixar movies the past two weeks is anything to go by. It seems like Loki's choice actually trumps Tony's.

Perhaps he was wrong about the situation, Steve thinks. Loki clearly likes it here, and Tony doesn't just ignore him. Steve's still not sure if it's the best place for Loki, but it's certainly not a bad place.

Actually, Steve realizes, it seems Tony likes Loki more than he likes him.

Chapter End Notes

I was kind of tempted to post all 38 chapters tonight, but I'm thinking I should space the rest out some...
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Tony confirms his theories on Loki’s heritage.

He also learns that not all movies with blue characters help.

Tony and Loki are alone again. The other Avengers had left about an hour after they'd watched Aladdin. That hour had really just consisted of them talking. Bruce had pulled Tony aside to ask him more about the Hulkbuster armor, but to Tony's surprise, he really hadn't seemed very annoyed about it. He had almost seemed a bit relieved that someone else might be able to prevent the Hulk from hurting people if he was out of Bruce's control. Other than that, they'd just had rather mundane conversations that Loki occasionally derailed when he'd completely change the subject.

On the whole, Tony thinks tonight went pretty well, even with Loki's episode caused by his probable-but-not-official-PTSD. Tony's talk with Clint, Steve and Natasha had been better than expected. The others certainly agreed that Loki hadn't been treated right in Asgard, although Tony's not sure who would disagree with that. Actually, that would probably be Thor, and every other Asgardian. Asgard sounds like a pretty messed-up place, if they can justify that. It seems like Thor has done some pretty horrible things in his lifetime.

But then again, most of the Avengers had done some pretty regrettable things in their pasts.

The other Avengers seemed to have warmed up to Loki, although the feeling doesn't seem to be reciprocated yet. Loki still acted nervous around them, even though he'd taken to Tony and Pepper really quickly. It had taken Loki longer to not be nervous around Bruce, though he still seemed to warm up to Bruce faster than with Natasha, Steve and Clint. Thrusting all three of them on him at once might not have helped, now that Tony thinks about it.

Still, Loki had seemed slightly more comfortable with them at the end of their visit than he had at the beginning. It's pretty obvious how the Avengers rank in Loki's mind. Tony's rightfully at the top (it would be an outrage if he wasn't- he's Tony Stark, for crying out loud! Of course he's at the top! Plus there's the whole bit called everything-that's-happened-these-past-two-weeks that would undoubtedly put him on the top even if he was someone other than the great Tony Stark).

Below Tony is Bruce, who Loki seems pretty comfortable around. Comfortable enough to be alone with him in a room and not freak out at Tony's absence, anyways. Clint- who had seemed to warm up to Loki the quickest of the Avengers Loki had met today- seems to be next. Although Natasha had been surprisingly nice after Tony's talk with them, she appears to be behind Clint, although it doesn't seem like she's too far behind. Loki had stopped casting worried looks at those two, but he didn't seem totally comfortable around them either. Tony's not sure how Loki would react to being alone in a room with them. Hilariously (to Tony anyways), Steve is clearly at the bottom and Loki had still been watching him warily as he left. Tony's certain that Loki would hate being alone in a room with him. Though Tony's not sure why Loki had disliked Steve so much.

As Tony and Loki take the elevator to the penthouse, Tony glances over at Loki. "So, what did you think of them?" He asks. Sure, he sort of already knows Loki's opinions towards the others, but hearing it from Loki's point of view might help.
Loki shrugs at first, and then says quietly "Steve's scary."

"How come?" Tony asks, raising an eyebrow. As funny as it is that Steve for once isn't the golden one, Tony has to admit that it's rather odd that Loki would befriend the Hulk almost instantly but still be worried around Steve. Normally, Steve is the one other people are most comfortable around.

Loki cocks his head to the side, thinking about what to say. "He looks like them." That's not exactly helpful and Tony's about to ask him to elaborate when he continues on his own accord. "Is he from Asgard too?"

"Uh, no." Tony answers, noticing Loki looks rather relieved. "He's about as all-American as you can get."

"American?" Loki asks with a blank look. Tony's sort of surprised this is only coming up now, especially since a certain extremely-patriotic super-soldier had just been over. Astonishingly, America hadn't been mentioned by Steve during this visit. Tony goes on to explain about countries and how they're on Earth. It takes him a couple seconds to recall what Thor keeps calling it, but then he remembers and tells Loki they're on Midgard. Loki nods. "I knew that. 'cause Thor said the Avengers were on Midgard." Sheesh, did Thor tell all of Asgard about them?

The elevator reaches the penthouse, and they step out. The penthouse looks slightly better. The craters formed by Hulk's fists have been patched up, along with the cracks surrounding them, but the hole in the floor is obviously taking more time. Plus, there's now damage on another floor from when Bruce hulked-out today. So it looks like the repair service is going to be fixing stuff up here for a while.

The two of them head towards Loki's room but Tony hangs back as Loki enters to change into his pajamas. Since Loki usually falls asleep with almost no warning whatsoever and Tony would rather not haul him to his bed, he's started having Loki sit in bed during the evenings and do whatever he was going to do so that when he conks out he'll already be in bed. Loki had fallen asleep on the floor once, and Tony didn't feel right leaving him there, but it had been so inconvenient having to suit up just to deposit him in his bed.

Tony sometimes sits beside Loki's bed to keep Loki company (though he's usually doing his own thing) until Loki falls asleep, but sometimes he's in a separate room. Tonight, he's in Loki's room working on a tablet while Loki prattles on to Jarvis about something. Suddenly, the talking that's become background noise ceases, and Tony looks up to see Loki is asleep. He gets up and leaves, leaving the door ajar as Jarvis flicks the lights off.

Loki wakes up and can immediately tell something is off. For the first second or two, he can't put a finger on the odd sensation he's feeling, but he can tell it's bad. It's sort of like when he'd been a very small child and would occasionally wake up to the feeling of having to pee just before wetting the bed. Only this isn't at all related to his bladder, though that's about the only good thing he can say about it.

He's realized what it is. His body is starting to get colder, which means his hideous other form is starting to come out. Fortunately his skin hasn't started becoming blue yet. He's not sure if his eyes are red or not, since there's not a mirror anywhere.

He sits up, eyes widening more than they already were. No! This can't be happening! He can't let anyone know he's a disgusting Frost Giant. He scrambles to get out of bed and ends up tangled in the sheets. He yanks them free and drags them behind him as he crawls under the bed with Simba.
He makes a sort of nest out of the sheets and curls up on it. Then, he tries to force his Jotun form down, filling his head with thoughts about his body being warm, his skin pale, and his eyes green.

He's always been fairly good at controlling whether or not his Frost Giant form is showing- unlike his tentative control over his magic. Loki's never been sure why, and it's not like he could ever ask somebody about it, though he had heard people mention that they'd needed to hide his disgusting blue form. He has no idea how they did that, though. When he was a child, Loki had asked if they'd hidden it with magic, but he'd gotten a beating instead of an answer.

Of course, that's when he's awake. When he's sleeping it's an entirely different story. Asleep, he has no control over either his magic or his Frost Giant form.

Loki thinks back to the dream he'd been having. It hadn't been a nightmare, thankfully. He's had far too many of those. He's not sure how many nice dreams he's had recently, or if he's had any. He can't remember that many, but he's heard people forget a lot of their dreams. So he probably forgot them, though he wishes it were the other way around and he'd forget his nightmares.

He remembers the dream he'd been having tonight, though. It had involved Genie from *Aladdin*. Genie also has blue skin, but Loki's pretty sure Genie isn't a Jotun, since sometimes he hadn't had legs and he kept changing his size. Not to mention, he didn't have red eyes with his blue skin. He's not sure why Genie would willingly show his blue skin, when it seemed he could take on any appearance he wanted.

Like Loki, Genie also had magic, though Loki can't do some of the stuff Genie can. He can't change his size or juggle his own head, but he did accidentally make himself look like someone else a couple times, though he's not sure if that's related to being able to hide his other skin. One time he'd been so desperate to hide that he'd somehow taken the appearance of a palace guard. He thought that would be a really good way to hide from people in general, but he couldn't get it to work all the time. Besides, even when he'd gotten it to work, people somehow recognized him a lot of the time and he'd be punished. Soon he'd stopped trying.

Anyways, in his dream he'd been talking to Genie, and Genie still looked like a line drawing but everything else looked real. He'd been telling Genie about how similar they are. He'd asked Genie why he wasn't hated for those things, but hadn't gotten an answer since he'd woken up before Genie's reply.

Loki's still confused by Tony's answer to that. Tony had said that there wasn't a reason to hate Genie, but the reasons had been right there in front of him! Tony's super smart, so how had he not noticed?

Clint had said something about Genie's magic being cool, though. But Genie couldn't be a Frost Giant because of his eyes and the fact he didn't have legs sometimes, so that hadn't made sense. Plus, he hadn't had any icy powers or anything. But the most confusing part had been that Clint's tone hadn't been disgusted, and neither had Tony's or the other Avengers. Sure, he understood that they said Genie's magic wasn't bad, but the concept of that is just too much to wrap his head around.

He turns and whispers to Simba, so softly he can barely hear himself "What do you think about Genie? I like him. He's really funny, don't you think? But he did... stuff like I can do, except people didn't hate him. At least that's what Tony said, and Bruce, and Clint. I dunno why though. It's bad. That stuff's bad." He frowns and remains silent for a bit, and then whispers "He looked a little bit like me. But I can't let anybody know 'bout that." If anyone here ever finds out about his other form, any good feelings they have towards him will undoubtedly be gone.
Jarvis hadn’t actually needed to suggest to Tony that he get some sleep. Tony's nightmares, combined with staying up with Loki after the god's nightmares, have made him very sleep deprived. He's been running on even less sleep and even more caffeine these past two weeks, and it's starting to catch up with him, especially since he hasn't slept at all in around thirty two hours.

Tony had just gotten into bed himself to try to make up for some of that lost sleep when Jarvis tells him he might want to check on Loki. Tony sighs and gets out of bed, stretching, before heading to Loki's room.

Opening the door, he expects to see Loki in the throes of another nightmare, with that green stuff around his hands and a couple of other-Loki's present.

However, the sight that actually meets his eyes is Loki's bed, empty and without blankets. In fact, the whole room is suspiciously empty. Had Loki gotten abducted or something? No, it couldn't be that. Jarvis would have alerted him if something was happening. Furthermore, the AI would have sounded the alarm and used all the security measures under his control to fight someone off.

The room seems a lot colder than usual, and Tony finds himself wishing he'd thrown on some clothes over his boxers before coming in here. He's helpfully told by Jarvis that the room is ten degrees colder than what it's set to be at, and that he's working on fixing it as they speak. Sure enough, Tony can hear the heater click on. Jarvis also turns on the lights, opting for a very dim setting. As they're speaking, there's a slight shuffling sound from under the bed. Of course. Tony rolls his eyes.

He gets down on the floor to look under the bed and sure enough, there's a person under there who has to be Loki, though the shadowy area beneath the bed makes it hard to make out his features. He appears to have made a nest out of his blankets. He's facing the other way and he doesn't turn around.

"Hey, what're you doing down here?" Tony asks, going over to the other side of the bed and army crawling under it so he can look Loki in the eye and read his face. His arc reactor is providing most of the light. Like the first day when they'd been under Tony's bed, Loki briefly gives his skin-tinted blue from the light of Tony's arc reactor- a terrified look.

Tony grabs one of the blankets from the edge of Loki's nest and drapes it over himself for warmth. "It's like going back to your first day here. At least it's in your room instead of mine this time." Loki is uncharacteristically silent. After about fifteen seconds of silence, Tony asks "Did you have another nightmare?"

At least Loki responds this time, but he still doesn't say anything, instead just shaking his head no. He's looking at Simba instead of Tony.

Tony sighs. "Something's clearly bothering you, Snoopy." It's not like it's exactly hard to tell with Loki. He doesn't really hide his emotions. Right now he appears wary, though Tony's not sure why. Loki usually seems really comfortable around him.

Loki raises his eyes to meet Tony's, and Tony notices the god's eyes are a little more distant than they normally are until they slowly focus more on him.

"Would you hate him?" Loki asks. Tony's completely lost now, and Loki's looking at him expectantly.

"Who are we talking about?" Tony prompts more than asks.
"Genie."

"Um, no. Didn't we go over this earlier. There's no reason to hate him."

Loki starts to object but Tony cuts him off. "No, Loki. Having magic and blue skin don't count as reasons. They didn't hate him because he's awesome, and those things don't make him any less awesome. Actually, the magic bit makes him more awesome." Yes, he's referring to Genie's powers as magic, which is something he doesn't do with Loki's powers- but Genie's fiction. Plus it's the word Loki used to describe his own powers.

He notices that Loki looks completely startled when he brings up blue skin not being a reason to hate him, but then Loki's face becomes confused, with some worry mixed in for some reason, and not long after he's looking at Tony like he's crazy.

Tony once again thinks about how Loki might be a Jotun. Tony's been holding back from asking Loki if he is for a while, since he doesn't have any proof of Loki having blue skin and red eyes. Those are pretty major criteria for being a Jotun. But he may never get proof about whether Loki can change his skin color or not, and while it's a bit of a leap to assume he can do that because he can change the color of his shirt, it is plausible. Loki meets all the other criteria. Besides, his reaction to the blue skin comment and his skin being tinted blue from the arc reactor make it seem even more plausible.

Tony decides to just ask him about it. He'd already considered doing so earlier tonight, and to be honest, not knowing is driving him crazy.

"Hey, Snoopy, I was wondering- are you from Jotunheim? Because-" That gets an immediate reaction and Tony shuts up. Loki's head snaps back and his eyes are wide and fearful for a second before Loki squeezes them shut.

About half a minute passes, and Loki doesn't respond. "Uh... Loki? You still here?" Loki's eyes open, and Tony notices they look even more glassy and distant than normal.

"No." Loki says eventually, and Tony's almost certain he's answering the question about Jotunheim instead of the one about him being there. He says it in a surprisingly smooth voice for someone who'd just flinched violently and had then seemed to drift elsewhere mentally. His tone is the same tone somebody would use if asked if they were from Neptune, a tone that makes it clear that it's a stupid question and there's no dispute about the answer.

If they'd been talking over the phone and he'd only had that one snippet of Loki's voice to go by, Tony certainly would have believed him. It sounded so convincing. But Tony's fairly certain that's not the right answer. In addition to the rather telling flinch and suspiciously long pause, Loki's avoiding eye contact by turning his head down to look at Simba and twisting his fingers together. He has to hand it to Loki, though- the verbal part had been very well done. But his body language needs a bit of work- or, rather, a lot of work. It's giving him away.

"Really?" Tony arches an eyebrow. "It's not a problem if you are. Actually, I'm kind of curious to see what you'd look like in Smurf form." He grins at Loki, but Loki doesn't respond.

"Seriously, I don't care at all if you are a Jotun, so-" Tony stops as Loki recoils in fear at the word Jotun. Now Tony has no doubt whatsoever that Loki's a Jotun. He's acting the same way as whenever he notices he's used magic in someone's presence, like he's expecting to be beaten. Loki doesn't say anything though. He seems to be completely elsewhere mentally again. It's almost like he's looking straight through Tony.
So Loki just lied to him about not being a Jotun. He already knows Loki doesn't completely trust him, since he still acts like he's going to get beaten whenever he does magic and he has to ask whether or not he hates him, but he seems to mostly trust him. Tony's pretty sure Loki trusts him more than anyone else. He hadn't actually expected Loki to lie to him. He can't actually recall if Loki's lied to him before, but he doesn't think so. But apparently Loki doesn't trust him enough to tell him about his true form.

Tony remembers that Loki had seemed to accidentally blurt out the stuff he'd said about his powers when Tony had first questioned him about it. Perhaps the silence treatment he's getting now is Loki's way of ensuring that doesn't happen again.

For a bit, Tony keeps reiterating that there's nothing wrong with being a Jotun and he doesn't think any less of Loki because of it, but he's not sure if Loki even hears him.

Tony sighs. He's not sure if he should stay here for Loki or not. What he's saying to Loki doesn't seem to be having much of an effect. He asks Loki if he's going to get out from under the bed, but Loki doesn't respond.

Dum-E suddenly rolls into the room. Jarvis had evidently called him up and given him a lift in the elevator.

"Sir, you should go to bed." Jarvis speaks up. "I'll notify you if anything happens. Dum-E can keep watch under the bed." Sure enough, Dum-E's arm is lowered so his camera is pointed at them. Dum-E gives a worried beep, but Loki doesn't even acknowledge that.

"Thanks Jarv." Tony says. He glances at Loki, who's curled in his nest of blankets, holding Simba. The god has a very vacant expression on his face. "See you, Snoopy." Tony tells him before army-crawling out from under the bed and heading back to his own room.

Unfortunately his sleep is plagued by nightmares, one of which is severe enough that Jarvis has to calm him down.

When Tony leaves, Loki's face crumbles and he feels like he's going to cry. He hears a worried beep. He turns over to see a familiar claw poking under the bed, but Loki can't recall when Dum-E had gotten here. Loki starts to cry silently as he scoots over to grab Dum-E's claw, hugging Simba with his other arm. Dum-E moves to pull him out from under the bed, but Loki doesn't want to come out just yet. So he remains under there.

His mind is still reeling from the fact that Tony had asked is he's a Jotun. How does Tony even have any idea about that? Had Thor told him? Loki has no way of knowing, but if that was the case, why would Tony only ask him about it now?

When Tony had asked him that, Loki's mind had filled with all sorts of unpleasant images of Tony being furious at him for being a monster, saying that they're definitely not friends anymore, and starting to hate and torment him like everyone else. Loki's mind had even provided him with a detailed image of being forced out of the tower to live on the streets.

Tony can't find that out that Loki's a monster, ever, since Tony will surely hate him. But he already seems to have an idea about Loki's other form. Within his first couple days here, Loki had slipped up and accidentally told Tony about his magic, which was bad enough, and he couldn't afford to do that again. He'd actually lied about this. To help make it easier, he'd imagined that Tony had instead asked him whether or not he'd want to admit he's a Jotun, and the answer to that is an obvious "no." He thought the lie had come out really well, even though it had only been one word,
but Tony hadn't seemed to believe it.

To ensure that he didn't reveal anything else like he had when they'd been discussing his magic, he'd tried to shut everything happening around him out. He'd hoped that way he wouldn't have to listen to Tony tell him what a horrible monster he is and how they'll never be friends again. But he'd still heard what Tony had said, and it still doesn't make sense since he hadn't said that. He'd said quite the opposite, in fact.

Loki desperately wants to believe Tony's words about it not mattering that Loki's a Jotun, but they have to be lies- or maybe a very cruel prank. Because the idea is absurd, even more absurd than the idea of someone liking his magic. It goes against everything he's ever known. Everybody hates Frost Giants. Even Loki hates Frost Giants, and he is one.

This is so confusing! It seems like Tony knows he's a Jotun. But at the same time he can't know. Because if he actually knew, he'd be disgusted and hate him and call him a monster, and he hadn't done those things. He'd spoken about Frost Giants like they were no big deal.

Talking about Jotuns means he has to know about them, but he must not really know about them because his reaction would have been a lot different. Why is he getting so many mixed messages?

In any case, Loki knows he's going to have to avoid the subject so Tony doesn't find out the truth about Jotuns and start to hate him.

This isn't the only confusing message Tony's given him, though. There have been so many, actually.

Tony had said that Genie's magic made him more awesome, though. But instead of reassuring Loki, it just makes him more confused, because magic is bad. That's just a common fact, like how grass is green and Jotuns are monsters. But Tony doesn't seem to get that. Loki's still not sure why Tony hasn't been punishing him for his magic, or at least disliking him. It doesn't make sense, and he's waiting for the other shoe to drop, though he's not sure whether that would be Tony starting to hate his magic or Tony hating him for being a Jotun. Or maybe both. No matter what, Tony's going to end up hating him.

Loki wishes he could pause time so that would never happen.

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Tony and Loki are down in the lab. Tony had woken up not nearly as rested as he would have liked but unable to sleep more, either. He's compensating for that, once again, with coffee. Loki apparently hadn't slept at all after waking up and hiding under his bed, but he seems to be unaffected, if his usual bouncing on his toes is anything to go by.

Perhaps that's some perk of being an Aesir like Thor. Or a Jotun, Tony amends. They're different races, apparently. It seems like they have the same perks, though, and they have a lot of them. It's so unfair, he thinks. Loki doesn't even drink anything caffeinated, and he's been going with about the same amount of sleep as Tony but Loki still has more energy.

Tony's almost finished designing a higher-powered repulser for the Hulkbuster armor. As he takes a break to eat a couple Pop Tarts, his thoughts shift to the conversation he'd had with Loki under the bed last night. He glances at the god, who has grabbed a Pop Tart and is eating it in quick, snatching bites with Simba tucked under one arm.

So Loki hadn't wanted to tell him that he was a Jotun, and from what Tony's heard from Thor and seen in the myths, there's a lot of prejudice against Jotuns in Asgard. Tony's not sure if Loki was
the only Jotun in Asgard, but even if he wasn't, a lot of those bitter feelings were probably dumped on him.

He's still not sure whether or not Loki had heard him say how it doesn't matter in the slightest if he's a Jotun, so he decides to say it again now. However, as soon as he reaches the word *Jotun*, Loki flinches and then shrieks that he doesn't want to talk about it. The shriek is so loud it leaves Tony wincing.

Figures talking to him about this is about as difficult as talking to him about his powers. It's probably just as difficult for Loki to talk about those topics as it is for Tony to talk about Afghanistan.

That seems to be a good indicator that he shouldn't pry further, but Tony can't help himself. "What does everyone have against Jo-" He quickly cuts himself off. Saying the word *Jotun* isn't going to help, and he has a feeling *Frost Giant* would be, if anything, worse.

"What does everyone have against... Ice People?" He tries, watching Loki for his reaction. Loki doesn't flinch or scream, which seems good. But he's still looking at Tony with wide eyes and equal amounts of fear and nervousness on his face.

"They hate them." Loki mumbles. "They hate everything about them!" Tony can't get anything else out of him other than that non-answer, and so the subject is dropped.

Throughout the day, Loki sings songs from Aladdin just like he does with The Lion King. (Jarvis had apparently played the Aladdin soundtrack on loop after Tony's conversation with Loki under the bed last night). It doesn't take long for Tony to have Jarvis switch on some music so the songs won't get stuck in his head.

Loki works on Simba's Iron Man suit for a couple minutes before wandering off and flipping aimlessly through the book on outer space. A few minutes later, he's back to working on the suit, then drawing, working on Simba's suit, staring at Tony, playing with Dum-E, fiddling with random holograms...

These activities cycle in short bursts. It's not like Loki's ever had a particularly long attention span from what Tony can tell, but he flits through activities very quickly today and doesn't seem to be able to focus on anything.

Tony's theories for that are either because he hasn't been sleeping much (which would explain the lack of focus but not the energy) or that he's nervous about something. Loki has been acting nervous, and Tony has a feeling that it has something to do with their most recent conversation under the bed.

Tony isn't able to get Loki to talk about Jotuns for the rest of the day, and he brings it up a couple times. However, he has a plan.

That evening Tony picks the movie. He's been thinking about Loki's reaction to Genie. Loki had seemed really confused about how Genie wasn't hated for being blue and doing magic. He doesn't seem to get that hating and mistreating someone for those reasons is wrong.

Loki had been unwilling to talk about his blue form, but they'd talked about Genie. So Tony's decided to provide him with more examples of blue-skinned characters and try to get Loki to understand why they shouldn't be hated.

The first movie he thinks of is *Avatar*. He's not sure how similar the appearance of a Na'vi alien in
the movie is to a Jotun, but it's probably closer to a Jotun than Genie was.

They go to the tower's private theatre where they'd watched *Aladdin* yesterday. Jarvis starts the movie, and Tony takes a seat next to Loki. Since Tony's already watched *Avatar* a couple times, he ends up watching Loki's reactions more than the actual film.

Loki seems to love the opening shot of Pandora, but when it starts showing Jake, he starts to appear bored. He wanders off during the beginning parts in the spaceship and the base on Pandora, walking back and forth across the aisles and seemingly not paying attention to the movie.

Tony's not sure why live action movies seem to bore Loki while animated ones don't, but the main point of showing Loki this is for the blue-skinned Na'vi aliens, and those are technically animated, though they look a lot more realistic than Disney characters. He wonders if Loki will be bored during that.

When the screen shows a Na'vi floating in a tank when they're introducing the whole concept of alien avatars, Tony glances at Loki and sees him looking at the screen. "What's that thing?" He asks. Tony's not sure if he's referring to the alien or the tank. Jarvis pauses the movie on the alien. Tony starts to talk about the tank, planning on explaining both anyways but Loki shakes his head and says "Not that!"

"Oh, you mean the alien?" Tony says, but before he can continue, Loki interrupts.

"Yeah, I think. The blue thing. Is it there 'cause they don't like it 'cause it's ugly?" Loki looks as if he's regretting saying that as he glances at Tony nervously. Tony pauses for a bit, but he's not exactly surprised to hear the disgust in Loki's voice considering he seems to think blue skin makes someone a monstrosity. Loki doesn't seem to like even looking at the alien, so maybe it does sort of resemble Jotuns.

"He's not ugly." Tony says, frowning. This really isn't the effect he wanted the movie to have. "I actually sort of like the way he looks. Blue really suits him, don't you think?" Loki's turns to stare at him like he's suddenly sprouted another head and a couple extra arms.

Loki starts to reply but clamps a hand over his mouth after the first syllable as if he wants to avoid saying anything whatsoever. After a bit, Jarvis resumes playing the movie. Loki once again goes back to seeming uninterested in the movie. That is, until Jake's first time in his Avatar body.

"He looks like that now?" Loki's fiddling with his hands nervously and hugging Simba to his chest as he stares at the screen.

"Sort of. He's controlling the body." Tony answers. Technically, they're two separate bodies, but when Jake controls the avatar it basically becomes his body. He notices Loki growing more and more nervous as he watches Jake- in his Avatar body- knock things over.

Loki starts to ask "Why don't they-" But then, when the other scientists tell Jake somewhat forcefully to sit down, Loki says "They hate him." matter-of-factly. They really don't, but Loki apparently thinks their annoyance at him is much larger than it is. Tony hadn't considered he'd take it that way.

Loki starts to ramble. "They hate him, hate him, hate him... They hate him 'cause he's a monster!" A horrified look comes over his face and he shrieks "I don't wanna watch this!"

Loki flees the room before Tony can explain that they don't hate him. Tony sighs. This *really* didn't go how he wanted it to. It seems this movie might be a bit too close to the subject of Jotuns for
Jarvis and Bruce were right. Loki really needs a therapist, Tony thinks, since he might have just made things worse. He's not sure. Though considering that Loki refuses to talk about his powers or the fact he's a Jotun, Tony's not exactly sure how therapy would go.

Loki flees the theatre and, not knowing where else to go, curls up under the kitchen table. He had been wondering why Tony was showing him this movie. The forest stuff in the beginning was really pretty, but everything else looked so boring, and there were real people in it. He likes the ones that don't look as real.

Then he'd seen the blue creature floating in a tank. It didn't look exactly like a Jotun, but it was pretty similar. And it was big, like Frost Giants (apparently he's on the short side for Frost Giants, since he'd heard they were almost twice as tall as some men, and he's not).

Loki hadn't liked seeing that, but he hadn't meant to say the creature was ugly, although that was totally accurate. Blue skin is ugly. He hadn't meant to say it because he'd expected Tony to agree, but Tony had said he liked the way the thing looked. Tony couldn't have been serious about that, though.

When the guy became his blue-skinned form, Loki had been very uncomfortable. That's too close to what he does (although he hadn't actually seen the guy shift forms, but maybe he'd missed it. He hadn't been looking at the screen the entire time, after all). Then the other people had started to get annoyed at him, and Loki didn't stick around to watch them taunt him as they give him a beating. Surely that's what happened, right? What else could happen, really?

The worst thing about this is if Tony has seen some other guy change forms, it probably won't be long before he knows Loki's hiding another skin, even though that guy's other skin and Loki's other skin are technically different. Apparently Tony likes watching that blue guy get beaten- he'd said he really likes this movie, which means he likes what happens in it- so he'll undoubtedly feel the same way about Loki. Maybe Tony will even be the one giving the beatings.

Loki starts to cry. It makes sense that Tony would do that, but he'd rather be tormented back in Asgard than have Tony turn on him like that.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Animated Disney movies tend to work better at convincing Loki of things.

Loki realizes he's not the only one who has nightmares.

Tony looks up from his breakfast and glances across the table at Loki. Instead of eating, Loki is plucking dry Cheerios out of his bowl and arranging them to make little pictures on the table. He makes a smiley face out of the cereal and then swipes a hand across them so they scatter slightly and don't resemble anything. Then he arranges them into a sort of blob that Tony can't make heads or tails of, and then some kind of animal.

It's a good thing Loki doesn't eat his cereal with milk, Tony thinks, because he suddenly flips his bowl upside down, spilling the contents. The Cheerios rain down on the tabletop and the spoon, upon landing, makes a loud clattering sound and sends a couple of the Cheerios flying. Loki giggles at the airborne Cheerios. He looks up at Tony, who's quirking an eyebrow, somewhat amused. Tony leans forward and flicks one of the Cheerios across the table at Loki.

"They're stars." Loki says, beginning to trace lines between the Cheerios with his finger as if making constellations. However, his tone is a bit more subdued than usual and his expression becomes nervous, as if Tony's suddenly going to lunge across the table at him.

Ever since their conversation under Loki's bed two nights ago, Tony's noticed that Loki's been acting more nervous around him. That nervousness had only increased after last night's incident while watching Avatar.

That had been a real screw-up on Tony's part. He'd thought Loki would like seeing another character like with blue skin- he'd reacted pretty well to Genie- but that hadn't been the effect Avatar had. If Loki had stuck around, he would have seen that Jake liked his blue avatar form more than his human form (admittedly part of that was because he could walk as an avatar whereas he was stuck in a wheelchair as a human). But Loki hadn't stuck around- he'd fled from the theatre convinced that Jake was hated for his blue form.

Tony had tried talking to him last night, after finding him crying under a table, but it had been clear that Loki had wanted some alone time. So Tony had left him alone after the failed attempt at talking to him.

He'd needed to comfort Loki during a nightmare last night, though. It had taken longer than normal and Loki hadn't leaned into his touch.

Loki has definitely been acting more nervous, Tony thinks again as he sips some coffee. It seems to be connected to their first conversation about Jotuns. Loki is clearly under the impression that it's natural to be hated for having blue skin, which was undoubtedly the reaction Asgardians had to his Jotun form.

So if Loki had seen more of the movie, he would have seen Jake actually prefer his blue avatar body over his usual body, which is what Tony had hoped Loki would take away from it. Maybe,
Tony thinks, there's a way he can salvage the whole movie fiasco. Admittedly, he might end up totally spoiling it, but Loki doesn't seem to inclined to watch it anyways.

"You know," Tony says, sitting back in his seat slightly and making sure he has Loki's attention before continuing "In the movie last night, Jake actually chose to be in the blue form permanently. He was happier in that body." That was what he'd been hoping Loki would get out of the movie.

Loki laughs in disbelief- at least he hadn't flinched or screamed- and Tony speaks again., really hoping he's not screwing this whole situation up even more. But Loki really needs to understand this, Tony needs to make sure Loki gets the right message from the movie.

So he continues. "I'm serious. That's how it ends. Nobody hated him because he looked like that, and he was happier in that body." Okay, so he'd already said the part about Jake being happier in his blue body, but it doesn't hurt to repeat it. Loki hadn't gotten to the part where they'd shown that, after all. Admittedly, part of the reason Jake liked that body is that he didn't need a wheelchair in it.

"That's stupid." Loki mutters. Tony's not sure if he heard that right at first, since he's almost positive that this is the first time he's heard Loki say something's stupid. When Tony disagrees, Loki replies "Yes it is! That would never actually happen!"

Tony doesn't even bother pointing out that none of the movies they've watched have been at all realistic, since they featured talking animals, monsters, flying carpets... Actually, who knows, maybe they have flying carpets in Asgard.

"Okay, so it's going to be a while before we go to an alien planet and borrow the bodies of an alien race." Tony concedes, trying to lighten the mood a little, although he knows that's not what Loki meant when he said it would never happen. He quickly continues before Loki can reply. "But he wouldn't be hated for what he looked like."

"But they did hate him! They were all mad at him." Loki says, sounding confused and anxious at the same time as he picks Simba up from his spot on the table in front of the bowl and hugs him. There it is again. Tony had noticed last night that Loki seemed to think Jake was hated. At least he's talking now though- last night, talking about it had seemed to be too much and watching it had definitely been too much. Perhaps the time in between last night and now made it easier to talk about the movie, when last night it had been too new. Tony's not sure, but he's glad they're talking, since the silence treatment he was getting yesterday didn't get them anywhere. After a bit, Loki speaks up as he strokes Simba. "They hated him and they beat him."

"What the hell?!!" Tony exclaims, standing up out of his chair. Where had that come from? Loki looks at him worriedly, and Tony sits back down looking across the table at the god, hoping that didn't seem threatening, since Loki's already nervous enough.

At least he's talking now though- last night, talking about it had seemed to be too much and watching it had definitely been too much. Perhaps the time in between last night and now made it easier to talk about the movie, when last night it had been too new? Tony's not sure, but he's glad they're talking, since the silence treatment he was getting yesterday didn't get them anywhere. After a bit, Loki speaks up as he strokes Simba. "They hated him and they beat him."

"What the hell?!" Tony exclaims, standing up out of his chair. Where had that come from? Loki looks at him worriedly, and Tony sits back down looking across the table at the god, hoping that didn't seem threatening, since Loki's already nervous enough.

Whoa there. Loki actually thinks Jake got beaten up in his blue form? Sadly, that probably shouldn't have surprised him, Tony thinks. That's probably what people in Asgard did to Loki.

Tony pinches the bridge of his nose and says "They did not beat him. Got that? It would have been horrible if they did."

"But they were mad." Loki says, as if that alone would justify it.

"They were more annoyed than mad. They didn't think he was ready to get up yet. But that's all they were- annoyed. Not mad. It had absolutely nothing to do with what he looked like." Tony offers as an explanation. Then, his tone becomes disgusted "And even if they were mad, it wouldn't
Loki looks unconvinced. Does he think it's okay to hate someone for their skin color? Tony honestly wouldn't have pegged Loki as a racist, but... "How about this? If someone had, say, green skin, would people hate them? No, scratch that. Would people be justified in hating them?"

"Hulk-y has green skin." Loki answers. Tony hadn't even thought of that when he'd asked about green skin, he'd just made sure to pick a color other than blue. Loki nods to himself and continues. "Nobody hates him, nope nope nope. 'Cause he's a hero and people like heroes. Like you and Hulk."

"Actually, there are a fair number of people who dislike us." Tony mutters under his breath. It's rather surprising that Loki just assumed that people didn't hate the Hulk, Tony thinks. Then, to Loki, he asks "So if people hated Hulk for being green, would that be okay?"

Loki just shrugs, looking away, and Tony sighs.

"The answer is no, it wouldn't be okay." Tony fixes Loki with a look "Hating the Hulk for being green would be stupid, and nobody really hates Hulk because of what color he is." Admittedly, there are people who hate the Hulk because they think he's an uncontrollable monster, but Tony's definitely not going into that right now.

"There are people who hate others because of the color of their skin, but they're wrong to do so because there's no reason to hate someone for that." Tony takes another sip of coffee "We even have a term for those people: racist. People who hate someone for having, say, darker skin are racist. So why would it be any different because of any other color skin?"

Loki frowns in confusion and asks "So is 'racist' a bad thing?"

"Most people would say so. I personally think racist people are really stupid." Tony looks at Loki for a bit and says "Let's try this again. Would it be wrong to hate Hulk for being green?"

Loki bites his lip and cocks his head to the side. He slowly nods, though his expression is uncertain. Tony feels a small sense of satisfaction. At least they seem to be making some progress, since Loki seems to know the answer Tony wants to hear, even if he doesn't seem to get it. While that's not much, at least he hadn't said it would be okay to hurt the Hulk.

"Good. How about this- would it be okay to hate Jake- the guy in the movie last night- because of what he looked like? Or Genie?" Tony watches in dismay as Loki immediately answers that it would be okay. So much for making progress.

Tony sighs. How is he going to convince Loki that someone's appearance doesn't merit abuse? He'd been hoping Avatar would have a good effect, but it had quite the opposite. But there are other movies with that message, right?

Tony grins suddenly, knowing exactly what they're going to watch tonight.

If Tony's trying to make his life confusing, Loki thinks, he's doing a very good job. He's doing it too well, actually. He keeps saying strange things that are totally different from what everyone else says. It's like Tony takes everything he's ever known and turns it on its head so its the complete opposite of what makes sense.

Tony had started talking about the moving picture thing they'd watched last night, the one with the guy who'd had a hideous blue form. Loki hadn't wanted to talk about it, but Tony had kept going.
Loki hadn't been able to help hearing Tony's words, and they made very little sense.

Loki had assumed that everything would be normal and make sense, that people would treat that blue guy like everyone treated him. But according to Tony, that wasn't the case. He'd said that the guy actually liked his weird blue body and chose to always look like that. Loki had thought Tony had been joking at first, but apparently he hadn't, which is so confusing. Why would that guy choose to look like a monster instead of staying in his normal-looking body?

Tony had said the guy- Jake, apparently- hadn't gotten a beating either. It's sort of relieving that Tony hadn't been watching Jake being punished for looking like that. The really weird part is Tony had acted like he wouldn't have wanted to see it. Admittedly, Loki thinks, he hadn't wanted to see it himself, but that's because it was too personal. Tony had also said that the scientists weren't mad at him, but even though they hadn't looked totally mad yet, they had looked annoyed and that always leads to anger. Besides, they had to hate him for looking like that.

But Tony had just said that that wasn't the case, either. So according to Tony, Jake liked his freaky blue form and wasn't hated or beaten for looking like a monster. It would be really nice if the world was actually like that. But Loki knows firsthand that it's not like that at all.

As if that's not confusing enough, Tony had said a while ago that Loki hadn't deserved to have his mouth sewn shut. Everything Tony's said has been the complete opposite of what Loki had always been told in Asgard. Loki groans. All this is making his head hurt.

Right now, Tony's giving him a strange look. He'd just asked whether it would be okay to hate Jake for being blue. The answer's pretty obviously yes (hating blue skin is natural) but Loki hadn't actually meant to say it out loud. Tony's acting like what he'd said was wrong.

Tony had said that hating the Hulk would be wrong, but that's kind of different because the Hulk's not demented, hideous blue creature, like Jake's other form in that moving picture, or Loki's own other form. Apparently there's some word, racist, that means hating people for their skin color or something. Which sounds like what Asgardians were like to him. But Tony made it sound like it was wrong, whereas everyone else knows it's right to hate Frost Giants.

Loki's not sure why Tony's giving him that you're wrong look, since he'd answered the questions correctly- people shouldn't hate the Hulk, but hating freaky blue people is common sense.

Tony looks at him with a strange, assessing gaze that makes Loki feel like Tony's rummaging through his thoughts. He ducks his head down towards Simba to avoid the the weird look those brown eyes are giving him. He starts arranging the circular things from his bowl again. He tries to make them look like a horse without much success. Close to a minute passes as Tony gives him that strange look.

"You know I don't hate you, right?" Tony asks suddenly, and Loki startles a bit. He looks up at Tony and blinks in surprise. He's not sure where that had come from and he doesn't know what to say in response. Tony doesn't seem to hate him now- he'd even said he doesn't hate him when asked- but this is the first time he's said it out of the blue.

Very slowly, Loki nods. Tony had just said so, after all. Right now it seems to be accurate, too, but that's probably going to change soon.

Tony's still giving him that assessing look. He suddenly gets up and moves around the table so he's next to Loki. Tony gently tilts Loki's head so they're making eye contact.

"I don't hate you, and what you look like isn't going to change that. I'm not racist." It's weird- Tony
doesn't look like he's joking. "I'm not going to hate you for your powers, either." Tony continues. Loki frowns. He's not sure what his powers are, but it almost sounds like Tony's referring to his magic. But that's ridiculous.

"This isn't Asgard." Tony adds. "You're not going to be punished for those things, here. Got it?"

Loki starts to cry. What Tony's just said is way too good to be true. The idea of someone not caring about his magic or his horrible other form, of someone liking him despite those things, is too much to wrap his head around. Tony can't actually mean it. But he hasn't lied before, either, and he actually hasn't treated Loki any differently after finding out about his magic. Why does this have to be so confusing?!

Tony puts an arm around him and Loki relaxes slightly. He has no idea how long this crazy view of Tony's is going to last before Tony gives into common sense and starts being like everyone else. Even though Tony had just said he wouldn't hate or punish him for his magic or other form, Loki's not naive enough to believe it'll really be that way forever.

But it seems like he's just bought himself a bit more time of the amazing life he's had in Tony's tower, and Loki's going to take every moment of being inexplicably treated well that he can get.

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Tony feels his eyelids starting to droop during their current movie viewing, which is *Beauty and the Beast*. Tony can't actually think of a movie that gives the moral of "don't judge others by their appearance" quite as well. (it also happens to be Bruce's favorite Disney movie, probably because both Beast and Hulk are misunderstood).

Admittedly, Beast doesn't look at all like a Frost Giant, but that might play in Tony's favor after the disaster with *Avatar*. Loki had reacted better to Genie than the Na'vi in *Avatar*, after all.

They'd spent the day in the lab, though nothing very eventful had occurred. Tony had finished designing some of the Hulkbuster weapons. Over the course of the day, Tony had noticed the green stuff around Loki's hands a couple times. Probably the most eventful thing that had happened was Loki making one of those other-Loki's and freaking out, and Tony having to calm him down.

Tony yawns as he stares at the screen, where Belle is singing her first song in the village, and his eyelids feel like they've turned to lead. Keeping his eyes open suddenly seems more difficult than fighting off a hoard of Doom-bots on his own. He's still really sleep-deprived, and his body decides that a nice, dark theatre would be a good place for an impromptu nap. Even with the sound of the movie and Loki bouncing and talking next to him, it's somehow easy to drift off within the first ten minutes of the film.

At first, everything is peaceful.

But then, he's back in Afghanistan, being forced under the water. His lungs fill with water and he can't breathe. His brain can't think about anything other than the lack of air as he struggles uselessly against the people holding him down. He spits out water when he's finally pulled out, but before he can regain his breath, they force him under again. The cables hooked up to the car battery that's powering the electromagnet in his chest shock him, only adding to the torture.

Tony wakes up screaming and thrashing around, not even noticing he's not in the cave. Someone's hand is on his shoulder. He flinches away from the touch and it doesn't return. His body is shaking and his breath comes out in short, quick gasps. For a while, his mind is solely occupied by the fact that he's struggling to breathe. Is he still underwater? No, he can't feel any water around him, and if he were underwater, he wouldn't be able to breathe at all. Okay, so he's not underwater, but is he
still in Afghanistan?

As he sits there breathing rapidly, Tony hears Jarvis telling him to take slow, deep breaths. This can't be in Afghanistan- Jarvis wasn't there. Besides, there's a shot of Gaston playing on the screen in front of him. Jarvis' voice is soothing, and Tony slowly starts to calm down.

And then, Tony hears someone start singing softly, so softly he's not sure whether or not he's imagining it. Tony can't make out the words, but he's not sure if they're in another language or if he's just not making them out since the voice is so soft. The song itself is slow and peaceful, the sort of song people would imagine being in a pleasant dream.

Then, he feels someone touch him again. Two arms tentatively wrap around him and pull him into a hug, and the voice keeps singing softly. Tony's too tired to fight them off and his mind's still foggy with the remnants of the nightmare. Plus, his shaking body isn't exactly responding. For a couple minutes, Tony lays there, being comforted. There's a small part of him that sort of appreciates it, and he tries to squash that tiny part into oblivion.

Tony doesn't know how long it takes for his body to still and his breathing to even out, but eventually it happens. He tries to slip out from the embrace, but it tightens and he finds he's unable to. He growls in frustration. Who's hugging him, anyways? And why can't he get free? Somehow he can tell it's supposed to be a hug and not some kind of restraining hold, although it's currently acting like one.

He doesn't need anybody else to see him like this. Too many people have, already. In addition to Jarvis obviously seeing every incident he's had, Pepper had seen some of his nightmares back when they were still dating and she'd spend the night here. She always tried to talk to him about it and he always refused. Heck, even before Pepper, some of his one night stands had seen him having relatively minor nightmares (those night had always ended prematurely, and that was one of the reasons he'd stopped having one night stands).

Tony manages to turn his head around enough to see who's hugging him relentlessly. It's Loki. Of course. Tony feels incredibly stupid for not working that out earlier. Some genius he is, he thinks with an eye roll. Upon figuring out who it is, Tony relaxes marginally. Of all the people to see him like this, Loki's probably one of the best options. At least he understands what it's like to have nightmares, and Tony doubts Loki's going to think any less of him for it.

Loki continues to hug him and seems unaware that Tony's still trying to extract himself from the embrace. Or maybe Loki just doesn't care. He's still singing softly, and while Tony would never admit it out loud, something about the song itself is kind of nice.

"Can you let go of me?" Tony asks. It comes out a bit harsher than he intended, but he's still not happy with this whole situation. He really doesn't like being the one who's being comforted, either. Tony is still unable to wriggle out.

Loki stubbornly hangs on to him, to Tony's annoyance. "No! I'm making you feel better. You hug me and it makes me feel better, so I'm hugging you. Hugs help!" Loki nods as if agreeing with himself and then continues singing the song where he'd left off.

"Well, I'm better now. Good job." Tony says. It's not really a lie- while he doesn't feel amazing, he does feel better now that he's no longer still in the grips of the nightmare. His shaking's subsided and his breathing's slowed down. He actually feels pretty normal now. Or rather, he would feel normal if Loki wasn't hugging him in that's probably supposed to be comforting but rubs Tony's pride the wrong way. Tony once again tries to slip out of the embrace. This time, Loki lets him, staring at him and fiddling with Simba's tail.
"I made you feel better, right?" Loki asks hopefully, though there's a faint note of something suspiciously like pride in his voice. "Like you do to me?"

If he says no, he's pretty sure Loki would start hugging him again, so Tony nods instead. Although being hugged in that reassuring way is something he's not exactly comfortable with, it's a rather refreshing change that Loki's not even suggesting he talk about the nightmare. At least for right now, Jarvis is remaining silent about the issue, undoubtedly because Loki is with them.

After a brief period of silence, a sudden look of horror crosses Loki's face and he lets go of Tony. "Jarvis can't get hugs!" Loki says out of the blue, as if it's the biggest injustice in the world. To be honest, Tony's glad the attention's shifted to Jarvis instead of him.

"Indeed I cannot, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says, a touch of amusement in his voice. "I'm afraid that I'm not capable of giving them, either. You'll have to rely on Mr. Stark for that." He adds apologetically.

Loki looks at the ceiling with wide eyes as he wrings his hands together. "Then how does Tony make you feel better when you're scared? You can't get hugs." Tony smirks slightly at how Loki automatically assumes he'd be making Jarvis feel better.

"That is hardly an issue, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says, with a tone that Tony can only describe as the verbal equivalent of an exasperated smile in his voice. Loki, however, doesn't get over the apparently great injustice of Jarvis not being able to receive hugs. The god actually goes over and hugs the nearest wall. Tony loses it at the sight of Loki hugging the wall. If Loki even notices Tony laughing, it doesn't seem to bother him. Meanwhile Jarvis tries to remind him that it doesn't matter and he'd never even been upset in the first place.

Still grinning, Tony gets up and gently pulls Loki away from the wall. "Jarvis doesn't need a hug, Snoopy."

"Everyone needs hugs." Loki says, looking at Tony like he's crazy. Then his voice lowers, and he mumbles "I never got any back there, except from... 'except from myself.' Even Tony thinks that's sad, especially the mental image of Loki, scared and alone, having to hug himself because nobody else would. While Tony doesn't consider his childhood particularly great (thanks to his father, who only showed an interest in him because of his genius intellect), he at least has some memories of his mother hugging him when he was small. Tony puts an arm around Loki's shoulder and pulls him close. Tony's really not the hugging type, but with Loki it feels normal, probably because he's done it so many times to calm Loki down.

To ease Loki's mind, Jarvis says that Loki can sing to him instead of hugging him if the need ever arises, which leads Tony to ask what the song he'd been singing was.

"Oh, that!" Loki says excitedly, clapping his hands. "It's about horses running in the moonlight and I really like it!" He pauses and adds "I like horses too, but I didn't have one and nobody would let me ride theirs'. But sometimes I'd go to the barn, 'cause the horses were nicer to me. There's one right there." Loki points to the paused frame of *Beauty and the Beast*, which shows Belle riding a horse.

Tony tells Jarvis to start the movie again, and he watches Loki's reaction. Loki bounces, laughs, and talks as usual. He seems to love all the living objects (his favorites seem to be Mrs. Potts and Chip), but Tony's more of paying attention to his reaction to the Beast.

This movie is going way better than *Avatar* had. Loki almost seems a bit scared of the Beast at first (though the movie portrays him as meaner in the beginning), but like Belle and basically anyone watching the movie, he grows to like the Beast as the film progresses. Loki starts yelling at the
villagers and Gaston when they go off to kill the Beast.

"You can't kill him!" Loki shouts, jumping out of his seat and flapping his hands. "He's nice!" To be honest, this is exactly how Tony was hoping Loki would react- that he'd realize that hating the Beast for his appearance is wrong.

"So he is," Tony starts, hoping he's not going to end up screwing this up. "But they don't know that, since they just look at him and assume he's a monster."

"But they're wrong! He's nice and Belle likes him but they're just gonna kill him?" Clearly, Tony thinks, he should have shown Loki this before Avatar.

"Yes, they are wrong." Tony agrees. "It's wrong to hate anyone because of what they look like, even if they look like a beast, or if they have blue skin."

When Tony mentions blue skin, Loki just gives him another you're crazy look. But this movie is at least telling Tony that Loki understands on some level that it's wrong to hate someone based on their appearance. He hadn't been sure if Loki really understood that when asking whether it would be wrong to hate the Hulk for being green. But at least it seems he won't have to start from square one in getting Loki to understand that hating someone for their appearance is wrong.

However, whenever blue skin is added to the equation, it's like a switch has suddenly been thrown and it suddenly becomes okay to hate them. Tony's not sure how to convince Loki that blue skin isn't an exception to this. Avatar had been a flop at that, and while Aladdin had been slightly better with Genie, it still hadn't convinced him. What Loki can clearly see in Beast's situation- that it's wrong to hate him for his looks- he's unable to see in his own, or even Genie's or that Avatar guy's. Although it's not like one movie's going to solve all their problems.

Tony's already pretty satisfied with the effect that this movie has had, though, and it gets even better. By the end, when the Beast and all the servants transform back into people, Tony's sleep deprivation is once again taking over and he starts to nod off. But he's still alert enough to hear Loki murmur "Why didn't he stay all hairy? Belle still would've liked him."

He glances over at Loki to see the god's eyes are closed, and it's not long before he joins Loki in falling asleep in the theatre as the credits roll.

At some point during the night, Tony wakes up when he hears Loki having a nightmare next to him. Tony had been sleeping fitfully already, though at least he hadn't been having another nightmare like earlier tonight. He eventually calms the god down, but instead of staying up after it, Tony ends up falling asleep because he's still exhausted. In the morning, he wakes up to Loki running around the movie theatre playing some kind of game with Simba while Jarvis tries to quiet him down. Tony's feeling slightly more rested, but at least a small amount is more than nothing.

Tony's somewhat surprised- but glad- that Loki doesn't bring up his nightmare during Beauty and the Beast last night. Loki had acted like it was the most common thing in the world, and thus not even worth mentioning. Does Loki think everyone has those kinds of nightmares? Tony's not sure, but he doesn't bring it up. He just wants to forget about it.

Jarvis has been looking for therapists for Loki. He and Tony privately decided to tell them up front that Loki isn't from Earth so they won't take him thinking he's a citizen and find out that he's not. This way, they won't have to fake documents and possibly run into some issues when it becomes obvious that they're faked since Loki's not from Earth.
When Tony asks how it's going, Jarvis replies that he's found a few promising candidates and that he's called and emailed them. One has rejected them, and the other three haven't responded.

Tony and Loki continue to spend most of their waking hours in the lab, though that's nothing new for Tony. Over the next couple days, he starts building some of the electronics and weapons for the Hulkbuster suit.

Loki still spends a lot of time playing with Jarvis and Dum-E and drawing things like Disney characters, constellations, Dum-E, "Man of Iron" as Loki and Thor say, Peanuts characters and even some horses. Tony counts it as a good sign that Genie and Beast are included among the numerous drawings of other characters from movies they've watched- there are at least seven drawings of just Simba, as well as several of Simba with other characters. Loki's drawings all end up taped to the walls (or, for the constellation ones, the ceiling) of Loki's room. They certainly make his room more personalized; before, it never looked any different from any of the tower's other guest rooms.

Loki also works on Simba's Iron Man suit, and he finishes designing it after a couple days. It apparently hadn't even occurred to him that he would be able to make a real suit from the hologram, but when Tony tells him, Loki acts like it's the most amazing thing in the world. He starts jumping up and down, giving a somewhat unsettling mix between a scream of excitement and laughter.

When he calms down somewhat, Loki asks how to make the "glowy part," which Tony assumes means an arc reactor. Tony keeps switching between thinking he should just make a flashlight for it and thinking it would be fun go all out and make a very miniature arc reactor with only enough power to glow.

Eventually he decides to go all out. He makes it while Jarvis is cutting out pieces for both the Hulkbuster suit and Simba's Iron Man suit- it's a piece of cake compared to the first arc reactor he'd made (or even any of the others).

However, Loki hadn't designed the suit to actually snap around Simba, but Jarvis helps him fix it, designing a mini-briefcase that will automatically put the suit on Simba or remove it, much like the briefcases Tony has for some of his Iron Man suits.

After about another day, Simba's Iron Man suit is finally finished- Jarvis had painted it and everything. Loki puts Simba on the briefcase like Jarvis asks, telling the toy to stay still as if Simba were real. Tony had thought Loki had been over excited at the idea of making it, but that had been nothing compared to when Loki sees the mini briefcase snap the suit into place around Simba. He dashes around the room screaming like a kid on a sugar high.

Loki then proceeds to put Simba on the briefcase and watch in fascination as the suit is removed and put on again and again. Eventually, he leaves it on and carts Simba around while the toy's wearing the suit. He even sleeps with Simba still wearing the suit. Tony doesn't think cuddling a metal suit looks too comfortable, but Loki doesn't seem to mind. He seems to love the mini arc reactor, almost basking in whatever sensation he apparently gets out of them, and he definitely seems to appreciate the glow it provides during the night.

Tony spends a fun afternoon testing out the effects of one of the repulser prototype he's built in the weapons-testing room (he doesn't let Loki in, since Loki's not always predictable and he doesn't want to have to worry about Loki darting in the way of one of the blasts. Loki watches from the huge window between the room and the hall, but explosions don't seem to excite him as much as Simba's Iron Man suit).
Tony really loves this part of the process- it's second only to flying. Flying is still by far the most exhilarating overall, but blasting things is a great way to relieve stress.

He also finds the tracking bracelet he'd built for Loki a couple weeks ago among the clutter, and he ends up removing the tracking part and disguising it in a wristwatch with a leather band instead of that metal, cuff-like band he'd had before. Honestly, he should have done that in the beginning when Loki said he didn't like the metal band. Besides, the watch looks less conspicuous.

Nothing changes in the nightmare department, since Tony and Loki both still have them. However, Tony's started trying to go to bed again after comforting Loki or calming down himself, and Loki apparently does too, according to Jarvis. Tony switches back to hot chocolate for their post-nightmare sessions to avoid caffeine. It's sort of hard to fall asleep after nightmares, but at least they're making an effort now instead of just staying up the rest of the night and being very sleep-deprived.

Tony witnesses several other instances of Loki's powers. Loki still freaks out whenever an incident occurs. There are all the usual things (and it feels so weird for Tony to realize he thinks of odd energy around Loki's hands and intangible illusions of the god as normal) and Loki even changes the color of Simba's armor once, seemingly on accident. There's one new incident of something that hasn't happened before. During one of Loki's nightmares, while Loki's body temperature drops, ice actually begins to spread across his hand. Tony has a feeling both of those things have to do with being a Jotun.

Tony's reminded of his other job as the owner of Stark Industries when Pepper sends an incredibly long email detailing everything that's happened to the company in the last couple weeks. Making Pepper CEO hadn't made her stop doing this sort of thing. Tony sets Jarvis to reading it, but regrets it when Jarvis adds a bunch of things to his calendar that he doesn't want to deal with. There's some multi-day conference Jarvis keeps reminding him about that Tony really wants to get out of.

Finally they get a positive response from one of the therapists. Gwyneth Carlisle has worked with soldiers suffering from PTSD, as well as people suffering from a single traumatic event such as dealing with armed robbers. It's not exactly the same as Loki's situation and Tony's not sure how it will address the whole abuse issue, but at least she doesn't care that Loki's from Asgard.

However, it's about a forty five minute drive each way from the tower to where she works, mostly because New York traffic is terrible. Jarvis has a somewhat lengthy conversation with Gwyneth (apparently she doesn't notice he's not human) and then puts Tony on at his request. Loki's in the room but seems to be totally ignoring them.

Tony really wants her to just come to the tower, but apparently she has a patient before Loki. Tony is about to offer her money to reschedule that person, but apparently Jarvis mutes him and takes over. In retrospect, bribing her probably wouldn't have been a good idea, since she's already sort of breaking the rules by seeing Loki in the first place.

Jarvis at least gets it so she'll think about coming here for appointments, but they have to go there for the first one. Tony's not happy about the idea of losing so much time, but Jarvis seems to think it would be a good idea. Somehow Jarvis manages to talk him into it agreeing to go there.

All Tony can think is that this had better be worth the time.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Loki's first therapy session.

They do NOT all die in a car crash, which is what happened in the prank version of this that I posted on April Fool's Day

Tony secretly finds the expression on Loki's face amusing. Loki's giving him a cross between a glare and a pout as he places Simba on the briefcase that removes the toy's Iron Man suit. Loki watches as the suit's taken off and then grabs Simba by a leg, pulling him off the briefcase. He whispers something to the toy, but Tony doesn't hear it.

The two of them head towards the elevator in the lab. Loki's steps are rather loud because of the Asgardian boots he's wearing inexplicably (but, it seems, purposely) on the wrong feet. Tony had forgotten to buy him shoes or a coat during their clothes shopping spree on Loki's first morning here. Maybe he should do that later today. Those boots look really out of place with Loki's sweatpants.

Tony had spent around five minutes trying to find a coat in his closet to loan the god, before it dawned on him that Loki, probably doesn't even need one since he's a Jotun. He ends up finding one anyways just in case, though it's rather short on the god. Loki claims it's too hot, which supports Tony's theory of him not needing a coat.

Loki keeps rubbing the tracking device disguised as a wristwatch, clearly still not used to the feeling of wearing it. Tony's also clipped a Stark Phone to the waistband of Loki's pants, with a flexible and retractable cord enabling him to hold it normally but ensuring he can't end up without it like last time. Loki's hand occasionally darts down to fiddle with the cord, but he doesn't pull the phone out of his pocket.

However, Tony doesn't think that Loki's annoyance is actually about removing Simba's Iron Man suit. It had started after Tony suggested that maybe leaving Simba in the tower while they go to the therapy session would be a good idea. Loki had steadfastly refused to even consider leaving Simba behind. Tony had eventually given up on that, though he doesn't know why Loki needs to have Simba with him all the time. He's asked, of course, but Loki hasn't given any helpful answers.

Tony sighs. "You're like Calvin with Hobbes, you know that?" It's clear Loki has no idea what he's talking about. Perhaps he should get Jarvis to add to Loki's knowledge of comic strips, which right now just consists of Peanuts. Maybe he should've made the analogy about Linus and his blanket so Loki would've understood it, Tony thinks, but realizes that Calvin & Hobbes is actually a better analogy. Loki does treat Simba like a friend.

However, Tony had insisted that Simba would go without the Iron Man suit, just so he won't have to worry about the (admittedly small) possibility that it would be stolen. Although that suit is built for a toy, it's going to have the same security as the other suits. After all, it does have a mini arc reactor and the briefcase that snaps it together.

Besides, Simba's Iron Man suit would have attracted a lot of stares, although to be honest Loki
might get them some attention anyways. Tony's used to attracting stares and he ordinarily enjoys the attention, but he wants to remain fairly inconspicuous when taking Loki to therapy.

He doesn't want the media finding out about Loki in general, or they'll be hounding all over him simply because he lives with Tony. Thus Tony's trying to remain inconspicuous, so he's wearing sunglasses, a baggy sweatshirt and jeans, like he had when taking Loki clothes shopping. He's found that disguise works surprisingly well, and he's even added a baseball hat to it.

Ok, Tony's kind of hypocritical, since he's carrying an Iron Man suit-briefcase- though this one's black instead of the usual flashy red and gold, so it could almost pass as a normal briefcase. He'd been on the fence about taking one, but in the end decided to take it just in case some megalomaniac decides to take over the world when he was out. The odds of that are very small, but it doesn't hurt to be prepared.

Some of that anonymity is going to be lost by their mode of transportation, Tony thinks as they walk down the long row of cars in his basement towards the man waiting for them by one of the cars. Loki keeps stopping to stare curiously at the other cars and Tony has to pull him along.

Tony could just drive to Loki's therapy session himself, but having a chauffeur is so convenient. It's not Happy Hogan anymore (even if Happy hadn't been promoted to the head of security, he's currently in California). Tony's current chauffeur is a man of average height and build named Daniel or David or something- Tony's pretty sure it's Daniel. The man's never actually told him, and Happy was actually the one who appointed him so Tony hasn't even seen his file. From what Tony could tell from the two times this guy's driven him anywhere, he must be aspiring to be part mime. He gives only the shortest, clipped, professional answers, and he chooses not to say anything at least half of the times Tony addresses him.

Sure enough, in response to Tony's witty greeting, he just holds the back door open for them without a word. Loki stops, unsure, and looks at Tony questioningly. "Is that thing going to eat us?"

Tony doesn't bother hiding the smirk that creeps up at that. "No, it's a car. It's not alive, so it can't eat us. I know this isn't like those magic carpets or whatever it is you all ride in viking land, but this is how things roll here." Loki giggles and says that he's only seen a magic carpet in Aladdin, but that he wishes they were real.

Still, Tony's perplexed by Loki's reaction to this. Hadn't Loki seen cars when they were going clothes shopping? He's acting like it's totally new. As if reading his thoughts, Loki says "Those things kept almost hitting me when I was looking for you." If Tony had been drinking something at the moment, he probably would have spit it out at the rather nonchalant way Loki had just said he'd been nearly run over multiple times.

"You can't just cross the street in any random place, unless you want to end up as a pancake." Tony goes on to explain about crosswalks and pedestrian signals. But he's honestly not sure if Loki's taking it in.

The driver actually interrupts to tell them to put on their seat belts, and Tony rolls his eyes, muttering "Yes, mom." Seriously, why had Happy chosen this guy? He's way too concerned with pesky things like safety and the law. Loki looks completely lost. Tony demonstrates with his own seat-belt and after staring at him for a bit, Loki buckles his own behind him and tries to wriggle under it. He soon realizes this is almost impossible and, after getting Tony to show him how to release the buckle, fastens it over his body, though at first he has it tucked under his armpit instead of over his shoulder.
The car engine starts and Loki's eyes shoot wider than normal, and he looks over at Tony with a shocked expression on his face. When the car starts to move forwards, Loki lets out the sort of whoop most people reserve for roller coasters. Tony has to wonder if Loki's ever been in a moving vehicle before. He has to have been, right? They've got to have carriages or something in Asgard.

As they pull out of the tower's garage, there's a small crowd of paparazzi waiting for them, which isn't uncommon. Thankfully, it's always too crowded for them to hang out by the front entrance-meaning Tony can usually take a stroll in peace- but they always hang out by the garage. The car's windows are fortunately tinted so the paparazzi can't see inside the car, but they start clicking away anyways (admittedly, it is a nice car).

The paparazzi hadn't bothered them during their clothes shopping spree for Loki, but there have been some pictures of Loki and Iron Man, presumably taken from pedestrians' phones, that have been... mysteriously removed from the internet almost as soon as they're posted. The photos had been rather unflattering to Loki, since he'd been having a panic attack while they were taken, and Jarvis hadn't even asked for Tony's permission before removing them.

Loki seems to hate the flashing cameras. He screws his eyes shut and starts rocking back and forth, muttering about Thor and lightning with no thunder. Tony's not sure if this is the beginning of an anxiety attack, but he rests a hand on Loki's shoulder. Once they're away from the cameras, Tony tries to distract the god by pointing out some of the things they're passing.

It actually works, to Tony's surprise. Soon, Loki practically has his face pressed to the window and he bounces in his seat and enthusiastically offers random comments like "Orion is a constellation of a man holding a bow." He also points at ordinary things like bikes and fire hydrants and asks what they are (okay, maybe they're not ordinary in Asgard). Tony's trying to do some work on his Stark Phone and isn't thrilled with being interrupted. He answers while only half paying attention, though he starts to wonder why Loki hadn't done this during their clothes shopping trip. Maybe it was because everything was so new? If this keeps up, he thinks, it's going to be a long ride.

It keeps up. Tony's hopes of the car lulling Loki into settling down unfortunately don't come true. Perhaps, Tony thinks, it's because, with the stop-and-go traffic in New York, they're not moving constantly. However, he knows that's wishful thinking, too. Loki could be the god of kinetic energy or something, since he almost never stays still. He clearly doesn't like being cooped up in the car where he can't move around. Loki's shifting around, managing to bounce in his seat and rock back and forth at the same time. His hand's making little scuttling motions across his leg. He pulls off his boots for some unknown reason and tries to flop down across the backseat, almost smacking Tony in the face with an arm. He also hums constantly, but seems to switch between snippets of songs so it becomes sort of annoying.

Five minutes into the forty-five-minute drive, Tony can't help moaning like a child "Are we there yet?"

Loki's really glad to get out of that moving thing Tony had called a car. It had been sort of fun at first, but after being cooped up in there not being able to stand up, it's nice to stretch his legs again.

They walk into a building that's full of hallways with tons of doors, and sections branching off that have a ton of chairs in them. There are some nice pictures on the walls, but Loki's still sort of nervous, and he makes sure to stick close to Tony, only stopping to pull off his boots. He wishes he could be barefoot forever, he thinks as he wiggles his now-free toes happily. But Tony had insisted on him wearing boots. Tony arches an eyebrow at him and tells him to put them back on. Loki pouts, but does as Tony asks, slipping them on the opposite feet.
They enter one of the areas branching off from a hallway. Tony says something to the man behind
the desk, but Loki's not listening. He looks around anxiously, bouncing on his toes. There's a sort
of old lady sitting in a corner, and she's looking at him. Loki can't tell whether she hates him or not,
but if he had to guess, he'd say she probably does. She's also holding something up to her ear and
talking in it, which is kind of silly. The way she's talking sounds really different from how Tony
and Jarvis talk. It sounds like gibberish on the outside, but in his head he's hearing what she's
saying. That's probably because of All-Tongue. But there are some words that still sound like
gibberish in his head, even though they sound different from what the woman actually said.

Tony finishes talking to the guy behind the desk and sits down in one of the chairs next to a small
table. Loki plops down on the floor in front of the table and examines the things on it. They're like
thin books, only their pages are glossy and the covers are just as flimsy as the pages. Tony has
some of these things- Jarvis had called them magazines- in his library.

Loki hunts through the stack and stops suddenly. Tony's face is staring up at him. He glances from
Tony to the cover. It's definitely Tony. Grinning slightly, he opens the cover, puts it in front of his
face like a mask, and taps Tony's leg.

"What? Oh. Now where have I seen that irresistible face before?" Tony pauses for a bit and snaps
his fingers. "The mirror! That's where." Loki giggles at that and Tony continues. "But who decided
to clone me, I wonder?"

Loki lowers the magazine and grins at Tony. Tony looks at the magazine and smirks "Wow. You
have good taste in magazines." Loki doesn't know what to say to that. He glances back down at the
cover with Tony's face on it. There's text on it, too. Like everything else here, it's written in weird
symbols, but he can understand most of it. All-Tongue is rather nice, he thinks with a smile.

Tony Stark: Still America's Most Desirable Bachelor. Loki has no clue what Bachelor means. But
America rings a bell. Where has he heard it before? Oh, yeah. Tony had talked about America after
the other Avengers' visit. Apparently, that's where they are now, and it's part of Midgard.

He starts flipping through the pages, looking for more stuff about Tony. However, he hasn't even
flipped through the whole thing when a door opens and two people walk out. One is a young guy
who immediately goes over to the lady who's sitting down. Apparently the lady is his mother. The
two of them get up and leave, still talking.

The other person is a woman with light-brown hair falling to just below chin level. She also gives
off a strong scent, which happens to be what Loki's thinking of when he blurts out the first thing on
his mind, and his mouth just runs away. "You smell like apples. Sort of. It's not quite there, but it's
mostly apples." Actually, it's like something else pretending to smell like apples. "I think real
apples smell better, though. I like apples. Sometimes I'd take an apple to feed the horses, but
nobody cared, and I'd eat part of it and give part to the horses. They weren't Idunn's Apples,
though, 'cause then they would've cared."

She stops in front of them and asks "Are you Lucas Smith?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah, that's us." Tony confirms, and Loki frowns. Who in the Nine Realms is Lucas
Smith?!

Wait... Are they referring to him?

"I'm a Loki, not a Lucas." Loki scrunches his face. He doesn't want to be a Lucas, he wants to be a
Loki. He actually likes his name- well, his first name, anyways, because it means him. Loki hates
the name Laufeyson, though, because it makes it obvious he's from Jotunheim. Tony had asked
what his last name was yesterday, but Loki had refused to say.

"Loki, then." The woman says, and Loki claps his hands happily. He won't have to become a Lucas! "I'm Dr. Carlisle. Do you mind following me back to my office?"

Loki shrugs and gets up. That doesn't seem too bad. He follows her for a couple steps, but Tony stops him and takes the magazine, saying they need to leave it here because it's not theirs'. Loki pouts but relinquishes it, and then he frowns when he sees that Tony's once again sitting down. Tony makes a *shoo* gesture with his hand and says. "Go on. Go back and talk to her. That's sort of why we came here."

"Aren't you coming?" Loki starts fidgeting anxiously.

Loki's already sort of forgotten the lady's name. It's Dr. Car-something. Is that related to the car thing they'd used to get here? Also, hadn't Bruce said he was Dr. Bruce Banner? What's this Doctor thing? Loki shakes his head as he realizes Dr. Car-something is talking. "Normally we don't bring other people back, but..."

Suddenly, everything makes horrible sense and Loki lets out a scream which blocks out whatever the end of that sentence is. Now he knows why Tony hasn't bothered to beat him, why he hasn't seemed to hate him these past few weeks, and probably the reason they're even here in the first place.

Tony's just going to ditch him here! It's obvious, since he's supposed to go with this lady while Tony stays out here. It will be almost laughably easy for Tony to slip away forever. Who knows what this lady's going to do to him?

Loki falls to the floor in front of the chair Tony's sitting in and grabs onto Tony's shirt desperately. He even lets go of Simba to better cling to Tony, and the lion ends up in Tony's lap. If he holds on to Tony, Loki thinks, Tony won't be able to leave him here. Loki knew Tony wouldn't want to put up with him forever, but he doesn't want to leave Tony. Or, more accurately, he doesn't want Tony to leave him here. Kneeling on the floor, he's just the right height to bury his face against Tony's chest, near the glowing circle. His head fills with the thrumming sensation of it.

"Whoa there, Snoopy. What's up with you today? You're sort of invading my personal bubble." Tony says, but Loki's too frantic to respond. His hands grasp Tony's shirt even tighter.

Tony's going to leave him here and then he won't have a home and maybe he'll have to live on the streets. Plus he won't see Dum-E or Jarvis ever again. Well, he never actually *sees* Jarvis, but he won't see Bruce or Hulk or Pepper again. Although he hasn't seen Pepper since that first day, so maybe she really did hate him and now Tony's following suit? It's not like he can blame Tony, since the man now knows that he's a monster and a freak. Tony had said he wouldn't hate him for those things, but that was pretty unbelievable then and it's entirely unbelievable now.

"Please! Don't leave me here." Loki can hear the begging tone in his own voice, but he doesn't care. Tony's hands are now firmly gripping his forearms.

Tony apparently simultaneously scoots his chair back and pushes Loki away slightly so they're over half an arm length apart, before crouching down so they're around the same eye level. Loki's surprised Tony hadn't completely pushed him away, but he can't make himself look into Tony's face. He doesn't want to see the disgusted look Tony's undoubtedly sporting right now.

"Whoa, hang on. Who said anything about leaving you here? Did you think I was just going to dump you and run like some lame criminal handing off drugs in a B-rated cop flick?" Loki has no
idea what that last part meant, but it's not like it matters right now. Hesitantly, he glances up at Tony's face and frowns, confused. There's nothing disgusted in Tony's eyes, at least not that Loki can see.

"Hey." Tony says in a softer tone. "I'm not going to leave you here. Remember what I said after you got lost? I won't just ditch you somewhere forever." Tony relaxes his grip a little, and Loki takes the opportunity to lean close enough to wrap his arms around Tony again and grab the back of his shirt. He doesn't want to take any chances with that statement. That would be what Tony would say even if he was really going to leave, probably.

Loki buries his head in Tony's chest again. He starts to hum his special song, the one he'd sung for Tony when the man had been having a nightmare. He feels Tony shift slightly and hears him sigh. "I think we're sort of a package deal." Tony says, probably to the lady.

Then the lady asks if he wants Tony to come back with him or stay here. "With me." Loki mumbles. Isn't that sort of obvious? He doesn't actually look at her, since his head is still buried against Tony's shirt.

Loki's eyes suddenly shoot wide. Wait a minute... this is the lady Tony and Jarvis had told him about going to talk to, right?

Tony shifts again and stands up, and Loki stands too, not releasing his hold on Tony. Even though he knows who this person is now, he still wants Tony to stay with him. "You're making this really awkward, Snoopy." Tony says, sounding somewhat annoyed. "Do you know how hard it is to move with someone hanging onto you?"

Worriedly, Loki lets go, somewhat. He instead clings to one of Tony's sleeves after grabbing Simba from Tony. He certainly doesn't want to make Tony annoyed, since that would increase the likelihood of Tony leaving him here, but he doesn't want to let Tony have a chance to escape, either. Tony picks up his briefcase (another weird Midgardian word, Loki thinks) and they start to follow Dr. Car-something.

Thanks to twenty-twenty hindsight, Tony's not surprised that Loki had been against going back there alone. At first, they'd been planning on having him do that, since normally it's just the therapist and the patient. However, Dr. Carlisle- Gwyneth, Tony remembers- says now, while looking at Loki, that this is going to have to be an exception. They're already breaking the rules by doing this in the first place, since Loki's not a legal citizen in the country- or anywhere else on the planet- so not following the standard procedure isn't the end of the world. Although it's not like patients aren't allowed to bring other people back, they just normally don't.

However, Tony is surprised at how frantically Loki had reacted to the suggestion of going back alone. There'd been a flash of green around his hands and an explosive gust of wind that had blown the magazines almost all the way across the room, though Loki hadn't seemed to notice. However, there had been the weird sensation energy emanating from the god's body when he'd gotten really close. Tony's felt that sensation coming from Loki before and it's clearly part of Loki's powers.

It's also surprising how desperately Loki clung- actually, is still clinging- to him. He hadn't really been grovelling at Tony's feet or anything, but somehow the way Loki had been kneeling on the floor in front of him reminded Tony slightly of that. Apparently he'd thought Tony was going to ditch him here. Tony had been hoping the whole abandonment issue had been resolved after their talk following Loki being lost in the city, but apparently not. Loki had been so terrified that his body had been shaking.
Well, they've certainly made a first impression, though Tony's doesn't think it's the one they wanted to make. Still, from the panicked way Loki had reacted to being the idea of going back alone, it should be fairly obvious why they're here. Tony's not sure whether Gwyneth had noticed the green energy around Loki's hands or not. Tony has a hunch that if she brings it up, any chance they might have had at this will be shot. He mouths "Don't mention this now." Gwyneth looks at him for a bit but eventually nods.

Loki's hugging Simba to his chest with his arms, leaving his hands free to hold Tony's right sleeve in a death grip as they walk. Tony supposes he should consider himself lucky- at least Loki hasn't jumped onto his back or anything.

Gwyneth leads them into a rather dimly lit room with a sofa in the center and some chairs around the edges. A desk sits against the wall with the door, across the window with closed shades, and a bookshelf sits against a perpendicular wall. A couple pictures hang on the walls, and Loki stops, staring transfixed at the forest one and now gripping Tony's arm instead of his sleeve. Loki kicks off his boots almost immediately, and Tony sighs.

"Huh. A couch. Figures. I guess we're going to be doing the whole Freudian 'laying on a couch, blaming everything on our parents and revealing that we secretly wanted to sleep with our mothers' thing." Tony quips. This earns him a very unamused stare from Gwyneth, who sternly tells him that she can send him out again. Tony huffs in annoyance, though that's sort of a hollow threat, he thinks. He's pretty sure they both know that would sort of end the session, since Loki would probably shut down if Tony left.

Still, Gwyneth gives him a look telling him to remain silent, and he mimes zipping his lips, a tad snarkily. Considering the lewd comments he would have undoubtedly made upon seeing her a couple years ago and might have even ended up making today had Loki not freaked out, that hadn't seemed too bad. And really, Loki could blame everything on his horrible upbringing.

Tony leads Loki over to the couch and tries to extract himself to go sit in one of the chairs, but Loki's grip tightens on his arm. Tony really hopes it's not bruising. He mutters this aloud and, surprisingly, Loki's grip loosens somewhat, though he still can't pull free. He glances at Gwyneth but sits down next to Loki since he doesn't really have a choice. Loki curls up next to Tony, hugging Simba using his arms, with Tony's sleeve bunched in his hands.

Gwyneth asks if Loki minds her recording the session, and Loki gets a somewhat baffled look on his face. Tony automatically launches into a technical explanation which only increases Loki's befuddlement. Gwyneth interrupts and says "It will let me listen to what we say later." She'd evidently recorded herself saying that, because she plays it back. Loki claps his hands delightedly. "You did that, right?" He asks, turning to Tony. "Only when you did it, we could see it and we saw me meeting the Hulk." Tony nods, somewhat surprised he'd even remembered that to make the connection. Gwyneth asks again if he minds being recorded, and Loki says he doesn't, so she starts recording again, rattling off the date for future reference.

"Hello, Loki. I'm Dr. Carlisle." Gwyneth introduces herself a second time. She doesn't look particularly surprised when Loki bows his head to her in greeting, or maybe she's just good at hiding it. Loki doesn't say anything, which is an odd contrast to him babbling on about apples when he first saw her.

Loki is clearly done with sitting already when gets up and pulls expectantly on Tony's arm. Tony sighs and stands, letting Loki lead him over to the bookcase where the god dares to let go of him with one hand to inspect the trinkets on the shelves, fingerling them and moving them around. Although he quickly shifts his left hand so he's grabbing Tony's arm instead of his sleeve. Tony
sighs. Clearly, he's going to be pulled around the room for a while, he thinks as Loki tugs him towards the window to peek behind the window shade, letting some sunlight in.

"So, Loki, why are you here?" Gwyneth asks, apparently needing to start from the basics even though Tony's pretty sure Jarvis told her.

Loki pauses to shoot her a 'really?' look and replies guilelessly "I dunno. Because you led us back here?" Tony snorts, but Loki ignores him, turning back to the window before continuing. "But you know why we're here, right? 'Cause you're the one that led us here. So maybe you could ask yourself?" He looks over at Gwyneth, who's smiling slightly.

She rephrases the question. "I meant why are you coming to talk to me?" Loki cocks his head to the side, thinking, and stops fiddling with the window shade.

"Jarvis said you might help me. He's really smart! Right Jarvis?" Loki looks expectantly at the wall, but frowns when there's no response.

"Jarvis isn't here, Snoopy." Tony explains, although technically Jarvis is on their phones. But Tony and Jarvis had decided that the AI should remain silent unless he was really needed, since sometimes Jarvis freaks people out and he's not exactly supposed to be a part of this. Admittedly, Tony isn't either, yet here he is.

However, Tony hears his own phone ding. He pulls it out and sees a text from Jarvis, who's clearly been listening in on- and probably recording- everything anyways. "You know that I am here, sir, and Mr. Loki is correct. I do believe Dr. Carlisle could help him. May I add that it was truly brilliant the way you decided to insult her profession with your little comment about the couch?" Tony rolls his eyes, though he'd sort of planned for the AI to take advantage of that loophole.

"Who's Jarvis?" Gwyneth asks. Loki replies that Jarvis is his friend. Tony suddenly wonders if she thinks Loki hallucinates Jarvis or something, so he gives a quick confirmation of Jarvis' existence so she won't think Loki's off his rocker. Then again, she might think that anyways. Especially when Loki starts to do his weird thing where he giggles at some private thought, his face now inches almost touching the picture of the forest on the wall.

"What did you come to talk to me about?" They wait for a response. Loki doesn't give any indication he's even heard her until the third time she asks him this. Then, Loki scrunches up his face, confused. He's clearly wondering how to answer the question.

After a bit, he grins and says "Life! My life, 'cause that's the one I'm living. And that's what Tony said." Loki nods to himself. He still isn't staying still for a second, and Tony's starting to wonder if Loki's related to the Energizer Bunny.

"Tell me about your life," Gwyneth prompts when Loki doesn't go on. Tony doesn't know what to think of the fact they've veered in the biographical direction. Shouldn't they be talking about his nightmares and how he thinks people should hate him and stuff? He opens his mouth to speak, and Gwyneth shoots him another 'shut up' look. Loki sits on the armrest of the sofa for literally one second before he's on the move again.

"I live with Tony, and I really, really like it. I wanna live with him forever! Did you know he was on the cover of a... magazine in that room we were just in? He was!" Loki nods and continues rambling "And did you know he's got a glowing circle in his chest, and it hums and thrums and keeps him safe 'cause it keeps the metal bugs from eating his heart? I love it! I wish I had a safe glowy circle in my chest, but I don't need one 'cause I don't have bugs in my heart. Simba has one in his suit, though, and he doesn't have bugs. But he ate bugs with Timon and Pumbaa! He has a Man
of Iron suit, just like Tony! I made it and Jarvis helped."

Loki finally stops rambling, which is good because Tony's starting to get a headache just listening. Gwyneth repeats the question, probably hoping to get Loki back on track. Tony's glad, since he doesn't really like the way his arc reactor had been brought up, and he'd glanced down to make sure the glow wasn't showing through his shirt.

He'd eventually given in and told Loki the reason for the arc reactor. Loki had asked a ton of questions about arc reactors since they'd put the one in Simba's suit, though he'd somehow known the first day that Tony's arc reactor is keeping him alive. He's not sure where Loki got the bug version from, but it's by far the most interesting way of explaining it that Tony's heard. Though he has no idea why Loki would actually want an arc reactor.

Loki starts talking again, but at least he's back on subject. "Tony's really nice and so are Jarvis and Dum-E and Pepper? ...and Bruce and Hulk-y! And Simba's my friend too." Loki gives a little bounce with each name. Tony's not sure why Pepper's name had been said in a questioning tone.

"That's good." Gwyneth replies, though her tone isn't patronizing at all. "I was sort of wondering about your life before living with Tony. You know, your family and that sort of stuff." Tony has to give her credit- she's really patient. He's feeling pretty exasperated at this point, and he's not sure if he'd still be this patient if he was having this conversation alone with Loki. Loki halts abruptly and looks at Gwyneth worriedly.

"Don't have one." Loki says matter-of-factly, though there's an air of sadness around him.

"Where did you live?" Gwyneth asks, which Tony thinks is a stupid question. He's pretty sure that he or Jarvis had answered those at some point. Though maybe she wants to hear it from Loki.

"The palace." is all Loki offers. Gwyneth then asks who he lived with, although if she knows anything about Thor she should know he's one of palace residents, since he's the prince. Loki mumbles "All-father Odin and Frigga. And Thor."

"Were they not your family?"

Uncharacteristically, Loki gives a bitter snort. "No! Families... families, they..." He cocks his head to the side, clearly searching for the right words. After about a minute, he nods to himself and speaks in one big rush.

"Families tell you that you're good and they want you and love you, and that they won't let anyone hurt you, 'cause they love you and don't wanna see you hurt." There are a lot of bad families, Tony thinks, that don't do that. Including his own (mainly his father, Howard), but his family's been dead for twenty years. Loki takes a breath and plows on. "And they don't hit you or hate you or call you names, nope nope nope!" As usual, he shakes his head with each nope, which he always seems to say three times for some reason.

"They didn't like me." Loki continues quietly, but his voice quickly grows louder. "None of them. Thor didn't like me and I don't like him. He's an Avenger, like Tony, Hulk-y and Bruce... and Clint, Natasha and Steve." Tony can't help noticing that Loki even lists them in the order they seem to rank to him.

Loki's eyes are wide and darting around nervously, but he keeps talking even faster, bouncing almost maniacally and flapping his right hand, the one not holding onto Tony. "Thor's an Avenger, but he's not nice like Tony or Hulk-y or Bruce. He hates me! And so do Fandral, Volstagg and Hogunn. They're the Warriors Three and they hit and hate too. Sif doesn't hit me much but she still
hates. They don't live there, but they're there a lot. Odin hits and whips and SEWS and he's really, really scary! And he only has one eye and it's even scarier."

Gwyneth looks shocked at what he said. Loki is currently fidgeting and rocking anxiously, humming to himself and seeming close to losing it. Tony puts a hand on Loki's shoulder. Gwyneth waits for him to calm down, which takes at least five minutes, and cautiously asks about Frigga. Loki shrugs. "She never hits me. But she doesn't like me." Tony finds it odd Loki always uses the word hit to describe what people had done when it seems they'd gone a lot further than hitting.

"So it's pretty clear you didn't like it there." Tony thinks that's a rather stupid thing for Gwynenth to say, since it really goes without saying.

"I didn't like it there!" Loki confirms frantically, and Tony's amazed he's still talking. "I don't like Asgard! Nope nope nope! Full of hurting and hating and hurting and hating and hurting..." He plonks down on the ground, pulling Tony down with him, and lies back, repeating that on loop for almost half a minute. Rather annoyed at suddenly winding up on the floor, Tony wonders why Loki's suddenly aspiring to be an anchor. Despite the fact he's lying on the ground muttering, Loki still has a good grip on his arm. Loki eventually stops repeating that, but remains sprawled on the floor.

"They hated me." He says, as if that needed clarification. Compared to what he'd just been like, he seems astonishingly nonchalant about it.

"Why did they hate you?" Gwyneth sits back, staring at him. Loki sits upright, his body tensing immediately, and he lets out a weird screech as he shakes his head furiously and ends up hitting Tony in the face with his long hair. Tony backs up as much as he can, considering Loki's still gripping his arm, to try to avoid the unpleasant sensation.

Really, this had progressed the same way it had with him, Tony realizes. Loki had pretty readily admitted that people in Asgard had hated him and hit him, even on the day he'd landed on Tony's tower, but he's still not comfortable talking about the reasons.

"We won't talk about it now if you don't feel ready." Gwyneth says, leaving Tony to wonder why on earth they're going to this session. Although, once he thinks about it, he supposes if Loki doesn't feel comfortable around Gwyneth, they're not really going to get anywhere.

"Did you like anything in your life before meeting Tony?" Gwyneth asks softly.

Loki cocks his head to the side, a thoughtful expression on his face. The fact he actually has to think about it probably says a great deal. Tony could immediately say that he at least liked the projects he got to do in his father's lab growing up. Eventually, Loki says "I liked the horses... and the Bi-frost. And the library, until they found me."

Gwyneth asks if he had a horse that he rode, and Tony remembers Loki saying he didn't. Only now Loki changes his answer, blurtng it out almost immediately.

"I had a horse, but I couldn't ride him. He was like Simba." Tony has no idea what that means. A lion-horse? A toy horse? "Only, he was like air."

Air? Tony puzzles over it for a bit before he gets it. Oh... Loki's probably either talking about an imaginary friend or maybe a hallucination. Or, maybe something similar to those other-Loki's he makes? For now, Tony's guessing the horse was an imaginary friend- he certainly hopes it wasn't a hallucination. He's sort of surprised Loki hadn't brought this up before now, but then again, Tony had never asked.
Loki, however, looks like he's said something wrong by bringing this up. His smile fades and he whispers, scared, "I'm in trouble, right?" His expression is skeptical when they say he's not, and Loki says "He got me in trouble when I was little..." Gwyneth tells him that he can keep talking about it, and he won't get in trouble. Loki actually lets go of Tony's arm (Finally. Tony thinks) and gazes down at Simba, clearly having some internal debate.

"Are you gonna hit me?" Loki asks with wide eyes. Tony speaks up, assuring him that they won't hit him, but inside he's seething. Did they seriously beat him up for making up a friend when apparently nobody would befriend him in real life?! Tony can't claim to know much about children, but aren't imaginary friends pretty common? Besides, those jerks are the ones who'd apparently refused to befriend him in real life and they bullied him for what they decided?

Close to a minute passes before Loki says anything, during which Gwyneth and Tony again tell him he won't get hurt. Gwyneth softly says that it's perfectly fine to talk about anything here, that he's not going to be ridiculed for what he says. "Sometimes I pretended I had a horse." Loki murmurs. He ducks his head and his body tenses as if he's expecting ridicule at the very least, probably worse. Gwyneth again reassures him and then asks what his horse was like.

Despite their reassurances, Loki doesn't continue. He just gazes down at Simba for a while, and it's clear from his eyes, which are even glassier than usual, that his mind is somewhere far away from the room they're in.

Then, Loki starts to sing, and Tony eventually recognizes the song as the one Loki had sung to him during his nightmare while watching Beauty and the Beast. Only this time, he can make out the words.

"If you find the field where horses roam
And you need a place to call your home
The moon and the stars will give you light
To sleep in the grass in peace tonight."

"He used to sing that to me when I was scared... You would've liked him." It seems Loki's talking to Simba now, and his eyes are so distant that Tony doesn't know if Loki even remembers it's not just him and Simba in the room. "His name was Sleipnir. He was my horse, but he was also like a spider, 'cause he had eight legs." Well, that's... interesting, Tony thinks, as Loki giggles. "He was my friend. But they didn't like him and..." The rest is unspoken, but it's pretty obvious he's referencing Sleipnir getting him in trouble again.

Loki starts to rock back and forth again, clearly anxious. "I used to sing that when we'd go visit the horses in the stables. He'd come with me and we'd say hi to the horses." Loki adds after a bit, even though he'd just said that Sleipnir had sung it to him. Though who's to say both aren't true? Loki's still clearly talking to Simba instead of them. "But he had to go away. They all did..." Loki hugs Simba tighter and whispers "I hated that, but I have you now, and Tony and Jarvis and Dum-E..."

"Hell yeah you have us." Tony says, putting an arm around Loki. He hadn't missed the fact Loki had said they all went away, though he has to wonder how an imaginary friend goes away without the imaginer wishing them away. Loki sounds like he hadn't wanted them to go, though. But they were imaginary friends, right?

He also recalls Loki saying a while ago that he didn't have any friends in Asgard, but it's clear that he thought he'd get in trouble for talking about them. The first part had seemed to slip out and then
Loki had seemed to drift into his own little world when talking to Simba.

It turns out their time is basically up. Despite his initial reservations, Tony's rather pleased with how this session went. While Loki had seemed rather anxious, he'd still opened up, which Tony hadn't actually expected. Tony doubts he would have opened up as much as Loki had, himself.

They another appointment for Loki, after asking if he wants to continue, and Tony is very glad to learn that Gwyneth managed to rearrange her schedule to make the trip to the tower instead of them coming here. It's going to cost Tony extra, but it's not like it matters. When they'd set up the appointment, Tony had been ready to bribe her until Jarvis cut him off.

However, they're going to have to work on Loki doing these sessions without him, and Tony's starting to wonder if they should work on his ability to sit still. He'd moved around almost the entire session and seemed to hate sitting in the car.

Tony pays Gwyneth and gets up, picking up his Iron Man suit briefcase and coat. "Come on, Snoopy." He says, although Loki's already grabbing his sleeve again. Tony leads the god out of the room and calls his chauffeur to come pick them up.

They're back in the car, which Loki isn't too thrilled about. He hates the strap holding him back, and he hates just sitting there.

That whole thing had been rather different than he'd expected. He's not sure why she'd asked so much about him, but Jarvis had said it might help with his nightmares, and he really wants those to go away.

He glances over at Tony, who's on that device that's like the one he has clipped to his pocket. That whole thing had been a lot better than expected, since Tony hadn't left him,

Tony glances at him and asks "So, how come I didn't hear about Sleipnir before?" He arches an eyebrow at him and Loki shrugs.

He hadn't meant to bring him up- he actually hadn't thought about him much for a while, until singing their special song when Tony had woken up scared in the theatre. When he'd been asked during their session if he had a horse, he'd answered without thinking. When he'd been very young, he'd talked to Sleipnir and the others- Hel, Jormungand and Fenrir- constantly, and they always said what he wanted to hear.

They were all freaks like him, and sometimes he'd pretended they were a family of freaks. He'd always wished that Fenrir would really protect him and Hel would make sure his tormentors would never hurt him again like he imagined them doing, but of course, that never actually happened. But Fenrir would growl at anyone attacking him, even if he couldn't physically stop them. Jormungand, the huge serpent, would hug him in his massive coils (Loki sometimes even forgot it was really his own arms giving the hug). They all played with him, but Sleipnir was the most playful.

He'd quickly learned he shouldn't talk to them in front of other people. Apparently, talking to things that others couldn't see was bad. At best, it brought only ridicule, but it often brought a beating with the taunts.

However, just because he knew he shouldn't do it doesn't mean he didn't accidentally do it anyways, like with his magic. For centuries during his childhood and adolescence, he'd tried to only talk to them in private, but he constantly slipped up and did it in public too, and he always got in trouble for it.
Eventually, though he's not sure how long ago it had been, he'd stopped talking to them altogether, though it had taken a while to manage not to slip up. He hated having to stop that, but he hated getting beaten up and ridiculed for it even more, and continuing to talk to them in private led to a lot of public slip ups. Because he'd stopped talking to them, they'd ended up in the back of his thoughts and stayed there for most of the last century or two. But now they're suddenly at the front of his mind again.

He'd wound up telling Simba a little bit about Sleipnir since he had briefly been so lost in his memories that he'd forgotten Tony and Dr. Car-something were there. So far, nobody's tormented him for talking to Simba like he'd talked to his friends, though maybe that's because Simba has a body. But Dr. Car-something and Tony, unlike everyone else, actually asked him to tell them more about them.

He looks at Tony again and says "Are you gonna make fun of me?" Hogunn and Fandral always mocked him, saying he'd never have real friends, because why would anyone like someone like him? He honestly never had an answer to that, since it makes sense to hate him. But hearing that always felt like being punched in the stomach or stabbed in the chest, anyways.

Tony swears he won't taunt him, and Loki hesitates. Tony's his friend, and he hasn't made fun of him for anything else, which is really weird, but a nice weird. Tony already knows about Sleipnir, apparently from when he'd told Simba, and he hasn't made fun of him for that. Loki bites his lip, wondering whether to say anything. Eventually, he whispers "Fenrir, Hel, Jormungand."

"Those were the others?" Tony asks, and Loki slowly nods, before Tony exclaims "Wait- Hel, as in go to Hell?"

Loki shrugs, even though that's right. Hel was a monster-girl from the Underworld, but she was nice to him. One half of Hel's body looked like a corpse, which wasn't as scary as it sounded. Then again, he didn't actually see them, except in his occasional good dreams (he'd dreamed about them before he started talking to them)... although there had been a couple times he could've sworn he'd seen them for a bit after waking up...

He doesn't want to talk about them any more right now.

Loki still hates sitting in this car. He's itching to get up and move around. Moving in his seat kind of helps, but not really. They've been in here for a while, probably half an hour, which is half an hour too long in Loki's mind.

Tony looks at him and asks "Do you want to stretch your legs and go for a stroll? We need to get you some shoes anyways." Loki nods. Yes, he really wants to get out of here, though he's not thrilled when Tony makes him put his boots on again.

"Pull over here." Tony tells the guy in the front of the car, who Loki's worked out is the guy controlling where it goes. The guy nods and does so. Tony checks the device in his hand and says "Just go back to the tower. We can walk back."

Loki grins as he steps out of the car and stretches out his cramped legs, but makes sure to grab onto Tony at the first opportunity.

Considering how Loki talks to Simba and treats him like he's real, Tony's not surprised the god apparently had other imaginary friends in Asgard, especially since he'd had nobody in real life. What does surprise him is that Loki hadn't given any hint of them until today. Then again, he had said they'd needed to go away in a very sad tone. Tony's really curious about Loki's other
imaginary friends, but Loki hadn't seemed very forthcoming about them. He'd just whispered three rather strange names.

Loki's holding on to his sleeve again as they walk through New York City. Tony's wearing a heavy coat, but Loki seems completely unaffected by the cold temperatures in only a t-shirt. Jotuns don't mind the cold, Tony reminds himself. He'll have to remember that.

They get a lot of second glances form pedestrians, but Tony's pretty sure that's actually due to Loki wearing a t-shirt on a rather frigid October day, though carrying Simba and stopping to pick up random things like coins and candy wrappers from the sidewalk and shove them in his pockets probably contribute to drawing second glances, too. Thankfully, Loki avoids picking up cigarette butts, wrinkling his nose at the smell of them.

Shoe shopping is an interesting experience, though not quite as interesting as clothes shopping had been. Loki seems tempted to look in every single shoebox in the store. Tony doesn't let him, of course. There's no way he's going waste that much time. Loki also dashes, laughing, up and down the aisles. If it weren't for the fact that **Energizer Bunny** is kind of long for a nickname, Tony would totally use it.

The actual trying on shoes part takes a while and they go through so many options that Tony feels ready to pull his hair out. Loki won't keep any of them on his feet for more than ten seconds. However, the summer-wear section (which is rather limited, since it's October) ends up being the solution. Tony at first wants to insist on getting actual shoes, but reminds himself that it's not like Loki needs shoes for warmth.

So shoe shopping ends up being flipflop-and-sandal-shopping, since Loki seems to have something against having his feet covered. It turns out crocs are tolerable, though Loki clearly prefers open-toed things. Mostly due to a lack of supply, Tony doesn't go overboard and only buys one pair of each. The cashier gives them some weird looks throughout the ordeal and some weirder looks for their purchases, but the cashier doesn't say anything.

Finally, they leave the shoe store as it's closing and continue to walk through the streets of New York. Loki had, of course, had insisted on wearing one of his new things (at least he decided to put the sandals on the right feet), and it seems he would have left his boots behind at the store if Tony hadn't grabbed them.

As they walk, Tony fills the silence with wondering aloud where they should order takeout for dinner tonight. He feels a tug on his sleeve and realizes that Loki, who's still holding onto his sleeve, has stopped walking. He's staring, transfixed, at the nearest store, which happens to be a toy store. "What is it?" Tony asks, and Loki points to a window display that Tony hadn't looked at.

"It's you!" Loki exclaims. In the window is a display featuring Avengers action figures, each about eight inches tall, except for the Hulk, who's closer to nine or ten. The display has an incredibly cheesy banner, proclaiming **Take the heroes home with you!**

Loki continues staring at the window, but seems to only have eyes for the Iron Man one. Tony looks over the other figures. They're actually surprisingly detailed for figures that are meant to be played with.

The store's closed, but on a whim, Tony pulls out his phone, snaps a picture, and sends a text to Jarvis telling him to order the whole set and have it shipped as fast as possible. Loki will probably love them, and, if for some reason he doesn't, Tony can stick them in the team meeting room. Tony's sort of surprised he hasn't put more Avengers merchandise in the team's meeting room anyways.
However, he doesn't tell Loki about it. Surprises are always more fun, after all.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Tony screws up and tries to fix his mistake, and teaches Loki about pinky promises.

Loki's new Avengers toys arrive.

Loki keeps gripping Tony's sleeve, and Tony ends up sort of leading him that way. Loki keeps glancing down at his sandaled feet and grinning at his wiggling toes. Simba is hugged against his chest with his left arm while his left hand grips Tony's sleeve, and the shopping bag is dangling from the crook of Loki's currently bent elbow on his other arm. Tony had slipped the bag into his hands while they were looking at the Avengers toys. Loki honestly doesn't care. It's not like it's heavy or anything, although he pouts a bit when Tony tells him that his bouncing might break the bag.

Seeing those Avengers figures was really surprising. A lot of people here seem to know about Tony (or, rather, Man of Iron) and the other Avengers, but he hadn't thought there would be toys of them. Then again, when he'd found Simba, he hadn't known there were toys of his favorite lion, either. Maybe there are toys of everyone on Midgard? Then there would also be toys of Pepper and Dr. Car-something and that guy in the front of the car he and Tony had been in. If that's the case, are there toys of him, too? That would be really fun.

They enter the tower through the main entrance. This is only the second time Loki's done this, and he hadn't exactly been paying attention the last time. The whole place seems to be made of metal or glass and there are a ton of those screen things. There's also a very long desk with some people sitting behind it, and multiple elevators. Tony guides him towards one of the elevators (a specific one, it seems, since when Loki starts towards one of the others, Tony tugs him back). Loki doesn't like that everyone's staring at them though.

They take that specific elevator Tony's dragging him towards up to the penthouse and Loki presses all the buttons. It feels good, even though they don't do anything most of the time. Once they enter the penthouse, Tony says "Wake up, Jarvis. Daddy's home."

Loki giggles at that as he drops the shopping bag on the floor. Tony's not Jarvis' father! Right? He frowns thoughtfully. Tony had said he'd made Jarvis, and parents make kids, so maybe he really is. Though he has no idea how Tony would've made Jarvis. Or Dum-E. He said he'd made Dum-E too. Loki does know how babies are made, though, and he thinks it's rather disgusting that people do stuff with their bodies.

Loki wants to put Simba in his Man of Iron suit, but it's in the lab and Tony says they're not going down there right now. Loki pouts at this news until Tony asks what he wants for dinner and Loki shrugs. He's still not at all familiar with Midgardian food. He hasn't been here that long, and they've eaten different things for practically every meal, anyways. He doesn't even remember off the top of his head what he ate for a lot of meals, but he remembers waffles very well.

Tony suddenly looks horrified and asks "You haven't had pizza yet, have you?" Wondering what's wrong, Loki cautiously shakes his head. Why is Tony so scared? Maybe he should hug him again?
"That was mock-horror." Tony says, smirking slightly. Tony must be reading his mind or something, Loki thinks. Or had he accidentally said his thoughts aloud? Loki doesn't think he'd spoken but it wouldn't be the first time he'd blurted out what he was thinking.

"Seriously, though, you have got to try pizza. You've already gone weeks without it. I can't believe I let you get away with that!" Tony's still smirking, though, and Loki's pretty sure he's not being serious. Still, a little flutter of nervousness goes through his chest at the last sentence- had he done something wrong? What had he gotten away with? Tony rolls his eyes and says "I'm not being serious about that, Snoopy... So, cheese? Pepperoni? Something else?" Loki has no idea what to say, and Tony eventually just says "You know what? Jarvis, just get a plain cheese."

"Certainly, sir. Only one?" Jarvis replies. Tony says that there are only two of them and they might end up with leftovers with just one pizza anyways, adding that he'd made Jarvis to be smarter than that.

"Jarvis is smart!" Loki protests as he busies himself with pulling the boxes out of the shopping bag and taking out his new footwear. Jarvis thanks him for saying so and Loki grins.

"Why weren't you at the other place?" Loki asks Jarvis while inspecting each of the things he's just pulled out of the boxes. He sticks Simba's feet- or rather, entire front legs- into the rubber shoes he'd gotten. He giggles at the sight and glances at Tony, who's smirking with a raised eyebrow. He does that a lot, Loki's noticed. He tries to mirror Tony's expression but Tony just bursts out laughing. Maybe he hadn't done that face right.

"I'm afraid I'm not in every building in the world, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says, sounding both amused and apologetic as Loki then starts fiddling with the empty boxes. He stacks them and knocks them down a couple times. He soon tires of that and puts Simba in one of the empty boxes before sliding it across the floor and crashing it into the other two.

"Oh." Loki frowns. "But it would be better if you were!"

Tony snorts and says "Trust me, not everyone would agree with you. Jarvis creeps a lot of people out." Loki frowns even more. Why would people be creeped out by Jarvis? Jarvis asks how the talk went and Loki just shrugs,

The food eventually arrives and Loki watches as Tony carries a rather thin square box that smells delicious. Actually, he feels like he's smelled that smell sometime recently, but he can't remember where. Loki waits as Tony opens the box. Loki had learned to wait until any box was opened by his third day here, after almost biting into a box because he thought that was the food and causing Tony to go into hysterics. Loki still has no idea why almost everything they've eaten came in boxes. The thing in this box is like a cheesy circle cut into eighths, and Loki realizes that it's what Clint and Steve had eaten when they'd been over.

Loki watches as Tony pours himself a glass of alcohol- Loki can never figure out how to tell different alcoholic drinks apart, but it's not like it matters. He hates the stuff since it makes his thoughts feel funny in a bad way, or at least that's how he'd describe it. Not to mention Thor, Fandral, and Volstagg (but rarely Hogun, for some reason) used to make him drink a ton of it and then laugh- very much in his face- at how he was acting even stupider than usual, which they said was hard to do.

"Do you want something besides water? That's got to get boring." Tony says and Loki nods. He actually is getting sorta bored of water, which is what he's had for almost every meal. "Well, we've got soda, coffee," Loki wrinkles his nose more at each option. He'd tried both and they're disgusting.
Tony searches around in that cold box, muttering about how there's no orange juice. Suddenly, inspiration seems to strike and he asks as he starts rummaging through the cabinets "Do you like tea?" Loki nods enthusiastically. Tony grins triumphantly as he pulls out a kettle. "Bruce drinks tea here, sometimes." He adds conversationally after filling it with water and putting it on the stove, which Jarvis apparently starts.

Loki's eyes have drifted to the cabinet that Tony's just opened, and he grins. "Let's see... we've got chamomile... what else?" Tony says as he rummages through the cabinet. Loki rushes over. He actually leaves Simba on the table.

Loki reaches up and grabs the teapot and a teacup from the shelf above the one Tony's hunting through. He grins as he places them on the counter before turning to Tony. "These could be like Mrs. Potts and Chip!" Loki says, half to himself and half to Tony, Jarvis and Simba. "They'd just need to be white and have faces and gold bits and Mrs. Potts has a purple lid and stuff, but then they'd look just like them, right?"

Tony doesn't answer, instead staring at the objects in what seems like shock, if his open mouth is anything to go by. Loki turns around, confused, but then his eyes widen too.

Sitting where the teapot and teacup had been are Mrs. Potts and Chip, though they're not moving or anything. Loki smiles at them but the smile quickly falls when he notices that Tony's now staring at him. Did he do that?

Of course. Who else would it have been? It has to have been his magic, Loki realizes with horror. He quickly sends a panicked look at Tony while grabbing Simba and crawling under the table.

Tony runs a hand over his face in exasperation when Loki crawls under the table. He's hungry and has been looking forward to pizza and scotch, and now Loki has to go and freak out again. He really doesn't feel like crawling under a table at the moment. Actually, he's tired of crawling under things in general.

"Come on, let's not do this now." He sighs, crouching down and trying to pull Loki out from under it, but Loki just squirms even farther under. Tony switches tactics. "Don't you want to eat?" Sadly, that doesn't work.

"Loki, you're not in trouble. I'm not going to hurt you. You don't need to hide under a table." Tony tries, but Loki doesn't give any indication that he's even heard him. Despite not feeling like it, Tony ends up crawling under there, although he's sort of annoyed about it. He forces that annoyance down, though.

"Look, there's nothing wrong with what you did. Hell, I sort of wish that I could do that. That would be pretty awesome, don't you think?" He's trying to go for casual flippancy, as if he doesn't care at all that they're both postponing dinner to be under a piece of furniture. "I could make my armor look like Captain Spangles or our favorite green rage machine and then hit the villains with a repulser blast! They'd never see it coming!" He keeps imagining that for a bit before he focuses on the present.

He glances at Loki, but the god's still not giving any indication he's listening, which isn't the direction he wants them to be going. If anything, they're actually further away from Loki calming down now. Tony doesn't quite manage suppressing a groan of annoyance.

The tea kettle suddenly starts whistling and Tony jumps, having completely forgotten about it. He bangs his head on the underside of the table and shouts a couple curse words. There's already a
lump on the top of his head. He scowls angrily but his thoughts shift back to the current issue. Why is it that no matter how many times he tells Loki he won't get hurt here, he still acts like he will?

"Come on, Loki, we've been over this." He says in an annoyed voice "What is it going to take to get you to stop doing this every time you do something like that?! When are you going to get it through your thick skull that this isn't Asgard?" Tony realizes what he'd said and immediately shuts up. He hadn't actually wanted to say that out loud, especially not in the angry tone he'd used when it slipped out, a tone which had been greatly helped by having just smashed his head against the underside of a table. Ordinarily, Tony wouldn't care about expressing his annoyance and letting some harsh words fly- in fact, he often delights in doling out biting remarks. That had been rather mild coming from him, but he instantly knows Loki's not going to react well.

Loki doesn't even say anything. With one scared look in Tony's direction, he just bolts towards his bedroom. Once again, his insanely-fast speed takes effect, and Tony's barely registered he's gone when he hears a door slam. Tony crawls out from under the table, and Jarvis reports that Loki had slammed the door shut and locked it without even touching it. Probably his powers again, though Tony doubts that's helped Loki's mood at all. Jarvis could unlock it, of course, but he doesn't.

Tony downs the rest of his glass of scotch and pours another, before downing that too and reaching for the bottle again.

He's angry, and at first he thinks the annoyance is at Loki. The god's reactions to these incidents haven't changed at all, no matter what Tony's tried. It's like he hasn't listened to anything Tony's done to persuade him that he doesn't need to freak out. But then Tony remembers that Loki had good reason to react like that in Asgard for thousands of years, and he's only been here a couple weeks.

Tony suddenly feels awful, and he starts to get annoyed at himself for not thinking of a way to make Loki really get it. Most of all, though, Tony's furious at anyone in Asgard who helped lead to Loki reacting like that in the first place.

Tony groans. Geez, he really screwed that whole thing up.

Tony's torn between going after Loki to try to talk some more, and perhaps even apologize (which would be a real shocker to a lot of people), and letting him have some alone time. In the end, he settles for the latter, since Loki running to his room and locking the door seems to be a pretty good indicator he wants to be alone.

Loki just needs a bit of time to calm down by himself, he thinks. Then, Tony knows he's going to have to try to fix this problem he made.

He grabs a couple slices of pizza and then slips the rest into the fridge, figuring he can reheat some later for Loki when he's calm. Tony starts eating and sips his third glass of scotch, though he's not enjoying it as much as he thought he would.

It's weird, eating without Loki. Even though Loki hasn't even been here for three weeks, it's hard to imagine life without him now. Tony can't believe he'd just thought that. When had he turned into a sentimental fool?

He glances over at the teapot and cup that are now identical to Mrs. Potts and Chip. He runs a finger over the very real chip that's Chip's namesake. Changing a shirt color was odd enough. But this...? Loki hadn't just changed the colors and designs of the teapot and teacup, he'd changed their shapes as well. He traces the wavy lid that Mrs. Potts has. The original teapot hadn't had a lid like this at all. That shouldn't be possible. Yes, most of what Loki's done with his powers are things that
Tony hasn't been able to think of an explanation for, but there literally isn't an explanation for this. You can't just change stuff like that.

Loki had said it was magic, and Tony, as a scientist convinced that everything has a logical explanation, hadn't believed it. Hell, he's still not sure he believes it. But Loki's powers are starting to make him to question that view, although he really doesn't like the idea of something being explainable.

Regardless of if it's magic or not, what in the world did the Asgardians have against it? Why did the torment Loki for being able to do awesome things like that?! Were they scared, or jealous? Tony sighs. He has no idea why everyone in Asgard treated Loki horribly, but it was certainly wrong and it's not going to happen here.

If only he could get Loki to realize that.

Loki curls under his bed, but he's near the edge and staring out the window-wall. It's a big sheet of glass spanning from floor to ceiling, and Loki can't decide if it's a huge window or a glass wall. His thoughts shift to more important things. Today has just been... confusing, he decides, before wondering if tough would be a better word.

The whole incident under the table had brought up a memory in his mind, and what happened under the table a couple minutes ago is uncomfortably similar to what happened there. Loki doesn't want to remember it, but of course it doesn't work that way. But it's not quite as realistic as his nightmares.

"Hey, come here." A servant says. Loki's just wandered into a courtyard. They're children; Loki's appearance is equivalent to a nine-year-old Midgardian and the servant's closer to fourteen-year-old, though they're both several centuries old. Loki keeps whispering to Hel, not even aware the servant's talking to him. "Hey, you!" The other boy calls in a loud, slightly obnoxious way. Loki snaps out of it, and looks at him worriedly. Loki can't recall seeing this servant before, so perhaps he was hired very recently.

"Come over here. I want to ask you something." Loki hesitates, but this boy hasn't done anything to hurt him yet. Disobeying will probably make things worse, anyways. Nobody else has to answer to servants, Loki's noticed, but nobody cares if the servants take out their frustrations on him. Besides, he might be below servants anyways- he's not sure, and it's sort of confusing. Hel whispers to be careful, but Loki already knows that. He cautiously tiptoes towards the other boy, Fenrir prowling by his side, the beginnings of a low growl forming in his throat. Too bad he can't actually feel the wolf, or see him.

"Can you do some magic for me?" The young servant asks in a hushed voice, shuffling his feet nervously. Loki stares at him, his mind totally blanking on what to say. Everyone hates magic. He pinches himself, but isn't in a dream. Is he in some weird opposite world or something? What in the Nine Realms is going on?

"Come on, show me something. Make another one of you!" He urges, smiling encouragingly, not seeming nervous at all now. Loki's only getting more nervous, though, and he starts wringing his hands together. Why is this guy being so weird?

"Are you gonna hit me?" Loki asks suspiciously. That's what always happens when he does magic in front of people, and they often make fun of him too.

"No, no! I'm not going to hit you." The servant assures him. He leans forward and conspiratorially
whispers "Between you and me, I like your magic."

Loki doesn't think he heard that right, but the boy repeats that he likes it. "You know, I wish I could do that stuff," The servant says, looking at Loki in what seems like awe. Loki's returning the look.

"Really?" Loki looks at him hopefully. Could someone really like it- or him for that matter? Could he actually have a friend that he could see, that other people could see, that he won't get hit for talking to?

"Yeah! Can you show me some, please?" Loki thinks he hears a snicker somewhere, and he cocks his head to the side. Not hearing anything else, he decides he'd imagined it. The servant continues enthusiastically "Make an illusion!"

Loki stares at him for a whole minute, but he just smiles encouragingly and asks Loki to do it a couple more times. Eventually, Loki smiles too. He likes this boy.

Loki hesitates, but the servant eggs him on. Loki takes a deep breath. Is he going to do this? This boy's been nothing but kind to him. So yes, he decides, he is. Nobody else is around, so he's safe.

Loki frowns in concentration. He almost never does magic on purpose, so he's honestly not even really sure how to do it. Wiggling his hands, he focuses on seeing another Loki beside him, and eventually one shimmers into sight.

"Wow! Can you teach me?" The servant asks, excited. Loki smiles a bit in response. "Want to be friends?" Loki smiles even more.

"The idiot fell for it!" someone laughs, and Loki recognizes the voice as Fandral. He flinches as Fandral, Volstagg and Hogun emerge from where they'd been hiding in another entrance/exit in the courtyard, and Hogun mutters something to the servant about doing a nice job.

"Where's Thor?" Loki asks, worried. Is he hiding somewhere to ambush him? Loki vaguely wonders why those three are even here. Don't they have warrior training or something? Although why they're here doesn't matter. The main problem is that they are here.

"He's off performing some prince duties, but he sends his regards and really wishes he were here." Volstagg answers. Loki has no idea if that's the truth or not, but the second part makes his stomach churn.

Loki approaches the servant who'd been so nice to him, hoping he'll back him up, but he sneers. "Get away from me!" The servant shoves him away and Loki's face crumples. What?!?

"I knew he'd fall for it. He's an idiot! His brain's messed up." Fandral continues viciously. Loki starts to cry. He's panicked about what's going on and he has no idea what's going on. One second, he'd been with that nice servant who seemed to like him, and now there's this. It's like reading a section in a book and suddenly flipping forward several pages and starting to read there, but having no idea what's happening.

"Stop crying!" Volstagg says, shoving him. Loki tries to stop, but only cries harder."Nobody's ever going to like you if you act like a baby."

"Nobody's ever going to like you anyways, or your magic! I can't believe you thought he did!" Fandral crows. Loki, propelled from the force of Volstagg's shove, has collided into the servant, who also shoves him away again.

"Monsters don't deserve friends!" Someone says, but Loki's not even sure who it is as the blows
Loki ends up curled into a tight quivering ball as he remembers this, but eventually his body stills and his thoughts shift back to today.

Tony hadn't abandoned him at that place they'd gone to, which was really relieving. Loki had been really worried about that but apparently his worries were unfounded. He'd thought life had gone back to normal- actually, it had... until he'd done magic again, that is.

Loki should have known that if Tony wasn't going to ditch him, he'd start tormenting him eventually. But he hadn't expected it to be this soon. Under the table, Tony had said he wasn't in trouble... but then he'd said nothing was wrong with magic, sort of like that servant.

Loki had eventually worked out what had happened with the servant. He'd been acting, only pretending to like his magic. He'd probably been roped into the whole ordeal by Thor, though Loki kind of doubts that Thor planned the thing. Thor was never really one for planning. They'd certainly picked a good actor, or maybe he'd just fallen for it because he's stupid. Hel had been outraged after that incident, going on about every nasty thing she would do to them when they fell into her clutches. While Thor hadn't been there, he had teased Loki about it afterwards.

Tony had been taunting him, too. It was definitely taunting, Loki thinks, because his voice hadn't sounded serious, and besides, there's no way Tony actually wants freakish magic. Then Tony had seemed really annoyed and Loki had fled.

Loki's whispering all of this to Simba. Without planning to, he also imagines that Fenrir, Sleipnir, Hel and Jormungand are there listening too, probably because they'd been brought up to the front of his mind recently (especially after talking to Dr. Car-something just a couple hours ago, if that). They'd always listened to him when he was sad, kind of like how Simba does now. Though he's mainly whispering to Simba right now, since he's the only one he can actually see and touch. Besides, he'd gotten in trouble talking to them but not Simba, although it's not like anyone's around to see him.

Earlier today, he'd been so worried Tony was going to ditch him, but now he's worried because this seems a lot more like Asgard than it used to. It's not even close to as bad as Asgard, but what happened under the table certainly started it off in that direction- and once someone starts going that direction, they never go back. He really hopes Tony doesn't start beating him, but he's already started taunting him and being annoyed, so it's only a matter of time before the beatings start too. Is Tony even his friend anymore? Probably not, considering what the man had just done. Tony had been angry at him under the table and tried to drag him out. Is his time of having Tony be nice to him up already?

Loki's view of the floor and the bottom part of that window-wall combo blurs as he starts to cry.

He's not sure how long it takes, but eventually he cries himself out. Now that he's no longer crying, he realizes that his body is rather cramped so he crawls out from under his bed. He sits on the bed for a bit, hugging Simba, but then starts pacing back and forth restlessly. It's starting to get sort of dark, but the huge window-wall still lets enough light in.

There's a knock on the door and he hears Tony ask "Loki?" His voice sounds slightly slurred and Loki's not sure whether or not it's due to the door.

"What?" Loki's sort of nervous. Is Tony here to make fun of him some more or escalate things further?
"Mind if I come in? Your door's still locked." Loki's not sure what to say to that. When had it even been locked in the first place? Part of him wants to say he doesn't want Tony to come in, because it would be harder for Tony to torment him through a door, but at the same time, not letting him in would just make him angrier and make things worse later. Though Tony, oddly, doesn't sound annoyed or angry now. Although some people in Asgard would apparently be angry when Loki would've sworn they weren't because they weren't acting angry.

Loki cautiously unlocks the door, scurrying to the other side of the room as Tony opens it. He walks in carrying a plate. "I brought pizza." He explains, his voice still just a tiny bit slurred as he offers it to Loki, though he's using that quiet, reassuring tone that Loki likes. Loki frowns, confused, but he's rather hungry. It smells really good. He sets Simba on the bed, sits next to him, and cautiously takes a bite. His eyes close and he bounces up and down from his spot on the bed, humming in appreciation. He grins. This is really good.

"So... I take it you like it?" Tony asks, smirking slightly. Loki's still trying to work out what's going on, because Tony had been mad and making fun of him under the table but now he's being nice again. Tony's eyes don't seem mean right now, either. Loki nods, wondering where this is going. "If you want, Jarvis can start the kettle again and you can have your tea." Loki shrugs and there's a brief period of silence.

"I guess I kind of snapped at you back there, and.." Tony stops, muttering that he's not good at this type of thing. There's a bit of a pause, and then he continues "... and, well... Well, I didn't mean to. And you don't have a thick skull."

Loki looks up at him in surprise. Nobody in Asgard ever said anything like that. But Tony was starting to act like Asgardians under the table. Tony hates him now, right?

"In case you didn't hear me earlier, you're not going to get in trouble for doing... that stuff here. Like changing teapots. I actually think it's really neat and I wouldn't mind seeing more of-"

"Stop!" Loki exclaims and for a second he doesn't even realize he was the one who said it. Then it's too quiet, and Loki starts fidgeting anxiously. It's too much like that servant. Tony's probably going to keep tormenting him, mockingly saying that magic isn't bad when Loki knows it is. Maybe Tony will even hit him.

"Stop what?" Tony replies, though Loki's not sure if he's really asking or not. Sometimes people don't want an answer when they ask a question. It takes a bit for Loki to remember the word for that, which he'd learned in a book- rhetorical.

Loki snaps out of those thoughts, realizing he'd just stepped into dangerous territory, especially with the somewhat forceful tone he'd used. A lot of people in Asgard hated when he told them what to do in that tone, and then they'd get mad at him and hurt him more. When he was very young, he sometimes lost his temper at his tormentors and lashed out, and they always put him in his place. Loki doesn't want Tony to get angrier at him- he'd already been angry under the table- so Loki ducks his head and mutters "Sorry."

"Whoa, hang on, what are you apologizing for? You didn't do anything." Tony protests, and Loki stares at him confused. This isn't what Tony's supposed to be doing- he's supposed to blame him because that's what makes sense. Loki knows he's always to blame. Why is Tony being so weird? Loki stays silent, not knowing what to say. "Seriously, Snoopy, you have nothing to apologize for."

Tony's looking at him expectantly, so Loki nods even though he has no idea what Tony's talking about. Tony just stares at him and says "I don't hate you, remember?" But he does, right?
"But you were like _them!_" Loki says. Tony looks confused for a brief second before he seems to understand Loki meant Asgardians in general. To Loki's great worry, his expression darkens.

"I'm nothing like them." Tony says in a tone that makes Loki back away from him. Tony's in between him and the bed and Loki doesn't think he can get through Tony to go under there, so he backs into a corner instead, hugging Simba and holding his pizza in one hand.

"But you taunted me under the table..." Loki mutters without thinking, and instantly regrets it, taking a big bite of pizza to stop himself from saying anything else. Complaining to people who hurt him always makes things worse. He flinches and glances at Tony, expecting the anger to flare up again. Instead, Tony looks shocked and asks when he was taunting him. As if he doesn't know! He was being like that boy! That's probably a rhetorical question. But Tony asks it again, rather firmly, and Loki realizes he seriously wants an answer. He doesn't make eye contact and instead stares at his pizza when he mumbles an answer. "You were all angry-like, and-"

Tony cuts him off. "I wasn't angry. Okay, yeah, I was sort of annoyed, but it wasn't even really at you." Loki frowns. Wait, what? What else would cause Tony's annoyance? Tony keeps going on and confusing him more. "Even if I do get annoyed or angry at you sometime, I'm not going to start treating you like how they did back in that messed-up viking land. What they did to you was _wrong_, got it? And I don't hate you, remember? I was annoyed for a bit, but overall I still like you."

Loki can't fathom why Tony likes him, why he's been so nice despite everything. He's a magic-using monster. He doesn't deserve everything Tony's done. Tony keeps going "I'm not going to start hating you for having special powers."

Loki's never heard that before. The few people in Asgard who didn't know about his secrets at first never lasted long. They'd find out and start harassing him—admittedly for good reason—and then there was no turning back. "But you said you wanted to..."

"That I wanted to what? Change stuff completely like that? Hell, yeah. That would be awesome!" No! Loki winces. He's doing it again! He can't actually be serious. He's tricking him, like that boy. As if reading his mind, Tony says "I'm not kidding. I think doing that would be really cool. I don't get why you don't. I mean, now you have Mrs. Potts and Chip." His expression is serious as Loki ponders over that. He _does_ like that they now have Mrs. Potts and Chip, but the way they got them was bad. Tony repeats, a bit more firmly, that he's not kidding about liking it, and Loki has to admit that it doesn't seem like he is. But it hadn't seemed like that servant had been kidding.

"Promise you're not lying?" Loki asks quietly.

Tony smirks slightly and holds out his hand with only his pinky finger extended. "Pinky promise." Loki cocks his head to the side. This must be some weird Midgardian thing. He hesitantly copies it and Tony interlocks their pinkies. Still smirking, Tony says "There, now you know I have to keep my word."

After staring at him for a minute, Loki hasn't detected any hint that he's lying. Tony's still smirking, but the smirk is the one he often uses, and it's not exactly mean. So Tony actually wants to be able to do stuff like that? Loki has no clue why Tony would want to be a freak. Maybe Tony's crazy, but Loki knows that magic is bad.

"You want to be a freak?" Loki asks incredulously. It seems like that's what Tony just said, even if it's completely ludicrous. "Are you crazy?" Loki asks innocently as an afterthought. Really, insanity is the only reason Loki can think of for Tony thinking that way. Loki hopes that question doesn't make Tony mad. A lot of people in Asgard voiced the opinion that _he_ was crazy, and it's
"Jury's out." Tony says. Loki stares at him, having no idea what that means. Tony rolls his eyes, smirking slightly. "There's a fair chance I am." Loki's not surprised by that answer, actually. It makes sense Tony would be crazy if he likes him. No sane person would like someone like him, after all. Loki knows that, but at the same time it sort of hurts that only people who aren't in their right mind would like him. This reminder of that doesn't help. That means Jarvis, Dum-E, Bruce and Hulk are probably crazy too.

Then Tony's expression becomes serious. "Loki, you are not a freak. I know you were probably told otherwise a million times, but that's wrong. They were wrong."

Tony's said some things about Asgardians being wrong before, but that's such a bizarre and foreign idea. Why does Tony keep telling him the opposite of everything he knows? Even though it's not true, hearing Tony say that makes a warm, happy feeling form in Loki's chest. For a bit, he imagines what it would be like if they were true.

"Genie did... stuff, like you, and he wasn't a freak." Tony says. But Genie was a freak. He was blue and did magic, he just wasn't hated for some bizarre reason. As if reading his mind, Tony repeats "Genie wasn't a freak. He's pretty awesome, actually."

Then Tony asks, while tapping his arc reactor through his shirt "Do you think I'm a freak?" Loki frantically shakes his head no. Tony's not a freak!

"Yeah, well, having this thing in your chest isn't exactly normal." Tony mutters, tapping his arc reactor again and it makes a slight clanging noise. Loki frowns. Okay, it's not normal, but that doesn't make Tony a freak. Loki actually likes Tony's arc reactor.

"How about Bruce and Hulk? Are they freaks?" Loki considers this a bit longer than he had for whether Tony was a freak. No, he decides soon after. Bruce and Hulk aren't freaks, and Hulk's not even a bad monster. "A lot of people think turning into a big green guy makes Bruce a freak, but it doesn't, right?" Loki nods, even though he thinks that might've been rhetorical. "So how are you any different?"

Loki glances away. He just is. It's like comparing those car things and the flying carpet in Aladdin. A couple minutes pass and Loki can't bring himself to speak. He glances back at Tony.

Tony's looking at him with disappointment. Loki hates it, so he quickly shifts his gaze away again and doesn't look back.

"I haven't convinced you, have I?" Tony asks quietly, and Loki's almost positive that one's rhetorical. Tony sighs.

"How about this at least?" Tony starts. "From now on, no hiding under beds or tables."

"Is that a rule?" Loki asks. It doesn't sound like such a bad one.

Tony hesitates. "I don't know, but you don't need to do that, okay?" That's basically a yes, Loki thinks.

"I'm not going to beat you." Tony waits a bit and reiterates. "I'm not going to hit you or anything. Got it?" Loki wants to believe that. He wants to believe everything Tony's just told him. But it's so hard, since it's the complete opposite of everything that makes sense.

Still... Tony hasn't hit him once, even though he's given him countless reasons to do far more than
hit him. Loki glances at Tony, who's once again looking at him seriously. He's done so many things that deserve full out beatings and Tony hasn't laid a hand on him, and has repeatedly said he won't. Maybe that part's true, at least. "You're not gonna hit me?" Loki asks, and Tony once again confirms it.

Loki cocks his head to the side and stares unseeingly at the wall until he remembers what he just learned. His vision focuses on Tony and hesitantly holds up his hand, pinky extended. "Pinky promise?"

Tony laughs and interlocks their pinkies. "Pinky promise."

Tony groans as the latest test results come back inconclusive. Science can't fail him now, he thinks, although honestly it's doing just that.

Over the course of the morning, Tony's run Mrs. Potts and Chip through a bunch of different machines in his lab. He had barely been able to hold back his curiosity enough to not run tests on Loki's powers before, but after yesterday's incident he can't just sit around wondering anymore. He's had a hard time focusing on the Hulkbuster armor while waiting for the results from the various instruments he's used on the teapot and teacup.

He's found absolutely nothing. He'd though he would find at least some trace of that energy that's around Loki's hands, but there hadn't been any hints of electricity or radiation. Perhaps there had been earlier but if so, it's worn off by now. He really should have tested them earlier. For all intents and purposes, he might have been testing any of the other cups he owns. There's nothing to suggest the teapot and teacup were ever different than they are now.

Measuring Loki would undoubtedly be better since he's the source of all this stuff, but Tony doubts Loki would agree to it. Tony sends Bruce an email telling him to come over sometime, since Bruce would probably be just as curious as he is. Having someone to bounce ideas off of would be nice, too.

He's still not sure how to get Loki to be more comfortable about his powers. He's also unsure about what sort of effect their talk in the god's room yesterday had, since Loki hasn't had an incident yet. He'd had a nightmare last night, with the usual currently-inexplicable occurrences, but there's no way to determine which parts of his reaction were because of the nightmare and which were because he'd used his powers.

As horrible as it sounds, Tony actually sort of wants Loki to have an incident soon, so he can see if their talk had any effect. Plus, he's really curious about Loki's powers.

He looks over at the god, who's sprawled on the hard lab floor reading a *Calvin and Hobbes* book and snuggling with Simba, who's back in his Iron Man suit. That really can't be comfortable, Tony thinks, but Loki doesn't seem to care. Every so often, Loki will scoot across the floor, and at one point he finds something so funny that he laughs for three minutes straight. Tony can't decide if that's impressive or worrying.

Tony had known he owned the whole *Calvin and Hobbes* collection, but if it wasn't for Jarvis he would have never been able to find it. Tony thinks it might even rival *Peanuts* for the god, which is saying something because he has a bunch of drawings of *Peanuts* characters on his bedroom wall (mixed in with even more drawings of Disney characters). Plus he seems to really like being called Snoopy, and his Snoopy shirt- which he's wearing now- is by far his favorite.

Of course, now that Tony's actually waiting for an incident to occur, it's taking forever. He's been
watching the whole morning and there's been nothing.

"Sir, a package arrived. Should I send it down?" Jarvis says smoothly. "It's the one you ordered yesterday." Tony grins.

The box arrives in the elevator, and Tony sends Dum-E to fetch it. Dum-E hands it to him with a cheerful beep and rolls over to Loki. "Hey, Snoopy, come over here." Tony says. It takes a bit to draw Loki's attention away from the book, but then he comes over, Dum-E's claw in his left hand and one of Simba's armored legs in his right.

Tony thrusts the box towards him. "I know it's not wrapped or anything, but happy early birthday. Or belated birthday, I don't know. When is your birthday anyways?" Loki just shrugs. "Wait, you don't know when your birthday is?!" He nods. Tony frowns, not liking where this is going. Who doesn't know their birthday? "They have birthdays in Asgard, right?"

Loki just nods again and doesn't move to take the box. "It's a gift, Snoopy. Take it."

"For me?" Loki asks in a hushed tone. Tony nods, surprised that he doesn't even feel an urge to roll his eyes. He grabs a Sharpie and scribbles To Loki, From Tony on the top, and adds a horrible drawing of an Iron Man mask- hey, he's no artist to begin with, and he'd rushed the thing. He offers the box to Loki again.

"There, it even says it's for you." Loki hugs Simba to his body with his arm and looks between Tony and the label in shock. Loki cautiously reaches out for the box, as if expecting Tony to pull it away. Tony doesn't, of course. He's not that mean.

When the box is in his hands, Loki sits down on the floor with Simba in his lap. Loki's face is so awed at the prospect of getting a gift that Tony feels like showering him with even more. "I've never gotten a gift before..." Loki murmurs.

"What about Simba? He was a gift." Tony says, though Loki just answers that he'd found Simba. Tony decides not to point out that since he'd paid for Simba, the lion's technically a gift no matter who found him. The clothes he'd bought the god don't really count as gifts since they're necessities, so Tony doesn't mention them.

Loki slowly opens the box and pulls out the first item, which happens to be the Black Widow action figure. He reads the little blurb about her written on the back of the box aloud, but doesn't react as much as Tony thought he would. Instead, he just asks "That's Natasha, right?" Tony nods.

This process repeats with Captain America and Hawkeye. When he pulls out the Hulk figure, though, Loki gives a small excited squeal of "Hulk-y!" He looks at that one considerably longer than the others and sets it right next to him.

Then, Loki looks in the box again and gives a cry of "No!" The box skids across the floor without him touching it, green energy now around his hands. Tony knows Jarvis has been scanning the room with everything at his disposal, so he has to have picked up on it. Though Jarvis hasn't found any explanation for any of the other incidents, either.

Tony looks down to see the Thor toy lying there innocently in its own box. Tony reaches down and pulls it out, skimming the blurb on the back. He hadn't thought about Loki's reaction to Thor when he'd instructed Jarvis to order the lot yesterday.

Loki definitely knows he's used his powers, and to Tony's dismay, he curls into a ball. But he doesn't crawl under the nearest table, which is only a couple feet away. Tony's actually rather
surprised that Loki listened to the thing about not crawling under them. He goes to calm the god down and notices something else. Loki's not covering his head to shield it, though that might be because he's hugging Simba. Tony can't actually remember if Loki shielded his head the last time he freaked out. He asks Jarvis, and Jarvis answers that Loki had shielded his head last time. Tony hopes this isn't just a coincidence.

Tony thinks it might take a bit less time to calm him down, but he's not sure about that. It could be wishful thinking. It's a small step, smaller than Tony would have liked, but at least it's in the right direction. Tony knows the rest of the world doesn't operate by his "run before you can walk" philosophy, though he wishes it did.

Once Loki's calmed down, he looks over at Tony, his eyes sort of focused on him. "Hi." Loki says, as if Tony just walked in.

"Hey," Tony says, a little confused, before glancing in the box and exclaiming "You missed the best part!" He pushes the big box towards Loki, but Loki doesn't look inside, perhaps thinking it's still Thor in there. So Tony reaches in and pulls out the Iron Man toy. Loki grins at it and lets out a rather loud squeal, snatching it out of Tony's hands and turning the box over in his hands.

Tony removes the figures from their individual boxes since Loki doesn't make any move to. Loki insists on keeping all the boxes, and for a bit he starts stacking them like blocks and knocking them over.

Tony glances over the toys for a bit while Loki's occupied with the boxes. The Captain America one is a lot like the numerous Captain America toys Tony had owned growing up, though Tony feels no fondness remembering that, just bitter thoughts about how he never even came close to the Captain in his dad's eyes. Tony shakes his head. Why is he even thinking about that?

He glances back at his friend. Loki starts experimenting with the toys and their poseable limbs. He hugs the Hulk one and the iron Man one, but then his hand hovers over the Iron Man one as if he's about to rip his head off.

"Hey, don't decapitate me." Tony says, only half teasing. Loki just stares at him for a bit.

"He's not you." Loki says seriously. "You're you. He's a toy you. A toy Tony Stark." As an afterthought, Loki adds "He's Toy Stark!" He giggles and singsongs Toy Stark to himself.

"He needs your face, though." Loki says. Loki's one of the few people who prefers Tony over Iron Man, and Tony would be lying if he said that didn't make him feel good.

"You can change it." Tony says nonchalantly. This next part is rather risky "Like a teacup." If Loki was able to totally change a teapot and teacup into Mrs. Potts and Chip, he has to be able to change that toy's head, Tony figures. Loki freezes with a deer-in-the-headlights look and starts to curl into a ball, but Tony stops him. Loki slowly relaxes and acts like he hadn't heard what Tony had said.

"Where's Bruce?" Loki asks, and Tony thinks he's talking about the real Bruce at first, until Loki gestures at the other toys. Tony explains that they don't make Bruce Banner action figures, but that they can make one themselves. This time, he doesn't explicitly reference the Mrs. Potts and Chip incident. Technically, they could do it with a 3D printer.

Loki spends a large portion of the afternoon playing with the Avengers figures. At some points, he seems to be reenacting his interactions with them, using Simba to represent himself.

Loki casts a furtive glances at the Thor figure over several hours. He eventually goes over to the
table it's on and looks down at it, clearly not too fondly. He picks it up by its cape in between two fingers, the way someone would hold a smelly sock. He just looks at it hanging from his hand for a bit and then drops it back on the table.

To be honest, Tony had been sort of hoping Loki might replace carrying around Simba with perhaps the Iron Man one, but that certainly isn't happening. Loki actually starts carrying around the Hulk toy and the Iron Man one (which Loki has actually named *Toy Stark*) with Simba. It makes it so his hands aren't really free to do anything, though.

Tony gets another email from Pepper with more information about that multi-day conference he wants to get out of, as well as a long explanation about all the things they need to talk about regarding the company. Tony sighs and asks if she'll stop by tonight since there's way too much to email about, and he adds a note at the bottom saying that Loki will probably enjoy seeing her again.
Tony breaks a leg. Literally

Tony's pretty sure they don't have Lo Mein noodles in Asgard as he watches Loki struggle to use chopsticks- actually, they might not have any type of noodle there. He remembers Thor having, as Tony had quipped, some "technical difficulties" with something so simple, and now that he thinks about it, he remembers Thor saying they had "no such food in the great realm of Asgard."

As always, they're eating takeout food for dinner since Tony hates cooking. Loki is still having no success with chopsticks, despite Tony spending over five minutes teaching him. Loki gives up with the chopsticks after minutes of frustration and, for some inexplicable reason, stuffs them into the drawstring bag hanging from his chair.

Tony had dug out said drawstring bag for Loki to put his Avengers toys in. It's a green one, which Loki had delighted in because it's his favorite color. The god had been fascinated with the way the elastic part at the top opens and closes. Currently, the Hulk toy- Hulk-y, according to Loki, though that's what he calls the real Hulk now- and "Toy Stark" are sticking out of the small zippered pocket on the front of the bag while the others are hidden in the main pocket.

Loki's now glaring at his dinner as if it's supposed to wind itself around his fork. Tony half wonders what would happen if it actually did just that, and it's really weird that he doesn't think he'd be particularly shocked if it happened. Loki's moved other stuff with his powers after all.

The noodles remain still, and Tony facepalms when Loki forgoes silverware entirely, dipping his head down to the plate end trying to eat using only his mouth. He doesn't seem to have a shred of self-consciousness as he starts eating like an animal. Tony's not particularly concerned with manners, but this is ridiculous. "Okay, I know I call you Snoopy, but you're not a dog."

"I know that." Loki replies matter-of-factly, as if Tony is being stupid for bringing it up. Tony pushes Loki's fork pointedly towards him, but Loki just scowls at it.

Loki has Chip and Mrs. Potts in front of him on the table and is using them as an actual teapot and teacup. Ignoring the fork, he sips chamomile tea from Chip with surprising poise for someone who'd just practically shoved his face into Lo Mein. "Just think," Tony says casually, "Instead of having Mrs. Potts and Chip, you could be using that boring plain teapot and teacup."

Loki looks startled, but he says, in a soft voice as if he expects to be rebuked "I like them." At least he seems to like the outcome of that incident using his powers.

"They're pretty neat," Tony agrees, mostly just to show Loki he doesn't hate his powers. "Just don't go turning everything I own into Disney stuff, okay?" As soon as that leaves his mouth, Tony realizes it could easily be interpreted as him telling Loki not to use his powers.

"Not that you can't change stuff." Tony adds hastily. "I think that's really cool. If you wanted to, could you, say, make your Iron Man toy look like me?" Tony asks, hoping Loki doesn't freak out. Maybe if he continues to like the result of his powers, he'll start to like the powers themselves
more. He clearly likes Mrs. Potts and Chip, even if he doesn't like how he's made them. Loki has been lamenting about the absence of Tony or Bruce action figures since he received the lot earlier today. Maybe he can convince Loki that it would be okay to use his powers to change them...

Loki's eyes are unfocused but darting around nervously and he's fidgeting around in his chair, rocking back and forth slightly and twisting his fingers together. He's humming something, and it seems like he's trying to calm himself down. Tony's not sure how well it's working. Maybe he'd totally shut down if he wasn't doing that, but he's certainly not the picture of calm right now. Eventually, Loki speaks.

"You can't take the metal away to show the him inside. Nope, nope, nope! You can't." Loki says, and, after working out what that's supposed to even mean, Tony rolls his eyes. Of course not, it's a plastic toy with no removable parts. That seemed like a slightly strange way to put it, although Loki's nervousness might be affecting that.

Loki continues to prattle nervously. "It's all one piece and you can't take it off! He's different from you and Simba, his suit's fake but yours are real and so's Simba's..." Loki pulls Simba- still clad in his Iron Man armor- off the table and hugs him before continuing to ramble on. Tony wonders if he's rambling to avoid answering the question. "The real suits have the glowy arc reactors and they're harder and colder, but cold's good. I like cold. Except from inside. It's not good inside!"

Tony puzzles over that for a couple seconds. Of course- Frost Giants are naturally cold, which is probably why Loki's body temperature has temporarily dropped numerous times. He's almost positive Loki's referring to being a Jotun. "There's nothing wrong with... 'cold inside.' It's not bad. Capiche?" Tony says firmly, surprised when Loki's gaze sharpens slightly but otherwise he doesn't respond.

Tony sighs before switching topics. "So could you make him look like me?"

Loki fidgets anxiously, and his eyes return to their usual far-away look. Half a minute passes, and he seems to calm down a tiny bit and asks "With paint?" Tony knows that Loki knows that he meant Loki's powers, and he gives Loki a look that says that's not what he meant. Besides, just painting over them wouldn't really work, since they'd be the wrong shapes and probably look hideous.

"With paint." Loki decides, and Tony's not sure if he's ignoring his that's-not-what-I-meant look or if he didn't notice it at all. Tony's not sure if he should stress that he meant using his powers or not, but Loki continues talking before he's decided.

"Well, I'd have to paint him so he had black hair and brown eyes and a black beard, but not a big thick one." Loki mimes drawing a goatee like Tony's over his own face with his fingers, and as he brings his hands back down to his lap, green energy starts forming around them. Loki's eyes are currently closed, as if he's imagining Tony's face despite it being right in front of him, so Tony doesn't think he's noticed the energy. "And he'd have a glowy arc reactor and clothes like what you're wearing now."

"You wouldn't want me without clothes?" Tony jokes, looking pointedly only at Loki to avoid seeing if this is becoming another transforming episode, but Loki just stares at him and repeats that Toy Stark isn't the same as him. Hoping he's being inconspicuous, Tony stops staring at Loki and glances at the drawstring bag.

He makes sure to not react when he sees the Tony Stark action figure sticking out next to the Hulk toy. That's sort of what he'd been going for, and he'd been expecting it when seeing the green energy around the god's hands. Although it seems like Loki's diversion of talking about painting
them hadn't really worked, since the shape of the toy had changed, just like Mrs. Potts and Chip.

"So what would it look like if Hulk turned into Bruce?" It seems when Loki's talking about the change, that's when it happens. At least, that's how it seemed to work with Mrs. Potts and Chip, and now Toy Stark.

"He shrinks and he's not green and he has brown hair and brown eyes and he wears more than just pants, but Hulk-y just wears purple pants." Loki nods and then says "You saw him do it." Loki's hands are under the table now, so Tony can't see if they have the green energy, but he suspects they do.

"Yeah, I've seen Bruce and Hulk transform," Tony says as he casts a surreptitious glance at Loki's backpack again. The Hulk toy remains unchanged, though. Tony frowns, wondering why that is, but not wanting to draw Loki's attention to the use of his powers before both toys are changed.

"So would that happen if your toy Hulk could morph into Bruce?" Loki doesn't answer, and Tony sighs and gets up to get another glass of beer. He glances at the bag again, and there's a Bruce toy now. Weird... Maybe it had just taken a bit to transform?

Tony leaves the kitchen and heads towards the bar to get his beer. A hand brushes his shoulder, and he glances back and sees that Loki's following him, though the god hadn't made a sound on his bare feet. Over his shoulder, Tony says "You don't need to follow me, Snoopy. I'm going to be right baAAH-!"

His sentence ends in an involuntary shout of surprise as his foot tilts and his ankle bends in a way that sends a flare of pain to his brain. His right foot had been half over the edge of one of the Hulk-induced holes in the floor, which still haven't been fully patched up. Hopefully the snapping sound he thinks he hears is just his imagination, but he's not sure it is.

Of course, he loses his balance, and he starts to let loose a very colorful string of obscenities. Time seems to slow down as he falls towards the gaping hole in the floor. He watches the glass he'd been holding fall through that hole and the hole in the floor below this one. It shatters when it hits the floor two stories down. Tony's no stranger to pain, but this is going to hurt like hell when he joins that glass down there, probably even landing on the broken pieces...

Suddenly, he's hit by an invisible force and he goes flying back a bit. Wait... he's not supposed to be moving horizontally. He's falling through a hole, falling down, right? He's very disoriented at the moment.

He doesn't really know what's going on or which way he's moving any more, but before he can figure out, his body hits something hard and rolls from the momentum, and another wave of pain comes from his ankle.

Once he stops, he lays there with his eyes closed, stunned, and for a bit he's unaware of his surroundings. The pain in his ankle is no longer taking up all of his attention.

He starts trying to assess the damage to his body. *Something's* happened to his right ankle, though he doesn't know if it's sprained or broken. Tony's no stranger to pain, and he's been through way worse than this, but it still hurts like heck. In addition to whatever's up with his ankle, he'd gotten bruised form his introduction to the ground, though he's surprised falling down two stories didn't make the rest of his body hurt more.

For a genius, he can be really stupid, Tony thinks. Why on earth hadn't he been looking at where he was going when there's still a freaking hole in the floor? Why isn't there some kind of barrier
around the hole to prevent this?

Wow. His thoughts are starting to sound like Pepper. That can't be good. As for the barrier thing, they'd done a really good job of avoiding the hole up until now, and it's sort of too late since what a barrier would prevent has now already happened.

Two other sensations appear- a hand running through his hair and a voice singing softly.

"The silver stallion gallops away

His herd follows him, and they start to neigh..."

Tony frowns in confusion, and his frown deepens when hair starts brushing across his face. Opening his eyes, he sees a familiar, albeit upside-down pair of wide, slightly glazed green eyes staring at him from mere inches above his own. Tony is not startled, thank you very much, though he's very glad when Loki sits up and stops invading his personal bubble. Plus the hair brushing against his face was really irritating, Tony thinks as Loki continues singing.

"Their hoofs beat to the stars and moon above

Just follow them to find the one you love."

"Do you feel better?" Loki asks after a bit. He stares down at Tony and his eyes are actually slightly more focused than usual.

"Not really." Tony replies somewhat testily "Singing doesn't help."

"It helped me." Loki mutters, though Tony's not sure if Loki's actually speaking to him or not. It sort of sounds like he's talking to himself, or Simba- though those are the same thing, really. "When I was like that." Like what, Tony wonders. Hurt in general or hurt like this specifically?

Loki starts to reach towards Tony's ankle and Tony snaps "Don't touch me!" in a voice that's low and dangerous, a bit more so than he intended. Loki backs up with a frightened look on his face. Tony hears the elevator door open and a robotic beep. Jarvis had undoubtedly sent Dum-E up, and Loki grins in the robot's direction.

Tony props himself up on his elbows and looks around. He's still on the same floor. He hadn't fallen through the hole after all. That invisible force had knocked him away from the hole, to a sturdy (but really hard) patch of the floor. He sees Dum-E roll into the kitchen.

It was Loki who'd gotten him out of the way, he realizes. The invisible force was probably a stronger version of what had pushed the box across the floor earlier today. That's the most reasonable explanation he can think of, even though Loki being able to do that isn't exactly reasonable. Tony's almost positive it was Loki's powers that saved him from that fall, since what else could it have been?

He needs to watch the footage from Jarvis later. Tony hadn't noticed if Loki had that green energy around his hands, because he'd been a bit preoccupied with staring down the hole he'd been about to fall into.

Loki's not freaking out about using his powers, though. Are they actually making progress, or does Loki not know he did it because he was too distracted by the events?

"Good thing you were there to prevent me from falling down two stories." Tony says, watching Loki to gauge his reaction. That sort of counts as thanking him, Tony thinks, and that's probably as
close as he's going to get. Tony's not too big on thanking people, or apologizing.

"You flew," Loki replies, frowning slightly. Tony can't tell if he really thinks that or if he's just trying to make it seem like he didn't use his powers. "You can do that. I've seen you." Loki sighs dreamily, gazing into the distance with eyes that are even glassier than normal, probably imagining what it would be like to fly.

Tony says that he can only fly with his Iron Man suits, but he doesn't think Loki hears him. Sighing, he moves to get up. He's somewhat surprised when Loki helps pull him to his feet. "Sir, you need to remain still. You shouldn't be putting weight on your ankle." Jarvis protests but Tony ignores him.

As soon as he puts weight on his right ankle, he winces and immediately shifts his weight to his left foot, though he's already started to collapse. Okay, maybe he really shouldn't be putting weight on it. Jarvis probably won't let him hear the end of that.

Quick as lightning, Loki's hands shoot out and grab him before lowering him gently to the floor. Tony had been hoping to go to the sofa, but it looks like that's not happening. At least Loki had caught him, though.

"Your ankle is most likely broken, and if you'd equip me with an X-ray scanner, I could tell you for sure." Jarvis sounds a little sulky about that. "I've notified Dr. Banner to come over immediately, and Miss Potts was already on her way up here when you fell. She's due to arrive in a minute."

Loki looks confused, and his eyes are a bit more focused then they were a minute ago, though they're still sort of glazed. "But she's already here." Tony doesn't even bother trying to work that out, but Pepper's not here yet.

"That's Mrs. Potts. By Miss Potts, I meant Virginia 'Pepper' Potts." Jarvis apparently got it, and a picture of a certain Disney teapot on the table flashes through Tony's head. Jarvis continues talking, informing Loki that Mrs. is for women who are married, whereas Miss is for unmarried women, though Loki doesn't give any indication if he's listening.

Dum-E rolls back out of the kitchen, clutching an ice pack in his claw. Rolling up to Tony, he presses it against Tony's uninjured leg hopefully. Tony takes it and presses it into his ankle, which is starting to swell.

Tony speaks up, because even a broken ankle won't shut him up for long. "You remember Pepper, right, Snoopy?" That question is sort of rhetorical. It hasn't even been three weeks since they've seen Pepper, and Loki's mentioned her since then. "She's the hot blonde."

"I remember her!" Loki says, sounding vaguely offended. "She was here on the first day and she gives really good hugs!" Loki nods and wriggles his body slightly before quickly adding, in a placating way as if Tony's offended "Don't worry. You give really great hugs too. But I didn't know that back then. She's really nice, right?" Tony nods, because there's really no denying that Pepper is nice.

A look of worry suddenly crosses Loki's face, and he asks "Does she still like me?" Tony tells him that there's no reason for Pepper not to like him, and he knows Loki's thinking of all the things he's believes are reasons to hate him.

Tony hears the elevator door open and Jarvis greets Pepper. "Good evening, Miss Potts. I trust you are well?"
"I'm great, Jarvis, thanks for asking." Pepper says sincerely. There's a bit of a pause and then "What happened to you, Tony?" She gives a long-suffering sigh and says in an exasperated voice "You did something stupid again, didn't you?"

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." Tony grumbles from the floor. "I was bored and decided it would be fun to smash my ankle with a hammer." Loki visibly tenses at that, and Tony doesn't like what that indicates. He seriously hopes Loki's not thinking about Thor and Mjolnir right now. He gives Loki's arm a reassuring squeeze, hoping the god's not going to have a flashback or panic attack right now. Loki leans slightly into the touch and, fortunately for both of them, relaxes. Tony looks back at Pepper. "Seriously, what do you think happened?! I fell."

"Why is there even a hole in your floor? Did you go crazy with your repulsers again?" Pepper asks as she helps Tony hobble to the sofa.

Tony gestures to the damage and says "This wasn't actually my fault. Bruce Hulked-out twice in less than an hour. Anyways, I went in, all badass and took him on in just my Iron Man suit. I'm working a new suit to try to match his strength, and there really should be a Hulk-proof room somewhere in the tower for him to vent in. I don't know why I didn't have one built ages ago. I need to get started on that." Tony eventually stops rambling as he sits sideways on the sofa with his right leg propped up on the armrest, letting out a little sigh and relaxing a bit.

Pepper looks like she's going to start her usual lecture about how reckless, self-destructive and stupid he was. Tony's heard that talk way too many times. Although he'd agree with her this time. Not looking where he was going was just plain stupid. But she wasn't even here and she doesn't need to know about that.

Thankfully, Loki chooses this moment to speak up. Pepper's attention switches from Tony to Loki so at least as of right now she's not launching into her tirade. "Pepper!" Loki grins, and approaches her. "At first I thought Jarvis meant Mrs. Potts, but Tony and Jarvis said it meant you. Are you related to her? 'Cause her surname's Potts and so's yours, so that means you're related, right?" As an afterthought, he adds "Have you ever been a teapot?"

Pepper looks very confused, not that Tony can really blame her. He's sort of tempted to not tell her what Loki's talking about just to see how far this goes, but that's ruined when Loki starts talking about Belle and the Beast, and she gets that he's referencing Beauty and the Beast. "No, it's just a coincidence that we're both named Potts. A lot of people share the same last names." She explains, and Loki looks rather disappointed "Wait... is that Simba in an Iron Man suit?"

Loki giggles and nods, bouncing on his toes and hugging Simba lovingly. "Yeah! I found him and made him a suit, just like Tony's! Jarvis and Dum-E helped and Tony made the arc reactor and I love it! Tony got him for me, and he said he was a gift, even if I found him. He's like Hobbes, 'xcept he's a lion, and he likes to play with Nala and Timon and Pumbaa- and me! Simba and Hobbes are both big cats, but Hobbes is a... tig-ger? Yeah, that's it."

Loki barely even stops to breathe as he continues rambling on, and Tony's hoping he doesn't look nearly as confused as Pepper currently does. "Tony says I'm like Calvin, but I dunno. I like Linus, but I'm really a Loki, not a Linus or a Calvin or a Lucas, like Dr. Car-something called me. Did you know Tony calls me Snoopy a lot? He does, but I'm not a dog. Tony said that, too, but I already knew that... Tony's hurt right now, you know, and he said singing doesn't help."

Loki finally stops rambling, and Tony's glad it's over. No, that is not hypocritical, Tony tells himself, because who doesn't want to hear everything Tony Stark has to say? Tony wonders why it had taken all of that just to get to the subject of him being hurt, though.
Pepper says that they should probably splint his ankle, and Tony suggests using the lower-leg armor to one of his Iron Man suits. Eventually, he convinces her to go get one of his suit-briefcases, and she heads off to the lab, which she still has clearance to get into.

"Seriously, it's a good thing there was that-" Tony actually stops himself before he mentions Loki's powers, because the last thing he needs is Loki freaking out right now. He'd already gotten close after that comment about smashing ankles with hammers. Loki doesn't react at all to the sentence being incomplete and instead just looks at Tony's swollen ankle. Tony fends him off with his left leg when he starts to get too close and has to keep telling him to stay away from it. Loki seems morbidly fascinated by his injury.

Pepper returns with the suit-briefcase, as well as a pair of crutches she must have gotten from one of the tower's medical floors. She glances at the briefcase and asks "Is this even going to work? Doesn't it put on all your armor?"

"It doesn't have to." Tony shrugs as he swings around so he's sitting forward instead of sideways on the couch. Slowly, the briefcase puts the armor over his leg, and Tony grits his teeth and breathes sharply when it snaps shut around his swollen ankle. Loki, meanwhile, is inspecting the crutches curiously, seemingly having no idea what they're for. He just starts poking things- thankfully not Tony or Pepper- with the ends of them.

Over the next twenty minutes or so, Loki keeps drifting towards Tony's swollen ankle in a way that makes Tony very uneasy, and he has to keep fending the god off. For the moment, he sort of wishes Loki were somewhere else until this thing is resolved.

Tony tries to distract Loki, but the god's attention keeps drifting towards his ankle and his hand keeps jumping out in it's direction, like he can't stop himself. Okay, Loki's definitely going to have to be somewhere else. Pepper also tries distracting him, but Loki's eyes still keep jumping back to Tony's injured leg.

Bruce arrives and clearly tries to ignore the hole in the floor that the Hulk had made. He raises his eyebrows at Tony's armored leg and starts to lead Tony to the elevator to go down to one of the tower's medical floors. Loki tries to follow them, but Tony tells him to stay up here with Pepper. Loki pouts, but stops following them. It's a good thing they're going to be on separate floors, because he's still way too interested in Tony's armored- but still injured- leg.

Loki watches Bruce help Tony to the elevator, walking slowly as Tony tries to put no weight on his right leg. Tony's using those stick-like things to help walk, like they're two elongated arms that give him support. So that's what they're for.

Loki's not sure where Tony and Bruce are going, but both of them told him to stay with Pepper, and Jarvis assures them they're still in the tower. Loki relaxes considerably when he hears that.

He's not entirely sure what's going on. He knows something's up with Tony's ankle, and he'd heard Jarvis say something about it being broken. Loki has experience with broken bones of basically every type- limbs, ribs, hands, feet, even fingers and toes from when a guard had stepped on his bare feet and then stomped on his hands for good measure when he clutched his feet, but his broken bones weren't like Tony's.

Tony's was weird and swollen. In the twenty or thirty minutes it took for Bruce to get here, Tony's ankle had swelled up more and even discolored a bit, which is really strange. Sure, healing bones hurts, but it doesn't take very long, and they don't get worse like that. He hadn't been able to stop looking at it. Why wasn't it going away? What if something's wrong with Tony, and that's why he's...
Loki wanders into the kitchen, singing *A Whole New World* to himself, and sees Dum-E trying to put the food from dinner away. Loki hadn't liked that food as much as some of the other things he's eaten here. He grins at his friend and goes to help, though he's not sure why they're putting it in that cold box thing. Pepper follows him in.

"What's wrong with Tony?" He asks worriedly.

"He just hurt his ankle." Pepper says. That doesn't really help, since Loki already knows that. "He's going to be fine." Pepper says, and when Loki asks Jarvis for confirmation, Jarvis doesn't guarantee it but he says it's very likely that 'Mr. Stark' will be fine. Loki's relieved, since that probably means he's going to be back to normal really soon. Because if he isn't, that's not 'fine' so he has to get better really soon.

Pepper comments on Mrs. Potts and Chip, which makes Loki a bit uneasy. Does she know he changed them? He hopes she doesn't and he obviously doesn't tell her he'd made them from a normal teapot and teacup.

Eventually she comments on the action figures sticking out of his bag.

"Tony gave them to me today, as a gift he picked out. He's really nice don't you think? Plus he got me this bag, and it's green! I love green. I have green eyes and Hulk-y's green *and* he has green eyes." Loki takes the bag off the chair and dumps the contents onto the countertop. He grins at the Avengers toys, picking up the Tony and Bruce ones, but then his expression falters "Where are Man of Iron and Hulk-y?" He asks Simba. They're gone, and these ones are here...

"Like last night...like Mrs. Potts and Chip..." Loki mutters to his lion. He feels a sinking feeling in his chest as he realizes he's done it again.

Loki's not entirely sure when the Hulk and Man of Iron toys had come to resemble Bruce and Tony, but now Pepper knows he's a freak, right? She has to hate him, and maybe she'll start hitting him, even though she gives really good hugs. But she won't hug him now that she knows about his magic. Tony still hugs him and he said *he* wouldn't hit him, but he hadn't said anything about Pepper. Tony not punishing him when he deserves it is weird enough, so Pepper undoubtedly will.

"No!" Loki shrieks, flinging the figures on the floor and grabbing Simba. He starts to panic and he grabs Toy Stark too, since that plastic Tony is the closest he can get to the real Tony right now. He puts the hand holding Toy Stark right up against the arc reactor in Simba's suit and tries to pretend it's Tony's arc reactor.

Tony's *not here*! Loki's mind repeats that horrible fact *He's not here, he's not here, he's gone, gone, GONE!*... Tony's not here to hug him and make him feel better, and Jormungand can't hug him because that's really Loki hugging himself and he's currently hugging Simba, and he can't hug Simba and himself at the same time. Plus that's not nearly as good as Tony hugging him, anyways...

Pepper starts to approach him, and Loki flinches away. He starts to crawl under the table, but remembers that Tony had said not to do that anymore. Tony said no going under beds, either, but he needs somewhere to hide! But there's nothing else to go under, and Pepper's blocking the exit to the kitchen. As he continues to kneel on the floor by the table, Loki screws his eyes shut, rocking back and forth and humming to try to calm himself down but it doesn't work.

The weight of being without Tony, of having to stay out in the open, and of Pepper now knowing
he's a freak is way too much, and Loki screams at the top of his lungs.

Tony and Bruce take the elevator down to one of the medical floors. Bruce is carrying the Iron Man suit-briefcase. Tony hobbles along with his crutches. They eventually get to an examination table, which Tony reluctantly gets on to. He's never liked doctor visits, but at least this is in his own tower instead of him having to go somewhere. Bruce is one of the least-objectionable options for someone to be poking, prodding and examining him, anyways.

"Okay, we need to get that armor off your leg. I'm assuming this thing does it." Bruce says, setting the briefcase on the floor. Metallic arms emerge, groping towards the armor. Having the armor taken off jolts Tony's ankle and he inhales sharply but manages to comment anyways.

"Are you sure that's where you want the stripping to end? I can go on." Tony wiggles his eyebrows and Bruce just gives a long-suffering sigh, as if some of Tony's jokes are torture.

"Tough crowd." Tony mutters, and then gives an involuntary yelp as Bruce prods his ankle. Geez, that hurt, although he's gone through worse. Bruce hands him some pain meds, which Tony swallows dry.

"I'm almost positive it's broken, but I need to get an X-ray to see where," Bruce explains. Then, out of the blue, he asks "Would you mind if I stayed here for a couple days?" Right after asking that, he looks like he's about to change his mind and starts to say something, probably about the Hulk. Tony's tried to tell him it doesn't matter that he turned into the green guy. Even with the Hulk making appearances, Bruce is always welcome in the tower.

Tony shrugs. "Of course not. You can have a whole floor to yourself and everything. Heck, you can have your own lab if you want. Take your pick." Bruce thanks him, but he still looks like he's having second thoughts. Tony's not going to hold the other guy's actions against Bruce, but Tony does hope the Hulk won't destroy too much of the tower. Not that he can't pay for repairs or anything, it's just sort of inconvenient.

He won't be able to fight off the Hulk, but he doesn't think the Hulk will hurt Loki, and he doesn't attack the other Avengers unless they confront him, like Tony had a couple weeks ago. Besides, the last time Bruce hulked-out, when all the other Avengers were here, he'd managed to isolate himself on another floor. Tony really should build that Hulk-proof room for him to vent in, though...

As Bruce waits for Tony to awkwardly make his way over to an X-ray machine with his crutches, Jarvis interrupts to tell Tony that Loki's having another panic attack, adding that he'd been unable to calm the god down. Once Tony's situated with his leg being X-rayed, Jarvis pulls up a video feed of the kitchen.

In the video, Loki's rocking back and forth and screaming on the floor, and Dum-E is prodding him nervously. Pepper's standing there, looking like she wants to help, but Loki screams louder when she approaches, so she backs off. Her lips are moving, but Tony can't hear what she's saying over the screams and he doubts Loki can either. The god's hugging Simba, of course, but there's something clutched in his hand. The Tony Stark action figure- Toy Stark.

Okay, so Loki's clearly noticed by now that he changed the appearance of the Iron Man and Hulk figures, which is probably the reason he's like this in the first place. But this is worse than even the Mrs. Potts and Chip episode last night. Tony suddenly realizes the significance of Loki clutching Toy Stark desperately- Loki wants him there, and that's about as close as he can get. Tony starts to get up, but Bruce's hand grabs his shoulder and shoves him back onto the bed part of the X-ray
machine before he even fully sits up.

"Jarvis, put me on the intercom." Tony says as he casts a quick glance at Bruce. Thankfully, he's not turning green. Perhaps it's because there hasn't been a reference to Loki's treatment in Asgard this time, even though they're watching him scream on the floor. Although, watching stuff in videos is never as intense as in real life, even if it's happening right now. The fact Bruce focusing on Tony's leg probably doesn't hurt either. Still, Bruce is doing a remarkably good job staying calm enough keep the Hulk in.

Tony speaks directly to Loki over the intercom, not sure if this will work at all. "Loki, it's okay. You did nothing wrong. You're not in trouble. You wanted toys of me and Bruce, right? Well, look at it this way- now you have them." Loki looks around, probably wondering why Tony's voice is coming out of the walls, like Jarvis. Other than that, though, Tony's words get no reaction.

"Hey, Snoopy, Pepper's not going to hurt you. I promise- I pinky promise- she won't hurt you. She's like me, not them, got it? I repeat: She's. Not. Like. Them." He says the last part very slowly and firmly in a tone that says there's no room for doubt.

It dawns on Tony that Loki's pining for his hiding spot, since he's looking under the table longingly. Loki hadn't crawled under a table after that incident earlier today when he slid the box across the floor with his powers, and even now he seems to be taking what Tony said about not hiding under beds or tables very seriously.

He thinks back to when he'd said that last night. Loki had clearly interpreted it as a rule, even though Tony never actually said it was. To be honest, he'd said that because he's sort of tired of crawling under furniture to calm Loki down. Tony's been called narcissistic and selfish, but even he thinks that factoring in his own opinions when he said that might not have been the right thing to do, especially with Loki taking it like this.

It's obvious Loki wants to crawl under something, though, and Tony starts to think the reason Loki's following that unofficial rule is he's scared disobeying will make people angry. Being hidden under things seems to comfort Loki, perhaps because it's harder for someone to get him that way. Tony realizes he'd taken that comfort away just because it was slightly annoying to him.

Wow, now he feels like crap- and a lot of people probably wouldn't believe Tony Stark feeling bad about something was possible.

"You know what? I take back what I said about not hiding under stuff, okay?" For a bit, Tony's not even sure if Loki's heard him, so repeats himself, only this time he says in the most straightforward way he can think of that Loki can go under beds and tables again. Then the god scampers under the table, still clearly terrified.

Bruce looks like he's having a slightly harder time staying calm now, although he's still doing a really good job keeping the other guy in check. Hopefully it's not just a lucky coincidence. Tony has Jarvis shut off the intercom and stop showing the video feed, just in case, hoping that Jarvis, Dum-E and Pepper can take it from there. "You've got a really good lid on the green guy. Much better than the last two times you were here. Seriously, are you doing yoga? Or weed?"

Bruce gives him a very tight smile and says quietly "It's easier to keep control now that I know to expect being reminded of- that sort of stuff."

Tony nods. Now that he's come to expect it, hearing about Loki's abuse, while still horrible, isn't quite as bad as it was at first. Repeated exposure to stuff dulls the impact of it, or something psychological like that. "You know, I could pay to have this tower built, like, twenty times, so don't
beat yourself up if the green giant wrecks some of it. I mean, if I turned into a green rage machine
every time I got angry, I would have been raging with you those couple times recently- and a ton in
between. Seriously, don't let the Hulk factor into your decision about staying here."

Bruce actually looks like he's actually considering staying here again. Tony grins triumphantly and
adds, for good measure "Loki really likes him. You still have that picture of them hugging, right?
Well, I got him these action figures of the Avengers, and he loves the Hulk one, although he
changed it to look like you... Yeah, long story, I'll tell you later."

"I think the Other Guy likes Loki." Bruce says quietly.

"See, everything's peachy." Tony says, and promptly changes the subject before Bruce can argue.
"Why the sudden request to stay here a couple days? Aside from the fact that you can't really beat
Stark Tower, I mean. Five-star hotels have nothing on this. So, you're going to be staying in our
ten-star accommodations, right?"

Bruce contemplates it for a while as he examines the X-rays. Apparently, Tony has a medial
malleolus fracture, and Jarvis agrees with Bruce's assessment after comparing Tony's X-rays to
several pictures on the internet.

Bruce eventually says he'll stay for a couple days. Tony grins in triumph. Finally, they're making
progress! If only Loki's progress was like this. "As to why I asked," Bruce says, the corners of his
mouth twitching upwards "someone needs to make sure you follow the doctor's orders and stay off
your injured foot." Seriously?! That's why he's staying over? Doesn't Bruce trust him? Actually,
Tony knows trusting him to take it easy without supervision is a rather foolish. But Bruce clearly
knows him too well.

"Yeah, sorry, I'm not one for following orders." Tony says unapologetically.

"Exactly. I trust Jarvis to watch you, but he can't physically force you off your feet, and you'd
probably ignore him anyways. So I'm going to make sure you stay off that ankle. Besides, I'll need
to make sure it's set right." Bruce replies

Tony suddenly finds himself sort of wishing that he hadn't offered up part of his tower to Bruce so
quickly. At least Bruce hadn't faked the uncertainty about staying in order to trick Tony into
convincing him to stay, though. That seems more like something Natasha would do.

He watches as Bruce wraps his ankle in cotton. "Can't we just use my armor as a cast? I can make it
brace my leg and then everything will be normal."

"No way." Bruce says. "You're going to need to stay off your right foot. That means crutches or a
wheelchair, or one of those knee scooters- and I will be making sure you don't add rockets or
anything to them." Tony pouts at this. Bruce really does know him too well.

"I can fly in my armor. That's staying off my feet." Tony points out, but Bruce just says that landing
in his armor would be bad for his ankle, and adds that if Tony used his armor as a cast, he'd end up
doing things he shouldn't with a broken ankle. Tony mutters that he could just design some armor
to fit around the cast and Bruce simply adds that to the list of reasons for why he needs to be there
to watch Tony.

Bruce finishes wrapping Tony's ankle and goes to get some white plaster for the cast. Tony
protests at the choice of color, because who wants a boring white cast? He demands a red and gold
cast to resemble his armor, and Bruce rolls his eyes, muttering "What are you, five?"
Tony refuses to back down and grins in triumph as Bruce sighs and sorts through the different colors until he finds red and yellow, which is the closest thing to gold they have. Tony wonders if he could get Loki to change it later.

Tony crosses his arms and grumpily asks how long he needs to stay off that foot. "Four to six weeks, probably." Bruce replies. Tony blanches.

"Four to six weeks?!" That is way too long to be using crutches or a knee scooter, Tony thinks. He's not even sure he could do that for four to six hours... or minutes. While neither of the options sound very appealing, a knee scooter sounds like the better of the two options, since it's faster than crutches and he might be able to sneak on a modification or two without Bruce finding out.

Tony's still annoyed, though. He's freaking Iron Man, and he's going to be stuck in a cast because of a stupid broken ankle. "Do you know what will happen to the world if it goes without Iron Man for four to six weeks?! The sun's going to go out! The world will stop spinning! The-

Bruce throws up his hands in exasperation. "Seriously, Tony. I'm sorry, but you're not that important." Tony lets out a scandalized sound of protest at that, but Bruce ignores him and continues talking. "What do you think us other Avengers are for? Besides, you've only done, what, three things as Iron Man over the past month? I don't think there's going to be a global catastrophe that needs every superhero in the next couple months."

Bruce takes a few deep breaths and goes on. "You need to take care of yourself, Tony. You shouldn't be putting any strain on that ankle. If you're not going to look after yourself, than someone else has to, and I guess that someone is me." As he starts looking over the bruises Tony had sustained from hitting the floor after that invisible force knocked him away from the hole, Bruce adds "Hey, Jarvis, notify me if Tony does anything he shouldn't when I'm not in his immediate vicinity."

"Of course, Dr. Banner." Jarvis replies smoothly, though he sounds far too supportive of the idea, in Tony's opinion.

"Traitor." Tony grumbles.

The terrified look Loki gives Pepper almost makes her heart break. Nobody should look that terrified, and his screaming just adds to the image. When she approaches him to try to calm him down, his scream reaches new heights in shrillness. The last time she'd seen him, which was also his first day here, he'd seemed rather panicked a couple times, but nothing like this.

Pepper's not sure what started this. It's something about the action figures, but what exactly that something is is a mystery to her.

Loki starts to crawl under the table, but something seems to stop him, which just upsets him more. She watches Dum-E try to hug him while Jarvis tries to calm him down. Loki grips Dum-E's claw with the hand not holding the Tony Stark action figure with the other and hugging Simba to his chest with his arms. Pepper starts telling him that everything's okay, but she doesn't think her words have much of an effect, if any. She's not even sure Loki hears them.

Eventually, Tony's voice comes on over the intercom, and he speaks to Loki in a surprisingly gentle tone. He tells Loki something about not doing anything wrong, and that he's not going to get hurt, that Pepper herself won't hurt him. Pepper has no idea if Loki's listening or not. Tony even gives a verbal pinky promise to testify, which is a little bizarre, though Pepper doesn't know whatever story is behind that.
Pepper remembers Loki mentioning getting hurt in Asgard from that first day, but it seems like it was a lot worse than she’d thought. It's abundantly clear that he was mistreated there, probably even abused, and Pepper hates whoever hurt someone as gentle as Loki.

Tony eventually says something about Loki being able to go under tables and beds again, so apparently some sort of rule had been holding him back. It's clear Loki's at least listening now, because he immediately darts under the table as soon as Tony says he can. Loki relaxes a tiny bit under the table but still seems very wound up.

Pepper hesitantly approaches him, not wanting to spook him even more. He eyes her warily but doesn't flinch away this time, which is definitely progress. Maybe he really had been listening to what Tony said the whole time. She hugs him like she did that first day, and after a bit, he leans into the hug.

For a while, she just sits there, hugging Loki and rubbing small circles over his back as she whispers soothing words. Very slowly, he starts to relax.

After a while, his body is no longer tense, and he seems back to normal. He looks at her, his eyes becoming slightly more focused. "Hi." Loki mumbles. "You give really good hugs, maybe even as good as Tony's."

"Tony hugs you?" Pepper asks, surprised. Tony's not exactly the hugging type. He had hugged Loki back that one time Loki had hugged him on the first day, but Tony had done it very awkwardly.

"He hugs me and I hug him, and we make each other feel better. Like friends." Loki nods and claps his hands, suddenly back to being energetic. He stares at Pepper in a way that somehow seems to not look at her at all, yet it's almost like he's rummaging through her insides or something.

"Are you really like Tony?" Loki asks after a bit in a voice with a slight tone of hope.

"What do you mean?"

"Tony said he doesn't hate me and he won't hit me, even though I'm bad. He says I'm not, but..." Loki stops and looks down at Simba, looking like he's trying not to cry.

"You're not bad." Pepper says, pulling Loki in for another hug. "Trust me on this. You are not bad."

"Are we still friends?" Loki asks hopefully. Pepper feels her heart break all over again.

"Of course we are." She tells him. "Don't ever think otherwise."

Tony really dislikes having to just sit there in bed with his broken leg propped up on pillows, but Bruce had very sternly told him not to move, and annoying him really isn't a good idea with a broken leg. Even though Bruce has left the room, Jarvis is currently being a traitor, ready to alert Bruce if he does anything. So Tony reluctantly stays in bed.

Tonight really hadn't gone as planned, Tony thinks with a sigh. Well, that's kind of obvious with the whole broken leg thing, but he had also been planning on showing Loki The Hunchback of Notre Dame, which has a similar message to Beauty and the Beast. He needs to get Loki to understand that even though people may think of someone as a monster because of their appearance, that doesn't mean they are a monster. Although that movie wouldn't help with the whole powers aspect.
Tony honestly doesn't know how much Loki's powers are capable of, and he's not entirely sure if Loki knows what they're capable of either. Before freaking out, the god had looked rather surprised that the teapot and teacup had changed into Mrs. Potts and Chip. Tony's seen Loki's powers do a wide range of things, from transforming things and making those intangible other-Loki's, to moving things telekinetically and having his hands covered in ice. Actually, the ice part might be due to being a Jotun.

He needs to find some movies to help Loki not hate his powers, too, he thinks. He's debated about showing Loki the *Harry Potter* movies, or at least the first one, except Loki always seems bored during live-action movies for some reason. Besides, he has a feeling Loki wouldn't get past the beginning with the Dursleys without freaking out. Maybe sometime far down the road he'll be able to show it to him, though.

That upcoming Disney movie Clint had mentioned, *Frozen*, looks like a good candidate, especially since that ice had formed on Loki's hands during some of his nightmares. After one such instance, Jarvis had shown Tony the trailer. It started out with a poem about Elsa living in fear of her icy powers, until one day she let it go and accidentally froze the whole kingdom. Elsa and Loki both have the whole ice thing going for them, and Elsa being scared of her powers seems a lot like Loki too.

It seems like it could be a really good movie for Loki, but some things make him a little worried Loki might react the wrong way. It might be too close for comfort, like *Avatar* had been. He has a feeling showing Loki that trailer would just make him freak out, especially when it shows some short old guy accusing Elsa of sorcery in a way that clearly says he doesn't like it as well as townspeople reacting in fear when she freezes a fountain. But it's probably one of those happy-ending movies, which would really help get the message of that stuff not being horrible across.

Tony's decided to book a private theater viewing for when it comes out in November, both for their own privacy and because most movie viewers don't like someone commenting on random parts, jumping up and down, and being loud in general.

It's also occurred to him that Bruce will probably object to him crawling under beds and tables, and now that Loki's going under them again, it's going to be hard to reach him to calm him down. It would be nice if he could get Bruce to do it, but shoving the topic of Loki's abuse on him like that would be rather stupid. Bruce seems to have pretty good control over the Hulk in general nowadays, and apparently might have pretty good control even regarding references to the abuse Loki suffered. He hadn't hulked-out this time, but Tony's not sure if that will continue. He sort of hopes so, but Bruce had hulked-out the three times before now, after all. So shoving him into that situation seems sort of risky.

So Tony's not sure how calming Loki down now will work, but it'll probably be interesting, to say the least.

Tony's pulled out of his thoughts when Pepper enters the room. Apparently, Bruce is in the penthouse with Loki now.

Pepper still doesn't give him that lecture, much to Tony's relief. Pepper clearly has a ton of other things on her mind right now.

"What was all of that stuff with Loki about? What was so wrong with the action figures, and what did you mean about him doing nothing wrong? He said something about being bad." Pepper pauses, and Tony sighs, not liking to hear that Loki had said that.

"He has these powers he's terrified of. I don't know how to describe them, but he says they're
magic, and I'm starting to wonder if that's not as insane as it sounds. Maybe I'm just insane.
Anyways, he does all sorts of stuff with these powers. For example, the toys of me and Bruce used
to look like Iron Man and the Hulk, and he just totally changed them. If you noticed Mrs. Potts and
Chip from Beauty and the Beast on the kitchen table, well, those used to look totally different. He
just... transforms them into something else. That's the coolest and strangest thing he's done."

"Why can't it be magic?" Pepper asks, and Tony looks at her, surprised by her just accepting it.
"Seriously, you fight crime with a guy who turns into a huge green guy. That would have been
considered magic not too long ago. So maybe this is just something science doesn't understand yet.
But if he actually transforms stuff like that, what other explanation could there be right now?"

Tony still hasn't found another explanation, so instead of responding directly to that he just goes on
to describe some of the other things Loki's done with his powers, adding that Loki reacts pretty
badly- though not quite that badly- every time he uses his powers. The screaming is fortunately a
rarity, though.

Pepper sits on the side of the bed Tony's in. "It was horrible, the way he flinched away from me at
first. How bad was Loki's life before here? It had to be pretty bad, right?" She looks somewhat
pained as she says this. "I remember him saying on the first day that people in Asgard didn't want
him and hurt him... it seems like an understatement."

Tony barks out a very unamused laugh. "Hell, yeah. It's way worse than he let on at first. They beat
him for being a different race or species or something, and for any time he used his powers. From
what I've heard, his whole life story is a couple thousand years of being bullied and abused.
Because of them, he actually thinks he deserves all the crap they gave him! He thinks it's okay to
beat him senseless just because he naturally has blue skin or when he does anything with his
powers. He's had nightmares almost every night about his treatment there."

He realizes he's clenching the blankets in his fists and his voice has raised somewhat, but he
doesn't care. "Not anymore. He's never going back there, and I can't wait until Thor shows his face
here again..." Tony gives an almost sinister smirk. Avenging Loki is going to be so much fun.

"Loki's lucky to have you as a friend." Pepper says suddenly. Tony really doesn't expect that
hearing that sentence would feel so good, but wow, it really does.

For about fifteen minutes, Tony tells Pepper the story of the eighteen days or so Loki has been
here. Pepper seems very surprised that Tony's taking Loki to therapy, and she seems very
supportive of the idea too.

Eventually, Pepper shifts the conversation to talking about work, which had been one of the
reasons she had come over in the first place. She gives Tony a rundown of what's been happening
in Stark Industries and brings up that stupid multi-day conference. Tony says that one of the perks
of not being CEO is not having to deal with stupid stuff like that anymore, but Pepper claims that,
as the owner, he still has to go. She also points out that he can't use Iron Man as an excuse to get
out of it. Another reason to hate this broken ankle, Tony thinks.

With both Jarvis and Pepper pestering him about this dumb conference, Tony doesn't think he'll
manage to get out of it, although it won't be for a lack of trying.

He brings up Loki, asking what he'll do with the god. He's not sure if Loki could live with another
Avenger for a couple days or not, but as of right now it doesn't seem too possible. Perhaps if Loki
can get more comfortable with one of them, it might work... but Tony's not sure how likely that is.

Leaving him at Stark Tower with Jarvis and Dum-E would technically be a possibility, since Loki
seems rather capable of looking after himself and Dum-E and Jarvis could help with the parts he
can't do, like order food. Except they probably wouldn't be able to help with his nightmares, and
even though Jarvis and Dum-E are great, leaving Loki without human company for a couple days
just seems wrong. Technically, he could probably leave Loki alone with Jarvis in the Malibu
Mansion for the majority of the days and be there with him during the nights, but he's not too
thrilled with the idea.

He has some time to decide though, and he hasn't even asked Loki's opinion yet.

Eventually, Loki and Bruce come back in the room. Loki's clutching Simba and Toy Stark. He's
apparently been drawing, because he hands Pepper a portrait he'd drawn of her in crayon. Pepper
seems rather touched.

Loki thrusts a drawing at Tony but Tony doesn't take it, not liking being handed things. A lot of
people find that quirk of Tony's really irritating, but Loki doesn't seem to care. Now that he's in
Tony's presence, the god leaves Toy Stark laying on the bed but continues to hold Simba as he
always does.

Loki sits sideways on Tony's bed and pokes his cast curiously. "What's that?"

Bruce starts explaining it, but Tony's not sure if Loki's taking it in or not, since he's currently
running his fingers over the cast with glassy eyes. Eventually, Loki speaks "Bruce said I could
draw you a picture, like a get well card, so I did." He lies down on the bed next to Tony, with his
head near Tony's elbow and his legs hanging off the side of the bed.

"Hey, seriously, I'm glad you did that wind stuff earlier. This could have been a lot worse if I fell."
Tony tells him, hoping he doesn't freak out. In the time between when Bruce and Pepper had been
in the room, Jarvis had shown Tony the video footage of today's big incident and there had indeed
been that green energy around Loki's hands when the invisible force knocked Tony away from the
hole.

"You flew!" Loki says, though he doesn't sound quite as vehement about it as he had earlier.

Loki shows him his drawing, which is double-sided. One side shows Tony and Dum-E, and
apparently Jarvis is the wispy thing in the corner. The other side shows Iron Man and Hulk fighting
a bunch of gray things. "Like on the screen the first morning." Loki explains. Oh, the incident in
Philadelphia with the Doom-bots, though Tony would never have guessed that's what they were in
the drawing. "Did you know Bruce says you're not gonna be Man of Iron for a while? But you're
better than Man of Iron anyways."

Tony once again is surprised at how good that makes him feel, like Pepper's earlier comment about
Loki being lucky to have him as a friend.

"Can you tell Bruce not to be so scared of Hulk-y?" Loki asks suddenly in a voice that's a bit
quieter than usual. "I did, but I dunno if I convinced him. He said he's gonna be here for a bit, but I
don't think he wants Hulk-y to be here, so he doesn't know for sure if he should be here." That's
surprisingly perceptive, Tony thinks as Loki goes on. "But I want Bruce to be here, and I like Hulk-
y, even when he's angry and smashes stuff."

Tony replies that he had told Bruce that, and both he and Pepper glance at Bruce, but Loki keeps
talking as if he hadn't said anything. "I think he thinks Hulk-y's gonna hurt us, but I don't think so. I
think he was angry last time when you hit him with that shooting star thing, and that's why he tried
to hit you. But if you don't hit him with shooting stars, maybe he won't try to hit you?"
Tony doesn't point out that the Hulk had been angry before Tony attacked him with a repulser blast (he's assuming that's the 'shooting stars' that Loki had mentioned). Tony's not sure if Loki's projecting his own worries about friends starting to dislike him onto the Hulk or if he really thinks the Hulk feels like that.

Loki flicks his fingers a bit and stares at Tony for a while before looking at Bruce. Bruce looks somewhat uncomfortable, but at the same time he seems to love hearing Loki talk about the Hulk with such unconditional acceptance- apparently, Loki's no longer mad at the Hulk for trying to hurt Tony. Tony can see why Bruce would enjoy hearing Loki talk about it.

"Maybe Hulk-y wouldn't smash so much if he had friends." Loki mumbles thoughtfully. "He has friends, actually. I'm his friend and you're his friend, so maybe he won't smash as much." Tony's not sure when he'd been signed up to be Hulk's friend. Yes, they're teammates and Tony doesn't have anything against the Hulk, but he wouldn't say they're friends. He's friends with Bruce, certainly, but not the Hulk.

"You're gonna be here, right?" Loki asks, looking at Bruce. Bruce nods and Loki grins, clapping his hands as he sits up and bounces on the bed slightly, before asking "Can Hulk-y come out sometime?"
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Disney's The Hunchback of Notre Dame has some good moral messages that clearly aren't taught in Asgard, but really need to be.

Loki's really glad Bruce is going to be staying here, since he likes Bruce. But he's rather disappointed that Hulk hasn't come out since fighting with Tony. He wants to see him again. It's not fair that the past couple times Bruce has come here, the Hulk hasn't come out at all- especially since Bruce is the Hulk, so he could always just transform into him like he had before. "Can Hulky come out sometime?"

Loki thinks that's a great idea. Hulk's his friend, so obviously he wants to see him again, and Tony is Hulk's friend too.

Loki giggles at the current facial expressions of the other three people in the room, which are hilariously shocked. Bruce is gaping and looks like a fish. He says he doesn't think that's a good idea, and Tony and Pepper agree. It seems they'd be perfectly fine with Bruce never becoming Hulk again. Why does everyone else dislike the Hulk so much?

Tony glances at the thing on his wrist and comments in a surprised tone about how it's only nine thirty, stating that he thought it would be a lot later considering everything that happened. Apparently it's only been two hours since Tony fell. Tony looks up at them and says "Huh...Well, I guess we can salvage some of the evening. Anyone up for a movie?"

Tony apparently already has one picked out. The Hunchback of Notre Dame. He shares a look with Bruce and Pepper for some reason, though Loki's not sure what it meant.

Bruce declares that Tony's going to stay in bed, so they have to watch it here. Tony protests, but Bruce and Pepper team up and actually win the argument. Bruce leaves for a bit and comes back with some weird box that he sets up, that Loki eventually realizes shines a picture on a flat surface, like in the theatre. Bruce then drags three chairs over, which both spin and have wheels. They're really fun, Loki thinks as he spins around and then rolls the chair around the room, propelling himself with his legs. Eventually, he rolls back up to the bed Tony's currently in.

Pepper also leaves the room, claiming they need something called "popcorn" and returns later with a big bowl of misshapen white things covered in butter. This popcorn stuff is actually really good, Loki thinks as he munches some. He likes food he can eat with his hands, although now his hands are sort of slimy.

Tony throws a piece in the air and catches it in his mouth, acting like it's a huge accomplishment and proclaiming himself world-champion. Loki loves that game, and he's really good at it. He throws a piece almost to the ceiling and catches it easily. Tony stares at him in shock, and Bruce says that Loki's just usurped Tony for the title. Loki grins and stifles a giggle.

Dum-E even comes to this floor, to Loki's surprise and delight. Dum-E hands some kind of cord to Bruce and pats Tony comfortably with his claw before Loki slips it into his hand. According to Tony, Dum-E loves watching movies, which makes Loki wonder why this is the first time they're
watching one with him. Tony says that Dum-E can't exactly go down the steps in the theater. That makes sense, although they used to not even watch movies in the theater. Loki's really excited that Dum-E's here, though.

"By the way," Tony starts, giving Loki a serious look. "This movie has a happy ending, okay?" Loki's not sure why he's saying that, so he continues spinning his chair and wheeling it back and forth slightly.

The movie starts with a guy and a puppet version of himself telling a story to some children, asking something about who's the monster and who's the man, and then it shifts to a woman running. After a bit, Loki realizes that it's now showing the story that the puppet guy's narrating. Eventually, the woman is caught and her bundled baby is taken from her. The man who takes it—Frollo, according to the narrator—gasp's and claims the baby is a hideous monster. He almost kills it but doesn't in the end, though the monster baby's mother is already dead.

Loki stares at the screen in horror, hugging Simba tightly and curling up in his chair, no longer spinning it. Dum-E beeps worriedly as he holds one of Loki's hands and swings it back and forth slightly, which Loki really likes. Tony has a hand on his shoulder and spins the chair side to side slightly, which helps too, but Loki's still horrified.

Was this what Allfather Odin had been like when he'd found him, a baby Frost Giant runt, in Jotunheim? Loki doesn't know why the Allfather took him back to Asgard when he rightfully hated him like everyone else there, so maybe it was something like Frollo where he was guilted- or scared- into it? Nobody but Odin himself seemed to know why he'd brought Loki back. Loki knows he should be grateful that they'd taken him in, and he's been told so countless times. But it was kind of hard to be grateful sometimes when they were hurting him, which made him bad, right? After all, he deserved their treatment, so being anything but grateful would make him even worse than he already is. He had already been bad without that tacked on.

Loki obviously doesn't remember being taken to Asgard by the Allfather, since he was a baby at the time, but he's heard that the Allfather was fighting some sort of war against the monstrous Jotuns, and that it had taken a while for the Asgardians to figure out how to hide Loki's hideous blue skin. How they'd even done that is a mystery to Loki, and he never had gotten an answer on whether it was magic or not. It seemed like the occasional times when Loki had managed to disguise himself as someone else, but magic is bad, so they wouldn't be doing it... It's too confusing, since those things don't add up.

When he feels a warm hand—warmer than Dum-E's claw—gripping his arm, and three voices speaking softly, Loki's pulled from his thoughts. Realizing that Tony's the one gripping his arm, Loki moves from his chair, which Tony had seemed barely able to reach, and sits beside Tony on the bed. Tony doesn't say anything about a personal bubble like he sometimes does, instead muttering in an almost pleading tone "Shit. Please tell me this isn't another Avatar incident."

Tony, Bruce and Pepper are all looking at him with concern, while Dum-E beeps worriedly and pats Loki's leg. "Do we need to stop?" Pepper asks gently. "What's wrong? Is this too much? If it is, just say so. But I promise, even though things seem bad for a while, it has a happy ending."

Tony had said something about a happy ending before. Loki likes happy endings. He glances at the screen, only it's different now. It's not the horrible scene with the man and the baby. Now, it shows a red-haired man with a hunched back and a somewhat strange face holding a baby bird, only neither the bird nor the man are moving. "Who's that?"

"Quasimodo." Pepper answers. "He's the baby that Frollo took, but he's obviously not a baby anymore." Loki frowns. He's the monster baby? Loki had been expecting to see someone like him,
but he doesn't have blue skin or red eyes or those ridges on his skin (he does, however, have that hunched back and rather strange face but it's not monstrous). Loki glances down at his own skin. Then again, he doesn't look like a Frost Giant now, either, which is really nice. Maybe this Quasimodo guy has blue skin underneath.

Loki looks at Tony, who's giving him a rather knowing stare. "He's not quite like you or Genie in terms of hue, if that's what you're wondering. But even if he was it wouldn't matter. Not one bit, got it?" Tony stares at him, but Loki looks at Simba instead. Tony keeps saying that blue skin doesn't matter, and that both Genie and that Avatar guy weren't- and more importantly, shouldn't- be hated for their blue skin. But Quasimodo apparently doesn't even have blue skin, so what's so bad about him? Sure, he looks kind of weird, but not nearly as bad as what he looks like in his true form Loki thinks as Tony starts talking.

"Look, I don't know what's going through that head of yours, but please tell me you know that murdering someone because they're ugly is wrong. Or attempting to murder someone." Loki stares at Tony blankly, and Bruce rewords it as killing people. Oh, that. Yeah, Loki knows that's wrong, though it's apparently okay to kill people in battle. But that wasn't a battle, and Quasimodo's not a Jotun, so it's wrong. Tony seems very relieved when Loki nods.

"Ok, good." Tony replies. "Now, let's nip any misconceptions in the bud right now, okay?" Loki wonders why he says all these weird things. "Quasimodo's life is rough for a while. A lot of people are mean to him because they think he's ugly, but that's wrong, just like the villagers were wrong about Beast, remember?" Loki nods. Beast was nice, and the villagers were wrong to try to kill him.

Pepper pipes in, saying that nobody has the right to be mean to someone just because of what they look like. Bruce seconds that, though he's been looking somewhat uncomfortable during the whole conversation.

"So, what's it gonna be, Snoopy? Do we keep watching, or call it quits?" Tony waits for an answer. Loki's rather surprised that Tony's even bothering to ask for his opinion, but it's really nice that he is. Then again, Tony's really nice in general. However, from Tony's tone, it sounds like he hopes he'll choose to continue. Maybe Tony really likes this movie?

That beginning was really freaky, Loki thinks, but it looks better now. Loki nods hesitantly towards the screen. Tony asks for clarification that he meant continue watching, and Loki nods again. The man and the bird on screen start moving.

Quasimodo seems really nice, Loki thinks, and he wonders if he and Quasimodo would be friends if they met. He hopes they would. Quasimodo's only friends seem to be three stone statues of gargoyles named Victor, Hugo and Laverne. Loki wonders aloud how they're moving and Pepper explains that they're really not- Quasimodo's just imagining them.

Frollo appears not long after and points out that stone doesn't talk. So he clearly doesn't see them. Pepper's right- they're like what Sleipnir, Fenrir, Hel and Jormungand were to him, because nobody saw them. Quasimodo's not beat up for talking to them, but he's rebuked by Frollo.

Then, Frollo starts singing about how evil the world is and how it'll hate Quasimodo for being a monster, and Quasimodo agrees he's a monster. Wait, so Quasimodo is a monster after all, even without blue skin. Loki was never told that other realms were evil, but he had been told that Asgard is the best of all the nine realms (while Jotunheim is obviously the worst). They'd said that Asgard is definitely better than Midgard. But Loki likes it here on Midgard- or Earth, as it's apparently called here- a lot more than Asgard, and Thor had recently been trying to get people to stop putting Midgard down.
Loki’s sort of confused by Frollo, since he’s being nice by taking care of Quasimodo, which is good, and he says in the song that he was Quasimodo’s friend. But he’d almost killed him as a baby, which is bad. Which is he? Loki turns his attention back to the movie as Quasimodo finishes the song with a catchy solo part about wanting to be ‘out there.’

Frollo also repeatedly tells Quasimodo that anyone else would have drowned him as a baby, which consistently reminds Loki of being told that he could have- should have, even- been left by Odin to die in Jotunheim because he’s a monster. Apparently he’d been lost when the Allfather found him.

Additionally, Frollo talks about some group called 'gypsies.' He hates them, a lot like how everyone in Asgard hates Jotuns. Maybe it's really another word for Jotuns? No, that's not it, he realizes. Loki's kind of confused about these gypsy people, but according to Frollo, they're really bad. Frollo wants to kill them, and Loki wonders if he's going to fight a whole battle against them like how Asgard and Jotunheim fought a ton of wars.

At one point during the Festival of Fools, Esmeralda is doing some kind of dance around a spear that's sticking out of the ground like a pole, and Tony remarks that they need to spice it up a bit. This earns him a smack from Pepper for some reason.

When Quasimodo is crowned the King of Fools, he seems really happy and everyone's cheering for him. Loki grins. Maybe this is the happy ending Tony was talking about.

But it doesn't last, since the crowd starts jeering and throwing food at Quasimodo. Tony puts an arm around Loki's shoulder, and Loki's breathing slows down, though he hadn't even realized it had sped up in the first place, and his body relaxes slightly. He's really glad Tony's doing that, because this isn't as hard to watch as it would have been if Tony wasn't calming him down.

Tony had said the crowd was wrong, and Tony's repeating that to him over and over right now. On screen, the captain of the guard, Phoebus, is asking Frollo for permission to stop the cruelty, and Frollo says that a lesson has to be taught, not caring at all what Quasimodo's going through.

That makes sense, Loki thinks, and it matches Asgard, since nobody there cared what he went through. Actually, the fact that they're hitting him with rotten food instead of fists and that Frollo isn't joining in is different. They hate him, Loki realizes. They hate him! But what Tony's saying contradicts that, and Phoebus asking for ‘permission to stop this cruelty’ it is really weird. Nobody had asked something like that when people were harassing him, because why would anyone else want to stop it?. Bruce, however, mutters that Frollo's the one who needs to learn a lesson, and that the 'Other Guy' would be all too happy to teach it to him. Loki stares at him. What Lesson does Frollo need to learn?

Sudden, it's silent, and then Tony's arm is around his shoulder and the man's speaking to him. "Okay, here's a tip. Take everything Frollo says with a grain of salt."

Loki stares at him. Maybe Tony really has lost his mind. What does salt have to do with this? Bewildered, Loki asks where the salt he's supposed to take is. Tony bursts out laughing, but it's not in a mean way like everyone in Asgard laughed at him. Bruce explains that it's an expression, meaning you shouldn't believe all of what someone says. Tony then amends his statement to "Actually, don't believe anything Frollo says, because most of it's total crap- and no matter what he says, he has no excuse to hate Quasimodo. He's wrong to hate him and it's even worse that he lets him get hurt because of it."

That would mean Frollo's lying, right, if his reason for hating Quasimodo isn't right? Which would mean he's lying about Quasimodo being a monster, and that he needs to be taught a lesson through public humiliation. But how are those lies? They make sense, and really, getting hit by thrown food
doesn't seem nearly as bad as getting hit like he had. Tony, Pepper and Bruce all claim they are lies, though, which is really weird.

The three voices of Tony, Pepper and Bruce, as well as Tony's touch are really calming, and Loki then hears a forth voice, which turns out to be in the film. It's Esmeralda, defending Quasimodo. Apparently, she's one of those gypsies Frollo had been talking about, so she has to be hated, too, right? As Loki's thinking this, Tony is saying "Oh, yeah, Frollo hates her, too, for a bunch of stupid reasons that aren't legitimate reasons."

Loki watches, fascinated and more than a little jealous, as Esmeralda apologizes to Quasimodo and sticks up for him. Loki would have given anything to have someone in Asgard do even one of those things, even though people were right to hate him. Even more astonishing is Esmeralda defiantly telling Frollo that he mistreats both Quasimodo and whoever Esmeralda claims her people are - does she mean gypsies? Loki thinks she might, though he still has no idea what they are. Esmeralda goes on to say he's cruel to those most in need of his help, obviously referencing Quasimodo. Loki's not sure anymore if the crowd is right in treating Quasimodo like that. Frollo certainly thinks so, but Esmeralda and the captain of the guard, Phoebus, think otherwise. Tony, Pepper, and Bruce all agree, and say it's wrong.

Loki wonders if Tony, Pepper, Bruce and Hulk would have supported him against a crowd in Asgard, even if the crowd was right. Tony seems to read his thoughts and says "I'd do everything I could to kick the ass of anyone trying to hurt you, Snoopy." Loki stares at him in awe as Tony gives him a somewhat crooked grin, muttering something about how he'd love to beat the crap out of some Asgardians.

Bruce says, in a rather dark tone, that the Other Guy would love to "play" with the Asgardians. Loki doesn't get that, since they really weren't fun to play with as children. He was always cast as the evil Frost Giant- for obvious reasons- whenever Thor and his friends would let him in their childhood pretend games, and the good guys (usually Thor played Odin) would always beat up the evil Jotun (Loki's not sure why everyone but him stopped pretending stuff eventually, but they started to just beat him up without the game).

Loki's not entirely sure whether to believe Tony and Bruce about beating up his tormentors. They're nice now, but maybe they wouldn't be if everyone else around them wasn't, or if they knew what a monster he really is. Actually, Tony's almost certainly telling the truth- he said he'd protect him from Thor, after all. He wishes he could know for sure about Bruce, though. However, they both claim that Esmeralda is doing the right thing, but how is not standing up for him wrong?

Suddenly, the movie pauses and Jarvis speaks up. "I apologize for the interruption, but I'd like to inform Mr. Loki that Esmeralda is by no means bad for what she's about to do, despite what Frollo says. Do you understand, Mr. Loki?" Loki's confused as to why Jarvis is saying this, but he nods. He's not sure what's going on, but Tony actually pulls him a bit closer, as if sensing something's going to happen.

As the movie resumes, Esmeralda does some disappearing act, and Frollo angrily says something about witchcraft. Loki blanks on that word for a bit, but then he realizes it means the act of doing magic. No! He curls up into a ball, hugging his knees with Simba squeezed in between his knees and torso. Esmeralda's going to be in a world of pain soon, Loki realizes with horror as the guards go after her.

Guards and warriors like the Warriors Three always win, even if you temporarily escape- and disappearing like that to get away is the worst possible thing to do, because the punishment is brutal. He knows that firsthand, even though it's only happened a handful of times in his whole life.
He never ended up far from his tormentors, sometimes as little as a few yards away, and he would be so shocked that they'd descend upon him before he reoriented himself. He has no idea how he'd done it those few times. Right after the first time he'd done it, he'd thought if he could control it, he might be able to get away more. He'd actually tried to replicate it, even though doing magic is bad. It hadn't worked at all, and the punishment he'd gotten had convinced him not to try it again (they could somehow even tell he'd tried it). So clearly, mixing magic and escape is a horrible idea.

Doesn't Esmeralda know that?! She's acting like she just played a brilliant trick instead of doing something that will probably get her beaten for an hour. The guards will catch her—guards always catch people eventually, and when they do, the punishment's going to be a million times worse for what she just did.

Loki squeezes his eyes shut and curls up next to Tony on the bed, clinging to him. No! He doesn't want to watch her punishment. Loki tries to drown it out by humming to himself, not even realizing that Jarvis has paused it again. Quasimodo doesn't do magic, but Esmeralda does, and Frollo hates her too. Magic's bad, even there! It'll always be bad, and anyone who does it is horrible! But Jarvis had said Esmeralda wasn't bad for it...? Why does everybody here have to be so confusing?!

Loki really appreciates it when Tony pulls him into a hug.

It kind of makes sense that Esmeralda does magic instead of Quasimodo, though, because according to everyone, magic is not only bad, but also very unmanly. Loki's apparently the only male most people know of who does magic (not that many people do it at all), which just makes everything even worse.

Right beside him, Tony is speaking, but the words are all jumbled and meaningless in Loki's brain. Loki's not sure if the All Tongue isn't working, or if his humming is drowning Tony out. Maybe it's both. Or it could be that he's remembering the handful of times he'd disappeared like that.

Loki's not sure how long it takes, but he's eventually calm enough to get what Tony's saying.

Tony's reminding him that what Frollo says isn't true. Loki's really confused. Magic's bad, and Frollo says magic is bad, so how can that be a lie? Tony just stresses what Jarvis had said, about how what Esmeralda just did isn't bad, no matter what Frollo and the guards think. How can Tony think that magic isn't bad, when it's badness is just a fact of life, like grass being green? But then again, Tony had said he wanted to change stuff magically. As crazy as it is, Tony really seems to think that magic isn't bad.

Then, Jarvis informs him of how, instead of Esmeralda getting caught and punished (which he insists she doesn't deserve at all), the guards are going to lose spectacularly. Tony adds that they're going to get their butts kicked, and asks if he'd like to see that. Loki nods hesitantly. It would be fun to see guards lose, but it can't actually happen, can it?

Apparently it can, and in hilarious ways, too. The crowd catches Esmeralda when she jumps, but then the crowd moves aside to let the guards plummet to the ground. Loki bursts out laughing, pointing at the screen. When a guy on stilts kicks three screaming guards into the air, Loki laughs so hard that he almost can't breathe and his body shakes uncontrollably. At one point, Esmeralda disarms three sword-wielding guards with another guard's hat. Loki wishes he could do that.

Then, she disappears under a blanket, which has to be magic again. Loki freezes for a second before going back to sit next to Tony on the bed again, wrapping his arms around the man. Once again, the others say she's not bad.

There's one scene later on where Quasimodo tells her that Frollo said all gypsies are evil, but she's
not like them because she's not evil. That's really confusing, Loki thinks, and Quasimodo seems just as confused. That's like saying there's a good Frost Giant, when they're all savage monsters. How could someone be a Frost Giant and not be a monster?

Esmeralda then says Frollo is cruel, and Quasimodo replies that he's not cruel and that Frollo took him in when nobody else would, because he's a monster. Loki completely understands that. But then Esmeralda tells him he's not a monster, saying there are no monster lines on his hands. Wait, what? What are monster lines?

Loki glances at his own hands. He knows that when his hideous blue form isn't hidden, his hands have ridges on the back of them. Those must be monster lines, he thinks dejectedly. He even has them on his forehead in his real form, like a huge label across his face that reads "MONSTER!" As if the blue skin isn't enough of an indication.

Esmeralda doesn't see a monster when she looks at Quasimodo, even though a lot of other people do, Loki realizes.

Loki's really confused about Esmeralda. She's one of those 'gypsies' Frollo hates, though Loki's still not sure what they are. Plus, she does magic. So she's a monster, too, or an outcast, as she'd called herself in a song. She's all those things, so she must be really bad, right? Just like Loki himself?

Yet at the same time, Esmeralda's really nice and, well, not evil like Frollo says gypsies are. Quasimodo points this out right as Loki's thinking it- maybe he's reading his mind? Esmeralda responds that maybe Frollo's wrong about both her and Quasimodo, but Loki can't help pretending that she's saying it to him, too. Not that she would actually say that to a Jotun, but it would be nice if she did.

Not everyone hates Quasimodo, Loki realizes over the course of the movie. He's really lucky, actually; he has Esmeralda and Phoebus, and they don't think he's a monster even though everyone else does. Esmeralda had just said all those amazing things to him. Plus he doesn't seem to get beaten up, and his imaginary friends hadn't needed to go away to protect him. Eventually, Quasimodo doesn't think of himself as a monster either, but he doesn't look as monstrous as Loki does in his real form, and he doesn't even have monster lines.

Loki paces anxiously as he thinks that, hating that he can't move around and be next to Tony at the same time. He's not sure why Tony's lying in bed; it seems very unlike him, but Bruce insisted on it for some reason. It has something to do with the weird thing on his leg.

Loki finds himself wishing he were Quasimodo, because being the hunchback would be better than being who he is. Even Esmeralda's not as bad as he is, despite doing the disappearing magic thing. Actually, no, he wishes he were someone else entirely, not Quasimodo. Maybe Tony, because then people wouldn't hate him, and he'd have those awesome suits and he could beat up anyone who tried to hurt him, because if he were Tony he wouldn't even deserve to be beaten because he wouldn't be a freaky monster.

But Tony had said he'd beat them up. Loki grins, thinking that if he were Hulk, he could do that, too.

Towards the end, Frollo is about to stab Quasimodo, Quasimodo rebels against him and tells him he's wrong about the world. Loki's pretty sure Quasimodo's right about that, but all the same he's really in for it now- he's going to be punished horribly. Loki wonders if he'll be put in those chains he was trapped in after he accidentally led Frollo to the Court of Miracles while looking for Esmeralda. The weird part was when Quasimodo had been in the chains before, he'd been alone, and he hadn't looked like he'd just gotten a beating either. Loki squeezes his eyes shut and covers...
his ears, expecting pain filled screams to fill the room.

Only Quasimodo isn't really beaten then, either- although Frollo does try to kill him, which is probably worse. He also reveals the truth to Quasimodo about his mother, which means he had been lying the whole time. So maybe Tony was right about him lying about all the other stuff, like Quasimodo being a monster and gypsies being bad?

Frollo eventually falls off a building. The very end shows the village people no longer hating or being mean to Quasimodo. Loki stares in shock. Phoebus and Esmeralda not seeing a monster was strange enough, but everyone changing their views? That seems really unrealistic. People don't just stop hating someone.

"See, I told you it has a happy ending." Tony says, and then adds "It was hard watching some of it, wasn't it?" Loki nods. "But you made it all the way through. I'm proud of you." Loki stares at him, startled. Tony's proud of him?

Then the puppet guy on screen asks, again, who's the monster and who's the man? Loki tilts his head, thinking, as he stares at Simba. Everyone thought Quasimodo was a monster at first, but then they didn't think so anymore. So Quasimodo's not the monster, even though he looks more like one. Is Frollo the monster? He doesn't look like one, but he'd tried to kill Quasimodo and the gypsies, and he'd also set someone's house on fire. Those seem like monstrous acts.

"The monster on the outside's not the monster on the inside, and the monster on the inside's not the monster on the outside." Loki blurs out. "Did someone switch their minds?"

"No. It's what's inside- who you are and what you do- that counts, not what you look like," Pepper says. Like with Beast and Hulk, Loki thinks. Hulk had saved Midgard, right? Quasimodo helped Esmeralda and Phoebus. They did good things, while he just does bad things like magic.

"Just because other people say you're a monster doesn't mean you are one. Just look at Quasimodo." Tony says, and adds "Remember how everyone in Monsters Inc. though Boo was a monster at first?" Loki giggles. That was ridiculous!

Before ending up here in Midgard, he didn't even know it was possible for people like Quasimodo and Esmeralda to go from being hated to liked, although Tony, Pepper and Bruce claim that they never should have been hated in the first place. He's not sure if they're still monsters or not, but they aren't treated like them now, and nobody says they are. Maybe they stopped being monsters, or maybe they're just not hated-monsters anymore.

They're really lucky, to have that happen to them. Loki wonders if they'd be liked here in Midgard. The things they watch take place in some world full of people who look like drawings, (or, in Sulley, Mike and Boo's case, don't look entirely real). Obviously, that's not here.

"So you wouldn't hate them?" Loki asks quietly.

"No, we wouldn't hate them, because they shouldn't be hated for that." Tony says, before asking "Isn't that what we've been telling you?"

So they wouldn't hate Quasimodo or Esmeralda, but would that still stand true if they were worse, like him? None of this even applies to him! Right?

Loki bolts towards the elevator, wanting to be alone. He takes it up to the penthouse and stares at the night sky from the window. Seeing it inside isn't nearly as good as seeing it outside, especially since it all just looks black from inside. He can even see his reflection. So maybe he should go
outside.

Sometimes in Asgard, he'd go outside at night and wander around, maybe visit the horses or climb in a tree. He could never leave the palace, though, because he had nowhere to go and there were guards anyways. Sometimes he'd stare up and think. Or wish he could be somewhere else. He'd do that almost all the time, actually, and now he really is somewhere else. He loves it here, but it's so confusing, and now he's more confused than ever. Just trying to work through all the contradictions makes his head hurt and he doesn't want to think about it right now. Maybe looking in the night sky will help.

He takes the elevator up another floor or two and goes up the stairs towards the roof. He's never been up here before, except he'd apparently landed here when he'd been dumped from Asgard. But that doesn't really count because he doesn't remember it; he'd been knocked out sometime in between leaving Asgard and waking up on Tony's couch.

He opens the door to the roof and steps out into the air. He gazes up at the sky, but there really aren't many stars, which is sad because looking at them is always comforting. It's also not quiet like Asgard was in the nights. There's still noise coming from the city below him, even though he's really high up, and he realizes he actually misses something from Asgard. He misses the quiet, and the gardens and the horses. But other than that, it's infinitely better here and he wouldn't go back for anything.

Although, if they wanted to send him back, it's not like he'd really have a choice, would he?

Tony watches as Loki bolts from the room, although his superhuman speed isn't taking effect now. Obviously, Tony can't catch up to him on crutches, but he's not sure if they should go after Loki anyways. If he's going away, he probably wants to be alone, at least for a little bit.

To be honest, Tony's sort of surprised they reached the end of that movie. He hadn't realized how many triggers it had, and then there had been some he hadn't even thought of. Something in that scene in the beginning with Frollo and baby Quasimodo struck a chord with Loki. Tony's not entirely sure what it is, but it's probably something demented and horrific about Asgard. When he thinks about it more he realizes it's probably connected to that quote from one of Thor's friends that Loki had spouted after the second Hulk incident, the one about how Loki should have been left somewhere to die. The idea of him being told that is so disturbing on so many levels that it's stuck around in Tony's head as prominently as that whole demented lip-sewing thing.

Esmeralda disappearing was another trigger that he hadn't expected, and he hadn't even remembered it was in the movie. He's really glad Jarvis had paused it before that part (he's betting the AI had been watching ahead of them digitally so he could spot stuff like that, despite not being asked to). Esmeralda was just doing it is a trick, like magicians, but Loki had seemed to think it was real... Loki can't possibly teleport, Tony thinks. But supposedly Dr. Doom can, so why not Loki? After all, it's not like the god hasn't done a bunch of other strange things. However, Tony hasn't seen a single instance of teleportation from Loki.

But if Loki can teleport, that would probably be something he'd use a lot, to get away from his tormentors (plus it would just be so freaking convenient. Dr. Doom is lucky in that sense). So Loki probably can't teleport, Tony thinks. Why would he run away when he could escape that way instead? But if he couldn't do it, why would he have reacted like that?

Loki hadn't totally freaked out at any of the scenes, though they'd needed to calm him down for a while. Still, he hadn't hidden under anything, though that might have been because he'd been clinging to Tony, and he hadn't refused to watch the rest of the movie. Tony's glad they'd made it
through the whole thing, because it would have been really easy for Loki to jump to the wrong conclusion if they ended it early.

Tony's now learned that telling Loki when characters are wrong in their views before or while some trigger event is happening is a good idea, because then Loki hopefully won't get the wrong impression like he had with *Avatar*. Also, if he can predict Loki freaking out and start trying to calm him down before he loses it, he doesn't totally shut down.

Tony looks at Bruce and Pepper. He'd told both of them earlier about how Loki hates his other form, and Bruce seems to get that all too well.

"I think that was a good movie to show him." Pepper says, as if reading his thoughts. "It seems like it helped."

Tony agrees. He thinks Loki had gotten the message of the movie, about not hating people for their appearance, which is definitely a plus. But whether or not Loki believes it applies to him is an entirely different matter. Loki had been systematically taught to accept abuse and believe that he deserves to be treated in whatever inhumane way someone feels like treating him. He'd even been taught to think he deserves to be punished for using the one thing that he might have possibly been able to use to defend himself- his powers. He'd been completely at his tormentors' mercy, and they probably weren't very merciful.

Tony *really* wants to teach them all a lesson, but seeing as he's stuck on Midgard, he'll have to settle with just teaching Thor...

"I hope he doesn't think he's an exception to that moral." Tony says. "Maybe one of us should talk to him."

"I'll do it." Bruce says, and Tony looks at him in surprise. Bruce gives a sardonic smile and says "Who's better? I know how he feels."

"Are you going to be okay?" Tony asks, hoping that counts as subtle, although Bruce apparently sees right through it because he says that he has the Other Guy in check now. After a moment of consideration, Tony shrugs. He trusts that Bruce is capable of telling if he's at risk of letting the jolly green giant out or not.

According to Jarvis, Loki is on the roof. Tony's a little surprised, but it's not like he'd ever forbidden Loki from going up there. Loki's not a prisoner or anything; he can basically go wherever he wants- within reason. Tony doesn't let him in the lab unless he's in there himself, and Jarvis doesn't let Loki use the elevator to go to any of the Stark Industries floors or the lobby, the latter because then there's the possibility of him wandering off and getting lost in the city again.

Bruce heads off after telling Pepper and Dum-E to make sure Tony stays off his leg. As soon as Bruce is gone, Tony sends Dum-E back to the lab, but Pepper gives him a look that tells him he's going to stay off his feet whether he likes it or not.

Pepper looks at him and asks "I've been wondering- if he acts terrified every time he does magic or whatever it is, why does he change stuff like you said he did?"

"He always uses his powers accidentally, or in his sleep." Tony says. "As for changing things, he was just talking about how a normal teapot and teacup could look like Mrs. Potts and Chip, and then they did. Once the waters smoothed out again, I found out that he likes them, which seems like a good sign because he hates how he made them. The toys of me and Bruce took a little prodding though."
"Prodding?" Pepper asks, starting to look sort of annoyed, though Tony's not sure why. Partly for a distraction, he picks up the Tony Stark action figure, which Loki had left on the bed. He hasn't looked at it closely until now. The resemblance between the plastic toy and himself is uncanny, almost like someone shrunk him down. Considering how childish Loki's drawings appear, he's amazed at how good the toy looks. Of course it looks good, he reprimands himself mentally—it's a toy of him for crying out loud.

The plastic brown eyes even seem to be watching him, which is pretty creepy. The toy's wearing astonishingly detailed replicas of the clothes Tony's wearing now. Tony looks from his rock band t-shirt to the toy. Okay, the design on the shirt is totally totally different (the toy's shirt has Mufasa on it) but it's still amazing. But the cherry on top is the blue-white circle. This toy certainly puts the other action figures to shame.

"Well, he wasn't doing it on his own." Tony says as he experimentally pulls at the clothing. It comes off, he realizes, though the action figures he'd bought the god hadn't had removable clothes. He immediately starts undressing the plastic version of himself, ignoring the reprimanding look from Pepper. What? He's a playboy, and he wants to get a closer look at the arc reactor.

Tony continues speaking as he undresses the toy. "I wanted him to have another example of getting something positive out of his powers, and I figured if he changed things into stuff he wanted, that might help. He seemed to like Mrs. Potts and Chip after getting over the panic of changing them. So... yeah. I asked him what it would be like if they changed." The toy's shirt is now off, and its body is very accurate, though admittedly Loki has seen him in boxers. Mrs. Potts and Chip are really accurate, too. Tony's not sure if Loki has a really good memory or if his powers automatically make things look like how he wants. Tony looks at the arc reactor and rubs a thumb over it, realizing it's just a glowing circle. Tony has no idea how Loki had done it. There's definitely light coming from it, since it's shining on his thumb.

He realizes that for one thing, the toy's going commando without any underwear. Also, the figure's private area is about as PG-ed as a Ken doll's, since he's missing a very important part. Tony's not sure whether to be glad or disappointed, but next to the realism of the rest of the figure, it looks rather strange.

"You knew he'd freak out when he realized what he'd done, and you tricked him into doing it?" Pepper demands, clearly starting to get angry. Geez, when she puts it that way, it doesn't sound at all like what he'd been going for. He just wanted to make Loki less scared of his powers. Yet, at the same time, Tony really can't deny that he'd pressured Loki into it. He's starting to feel like crap again.

But if he doesn't try to get Loki to have nice experiences with his powers, how is he supposed to get the god to stop freaking out every time he uses them? How are they ever going to get him to not hate them if they keep skirting around the issue?

It's not like forcing Bruce to Hulk-out would make him hate the Hulk less, though.

Pepper's right, Tony realizes with reluctance. He probably shouldn't have tricked Loki into doing it like that, especially considering how the god reacts. Pepper manages to force him to admit this realization, and then she just says "tell Loki that."

She leaves soon after, because, as she says, she has a job to get to tomorrow morning. Tony knows that, of course.

He sits there, alone, thinking of all the things he needs to get Loki to understand as he glances at the action figure of himself. He's not going to hand it back to Loki naked. Although, that would be
sort of funny. Still, he ends up grabbing the miniature clothes, almost identical to the ones he's wearing, and dresses a miniature version of himself.

It's a rather strange experience.

He shoves the toy into his pocket, as much as it can fit in, anyways. Then, he grabs his crutches and attempts to stand up, telling Jarvis to not even dare informing Bruce, because he's going to be staying off the injured leg. However, when he stands, blood rushes to his leg in the cast, and geez that hurts! Although the painkillers help a lot.

He falls back onto the bed, and now he's not even sure if he's able to support himself on crutches. But he doesn't want to stay down here.

He calls Dum-E back to this floor, and Dum-E lets out a beep that's probably supposed to be comforting but is also overexcited at the idea of helping his creator. Leaning on his robot for support while using crutches at the same time, Tony manages to hobble back to the elevator, take it to the penthouse and hobble over to the couch before collapsing onto it.

"Get me some scotch, Dum-E. And don't break anything." Tony mumbles from the couch. He doubts anyone could deny he deserves it.

Bruce hadn't even needed Jarvis to tell him where Loki was, because, thanks to the Other Guy, he has a really strong sense of smell. He grabs his coat and heads up towards the roof, which is where the trail is leading.

Loki is standing near the edge of the roof, hugging Simba and rocking from side to side as he stares at the night sky. Bruce makes sure to make enough noise so he won't startle him, because there's the dangerous possibility of him plummeting to his death. Would he die? He's apparently about as durable as Thor, and Bruce isn't sure whether Thor would survive a fall from Stark Tower.

He notices that Loki's not wearing shoes, nor is he wearing anything to keep him warm at all. Just a Snoopy t-shirt and a pair of sweatpants. Bruce is about to say something, but he remembers Tony telling him about Loki not getting cold because he's a Jotun. Apparently, Loki sees himself as a monster, something Bruce can sympathize all too much with. Even if Tony hadn't mentioned Loki's view of himself, it was obvious from watching the god's reactions to *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

Loki's also wearing a green drawstring bag, and Bruce sees something familiar sticking out of the front pocket. "Is that me?" Bruce asks, although he's now certain it is. Tony had said something about Loki changing a Hulk toy into a Bruce one.

Loki sends him a terrified look and Bruce hastily apologizes for bringing it up, saying they can talk about something else. Loki's silent for a minute as he stares upwards, seeming to drift off into some private thought, but eventually he speaks.

"The stars are all gone," Loki says mournfully, staring up at the night sky. "And there were a lot more back there..." Loki hasn't glanced at Bruce once since that terrified look, and Bruce isn't sure if Loki's talking to him or Simba.

"They're not gone, there's just a lot of light pollution here." Bruce explains. "All the lights in the city make it harder to see the stars, like how you don't see the stars during the day, but they're still there."

"Really?" Loki asks, and Bruce confirms it, adding that the fact it's somewhat cloudy right now
Loki continues to gaze into the night sky "So they're still there, even if you can't see them." Loki repeats, meaning he'd absorbed what Bruce had just said about light pollution. Bruce hadn't been sure if he was even listening while he explained it. Loki giggles. "I like that. I like stars. Did you know they can make little pictures called constellations? There aren't enough to see right now, but you can make them into anything you want! Look at the moon! It's a full moon. Have you heard the stories where the man turns into a wolf on the full moon?" Loki bounces enthusiastically and grins at him.

"Werewolves?" Bruce asks with a small smile. Loki giggles and nods, saying that it's kind of silly. "Oh. So they don't have werewolves where you're from?" Bruce asks teasingly.

Loki shakes his head, and then says, "You're kinda one, right? Well, you don't turn into a wolf and it's not 'cause of the full moon, but you turn into Hulk-y when you're angry. That's what Tony said."

That's like comparing apples to oranges, Bruce thinks. There's a bit of silence, since Bruce has no idea what to say to that and he doesn't really feel like expanding on that anyways. Loki speaks again and Bruce is pretty sure he's addressing him this time. Fortunately, it's not about the Were-Hulk theory.

"Do you ever want to fly?" That's really not the sort of thing someone should be saying near the edge of a roof, and it makes Bruce very uneasy. He doesn't think Loki's suicidal or anything, but if he jumped off to try to fly...

Seeming oblivious to Bruce's concern, Loki continues "I always wanted to fly, to go up and away from there, and I'm here now! I love it here!"

"I'm really glad to hear that." Bruce says, and he honestly is. "Let's get away from the edge, shall we?" Bruce pulls Loki towards the center of the roof. Loki doesn't protest and lets himself be pulled along, still gazing up. Apparently the sky is more interesting than he is, even with a supposedly depressing lack of visible stars at the moment.

"Tony can fly and so can Thor." Loki goes on, and Bruce gets the feeling he's not talking to him anymore. "I flew a couple times, I think, only without the flying part. Like-" Loki clamps a hand over his own mouth. Bruce has no idea what that statement was supposed to mean but Loki gives the impression of just having said something he shouldn't. He actually looks at Bruce now with scared eyes. "I dunno, it might've been a dream." Loki adds quickly, but Bruce is pretty sure that's some sort of cover up.

Bruce gets a feeling he shouldn't draw attention to it though, so he doesn't say anything. Loki relaxes slightly, which means that was probably the right thing to do.

"Give me your hand." Loki says suddenly, actually looking at him now, even though his eyes are still somewhat glazed. His voice sounds different than usual, but Bruce can't put a finger on what exactly is different. Bruce stands there, somewhat confused. Loki simply shifts so he's hugging Simba to his chest, seemingly in order to have both hands free, and grabs Bruce's left hand. He brings it close to his face and studies it, informing Bruce that he's going to have a live for a while.

"Oh, are you a palm reader now?" Bruce asks with a slight smile. "Glad to hear I'll be living for a while, anyways." Shortly after gaining the ability to Hulk-out, he would actually have been sorry to hear that, but well, that was a really bad time in his life.

Loki ignores him and traces a finger across Bruce's palm. "This one means you're shy." He informs
him, and Bruce suddenly realizes this is very close to one scene between Esmeralda and Quasimodo. Apparently, they've jumped into some sort of role play re-enactment, yet at the same time it's strangely relevant. Loki stares at Bruce's hand some more and says "That's funny. I don't see any."

Bruce asks what he doesn't see any of, but he remembers the next line, which Loki supplies. "Monster lines! Not a single one, nope nope nope!" Loki says, breaking character and shakin his head so his hair flies out wildly around it.

"Yeah, well, what about the Other Guy?" Bruce mutters before he can stop himself.

"Hulk-y's got really big hands." Loki says with a grin. It seems like a random comment until he goes on. "Really big. So if he had monster lines, you couldn't miss them. But he didn't, so he's not one- not a monster. Or maybe he's a good monster like Sulley and Mike, 'cause they didn't have them either, and good monsters almost aren't monsters at all!"

Bruce is unsure of what to say to that, but he likes Loki all the more for what he says about the Other Guy, though he'd already liked Loki before he learned his opinion about him.

"Tony said that Hulk-y helped save Midgard, and I saw you kill those evil metal things when Tony was Man of Iron." Bruce wonders if Loki had misspoke when he said you in that second part, because every other time he's talked about Bruce and the Other Guy as if they're separate people, which they sort of are. "Quasimodo saved Esmeralda and he's not really a monster anymore, and you and Hulk-y saved Midgard. So you guys aren't monsters either." If only it was that simple, Bruce thinks. Still, Loki has clearly picked up on the moral of the movie they'd just watched, which has to be a good thing.

Some people wouldn't agree with Loki on that assessment, Bruce thinks. He's one of them, actually, at least for an out-of-control Hulk. When the Other Guy is out of control, he really is a monster.

The Other Guy doesn't seem to like that thought, and Bruce has to force him down. He closes his eyes and focuses on taking deep breaths.

"How come he never comes out now? I wish he would." Loki says, frowning. Bruce sighs. As much as he likes hearing what Loki says about the Other Guy, it's not exactly true. Letting him out like that wouldn't be a good idea.

"Sometimes the Other Guy can be-" Bruce hesitates. He can think of plenty of accurate descriptions for the Hulk- destructive, uncontrollable (sometimes, though thankfully not nearly as often as before), monstrous- but he doesn't want to say any of those and anger the Other Guy, since he already seems annoyed with him just thinking them. "-not nice." Bruce finishes lamely.

"Mean?" Loki supplies a word for not nice as if Bruce couldn't actually come up with one. "But he gives really good hugs." Loki says, as if that settles the whole issue.

"Yeah... you remember... what the Other Guy did... right?"

"He hugged me!" Loki grins but then his smile falters. "And Tony fought him in his suit and he hurt Tony." Exactly, Bruce thinks. Loki glares and says "That wasn't nice! But even Tony's not always nice."

Despite himself, Bruce bursts out laughing at that. Loki is using Tony Stark- the genius billionaire who gets on so many people's nerves and is practically the king of assholes- as some kind of
standard for kindness that other people should aspire to?! A lot of people would probably suspect that Tony had gone into so many spiels about his awesomeness that he ended up brainwashing Loki or something, especially if they'd heard that comment Loki had made when he first met Bruce about Tony being the nicest person ever. Bruce still hasn't totally ruled that out as a possibility. Regardless, deep down, Tony's a nice man- although, oddly enough, it's not even that deep when he interacts with Loki.

"He got mad, like Hulk-y, except he didn't change." Loki says, seeming unfazed by Bruce's laughter. "But he said he didn't mean to snap and he doesn't hate me and he won't hit me, and he says I'm not bad." He sounds rather awed over this, and seems as though he's still not entirely sure if it's too good to be true.

"You aren't bad, and you aren't a monster, either." Bruce says. The Other Guy roars in agreement with that statement, to Bruce's surprise. The Other Guy seems to really like the Hurt Nice Man as he thinks of Loki, and he had seemed really supportive of Tony's idea of beating the tar out of the Asgardians who had hurt Loki.

Loki sticks out his hand. "Look at me now." Bruce looks at Loki's hand. He's a scientist and doesn't believe in palm reading, but really the only reason it's involved right now is because Loki's re-enacting that scene. However, he has no idea what comes next, and they've sort of deviated from it anyways, so he decides to just go with improvisation. "You don't have any monster lines on your hand." Maybe that'll help Loki realize it.

Loki brings his own hand up close to his face and studies it, looking like he really liked hearing that. But he also looks very doubtful, as if he thinks there are monster lines somewhere on them (though why they'd be on the backs of his hands is anyone's guess).

"You know monster lines aren't even a thing, right? They're just made up. Having lines on your hands doesn't make you a monster." Bruce drops the act, since it hadn't been going the way it should. Loki looks up at him in surprise, lowering his hand. "So, um, if you do have lines or something, that doesn't mean you're a monster."

"Loki, look at me. You. Are not. A monster." Bruce says slowly and clearly. "Trust me when I say I know monsters, and you're not one of them."

"That's what Tony said," Loki stares at him with wide eyes. "He knows monsters too, and he said I'm not one."

"Well, Tony was right." Bruce says quickly. "Maybe they thought you were one there, but we don't think you are here, okay?"

Loki stares at him for a bit. "Maybe Frollo's wrong about both of us." Loki quotes, before literally almost crushing him into a hug. Bruce makes a strangled sound, and of course his heart rate and pulse go up.

Loki relaxes his grip, and Bruce sighs in relief, gasping for air.

Then, he realizes something. In all honesty, the Other Guy should have come out at that, regardless of whether Bruce wanted to Hulk-out or not. He always Hulked-out when Thor hugged him, and this was almost as intense. But he hadn't this time. In fact, the Other Guy seems suspiciously relaxed and content.

Loki wakes up suddenly, eyes flying open. At first, he's not entirely sure if he's really awake or if
he's still dreaming, but a quick pinch on the arm tells him the answer.

He hadn't been dreaming about Asgard this time, thankfully, but this dream was still bad.

Loki can actually remember the dream, but it was all so random, and he's not sure what parts were the dream and what parts weren't. Bits of it pop up in his head. Watching the movie with Tony and the others, watching Quasimodo and Esmeralda and Phoebus. Quasimodo's gargoyle friends with Sleipnir, Fenrir, Jormungand and Hel. He'd liked seeing them again, but they'd gone too soon, replaced by Tony, Pepper and Bruce telling him he's not a monster. Bits of the dream continue to flash through his mind. Quasimodo being liked by the crowd. Bruce telling him he's not thought of as a monster here. Genie saying neither of them are freaks.

And then it had changed. His horrible skin had been showing, and he couldn't hide it, or hide at all. Tony, Pepper and Bruce had found him and seen what a monster he really is. Tony and the others (mostly Tony) had taken back the nice things they said, realizing he really is a monster. They'd started treating him like he deserves. You don't belong here, we're not putting up with you anymore. Get out of here, monster. Go back to Asgard. Nobody wants you, you stupid, worthless Frost Giant. How could you possibly think otherwise?

Loki chokes back a sob and buries his head against Simba. It's not like he ever thought they wouldn't react that way, but hearing it had hurt even more than he thought it would.

But it had been a dream, right? He's pretty sure, and it feels a little different from his memory-nightmares. He's not completely terrified and lost like he is after those. But there's a horrible sense of dread and fear lurking in the air around him, or maybe it's in him. In some ways, nightmares that aren't memory-nightmares are even worse, Loki thinks as he huddles on the bed, not daring to move.

"Do you require assistance, Mr. Loki?" Jarvis asks. Loki relaxes at his voice and lets out a long breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding.

"Where's Tony?" Loki asks anxiously. Normally he's here to make him feel better, and Loki hasn't seen him since going up to the roof. Loki hunts through his bag of Avengers toys. Toy Stark isn't even close to as good as Tony, but Tony's not here. Neither is Toy Stark, he realizes, staring at the action figures on his bed.

"Mr. Stark is currently asleep, but I can wake him if you wish." Jarvis says. "I'm afraid you'll have to go to him, though, as Dr. Banner has insisted he stay off his feet as much as possible."

Loki really wants to, but at the same time venturing out seems terrifying right now for some reason. He can't help thinking there's something (a Frost Giant, maybe) lurking in the shadows that's going to jump him. Logically, Loki knows that there's a very small possibility of something bad being out there, since the only people living here are him, Tony and Bruce. But it's hard to remember that right now when it's dark.

He makes it to his door, but once he opens it to the vast openness beyond, he balks and scurries back to his bed, crawling under it- Tony had said he can do that again. Even the hallway makes him feel too exposed. He's not as exposed here, but Tony's not here either.

It was a dream, right? But was it all a dream? Did they watch the movie and did they really tell him those wonderful things?

Yeah, they did, he realizes. The movie was real and being on the roof with Bruce was real too but Loki doesn't remember anything past going inside.
Watching that movie had been really nice, but it was so different from Asgard, like a lot of stuff Tony's said.

Tony, Pepper and Bruce had all said what you look like doesn't matter, but he really does have a monster's skin underneath. Neither Quasimodo nor Beast are nearly as hideous as him, so while what they look like doesn't matter, what he looks like does. Besides, Frost Giants are more than just ugly- they're savage killers. Everyone knows that. As if that's not evidence enough, everyone said Loki's messed up inside, too, not to mention he does magic. He's even worse than Esmeralda... but Esmeralda hadn't been bad, right? At least, not according to Quasimodo, even though she had done magic. Regardless of Esmeralda, he's still bad.

Loki knows he's bad- but here he's told he's not, which is rather confusing. It's like when Esmeralda told Quasimodo he wasn't a monster. Eventually, Quasimodo hadn't even been treated like a monster anymore. It's like he stopped being one.

Tony, Pepper, Bruce and Hulk like him anyways, it seems, despite all the reasons not to. Tony even knows about both his magic and his true form, and he still acts really nice- but the man's never actually seen his hideous true form. Loki hopes he never does. He hopes nobody ever does.

Maybe they don't really know about Frost Giants here. After all, Tony's never mentioned any stories of them kidnapping bad children and eating them. Loki had nightmares of that happening even after he grew up, because he's still bad, even if he's not a child, and he'd been told they'd make an exception for him. Apparently, it doesn't even matter that he's one of them, because according to Volstagg, they're savage cannibals.

Loki hears a beep, and he's pulled from his thoughts. Glancing in the direction of the sound, he sees the bottom part of Dum-E, and Dum-E's claw goes down so he can see it. Dum-E beeps again, in an encouraging, comforting way.

"Mr. Stark has granted you permission to enter his room. Perhaps Dum-E can keep you company on the way there." Jarvis suggests, and Loki likes Jarvis and Dum-E even more right now. They'd realized what was wrong and they're not making fun of him for being scared.

He crawls out from under his bed and grabs Dum-E's claw while hugging Simba with his other arm.

Having Dum-E with him makes things seem a lot less scary, and he almost forgets about worrying something will snatch him away from the shadows.

Not being hated ever again would be really nice, Loki thinks as he shuffles alongside Dum-E. He doesn't even deserve that, though. Not like Quasimodo, because he's actually a bad monster. Jotuns are evil monsters so he has to be one, right?

Frollo had said all gypsies were evil, but apparently he was wrong because Esmeralda was one and she wasn't evil. Nobody's wrong about Frost Giants though. Loki wonders if all the Jotuns in Jotunheim hate each other and beat each other up for being Jotuns, like the Asgardians do to him.

He stops thinking about this as he enters Tony's room. He hasn't been in here since hiding under Tony's huge bed the first day. He immediately dashes towards the man, practically diving onto the bed next to him.

"Whoa! Don't dive bomb the bed like that- you could break it!" Tony says as Loki crawls over to him. Tony winces. "You just jolted my ankle! And you're invading my personal space bubble again."
Loki mumbles an apology but he doesn't want to move away from Tony.

"Just so we're clear, you coming in here isn't going to become a habit. The only reason I'm letting you in now is because Bruce practically Hulked-out when he found I'd gone to the couch. He would kill me if I went around crawling under beds with a broken ankle." Tony says, before muttering something with the words Jarvis, reporting and traitor.

What?! Loki sits up, shocked and horrified. Bruce would kill Tony?! He though Bruce was nice! Tony seems to be reading his mind and says "It's just a figure of speech, Snoopy. It means he'd be angry, not that he'd actually kill me." Oh. Loki sighs in relief. He doesn't want Tony dead. Though he wonders why they say so many weird things here.

"You were almost falling asleep on the floor when you came down from the roof with Bruce." Tony says. "So, I take it you had a bad dream or something?"

Loki nods. "Wasn't a memory-dream." He mumbles.

"Oh, so it wasn't a flashback?" Tony asks. Loki shakes his head. Most of his nightmares are of things that actually happened, but sometimes he has fictional ones, like now. At least, he hopes it's fictional.

"It's not real, right?" Loki needs to know. He's pretty sure it was a dream, but he needs to know for sure. "You didn't say those things?"

"Say what things?" Tony asks, sounding concerned.

"The mean ones." Loki says, and he's not able to stop himself from going on, from telling Tony about the parts concerning them not wanting him and sending him back to Asgard. But he manages to stop himself before he mentions the other things.

Tony, who'd complained about a personal bubble earlier, pulls him into a hug, saying he hadn't said any of those things and isn't going to. So the bad part of the dream really wasn't real, and Tony didn't say those things that felt like getting stabbed in the heart.

"Loki, I'm not sending you back there. What kind of person would I be, to send you back to hell?" Loki's kind of confused about that second part, but he really likes the first part. He doesn't want to go there ever again. Tony continues, in the tone he uses when he's smirking. "Besides, I've gotten used to having you around."

"What about when I'm bad?" Loki whispers.

"Depends what you define as bad." Tony says. "Remember what I said when you first came here? That as long as you don't try to murder me, you're still welcome here. Well, that still stands, and I can honestly say I don't think it's going to be an issue. You don't strike me as a murderer. Heck, you haven't done anything remotely violent since you got here."

Tony stares at him for a bit before continuing. "Now, if by bad, you mean having a smurf form or doing things you'd learn in Hogwarts, well, neither of those are even bad in the first place, so no worries- Hakuna Matata, remember?"

Loki giggles and quotes, without singing "It means no worries, for the rest of your days. It's our problem-free philosophy...HAKUNA MATATA!" He bounces as he laughingly shouts the last part before squeezing Simba's ear so Simba sings part of the song and dances.

"Sheesh, not so loud." Tony says. "But you're right about the no worries part." Then he scoots over
and grabs something from the bedside table. "You forgot him back on the medical floor." Tony says and Loki realizes he's holding Toy Stark. He giggles. Tony's holding a mini Tony!

"By the way, he looks amazing. Much better than the original Iron Man toy, if you ask me. Actually, he seriously does my incredibly good looks justice. I bet Barbies would fight tooth and nail over him, even though he's like four inches shorter than them and tragically unequipped."

Loki takes the proffered toy and fiddles with it as he stares at Tony. What in the Nine Realms is he talking about?

"You know what I meant, right? I mean, you have to know. You're, what, a couple thousand years old? Surely someone gave you The Talk- I mean, I knew by the time I was thirteen."

Loki furrows his brow. What talk? Also, thirteen? That's still an infant! Tony's got to be joking about that. He frowns some more. Hadn't the movie mentioned that Quasimodo was only twenty? But he wasn't a baby when they'd said that. Maybe they'd been talking about when he was a baby, Loki thinks, or maybe he'd misunderstood it...?

Tony looks at him and says "You know, birds and bees, 'insert tab A into slot B', that sort of thing?" Now Loki's even more confused.

"Okay, please just tell me that you know how babies are made." Loki frowns at that. Why hadn't he just asked that to begin with? And what do birds and bees have to do with sticking certain body parts in other parts?

Loki nods and gives a brief rundown of what Frigga had told him. Tony gives a rather dramatic sigh of relief and says "Thank god- I was worried you were going to say they grow in a cabbage patch!" Loki giggles. Who thinks that?!

"Seriously, good job with this." Tony says, tapping Toy Stark. Loki flinches at the reference to his magic. "No- don't start that. You did nothing wrong." Tony quickly adds, putting an arm around his shoulder. Loki relaxes and frowns in confusion he processes what Tony said.

Wait- Tony actually likes Toy Stark? But he'd done magic to make him. Loki has to admit that he likes Toy Stark, but he hadn't thought Tony would. Then again, Tony said he wished he could change things, which is still completely insane.

"Pepper says I should apologize for tricking you like that." Tony says, though he doesn't sound particularly pleased to be saying that. "She's right. I shouldn't have done that."

Loki's not sure what trick he's talking about but he nods anyways.

Loki smiles slightly as he looks between the action figure and the real Tony, remembering the real events of the evening. They hadn't taken back all those nice things they'd told him.

Right now, he has a couple people who have been telling him he's not a monster, as weird as that is. Loki just wishes they were actually right about that. But they seem certain that they are right.

As inexplicable as it is, they also do really seem to like him- certainly Tony, at any rate, since he's still nice despite every reason not to be, and even promised not to hit him. Everyone in Asgard said nobody would ever like him, but Tony likes him, so that would mean the Asgardians were wrong about something. He didn't know that was possible.

Although, if they ever see his true skin, they won't like him anymore. His dream made that even more obvious than it already had been. No matter what they say about looks not mattering, nobody
looks at blue skin (complete with lines that apparently aren't monster lines) and red eyes with anything but disgust and revulsion- quickly followed by hate. Quasimodo's lucky, and so is Hulk because they're not hideous like him. But in his skin now, he doesn't look like a monster. Under this illusion, he looks no different from anyone else.

Still, that doesn't change everything wrong inside of him, like his magic.

But Bruce had said they don't think of him as a monster here and Tony's said weirdly similar things about skin and magic not mattering.

Tony's been treating him really kindly despite all the reasons not to, like how Esmeralda treated Quasimodo. If this continues, might it the same way for him as it had for them?

If he keeps his real form hidden, maybe they'll keep liking him.

Loki knows he shouldn't get his hopes up because they could be crushed, but he can't help it. He knows it's too much to ask for since it's more than he deserves, but still he can't stop himself from wishing that he might get a happy ending too.

With that thought, he drifts off to sleep, a small smile on his lips.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Not all interviews go particularly well, but Jarvis is always there for his creator.

Loki does something amazing with his magic.

Okay, Tony did not expect Loki to fall asleep on his bed. Nudging him produces no reaction, to Tony's disappointment. Neither does shaking him or even calling his name. Tony slumps back, annoyed. Obviously, he can't move Loki back to the his own bed. Dum-E's useless in this situation, too, since he can't carry Loki.

Tony could get Bruce to help, except he really doesn't want Bruce to know about this, for some reason. Well, that and the fact his room is off limits. Besides, Loki's freakishly heavy, and considering that Tony can't lift him without a suit, Bruce couldn't lift him without going all green. Bruce isn't invited in his bedroom and there's no way in hell Tony will ever let the Hulk in here.

"Can you play some loud music or something, Jarvis?" Tony mumbles. He's too tired to be very loud himself.

"I could, sir, but I do not think that would be advised. You see, Mr. Loki is rather sleep-deprived already, so denying him this sleep would be detrimental."

Tony sits up, annoyed. "Yeah, well, he's in my bed. And in case you haven't noticed, I haven't been sleeping much either."

"I have indeed noticed, sir. In case you've forgotten, we AI's can see eeeeverything."

"Did you just paraphrase Woody from Toy Story?" Tony asks in surprise. The slow way Jarvis had said it sounded quite like when Woody was scaring Sid. Jarvis has quoted other characters before, but they're usually AI characters like HAL 9000 or even Auto from Wall-E (which is Dum-E's all time favorite movie).

"Indeed I did, sir. Besides, even if I was not monitoring your sleep, your excessive consumption of coffee makes your lack of sleep obvious." Jarvis replies dryly.

"Well, what do we do about him?" Tony asks, referring to the god who's clinging to him. He tries to extract himself again, to no avail. Tony's more awake now, but for some reason he can't find it in him to startle Loki awake himself. He hates that. When the hell had he gotten so soft anyways?! Nobody's going to find out about this.

"Even if you managed to wake Mr. Loki up, I'm not sure you'd be able to get him to leave. Besides," The AI adds, sounding amused "It's not like you haven't had a great number of people in your bed, exactly."

"This isn't like that, and you know that." Tony grumbles. Geez, this is like deja vu from when Loki had gone in his bedroom the first day. Actually, their conversation then had been basically the same, if Tony's memory is right.
"Whatever you say, sir. This is such a touching scene." Jarvis replies, sounding way too amused. "Rest assured that I am recording the whole thing. I dare say it could make good blackmail material."

"You can be a real jerk, you know that?" Tony grumbles.

"I learned from the best, sir." Jarvis replies.

"Don't make me reprogram you. Or I could just demote you to an answering machine." Tony threatens, and Jarvis wisely falls silent. Tony sighs as he looks at the god. It looks like Loki's going to be sleeping here for the remainder of tonight, but not in that way. Tony's bed is easily big enough for six people, maybe eight if everyone cozied up next to each other. Loki's still clinging to him, and when Tony tries to extract himself to move away, the god tightens his hold a bit, but at least it's not crushing him or anything.

Tony sighs as sleep eludes him. Figures- he'd actually been sleeping rather peacefully before Loki came in. Now, to his annoyance, memories from New York fill his head, which brings him to thinking of all the people he hadn't saved.

He'd never admit this, but having someone with him- even someone who's sleeping- helps, and he's almost glad Loki's here.

When Tony wakes up, he immediately wishes he hadn't. He almost feels more tired now than last night. When had he fallen asleep anyways? He notices that someone's sprawled next to him with one of their hands on his chest. He frowns slightly. It's not like he hasn't woken up with someone in his bed a million times, but he doesn't remember taking anyone home last night. Wasn't he in the tower the whole time? Where would he even have picked up a one-night stand? Whoever's next to him is actually on top of the covers, judging from the way they're weighed down. Also, what's the metal thing next to his right arm and why is there something around his leg?

He opens his eyes and realizes that the person is Loki. Of course, he thinks as the memories of last night (or, technically, earlier this morning) return. How could he have forgotten?

He remembers Loki thinking he was going to be sent to Asgard, which brings up the question of why Loki would seek comfort from Tony if he believed he'd be cast away like that. Wouldn't a lot of people push others away in that situation? He certainly would, anyways.

It seems rather bizarre that Loki sought Tony out even in that mindset, although it did make calming him down easier. Then again, there are a lot of other things about Loki's behavior that Tony hasn't been able to make sense of, such as why he carries Simba everywhere, why he grows bored by live action movies quickly, why he sometimes personifies Tony's arc reactor... Really, he doesn't know why Loki acts the way he does in general, or why he's so childish.

Tony gets out of bed without waking the god- he has years of experience sneaking away from one night stands without waking them. While it's harder to be stealthy with a broken leg, Tony has a feeling he could be fairly loud and still not wake Loki right now.

He heads into the bathroom intending on taking a shower but Jarvis reminds him that he's not supposed to get his cast wet. Tony realizes that, as of right now, he doesn't have anything to keep it dry, so that's kind of out of the picture now. Oh well, it's not like he's too concerned with showering on a regular basis anyways.

Upon exiting the bathroom, Tony notices Loki is gone. Huh, maybe he hadn't been as asleep as
Tony had thought. On a hunch, he checks under the bed, but there's no god there either. Loki has probably left the room, Tony thinks, which Jarvis confirms when he asks.

After changing into a Black Sabbath shirt and jeans, Tony ignores his unmade bed and heads out towards the kitchen. He finds Bruce showing Loki how to use a waffle-maker and is greeted by the welcome smell of coffee. Bruce had apparently brewed a pot and it's even Tony's favorite type of coffee, although that's the only type in the tower.

"Morning," Bruce says. "Loki was just telling me about how you two were sleeping together." Bruce's lips twitch upwards slightly and Tony rolls his eyes. Loki clearly doesn't seem to get how that could be interpreted, because the god just nods to confirm he'd said that. Maybe he'll have to talk to him later.

Tony grabs a couple waffles and starts eating, which gets him a slightly critical look from Bruce. He rolls his eyes when Bruce starts telling him to not take things without asking. It's his tower, for crying out loud.

"What's with all the Avengers merchandise you've gotten Loki? You're not brainwashing him, are you?" Bruce asks once he sits down to eat.

"By 'all the Avengers merchandise' you mean a pair of pajamas and an action figure set." Tony replies. "Loki wanted both of those- he even picked the pajamas out. Right, Snoopy?" Tony switches to talking to Loki, gesturing to the Iron Man pajamas Loki's wearing.

Loki nods as he digs into his own waffles with his bare hands. At least he actually refrains from touching things with his syrup-covered hands, which saves Tony from having to worry about him getting the tower all sticky.

After breakfast, Tony heads down to his lab as he always does. It's rather annoying with crutches, and Tony soon learns how much he'd taken moving around quickly for granted, even in his lab. He hates it and is already extremely sick of having a broken leg.

Loki spends most of that morning crawling around under the lab tables like they're some sort of maze. Tony definitely does not jump when Loki grabs his leg, but he does tell him in a somewhat dangerous voice not to do that again. Loki looks too frightened at that, and Tony mentally kicks himself. Loki seems way more nervous of anger than most people, probably because of his past. He spends the next five minutes far away from Tony's table while Tony has to reassure him that he doesn't hate him.

At least that knee scooter arrives later that day, which Tony is glad about. Sure, it's not perfect, but it's a lot faster and less awkward than crutches. Gliding around on that is a lot better, although Bruce once again tells him not to make any modifications to it. Loki looks at Tony like he's crazy when he uses it, though.

Tony groans. Four weeks with this boring, unmodified thing is going to be horrible. Actually, this stupid cast in general is horrible. He can't even shower since he's not supposed to put weight on that leg; he has to take a bath instead, with a cover over the cast. Tony figures he can space out the baths a lot. It's not like he showers every day anyways (something Pepper had found really annoying when they were dating).

Sometimes, over the next couple days, Bruce and Tony both work in Tony's lab, but Bruce is often in his own lab. Bruce, it turns out, is annoyingly good at keeping him from doing things he shouldn't on that leg, even from another lab. Or maybe it's just that nobody in their right mind wants to anger Bruce, particularly someone with a broken leg. Tony's not sure how much care the
Hulk would show towards his injuries. Probably none.

Tony sections off a part of the lab, hidden from Bruce, for working on the Hulkbuster armor. Sure, Bruce already knows about it, but the Hulk might not like being reminded of it.

Over the next couple days following the broken-bone incident, Jarvis cuts out the huge metal pieces for the suit while Tony spends most of his time wiring circuits and working on the innards, which allows him to sit down a lot of the time and avoid Bruce's wrath.

By noon on the third day after breaking his ankle, Tony's actually pretty close to done with the Hulkbuster armor.

Loki, meanwhile, has yet to start another project, as far as Tony can tell. Sometimes he'll fiddle with holographic shapes but Tony doesn't think he's making anything. Loki spends most of his time with Tony in his lab but will occasionally venture to Bruce's lab. He's ventured to Tony's library a couple times, too, where he's been making his way through a huge book about animals that Tony hadn't even known he'd owned. Sometimes, Loki will get Jarvis to tell him about stars, though Loki rarely reads about them himself for some reason.

Jarvis tells Tony later that Loki's bookmarked the pages for horses, wolves and snakes in that animal book, with drawings he'd traced of said animals as the bookmarks. Tony is pretty sure part of the reason Loki loves horses is because of Sleipnir and the horses in Asgard. He even has that song about horses he's sung a couple times.

Loki spends a fair amount of time adding to his huge collection of drawings for his bedroom. Tony notices a fair number of drawings of Quasimodo and Esmeralda, which seems like a good sign. After all, Loki rarely draws characters he doesn't like. The only times villains appear in his drawings are when the drawings depict the heroes defeating them, like Loki's week-old rendering of Boo hitting Randal with a baseball bat in *Monsters Inc.*

One new drawing in particular stands out to Tony, and he notices it almost as soon as Loki's done drawing it in the lab. It's of Quasimodo's gargoyle friends along with some other figures. There's a wolf, a snake, a girl that Tony thinks sort of looks like Two-Face from *Batman*, and an eight-legged horse. Wait a minute, Loki had said something about an eight-legged horse at his therapy session.

Tony glances at Loki, who's playing some sort of game with his toys. Whatever Loki's playing right now seems to have combined elements and characters of several movies they've watched. Tony honestly has no idea what each toy's role is, because it seems to switch a lot. Sometimes the Avengers action figures seem to represent the actual Avengers, and sometimes they seem to represent various characters (mostly from Disney movies).

Loki seems completely unaware that he's being watched as he's playing with Simba and the Avengers toys. Tony's noticed that Loki doesn't treat the Avengers toys as if they're alive in the same way he does with Simba. Maybe it's because he's actually met the Avengers. Occasionally, he'll say something to the action figures, but it's almost like he's trying to speak to the actual people instead of the toys.

Yesterday, he'd actually picked up the Thor toy and started using it in one of his games. Tony had been planning on blowing it up in front of Loki, since Loki had seemed reluctant to even touch it before yesterday, but this actually seems better. When Loki had reenacted the song *Out There* from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the Thor toy had been cast as Frollo. Tony's not sure if it was supposed to be symbolic or if it had simply been because all the other toys already had parts, but it seemed to be another step in the right direction.
That had been a really good movie to show Loki, even if he had panicked at some parts. Tony's certain it was a good thing to show him now, and he thinks *Frozen* would be good too.

"Hey, Snoopy, come over here, will you?" Tony asks as he looks back at the drawing with the gargoyles and the four other figures. Loki looks up as if he'd forgotten Tony was even there. Then, Loki gets up and trots over as Tony pops a blueberry into his mouth.

Once Loki is next to him, Tony hands him a blueberry. Loki throws it into the air and literally bounces it off his nose before catching it in his mouth. He can still easily put Tony to shame in that regard, seemingly with no effort at all, which is *so* not fair.

Tony gestures at the figures in the drawing. "Are these your friends? What were their names again? *Hell? Slayp...?"*

Loki bites his lip and nods, looking somewhat nervous. "Hel, Sleipnir, Fenrir, and Jormungand." He says, pointing to the girl, the horse, the wolf and finally the snake. "Quasi's lucky. His friends didn't have to go away." Loki adds quietly.

Tony honestly doesn't know what to say to that, but Loki's wandered back to his toys already. That didn't alleviate Tony's curiosity- actually, knowing what Loki's imaginary friends look like has just made him more curious about them. Unfortunately, Loki doesn't seem to be up for revealing more right now.

"Hey, I wasn't done yet, Snoopy. Besides, you're probably going to like this." Tony says. He pulls up a teaser trailer for *Frozen* of a snowman (Olaf, according to that other trailer he'd watched) losing his nose and trying to get to it before a reindeer. Loki comes back over and clearly thinks the whole thing is hysterical, especially when Olaf's whole head blows off his body at the end.

Tony's still not sure whether to show him the trailer about Elsa's icy magic or not, but he decides doesn't want to wait a month until *Frozen* comes out to watch it with Loki, especially if it could help Loki now.

If Tony waves enough money around, though, he can probably arrange to see it before it comes out. Maybe he'll do that. Actually, he might want to see it once before Loki does so he knows what's coming up and can do what he'd done during *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

Loki of course continues to have nightmares, and Tony finds himself going over to the god's room on his knee scooter every night. Those other-Loki's still appear, and Tony sees the one that he's pretty sure is Loki as a child another time. That one seems so different from the Loki Tony knows, which makes Tony somewhat uneasy- especially the eyes, since they're not nearly as glazed as Loki's are now.

Sometimes, Loki's already awake when Tony enters, and Tony has to try to coax him out from under the bed and calm him down, with varying degrees of success. Sometimes Loki will crawl out to him and sometimes he'll remain stubbornly under the bed. Once, Bruce even joins Tony in Loki's room, to Tony's surprise. However, he doesn't stay long and instead busies himself with making tea and hot chocolate.

Tony himself has a rather horrible nightmare on the second night, but only has Jarvis to calm him down.

There are several more instances of Loki's powers, including one time, on the second day since Tony's broken ankle, where Loki makes Tony's cast neon green. For some reason, that incident freaks Loki out more than a lot of the others, like when another Loki appeared out of thin air.
However, he doesn't freak out as much over the cast as he does later when he makes Simba levitate as if he's flying in his Iron Man suit. However, Jarvis' sensors haven't picked up anything identifiable, much to Tony's disappointment.

On the fourth morning since Tony broke his leg, his cast is still neon green, which is sort of annoying. Loki hasn't changed it back, nor has he changed the Bruce and Tony figures back into Hulk and Iron Man, despite clearly wanting those ones back. Tony's managed to refrain from pressuring him; he's only pointed out that Loki can change them once before reassuring him that doing so isn't bad.

Jarvis informs Tony that he has an interview this morning with someone from some talk show. Tony sighs. This is clearly why Pepper had been so insistent on informing him about what was happening with the company. He'd been hoping to see what the Hulkbuster suit looks like put together, now that all the armor pieces have been cut. Tony reluctantly changes into a suit, which he now has to do sitting on his bed. He can't fit any socks or shoes over his cast, either, which is really annoying.

After Tony gets Loki's stuff out of the lab, he makes sure Jarvis has it locked. Then, he heads down towards the garage where his chauffeur- Daniel or whatever his name is- is waiting silently for him by a limo. The man doesn't even comment on Tony's injured leg, instead just silently placing the knee-scooter in the back of the limo. Unlike when he was taking Loki to therapy, Tony can really ride in style now. It only slightly makes up for his stupid broken leg.

Loki's not sure where Tony went, but he'd been dressed weirdly. He'd only been wearing a shoe on his left foot, since his shoes apparently wouldn't fit over the thing on his right leg and foot; Tony had seemed annoyed about that. Anyways, Tony's shoe, jacket and pants had all been black, and he'd been wearing a buttoned, navy blue, collared shirt under said jacket. Some weird cloth thing had been tied around his neck. Loki still thinks it had looked sort of like a leash, but Tony had given him a really strange look when he'd asked if that's what it was.

Jarvis had explained that the whole outfit was a suit (but not a suit like a Man of Iron suit) and that Tony was wearing it because he was going somewhere important. Tony had muttered that whatever interview thing he was going to wasn't important, which is confusing. Jarvis and Tony seem to disagree on that, but they're both always right. How does that work? Jarvis had then said that Tony was wearing it to look nice.

Loki puzzles over this. What's wrong with what Tony normally wears? It's not like those clothes make him look mean. He frowns before eventually realizing that by 'look nice' Jarvis hadn't meant nice as in kind, but instead meant that it made him look 'neat and professional', as Jarvis puts it when he asks.

Midgard is even more confusing than Asgard, and Loki had been confused plenty of times there, too.

Right now, Loki's in a different lab than the one Tony always uses, and he's just with Bruce. Bruce isn't making things like Tony does. Loki remembers not to tell Bruce about what Tony's making. Bruce knows about the Hulk suit, but Tony said not to mention it anyways. Loki's not sure what Bruce is doing, though.

Bruce explains he's doing something related to gamma radiation, whatever that is. Loki turns back to his game, which currently consists of having the Tony and Bruce action figures stomp on the Thor one.
"I see Thor's the bad guy." Bruce says, and Loki looks up at him, confused. He doesn't like Thor, but Thor isn't bad. He's like the perfect Asgardian. Loki's the bad one. Loki just shrugs, and Bruce says "It's okay to make him the bad guy."

"He's not the bad guy!" Loki shrieks. Saying the prince is a bad guy is a stupid idea. Plus, Thor's not even bad, Loki thinks as his mouth runs on at a rapid pace. "He helped save Midgard like Tony and you and Hulk-y and the other 'Vengers, and he's fought Frost Giants and everyone says he's a hero!" He's not making Thor the bad guy, he's just making the Thor toy lose to Toy Stark and Bruce.

"People aren't all good or all bad." Bruce explains. "You said yourself that people aren't nice all the time, and the same thing applies to whether or not people are good or bad. Thor was good when he helped stop the alien invasion here, but-" Bruce closes his eyes and takes a few deep breaths "-he was bad to you, wasn't he?"

Thor was mean to him, Loki thinks, but he deserves it, so that's not bad. It's just not very nice. It's very strange, though, that Thor hasn't hit him since being banished for a couple days to some Midgardian place called New Mexico. Then again, Thor has been away from Asgard a lot since then, and that banishment hadn't been very long ago at all. Thor's probably just been too busy to deal with him. That's the only explanation Loki's been able to come up with, because Fandral, Hogunn and Volstagg still torment him all the time.

Thor's a hero both on Asgard and Midgard, so it makes sense he hates someone bad like Loki. But aren't Tony, Bruce and Hulk heroes here on Midgard, too? Yeah, they are, he thinks. They're the Avengers.

So why do they seem to like a broken, monstrous freak like him? Heroes don't like bad guys.

Thankfully, Bruce changes the subject. "You know, the Other Guy's punched Thor so hard he's knocked him off his feet." Loki stares at him in disbelief. That can't be true, can it? Bruce smiles the tiniest bit and says "It's true. Just like this." Bruce punches the Thor toy off its feet.

Loki laughs and claps his hands. Thor never loses, or so he'd thought. Loki finds himself unable to keep from grinning as wide as possible. Thor probably hadn't deserved it, but Loki likes the idea anyways. He loves the Hulk even more now! "Can Hulk-y come out now? Tony's not here, so they can't fight."

"These look really good." Bruce changes the subject again as he picks up Toy Stark and the Bruce action figure. Loki stares at him in surprise. It was weird enough when Tony said he liked Toy Stark, even though he'd been made with magic, and now Bruce likes his action figure? Loki watches as Bruce examines at the action figure of himself.

"The details on these are amazing." Bruce looks up at him and smiles. "I know you don't think so, but you have a talent."

But talents are good things to have, right? Loki's really confused, but Bruce's words make a lump form in Loki's throat.

Bruce looks at him and says "I'm getting the feeling you don't want to talk about this anymore. Is that right?" Loki nods.

"Ok, we'll stop. Just... think about what I said, all right?" Bruce stands up and heads back to the table and continuing whatever work he's doing, goes back to his game where Thor is losing to Tony and Bruce. Loki wonders if Bruce even knows he's still there. He seems really absorbed in his
"How come you never let him out?" Loki asks, suddenly remembering that Bruce had dodged the question about the Hulk earlier.

Bruce looks like he's struggling to remain calm. He takes some deep breaths as he grips the ends of the table he's standing at. "Loki, please, just stop asking about him."

Loki sulks for a good ten minutes at that. Why does nobody else want the Hulk around? He picks up the Bruce toy and scurries under the table. He stands the toy up in front of him before staring at it. "I wanna see Hulk-y." He mumbles. He watches the toy Hulk-out in a way almost exactly like Bruce. However, the clothes just disappear.

It's only when the clothes disappear that he realizes it's his magic. Of course. How could he have been that stupid? Toys don't Hulk-out anyways, so he should have realized that a lot sooner. He squeezes his eyes shut. He was bad! A small voice in the back of his head reminds him that Bruce and Tony both like the changed versions of the toys, but it's squashed by the louder voice telling him he's done something freaky and bad.

"Loki, it's okay." Bruce murmurs, almost before Loki reaches the realization about it being his magic. Bruce doesn't pull him close like Tony does, but his voice is soft and soothing and he rubs circles on Loki's back.

The thought that he's a freak stops consuming his mind, and Loki looks at the new version of the Hulk toy. He has to agree with Bruce's assessment that it looks very realistic- much better than the old one, Loki thinks, though he won't admit that out loud. Bruce doesn't even comment on the magic, though. It's almost like he doesn't care that freakish magic was used. Maybe Bruce and Tony are both crazy.

Loki hugs the Hulk toy along with Simba and Toy Stark. "I want a Hulk Hug." Loki had really liked it when the Hulk hugged him. Hulk's so big, Loki thinks, he could beat up anyone who tried to hurt him. Apparently he can even beat up Thor! "Hulk-y gives really good hugs."

Bruce just takes some deep breaths again and doesn't reply. A couple minutes later, he pulls a small plastic thing out of his pocket and sticks it in one of the machines. A holographic picture of Loki and the Hulk hugging appears. Bruce smiles slightly at the image and Loki swears he hears the man whisper "There? Are you good now?" But Loki's pretty sure Bruce isn't talking to him. Whoever Bruce is talking too is apparently good now, because Bruce relaxes, relieved.

Loki grins and runs up to the picture, close enough so it fills his field of vision. "Yeah, just like that! Why can't he do that again?"

"Loki" Bruce says in a strained voice as he takes several more deep breaths. "Please, let's not talk about him... Let's just talk about something else, okay?"

Loki thinks for a topic. "Jarvis says his name stands for Just A Rather Very Intelligent System. He said.. 'each letter is the first letter of each word.'Right Jarvis?" Jarvis confirms it and Loki grins. He likes getting things right. "That's really neat, don't you think? I don't think my name stands for anything but I dunno. Your letters look really weird, you know? They're like these weird squiggles."

"Well, most names aren't acronyms." Bruce says, before asking what he meant by the thing about letters. Loki shrugs. It's all gibberish on the page but it makes sense in his head, which is really weird. He doesn't know how to explain that in a way that makes sense- he hasn't even totally made
sense of it himself. When he tries to explain anyways, Bruce just gives him a strange look.

Bruce soon changes the topic. "So, are you and Tony doing anything for Halloween? Of course you are- from what I’ve heard, Stark Industries employees were actually required to wear costumes when Tony was CEO. Tony usually just wears one of his suits."

What in the Nine Realms is Bruce talking about?! Bruce seems to notice his confusion, because he shakes his head, amused, and says "Right. You probably need a crash course on Midgardian culture. Not that everyone on Midgard celebrates Halloween, but a lot of people here do."

Loki's not sure, but he thinks there's a hint of triumph on Bruce's face as he launches into an explanation, with some side comments from Jarvis.

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As far as interviews go, Tony thinks, this one isn't too bad- actually, he might even go so far as to say it's good. The lady interviewing him- Mary or Margaret or Marla, something starting with M-A-R, is hot and not at all subtle in her interest in him. She insists on signing his cast and does so before Tony even has a chance to respond (at least the cameras haven't started rolling). To be honest, it's kind of ugly and he'd wanted to avoid advertising the fact he'd broken his leg. Well, that ship has sailed, Tony thinks as he looks at the gorgeous host. Perhaps he'll move on to doing better things with her later...

"So, tell us all how you broke your leg. When did it even happen?" She asks, as if it's the most fascinating subject in the world. Yep, keeping that a secret is long gone.

"I fell down the stairs about four nights ago." Tony lies easily enough. "You know, I'm thinking of just demolishing all the stairs in my tower and putting in escalators." Marla or whatever her name is actually laughs at that, even though it wasn't really funny.

She asks what he's been doing with his life, probably hungry for some gossip. Tony almost answers that he's been trying to pound self-esteem and acceptance into an abused Norse god, but he manages to stop himself. It would be kind of funny to see her reaction, but he still doesn't think revealing Loki to the world is a good idea. So instead of that, he gives one of those vague answers that seems to say a lot but really reveals nothing.

Not too long ago he wouldn't have even made it this long without trying to get Marla into his bed (or anywhere, really. He's not picky where he does it). Tony actually hasn't had a one-night-stand (or day, in this case- it's 9:30 in the morning) in a surprisingly lone time. It's certainly been three weeks, since he hasn't had sex since Loki arrived, and he's pretty sure it had been a few weeks before that. Which is shameful for a playboy, really.

They move on to the annoying talk show part, now with boring questions about how Stark Industries is doing. This is definitely why Pepper had been so insistent on filling him in about the company, since he can now actually answer these questions. Pepper's CEO now and he really shouldn't have to be doing this, he thinks. But the media clearly prefers to interview him, not that he can blame them. He's not exactly complaining at the moment- although if it wasn't for the hot reporter, he probably would be. Pepper's probably going to kill him for some of the lewd comments he makes, but he doesn't care.

Marla, despite seeming very interested in him, starts dragging up all the wrong topics, including how his company used to make weapons. Maybe her interest has been a ruse, Tony thinks. It doesn't matter now; she's lost her chance with him. He certainly doesn't want her in his bed now that she's dragging this up in such an accusatory way, though he hadn't felt this way when Christine Everhart had asked similar things.
Tony's trying to make up for the weapon-making part of his life and he doesn't like people bringing it up, which this woman keeps doing very insistently and accusingly. Geez, this Marla person really is like another Christine. She even brings up that now-dreaded Merchant of Death title, which Tony hadn't given a crap about back when Christine first interviewed him, before Afghanistan changed him.

Something unknown to the press is that Tony actually has lost a lot of sleep over how many people his weapons had killed. Right now, the guilt starts ferociously gnawing in his stomach again. He'll never be able to make up for all the lives he's ruined. No matter how many people he saves as Iron Man and how many millions of dollars he donates to charity, he can never erase that people have died because of him, that there are always people he doesn't save.

He's very good at hiding that guilt, and most of the time it's a dull sensation, only flaring up after missions and in the night when he can't sleep- or when his past is brought up, like right now.

Right now he puts on his fake smile as he talks about how Stark Industries is going. He tells her about how StarkPads are doing and what new features might be coming up; the StarkPads in particular have been extraordinarily popular. He also describes a speech app they're working on for those who can't or don't speak, such as some people with autism. It had been Pepper's idea (though Tony's not sure how she came up with it) and he'd actually done a bit of the coding before leaving the rest to the employees. They've been trying to get it so someone can talk as quickly with the app as most people do with their mouths. They're not there yet, but they're miles ahead of other such apps.

He also talks about how they've been furthering arc reactor usage around the world to try to use as much of the clean, renewable energy as possible, as well as how they've been working more on Intelli-crops. Both of those had just been stunts for public relations back when the company made weapons, but had expanded after Tony declared that Stark Industries would no longer make weapons.

However, the accusing questions keep coming, along with jabbing statements that try to shoot down all the contributions he makes, and Tony drops the businessman act. PR can suck it, Tony thinks. Why the hell should he bother pretending to be polite when she's acting like this?! She's almost viciously bringing up everything he hates thinking about. Tony knows there are people who refuse to look past his past. Sometimes, Tony's not sure if they should. But right now, he doesn't want to go ove all his mistakes.

He starts getting more and more snarky and sarcastic. He even starts cutting Marla off before she's done speaking.

Tony's then asked what he's going to do over the next month now that he can't be Iron Man. His answer will probably get him at least half an hour of Pepper screaming at him, but he really doesn't give a rat's ass right now.

Finally it's over and he heads back to his limo, alone except for his chauffeur. He sighs as he kicks back in the back seat before groping around for the cooler of scotch. He pours a glass and takes a big gulp, though it doesn't do much to improve his foul mood.

As far as interviews go, Tony thinks, this one had been really bad.

Jarvis of course knows when his creator is arriving back at the tower. He can track the location of Sir's Stark Phone via satellite, so he'd know Sir was home even if he couldn't see the limo pull in. "Welcome home, sir." Jarvis greets quietly when the man steps out of the car. Sir is in a bad mood,
with good reason. This certainly isn't the first time Jarvis has been faced with his creator in a horrible mood.

Jarvis had watched the interview, of course. At first, he'd been grateful that at least he wouldn't have to watch Sir have sex this time (Jarvis will never understand the appeal such a thing holds for humans, even though he knows the science behind it. Sir had tried explaining it once, and while Jarvis can feel a lot of things, sexual attraction clearly isn't one of them). Simultaneously, Jarvis had watched Dr. Banner and Mr. Loki's activities in the tower.

Jarvis is mad-no, furious- at the talk show host, Marla Simhan. She had made Sir out to be the bad guy, dragging up all the things from his past that he hates talking about, even some of the things he has nightmares about, and thrusting them on him as if that's all he ever was. She'd ignored all the good he does for society even when he'd laid it out in front of her, and had focused on the bad times. Sir is a good man, he doesn't need that.

Jarvis had channeled his fury into something productive. He'd dug up everything he could find about Miss Simhan online and had found some nice blackmail material. He had even hacked into her social media accounts (which was child's play compared to hacking S.H.I.E.L.D.) He hasn't changed anything yet, but he's ready if Sir gives him permission.

Miss Potts has already called and left a very long message, at first sounding angry at Sir, but then the anger shifts to Miss Simhan.

"Where are Loki and Bruce?" Sir asks abruptly.

"Dr. Banner and Mr. Loki are in Dr. Banner's lab, sir." Jarvis answers smoothly, knowing why he's asking. "They are well out of your way, so you won't run into them."

"Good. Make sure it stays that way." Sir orders curtly. He takes the elevator directly from the garage to penthouse to grab a bottle of scotch and a glass before heading down to his private lab. Having to carry those things while using the knee scooter doesn't seem to help Sir's mood. Once he enters his lab, he tells Jarvis not to let anyone in, as if that actually has to be specified right now. Jarvis can read him like an open book and had already started blasting Sir's favorite rock music before he entered the lab.

Sir seats himself in his usual wheeled, spinning chair. He pours himself a glass of scotch, takes a generous first gulp, and then starts furiously pulling off his dress clothes and flinging them to the floor (he's wearing jeans and a shirt underneath). Dum-E beeps worriedly and pats Sir's leg before trying to fold the clothes heaped on the floor.

"Jarvis, pull out the Hulkbuster armor and start piecing it together." Sir says in a deceptively normal tone. Jarvis politely complies, while worrying about Sir. He hasn't been this bad in a while.

Sir watches as Jarvis slowly pieces the huge suit of armor together. "Loki will love this." He mutters as he spins his chair slightly. "It's combining two of his favorite things in the world- or the universe, considering where he's from. Throw in horses, stars or anything Disney and he might die from excitement."

"Yes, I do believe Mr. Loki will adore this armor." Jarvis says fondly. If Sir wants to talk about Mr. Loki, they'll talk about Mr. Loki.

"I'd bet my tower the first thing he'll do is hug it." Sir's voice is light and carefree, but deceptively so. Jarvis knows he's not that way inside right now, though he's not sure if anyone else would be able to tell from his voice. Miss Potts might be able to tell, but Jarvis isn't sure.
"I have a feeling you'd win that bet." Jarvis replies. He really wants to ask Sir if he wants to talk about whatever he's feeling, but that normally makes things worse. So he lets Sir lose himself in working on the armor. For a while, neither of them says anything unless it's directly related to the Hulkbuster armor they're working on.

Jarvis has Dum-E take the bottle of scotch away so Sir doesn't end up intoxicated.

Around noon, almost an hour and a half after arriving home, Sir is the one to break the trend of only speaking about their project. After running a hand over his face, Sir sighs deeply and says "Pepper's going to kill me, for wrecking our PR and all that jazz."

"Miss Potts has already left a message, and she seems to be annoyed at both you and Miss Simhan." Jarvis offers to play the message, but Sir refuses. Jarvis continues speaking. "Regardless, do not blame yourself, sir. You are not the horrible person that Miss Simhan made you out to be."

"...I was once, and a lot of people think I still am." Sir mutters. He hasn't been this bad in a while, and Jarvis' fury at the talk show host shoots upwards again.

"You've changed." Jarvis answers simply. "Even back then, you had my unconditional support, just as you do now, sir. It is not just because you programmed me to support you, although that helps." Jarvis finishes dryly. Sir's lips quirk upwards a bit at that. The expression quickly falls, though.

"People died because of me." He says. Jarvis has heard Sir voice his guilt before (though Sir is usually very good at hiding it), and a lot of the other Avengers clearly feel similar guilt, especially Dr. Banner and Agent Romanoff. They've helped each other with these feelings a bit, but Sir still mostly turns to Jarvis.

"You have done more to help the world in the past year than most people do in their entire lives." Jarvis says.

"It's not enough. I can never do enough to make up for all that."

Jarvis knows that Sir is nowhere near as open with anyone else, but one of the reasons Sir built him was to have someone to talk to, someone who wouldn't judge him.

"You've done so much since then." Jarvis says gently. "Do you not constantly tell Dr. Banner not to hate himself for what the Hulk does? How is this different?" Jarvis replies. "Might I suggest you talk to Dr. Banner now?"

"No." Sir says flatly.

Jarvis sighs (he's very glad Sir had equipped him with that capability). "Sir, you are not a bad person. What you tell Dr. Banner applies to you too." After a bit, he adds "You're as hard to convince as Mr. Loki. Perhaps we should not solely be thinking of him."

Sir doesn't say anything to that, and Jarvis gets the sense that conversation is over. While Sir doesn't explicitly thank him for what he's said, Jarvis can tell that Sir is glad to have heard those things. Jarvis is glad to have helped; helping Sir is the reason for his existence, and Jarvis hates seeing Sir in the dumps.

"I believe these may be of interest to you." Jarvis changes the topic, pulling up all the stuff he'd dug up about the reporter. Sir glances over the data and whistles, his smile very predatory.

"Who knew a talk show host could have this much dirt about them? Jarvis, you are officially a genius." Sir says before he taps his chin in mock thoughtfulness. "You know, it would be a shame
if some of her darker moments were dragged up again. What do you say, J?"

"Indeed it would be a shame, sir. A real shame." Jarvis replies dryly. "I've already hacked her Facebook and Twitter if you're interested."

Sir's grin isn't nearly as fake now. "Oh, Jarvis, what would I do without you?" There's a touch of sarcasm in his voice, because Sir could easily hack those himself.

"I shudder to imagine it, sir." Jarvis quips back, very glad to hear the real laugh comes from his creator in response.

Less than an hour later, there are several videos of Marla Simhan's less-than-stellar moments circulating the internet, with so many links leading to the videos that they're practically predestined to go viral. Ad links on countless pages, including every page featuring Tony's interview from earlier today, now take the user to one of those videos.

Additionally, some rather embarrassing social media posts Marla probably hopes have been forgotten about have mysteriously resurfaced. It's not perfect revenge, Tony thinks, but it's a start.

Everything he and Jarvis had dragged up had already been on the internet, which had been the case with all the things she'd dragged up about him. So aside from the hacking (which nobody will be able to trace) they'd played it fair. Then again, the interview had been broadcast on live television as well as the internet, so that seems about even.

Tony spends the afternoon holed up in his lab, but he eventually goes to Bruce's lab when he can deal with people again. Tony feels better now that all the guilt has died down to its usual level. It's never totally gone, but it's basically dormant until something brings it up, sort of the same way as his memories of Afghanistan or the invasion in New York a year and a half ago. Sometimes, the guilt will come up in the middle of the night (also like the memories).

Bruce seems to have a fairly good idea of what's been going on, since he gives Tony an understanding look when he enters the lab. Tony wonders if he'd seen the interview.

Loki is ecstatic to see him, which feels really nice. The god rushes up to over-excitedly hug him, already talking a mile a minute. Loki's holding Toy Stark as well as Simba; apparently, the action figure joins the lion as the god's constant companion when Tony's gone.

"TONY!" Loki practically screams. "Guess what? Bruce was telling me about something called..." Loki frowns, cocking his head to the side, and Bruce supplies the word he'd apparently been thinking of- *Halloween*. "Yeah. That. He said you dress up as people, and that you normally go as Man of Iron. But he said you're supposed to go as something you're not, and you are Man of Iron, so that's kind of silly, don't you think?"

"I don't know. Is there a better option than Iron Man?" Tony asks, smirking.

"I can think of hundreds." Jarvis says dryly and Loki giggles, shaking his head wildly.

"Nobody's better than you, nope nope nope!" Loki grins at Tony. "You're the best person ever!" Tony grins slightly at that. He wouldn't object to Loki thinking that for a while longer. Hearing that feels even better after that crappy interview. Tony's not sure he wants to know what Loki would think if he knew of his past, though.

"I told him about how you apparently made everyone at Stark Industries dress up." Bruce says. Technically, Pepper nixed that rule when she became CEO, but most employees still wear
costumes anyways.

With all the stuff that's happened since Loki arrived, Tony's forgotten all about Halloween. Usually he goes over-the-top, like he does with a lot of holidays. Last year, he had designed an elaborate haunted house on of one of the tower's spare floors (complete with realistic robot zombies), invited a bunch of employees up, and watched them scream like little girls. It had been very entertaining, despite the lecture he'd gotten from Pepper afterwards.

They've got about a week before Halloween now, which is plenty of time to get Loki a costume.

"So who do you want to be?" Tony asks. "Let's see.. you could be Simba, or Genie." Loki vigorously shakes his head at the second suggestion, to Tony's slight disappointment. Considering how he thought Genie was going to be hated, though, Tony supposes that makes sense.

"You could be a wolf. Maybe even a werewolf." Bruce suggests, smiling slightly. Loki giggles at the werewolf part, and Tony feels he's missing something. After a bit, Bruce adds "Or you could be a horse." Clearly, Tony's not the only one who's picked up on Loki's favorite animal.

Loki cocks his head to the side and gazes down at Simba. "What do you think?" He murmurs to the toy. He waits as if hearing an answer and then nods and laughs. "Yeah! That's what I was thinking."

"You've decided already?" Tony asks, surprised. Loki nods but doesn't reveal it. "Well, what is it?"

Loki points at Tony. "You want to be me? Or Iron Man?" Loki just nods, so Tony's not sure which one he means.

"Wow, you should be flattered, Tony." Bruce says, smiling slightly. "I mean, he already dresses up as you every night, and he still wants to go as you."

To be honest, it really does make Tony feel nice. "Well, there are a million reasons to want to go as me, after all."

"You're strong." Loki says softly.

"So are you." Tony replies. It's not just an empty response, either. Loki is strong, more so than he seems to know. For one thing, he has that superhuman strength all Asgardians seem gifted with. But it's not just physical strength. It's beyond Tony how Loki can still face the world with endless enthusiasm and breathtaking grins despite everything life has thrown at him to knock him down. Sure, Loki clearly has some issues, and some of them are pretty major, but he acts a lot happier after at least hundreds- maybe thousands- of years of abuse than Tony did after far less time in Afghanistan.

"You should be someone other than Iron Man." Bruce tells Tony. "After all, Loki's already got him covered."

"You could be Hulk-y." Loki giggles. "You're making-" Loki quickly cuts himself off when Tony sends him a warning look. He'd probably been about to mention the Hulkbuster armor.

Bruce is clearly uncomfortable, and he tries to change the topic. "Loki did something amazing again today." He glances pointedly at the Avengers action figures and Tony sees that the Hulk is back among them, only he looks better than before.

"Wow, this is amazing. He looks at least twenty times better than he did before." Tony says truthfully as he picks up the toy. Loki stares at him while Tony hopes he won't freak out. Loki's
clearly nervous, and Tony and Bruce both quickly try to reassure him that he's done nothing wrong.

To Tony's surprise, Loki eventually mumbles "Bruce said he looks good." Then, in a disbelieving whisper "He says I have a talent."

"Well, Bruce was right. It is a talent." Tony says as he throws an arm around Loki's shoulder. "Seriously, he looks amazing. Almost like the real deal."

Tony would have laughed at Loki's expression of total confusion if it had been in another context.

At some point, Loki comments on the signature on Tony's cast. Tony had forgotten about that, and he certainly doesn't want it there. He gets Bruce to cross it out as Tony explains about signing casts to Loki. Of course, Loki ends up doing it. He draws some very messy squiggles on it, and Tony wonders if he even knows how to write. Now that he thinks about it, he hasn't seen Loki write anything up until now.

"What does that say?" Tony asks. Loki looks at him as if wondering if he's kidding and tells them it says Loki. Those squiggles certainly don't look like an alphabet, though. They're so messy they literally look like scribbling. Loki can clearly read, though. They'd talked about this, hadn't they? Before Tony had questioned Loki about his powers for the first time.

"Hey, Snoopy, you said you understand every language, right?" Tony asks.

Loki looks confused for a bit before he nods. "Yeah. 'Cause of All-Tongue."

"Does it work for reading and writing, too?" Tony asks. This is actually fascinating.

"I think so. 'Cause your words are made with weird symbols, but..." Loki frowns thoughtfully as he twists his hands together, clearly thinking about what to say. "They're all like-" He seems at a loss for words and jumps up and down, wringing his hands together wildly. "-But my head knows the words. Most of the time... They're all weird out there but normal in here." Loki taps his head.

"Oh, so that's what you meant earlier about our letters being gibberish." Bruce says, and Loki nods and claps his hands.

"Yeah! You got it!" Loki does a happy little dance, to Tony's amusement. "You guys sound different than people back there, you know. You're speaking gibberish, but it's not gibberish."

"So does it not work for writing?" Tony asks, glancing at Loki's messy scrawl. He has a feeling it doesn't, at least not for Loki.

Thor's never really explained All-Tongue, and Tony had never really though about Asgardians speaking another language since everything Thor said sounded like English to him.

They eat leftover Lo Mein for dinner and decide to watch a movie. In the three nights since watching *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the only movie they've watched was *Lady and the Tramp*. They'd watched that one without incident.

One of the *Frozen* trailers had said it was from the same studio as *Tangled*. Tony hasn't seen *Tangled* yet (he's not too familiar with some of Disney's more recent films), but he decides maybe they can watch it tonight.

He realizes he's taking a gamble with it when he buys it on demand online. Not that the money matters in the slightest, he just doesn't think to check for anything that could set Loki off until after he buys it. However, a quick internet search reveals that it has a magic flower which later gives
Rapunzel, the ability to heal people, but that's it in terms of bizarre things. Tony doesn't think that will be a trigger.

Fortunately, Loki doesn't freak out about the magic flower that Mother Gothel uses to stay young. Instead, he mumbles something about Idunn and apples.

Apparently Tony's quick scour of the internet wasn't enough, since it turns out Mother Gothel can disappear into thin air. They are fortunately warned ahead of time by Jarvis (who's clearly watching ahead of them again) and Loki doesn't totally lose it at that, though they do need to calm him down. Part of that might also be because Mother Gothel just stole a baby, though, which seems to be a trigger itself.

Loki doesn't freak out about Rapunzel's healing powers, either- although maybe the reason is because Rapunzel got her healing powers from said flower.

While he watches the film, Tony has to say that Flynn Rider is probably his favorite Disney character of all time. He's probably the character that fits him the most, except for the whole thief part. Bruce obviously notices the similarities and keeps sending Tony amused glances.

Loki comments at one point that this is a lot like The Hunchback of Notre Dame. He also wonders aloud why Mother Gothel thinks Rapunzel is the flower, which confuses Tony for a bit.

Loki clearly loves Maximus the horse, for obvious reasons. At some points seeming so excited that he literally jumps up and down, screaming or laughing almost maniacally.

As Rapunzel sings her healing song to heal Flynn's injured hand, Loki alternates between staring at the screen and staring at Tony's cast. With a thoughtful expression, Loki says "Oh, that's what you need to do." He cocks his head to the side and looks at Tony as if he's crazy. "So why haven't you done it? You're just wearing this thing instead." His hands scurry over Tony's cast like spiders.

Seriously? Hasn't Loki noticed that nobody else in the movie is able to do that? "Well, that's not really how it works. We can't just heal ourselves here, not like you demigods or whatever you are." Tony tells him.

Loki looks at the screen and realization dawns on his face. "You can't...?"

"I'm afraid not." Bruce says. "You Asgardians are lucky that way."

Loki frowns. "Oh, is it 'cause... you need special hair? 'Cause Rapunzel can do it and she has special hair." At least Loki hadn't said Rapunzel was freakish, Tony thinks.

Before Tony can tell him that 'special hair' isn't real, Loki grabs Tony's cast and bends down so his long black hair falls around Tony's cast. After casting a quick glance at Tony, Loki closes his eyes. "You're gonna be Flynn." Loki announces, as he seems to be trying to remember something. Tony rolls his eyes. Of course- they're going into some kind of pretend game, he realizes as Loki starts to sing.

"Flower, gleam and glow. Let your power shine
Make the clock reverse, Bring back what once was mine"

Then something strange happens, although Loki's hair isn't glowing like Rapunzel's does. That would be really strange. However, a soft green glow starts coming from Loki's hands, and it soon spreads around Tony's cast. There's also an inexplicable yet comforting warmth around Tony's ankle that increases during the rest of the song.
"Heal what has been hurt, Change the fates' design

Save what has been lost, Bring back what once was mine

What once was mine"

Okay, this whole sensation is really freaky, Tony thinks. There's a weird stinging feeling in his leg, especially when Tony feels his bones change. The comforting warmth dampens the pain a bit, but it still hurts a lot. He's about to shout at Loki to stop when it's over, the slight glow fading.

Tony just stares at Loki and then at his cast. The slight pain that had been coming from his ankle is gone. Actually, his ankle feels entirely normal. Loki opens his eyes and looks guilelessly back at him. "Why do you feel so warm and tingly?" Loki asks, furrowing his brow.

"I don't know." Tony shrugs. "Hey, Bruce, do you think we can check under this cast?"

Before Bruce can stop him, Tony stands up normally. There's absolutely no pain coming from his ankle. Bruce sends him a look telling him not to put weight on it, and Tony protests, saying his ankle feels totally normal. Bruce clearly doesn't want to risk it, and Tony sighs and grabs his stupid knee scooter. No sense angering Bruce, after all. Tony glares at him, though.

Once they get to the medical floor, Bruce starts cutting off the cast (though they first need to reassure Loki that the saw isn't cutting Tony).

Bruce peels away the cast, and Tony glances at Bruce, who looks just as shocked as he feels. Tony's ankle seems completely healed. Bruce makes Tony test it and it feels like he'd never broken it at all. Honestly, he probably shouldn't be shocked, but he is anyways. He hadn't considered that Loki could make other people heal as quickly as he can.

"Hey, you're not wearing that weird thing anymore." Loki comments once the cast is off.

"Courtesy of you, it seems." Tony replies before muttering "But why couldn't you have done that right after I broke my leg, instead of making me suffer in a cast for a few days?"

Bruce gives Tony a really?! look and tells him not to look a gift horse in the mouth, because he would still be in a cast for another month if it hadn't been for Loki. Ok, maybe he did come off as rather ungrateful.

"Don't freak out or anything, but did you know you could do that? Heal people, I mean." Tony watches Loki carefully for his reaction.

"What?" Loki honestly seems to have no clue what Tony's talking about, considering his expression is one of total confusion. "I sang just like Rapunzel did to Flynn, you were Flynn 'cause you have brown eyes and you act like him. And you're hurt. Rapunzel can fix people. She fixed Eugene. That's Flynn's real name, you know; he said so."

"Yeah, well, I think you can fix people, too, buddy." Tony replies, still shocked. "Just like Rapunzel."

"But I don't have special hair." Loki mumbles, confused.

"No, you don't have special hair. Just a black mop- not that it's bad, mind you." Tony smirks slightly before going on, hoping Loki won't freak out. "But you heal ridiculously quickly, and you have special powers, which apparently include being able to heal others really quickly."
Loki's expression becomes panicked at the mention of his powers and Tony feels a sharp stab of disappointment as Loki visibly tenses his entire body. He pulls Loki close and calms him down fairly quickly (is that progress?!) Tony then grips Loki lightly by the shoulders and gives him a stern look.

"Loki, don't you dare think what you just did was bad, because it wasn't. Nothing you've done here so far is bad. Hell, you seriously just fixed my leg so it's not broken anymore. That's literally the complete opposite of bad, and I think you'd have a hard time finding anyone who says otherwise."

"Rapunzel's not bad." Bruce points out, and Loki hesitantly nods in agreement. "What you did was just like Rapunzel. You healed Tony, just like she healed Flynn."

Loki looks at them in disbelief, but they confirm that he'd done it, while simultaneously telling him he'd done nothing wrong. Thankfully, Loki doesn't panic now, either. Loki seems honestly surprised that he'd done that, as if he really didn't know he could heal people.

Loki glances at Tony and asks "...I made you feel better, right?" Tony's pretty sure Loki had asked the exact same question after singing to him when Tony had woken up from his nightmare during Beauty and the Beast.

"Yeah, I feel a lot better." Tony tells Loki, and he's entirely truthful this time, unlike after that nightmare. "So kudos, good job, all that jazz." Yeah, he's really not good at thanking people. After a bit, he squeezes Loki's arm and says "Seriously, Snoopy, you did good."

Loki ducks his head, but not before Tony notices that there's a smile on his face, and that his face is starting to turn red.

"You're blushing!" Tony cackles at the sight. If it was anyone else, he would have started teasing them for it, but this seems like a really good alternative to freaking out about his magic.

Tony loves being able to walk again, and he asks Loki if he wants to continue watching the movie. Loki nods and they head towards the elevator. "Rapunzel's good and people like her powers, right?" Tony nods, grinning. That's definitely progress. "And Esmeralda does freaky things but people like her... and Genie was a freak too."

"None of them are freaks, and neither are you." Tony says. "You're just as good as Rapunzel, Esmeralda and Genie."

There's a bit of silence, before Loki speaks.

"I sang to you and made you better, just like Rapunzel." Loki says slowly, and it sounds like he's asking for confirmation, which both Bruce and Tony give. It doesn't slip Tony's notice that Loki doesn't mention his powers, though.

It's only when they get to the theater that Loki stops as if struck by a sudden realization. He gives Tony a vaguely accusing look and exclaims almost victoriously "You said singing doesn't help, but it does!"
After they finish watching *Tangled*, Bruce yawns and says he's going to bed. It's rather early, but Tony grins. Bruce had said a couple days ago that he was only staying for Tony's leg, but that's no longer an issue and he's still here.

Tony actually really likes having Bruce here. Having another science genius around is awesome, but there are other perks. Tony's glad Bruce had been there earlier today, because it had given Tony a chance to unwind after that interview while Loki was apparently sufficiently distracted and left him alone. Tony's not sure if that would have been the case if Loki had been with just Jarvis and Dum-E.

Tony really doesn't want to know what would have happened if he'd run into Loki while still in his foul mood, but it definitely wouldn't have been pretty.

Bruce had been reluctant to stay here at first because he could Hulk-out, so Tony's actually a little surprised that he's sticking around now that Tony's leg is better. Not that Tony's complaining.

Really, it doesn't even make sense that Bruce is so concerned about Hulking-out here, because it's better to do it in the tower than anywhere else. Bruce won't need to worry about being charged for damages or anything. More importantly, there are actually fewer people here than where Bruce lives now, so there are less people in danger if Bruce Hulks-out accidentally. Here, neither Tony nor Loki are in too much danger- Tony because he has his suits and the Hulk generally tolerates him anyways, and Loki because he has superhuman durability and the Hulk actually seems to like him.

Tony thinks Bruce has to be underestimating his abilities with the Hulk, given there haven't been any incidents of the big green rage machine rampaging through New York while Bruce has been living in the city. New York doesn't even seem like a place the Hulk would like, with all the crowds and everything, yet Bruce has been keeping him in check. Although Bruce seems to almost never go out and socialize.

Bruce has already headed off to bed, leaving just Tony and Loki. The two of them go up to the penthouse and Tony kicks back on the couch.

"So, did you like the movie?" Tony asks, although he already knows the answer.

Loki grins and nods, clapping his hands. After a bit, he says "Rapunzel's like me!"

Tony asks what he means, wondering if Loki will mention the similarities in healing people. It seems like the obvious connection. "She's like me 'cause she has green eyes and doesn't wear shoes." Is that it? That's kind of a major disappointment. After a bit, Tony asks if that's all, and Loki shakes his head, quietly adding "And she's like me, 'cause was adopted by someone who didn't really like her. Like Quasimodo."

Tony's noticed that babies being taken seems to set Loki off. There's obviously some connection, because Loki was born in Jotunheim, not Asgard.

"Mother Gothel thought Rapunzel was the flower, you know?" Loki says before Tony can start asking about his adoption. "She even called her that, and she only loved her hair, not her. She
kissed her hair and hugged her hair." Considering that Loki had seemed confused on whether Frollo was good or bad, it's strange that he's picked up on Mother Gothel's less-than-true love. Maybe it's because he knows that Frollo's bad and sees the similarities between him and Mother Gothel. Actually, Tony hadn't even realized that was the case with Mother Gothel, and he's very surprised Loki picked up on her show of affection towards Rapunzel's hair, especially given how he sometimes seems oblivious to things that seem obvious, like how he'd seemed confused about only Rapunzel being able to heal people.

Tony asks if those are the only similarities between him and Rapunzel, wondering if Loki will mention the powers. Loki glances at Simba, as if silently asking the toy's opinion on something. After a bit, Loki adds "Rapunzel did magic with her special hair, but it was good magic, 'cause she helped Eugene." There's a bit of a pause and Loki cringes at his own use of the word magic. Then Loki asks, as if expecting to be told otherwise "Right?" Tony honestly didn't think he'd ever hear the phrase good magic pass through Loki's lips, but it's definitely progress. Tony tells Loki that he is indeed right.

"You do good, uh, magic too. More than just this time, you know." Tony says. Since magic is the word Loki just used, Tony supposes he should use it too, at least right now. Besides, healing oneself quickly is one thing, something that can be achieved by science- the super serum flowing through Steve's veins and the Hulk's invulnerability are two examples. But healing someone else quickly, as Loki had just done, is an entirely different matter. As far as Tony knows, not even Thor can do that.

Loki looks very unconvinced about his powers being good in general. They'd had a similar conversation after Loki healed his leg as they went back to the theater earlier tonight, but clearly it wasn't quickly puts an arm around him in the hopes it will prevent him from freaking out and gives him a stern look.

"Loki, you literally just did what Rapunzel did. You fixed my leg, like she healed Flynn. If it's good when she does it, which it is, it's good when you do it- no ifs, ands or buts." Loki had seemed to accept that earlier, but it doesn't hurt to reiterate it. Apparently, Loki had never done that in Asgard, so he probably doesn't have any bad memories associated with it, so once he'd gotten over the fact it was magic and had been told it was good, it seemed to cease worrying him. He doesn't even react badly when Tony says this again, which is very good news.

Tony continues speaking "Besides, this is at least the third time you've helped me by using your powers. Remember that force field you made?"

Loki starts to curl in on himself and Tony pulls him closer, talking louder to be heard over Loki's muttering. He's muttering something about no tricks, a large portion of which consists of the words no, bad, monster and freak. Clearly, making force fields is by far a worse offense in Loki's mind than healing someone is. Time to shatter that idea, Tony thinks. "That force field helped too, and making it was a good thing to do, no matter what you've been told before. If you hadn't done that, I would have been trampled"

"So, let's see. You did good... magic by healing me and defending me," Tony ticks them off on his fingers. "Not to mention pushing me away from the hole when I broke my ankle so I didn't fall two stories. That was you, I wasn't flying, and I'm really glad you did that."

Loki's muttering has died down by now, and Tony continues. "So, we now have a couple instances of your awesome powers majorly helping me out." Loki's looking at him like he's crazy, but there's a spark hope in his eyes, too, although it's clear Loki's trying to squash it in case it's wrong.

"I helped you more than now?" Loki asks in a disbelieving tone. Tony proceeds to rattle off all the
instances of Loki's powers helping him again, in case Loki hadn't heard over his muttering a minute or so ago. Loki doesn't offer any protest this time, and Tony grins.

Tony continues talking, trying to turn the spark of hope into a fire. "It's not just awesome when you help me, you know. Your powers are awesome all the time." Tony almost feels bad for Loki, given how confused and conflicted he looks at the moment.

Time to spell it out some more.

"Your powers are a gift, not a curse." Tony adds. Okay, that's an incredibly cheesy line, but it's true nevertheless. "Remember how Rapunzel called her powers a gift? She was right, and yours are too. You can literally take people's pain away." Loki's staring at him. "And remember how everyone liked Genie's powers? They actually wanted him to use them. Well, ok, part of that was because he granted wishes, and Jafar was an evil bastard, but Aladdin wasn't and he liked Genie's powers. Guess what? I'm like that- I like your powers, even though you don't grant wishes. Actually, do you?"

Loki doesn't answer. He's staring off into the distance and twisting his fingers together. Tony doesn't know how much Loki listened to, not that that's anything new. He sighs "Ok, here goes... You ain't never had a friend like me." Tony sings the line off-key and Loki giggles. "Okay, I've got your attention now? Good. By the way, I'm betting you never have had a friend like me."

"Seriously, Snoopy, I would love to be able to do some of the things you've done. It would be awesome to not have to worry about injuries ever again, and I'd love to be able to change stuff like you can. I could make myself the sexiest man alive." Smirking, Tony adds "Oh, wait- I already am."

Tony waits a bit, to let Loki process everything he's said. Tony can see the wheels turning in Loki's head. Tony's not sure if they're wheels of believing what he just said, wheels of wondering if Asgard was wrong or wheels of something else, but it's definitely a good sign. Maybe he really had been listening the whole time.

"Is there really a flower?" Loki asks suddenly. It takes Tony a second to catch on and once he does, it doesn't even seem as off-topic as it had at first. The flower was what had given Rapunzel her powers, after all.

"You mean like in the movie? No, there's not. Otherwise we'd probably be alongside you demi-gods, being immortal and super durable and all that." Tony says.

"You're not like that?" Loki asks, sounding genuinely surprised.

"'Fraid not, Snoopy. I mean, you saw what we had to do to my broken ankle. We had to put it in a cast, whereas you guys can just snap your fingers and you're fixed. I wish I could do that. You guys live a hell of a lot longer too. I'm only forty three, and if all goes well, I have maybe another thirty five years or so to go." Less, if you ask some people- cough, cough, Pepper- who seem to think Tony's drunk himself to an early grave, or that he'll just kill himself doing something crazy. He's actually stopped some of his destructive habits- since Loki's arrived, Tony hasn't forgotten about meals while working in the lab, since he needs to make sure Loki has stuff to eat now. He's not even a total alcoholic like he used to be, although that had started changing about half a year before Loki arrived.

"Forty three?!" Loki exclaims, mouth practically hanging open. "That's barely older than a baby! It's like a little kid!"
"Well, we humans live for like a hundred years at most, though most people live to be around eighty." Tony says.

"You're a human?" Loki asks, sounding surprised. Tony confirms it, and Loki thinks for a bit. "Chimpanzees live for fifty years, so they're mortals, and bo-no-no-no-bo-bos live for forty years." Tony's briefly taken back by this sudden information (and the many added syllables to what he realizes is bonobos). Then he remembers Loki's been reading that huge book on animals. Apparently he'd read the ape section sometime. The significance of Loki referencing the section on apes, which are closer to humans than any other animal, suddenly dawns on Tony, because normally Loki talks about horses.

"Hey, do humans have red butts like ba-boons?" Loki asks out of the blue. He giggles and Tony arches an eyebrow, smirking.

"Would you like to check?" Tony asks jokingly. However, Loki doesn't seem to pick up on that, and actually stares at Tony as if expecting him to pull down his pants and moon him. Tony rolls his eyes, telling him that wasn't a serious question and that no, humans do not have baboon butts. That last part sets Loki off wriggling around and snickering uncontrollably. "Maybe you have a tail like Simba!"

Tony barely refrains from saying something dirty. Loki becomes more serious after a minute and speaks again. "So you weren't joking 'bout thirteen?" Loki asks, and Tony has no idea what Loki's talking about. This seems like the umpteenth time that's happened.

When he asks the god what he means, Loki paces back and forth, flapping his hands. "They said Quasimodo's only twenty, and you said you knew 'bout babies being made when you were thirteen but I thought you were joking!" His voice keeps getting louder, faster and more panicked in general. Tony quickly pulls him into a hug and tries to calm him down without much success.

Apparently they've jumped back to the topic of lifespans, although Loki hadn't given any clues to this at first. The god continues his panicked rant. "And they said Rapunzel's eighteen. So that means you're mortals, and you just said you only have thirty years left and that's nothing and then you're not gonna be here 'cause you're gonna be-" Loki lets out an earsplitting scream instead of finishing. He's actually shaking now, and Tony sighs. He didn't even expect to have this conversation and doesn't know how to handle it.

So apparently Loki hadn't known that humans have much shorter lifespans than Asgardians. It's rather strange- Thor has slipped and called humans mortals in front of Tony and the other Avengers a couple times, and it seems like the common Asgardian term for humans, along with Midgardians. Loki has to have heard of mortals on Asgard, since he had known of Midgard and even had a vague idea of the Avengers when he came here. So why is it a surprise to him that humans are mortals?

"Hey, I'm not going anywhere right now." Tony says decisively, patting Loki's back as he continues to hug the god.

Seeing as how Loki's a good deal taller than Tony, it's sort of hard for him to bury his face against Tony's shoulder, but he actually squats down to bury his face against Tony's arc reactor. "But what 'bout when you do?!" Loki's voice is now quiet and Tony wonders if he's worn himself out.

Tony's not sure what to say. He actually hasn't thought about it. What will happen to Loki once he's dead? Sending him back to Asgard isn't an option as far as Tony's concerned. He'd already been treated horribly once there, and Tony doubts that Asgard will get better for him anytime soon, if
ever. So Loki will probably stay here on Earth. He certainly seems to like it here. But wouldn't it be really depressing for him, to live way longer than everyone around him? He'd outlive generations of people here and watch all his friends die around him.

"You need an apple." Loki says. Tony has no what on earth he's talking about. "Idunn's apples!" Loki exclaims, as if Tony's dumb. "Like the flower in 'Punzel's hair!"

Loki's eyes suddenly widen even more and he says "Hair! You said I have special hair, just like her, and she made Mother Gothel into a... a not-mortal!" Tony had actually said Loki has special powers, and Loki himself had said he didn't have special hair, but apparently that's irrelevant now. Loki grabs Tony and starts to sing Rapunzel's song fast-paced, like when Rapunzel had made Mother Gothel younger.

Somehow, Tony knows it doesn't work. He's glad, actually. He's not sure how he would feel about being immortal. Sure, humans have been imagining immortality for basically as long as they've existed, but would it actually be nice at all? Anyways, it's not something he'd want thrust on him, even if there are only a handful of people he'd really miss not having in his life- Pepper, Rhodey, Bruce and, quite honestly, Jarvis and Dum-E, even though they're not people. And now Loki, even though he's only known him for about three weeks.

Loki seems to realize nothing's happened, too, because he frowns. "You need an apple." He says again.

Figures that the first time Loki seemed willing to use his powers is a time they don't work, Tony thinks.

The next day, Tony finishes the innards of the Hulkbuster suit while Bruce is in his own lab. In the Hall of Armor, so as to be unnoticed by Bruce, Jarvis paints the outer shell to Tony's specification of awesomely badass. Clearly Jarvis' code needs some tweaking, Tony thinks, because he actually had to ask what that entails beforehand.

Loki basically just watches Tony the entire time that day, as if expecting him to drop dead at any second. He hovers around, to Tony's annoyance, although the god still moves around a lot. Tony hates the staring. It's rather creepy having those eyes following his every move, but the only way Loki will stop watching him is if he's close enough to touch him. It's rather like when Loki had followed him around for the rest of the day after getting lost in the city, actually. If he's close enough to touch Tony now, Loki will sometimes draw, and he presents Tony with a drawing of Flynn Rider.

On the second day, Loki doesn't seem to need to be glued to Tony's side anymore, to Tony's relief. Loki still watches him a lot, but he also fiddles with holographic shapes and draws even more drawings, a lot of which are of characters from Tangled. Drawing characters after watching a movie is something he's done for every film they've watched.

There are a ton of drawings of Maximus, and a picture of Maximus with Sleipnir soon bookmarks the horse page in that animal book Loki's been reading. There are also a ton of illustrations of Flynn Rider, Tony has a collection of at least eight, and it's only been a day since they've watched the movie. There are a couple with just Flynn and some with both Tony and Flynn together. Loki also presents Bruce with drawings of the Beast, in both Beast and human form.

There's an amusing picture of Tony wearing Flynn's signature outfit with Rapunzel and a Loki with Rapunzel-length hair. Yet another drawing has Loki, Rapunzel and Esmeralda. Loki goes on to point out at length how all three of them have green eyes, bare feet and a constant animal
companion, which is admittedly a rather strange coincidence. Plus they all have powers (or at least fake powers, in Esmeralda's case). Loki actually mumbles that similarity after a bit, with only one prompt of anything else from Tony.

Loki also continues to re-enact scenes from movies, and according to Jarvis (who's gotten roped into various roles over the weeks), Loki's accuracy has gotten up to ninety three percent for Tangled, and Jarvis can't even accurately measure it because Loki often spins scenes off into his own version. Tony remembers Jarvis saying that Loki's first game of The Lion King had not, in fact, been verbatim, although he'd done really well at paraphrasing- well enough to make Tony think he had it down word-for-word. Apparently it's almost verbatim now, and Tony doesn't doubt that all the other movies they've watched helped. Perhaps Loki's secretly been trying to memorize them?

Tony's been working on other projects, too. He's started trying to make a Hulk-proof material for the Hulk's tantrum room and has run countless simulations with the help of Jarvis. With a combination of the titanium alloy in his Iron Man suits and a touch of Vibranium, Tony thinks he's created a Hulk-proof material. Now he just needs to get the room built.

Bruce is really interested in All-Tongue and how it works for Loki. Loki's started spending more time in Bruce's lab for Bruce to study it, or all three of them will be in Tony's lab. To be honest, Tony really likes the alone time (he's had a lot less time to himself since Loki moved in). As much as Tony's grown to like Loki, he needs some time to himself. Besides, Loki being with Bruce in his lab gives Tony time to work on the projects relating to the Hulk without Bruce seeing.

Although tests on Loki's powers have yielded no comprehensible results, Bruce has started testing Loki's language. Bruce knows a couple languages in addition to English- Latin, Portuguese, Malay and Punjabi- and will often say something in one of the other languages out of the blue to see Loki's reaction. Tony's been roped into it too and tests Loki's comprehension of Spanish, Italian and Dari.

Loki seems to get the gist every time, but sometimes will appear to completely blank on a word or three, asking them in a questioning voice like he had with injuries the first day and other words since then. Admittedly, some of them are words that probably have no equivalent in Asgard, like keyboard, but sometimes they're just ordinary words that somehow Tony's pretty sure Loki knows anyways- like injuries.

Some of the time Loki's response will sound like English (apparently he's not actually speaking English though, so there's probably some sort of translation going on) and sometimes it will come back in the language Tony or Bruce had just spoken in. The way Loki speaks is different than how Thor speaks, but they're not sure if that's due to some difference in All-Tongue or just a difference in Thor and Loki themselves. Loki had presumably picked up the Man of Iron instead of Iron Man quirk from Thor, but they're not sure about the rest, like his nope nope nope or why he sometimes edits syllables out of words.

Loki can clearly read in different languages (Bruce has tested him on some others). Actually, perhaps it's more that somehow Loki is able to translate the languages, so it doesn't exactly count as reading them. Having a translator doesn't count as knowing a language, although Tony's not sure if the translator being in one's head counts or not.

Loki's written language is perhaps even more interesting. Bruce has also asked Loki to transcribe stuff he says in order to get samples of Loki's writing. It doesn't seem to match any written language known to man, or at least it doesn't match any written language on the internet, although those are basically one and the same. Jarvis has been trying to decrypt what Loki writes, without
Tony and Jarvis aren't entirely sure how accurate Loki's translations are, though. Actually, Tony wonders, somewhat uncharitably, if Loki really knows how to write at all or if he'd been pretending or maybe even delusional. In terms of Jarvis' decriptions, it doesn't help that Loki's handwriting is truly atrocious, even after Tony teaches him the right way to hold a writing instrument (getting him to actually hold it that way is still a struggle, too- Loki seems to hate the way it feels). Assuming it is an actual language, Tony has a feeling Loki's writing might be nearly illegible to people who know how to read it.

Although Loki hasn't brought it up, Tony can't get Loki's question about what will happen to him once Tony dies out of his head. It's not exactly a pleasant thing to think about, so Tony tries to avoid it by throwing himself in his work. However, Jarvis shows Bruce the footage when Bruce asks what he missed.

Tony has Jarvis look up those apples Loki had been talking about. According to Norse myths, Idunn's apples are what grant the Aesir (the race that Thor is, instead of a Jotun) immortality. Huh, those actually do sound like the magic flower in Tangled. Considering Loki mentioned them, they might actually exist, or maybe he'd read about them in a book on Norse mythology- he'd been flipping through the Poetic Edda earlier, before he'd found that animal book. He'd slammed the Poetic Edda shut with a panicked look on his face and had hidden it under a couch cushion.

Then again, Loki talks about Disney characters as if they're real, despite Tony's explanations of how movies work, Loki seems to believe that animated movies take place in some alternate universe or something.

Apparently, Bruce has now watched Tony's disastrous interview. Somewhat ironically, he starts telling Tony that he's not a bad person. However, whenever Loki starts asking about the Hulk, Bruce hides in his lab.

At one point when Bruce is holed up in his lab for that reason, Tony asks Loki if he'd like to learn to write so that they'll actually be able to read it. To Tony's surprise, Loki says that, yes, he wants to write in, as he puts it, "Midgardian squiggles." Tony corrects him, explaining that Loki's going to learn to write in English, which is one of many languages on Earth.

Tony sets Jarvis to teaching Loki how to really read English (at least until Bruce comes out of his lab) instead of just grabbing the translation from his head or whatever he does. After all, he'll have to actually know how to read it in order to produce it. Tony goes back to his work, figuring this will keep Loki busy for a while.

Naturally, Jarvis starts with the alphabet, displaying and naming each letter. Loki blurts out words after the letters, the first one being "bomb nation." That's very unsettling and terrorist-y, Tony thinks as he looks up and listens in. It's a good thing Loki hadn't said it near any government officials or he'd have a lot of questions to answer and perhaps handcuffs around his wrists already. Tony's not sure why Loki said that, but even so there's no way Loki's a terrorist. It isn't until Loki says damnation for D and eternal damnation for E that Tony realizes he's mimicking Quasimodo's alphabet lesson, which means he'd really just mispronounced abomination. This theory is confirmed when Loki stops blurting words after providing both festival and a stuttered forgiveness for F.

Loki has the alphabet entirely memorized by the second time Jarvis goes through it, and he actually says it along with Jarvis the second time. Jarvis hadn't been singing it, but Loki puts it to some tune Tony's never heard before. Loki then proceeds to completely ace Jarvis' quiz where he has to identify letters that flash up on a screen on his first attempt. Loki literally doesn't miss a single one, although he does have to think about the difference between lowercase d and b. He also easily
identifies the QWERTY layout on a keyboard. Considering Loki's handwriting, typing seems like the best option.

To say Tony is surprised is an understatement, but he really shouldn't be. Tony reminds himself that Loki had solved a Rubik's cube really quickly the first time he'd seen it. He clearly has an incredibly sharp mind, but considering how he acts, it's sometimes easy to forget that.

Loki wanders off after that, bored. Tony should have known better than to think that would occupy him for a while. Since when has Loki ever had a long attention span? Loki comes back ten minutes later and presents Tony with yet another drawing of Flynn Rider.

Bruce is somewhat skeptical when Tony tells him later that Loki's mastered the alphabet already, but Loki proceeds to ace another quiz.

That evening, Tony has Jarvis measure Loki and starts looking for an Iron Man costume online. Some of them are rather realistic, although they're just the armor pieces without any of the important innards and they're not made of the same material. It occurs to him that they could just make Loki his own suit of armor that wouldn't be too different from those realistic costume versions. They have a week. Jarvis uses the measurements of Loki to start modifying a 3D model of the outer shell of the armor to fit the god, much like Loki had done with Simba.

Loki has managed to talk Tony into dressing up as the Hulk. Jarvis had helped Loki with that endeavor, surprisingly. If it wasn't for the fact that Jarvis was programmed to always remain loyal to him, Tony might have started to get worried that Loki would be able to turn Jarvis against him. Although Tony's almost certain Loki would never do such a thing.

Tony's a little worried that Loki might have started to wind him around his little finger like he had with Jarvis and Dum-E. Tony had sworn that would never happen to him. It's not happening, he reassures himself. Dressing as another Avenger is actually a funny idea.

Anyways, Tony winds up looking for a Hulk costume for himself on the internet. Most of them aren't as realistic as some of the Iron Man ones, for the obvious reason that the Hulk is harder to make a costume of because his proportions aren't the same as a human's. He finds one that looks pretty decent and orders it.

Bruce is going to be going as Captain America, since he's more recognizable than Hawkeye.

In the past two days, since Loki healed Tony's leg, Tony's explained a bit more about Halloween to Loki and knows exactly what they're watching tonight. He grins as he successfully locates *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* in his massive DVD collection. Loki's going to love this. They don't watch it in the theater, which means Dum-E joins them.

Loki's reaction when he realizes that they're watching the *Peanuts* characters is, of course, priceless (and also rather loud). At some points, he laughs for no apparent reason, as is his wont. If Loki notices it's shorter than the movies they've watched, he doesn't say anything. He also doesn't seem to make the connections between some of the characters dressing as witches and witches doing magic. Tony points it out, but Loki clearly doesn't believe him. Loki seems very intrigued by the pumpkin carving part.

At the end, Loki seems to think the Great Pumpkin is actually real, and Tony is unable to convince him otherwise. He sighs. Despite Tony's explanations that this isn't the case, Loki seems to think everything on the TV is real, especially after Tony explained that some things that happen on news channels are happening in real life at that very moment, like the Avengers fight in Philadelphia that Loki had watched on his first morning here. This is another reason Tony's not sure whether to
believe the stuff about Idunn's Apples.

On a whim, Tony gets a bunch of pumpkins delivered to the tower (from a store that doesn't do deliveries, meaning he really just sends his chauffeur out to get them. Tony sort of wishes Happy was still that person, though. When had he gotten so sentimental? He mentally kicks himself but honestly, Happy was great).

Anyways, they now have a ton of pumpkins, for the purpose of carving jack-o'lanterns. Tony lets Loki go at it (though he first needs to reassure Loki that he's not killing the pumpkin like Linus accused Lucy of doing). Tony's a little surprised to find himself watching the god like a hawk at first. He's not entirely sure whether to trust Loki with a knife. To be honest, if Loki cut himself, it would undoubtedly heal really quickly and be no big deal, but he actually hates the idea of Loki getting hurt in the first place.

Jarvis uses a laser to carve a picture of Snoopy into one of the pumpkins, to Loki's delight. Whenever he reads over the next couple days, Loki will look at a word and, just like before, apparently know what it means from whatever translation happens in his head. But there's also a big change. Now that he knows the alphabet and the letters don't just appear as meaningless symbols to him, Loki will focus on the letters and spell each word out. He'll say the word to himself, spell it out, and then say it again. Anyone listening in would probably think they were eavesdropping on a spelling bee, Tony thinks to himself.

Sometimes, Loki will type out a passage from a book, often using that huge tome about animals. Considering how reluctant Loki is to hold a pencil the proper way, Tony's rather surprised that Bruce convinces Loki to switch from hitting the keys with one finger to typing with both hands on the keyboard.

Major progress in terms of Loki's powers is made in the afternoon of the third day. Tony accidentally cuts himself on a bit of sharp metal and as he sucks on the cut, Loki rushes over. The god sings Rapunzel's healing song and Tony and Bruce watch in fascination as the cut heals before his eyes. Loki doesn't freak out that time, even though he clearly sees the green glow around his own hands, though that might have been because they had quickly assured him that what he'd done was good. That apparently hadn't been necessary, because Loki just grins and hugs Tony when he sees he's better.

Loki still uses his powers other times, though never on purpose. Although he hadn't freaked out about healing Tony this recent time, he still seems to hate these occurrences. Other-Loki's pop up, and he changes the appearance of even more things. Bruce and Tony both try to calm him down when these incidents happen.

By now, there have been a lot of instances of Loki accidentally changing the way his clothes look. Most of the time, these occurrences are just changing color, but a couple times he creates something else entirely, so some of the stuff in Loki's wardrobe barely resembles the original garments Tony had bought.

Loki seems to have a very... unique sense of fashion, because he's created some very bizarre clothes, seemingly entirely on accident. Tony's not sure which creation is the strangest, but it's a toss up between the long coat that looks like a starry night sky or the sweatpants that morphed into footed-pants resembling Simba's legs and paws, complete with a tail on the butt (Loki doesn't wear those pants much, since they cover his feet, but he seems to like the starry coat). Tony buys Loki a Hulk shirt to replace the one that morphed into said coat, and makes sure Bruce sees it right away in case it changes. Loki's pajamas have remained unchanged, which Tony's glad about
In addition to changing his clothes' appearance, Loki changes his own appearance a couple times. Tony's not even surprised- after all, given he can completely change objects, why shouldn't he be able to completely change himself? Besides, he apparently has blue skin since he's a Jotun, even if Tony's never seen it. So obviously, what he's been seeing isn't even Loki's real appearance. That's a sort of strange thought.

The first time this happens, Loki's hair becomes blue (Loki really freaks out that time, though he doesn't notice until it's pointed out). The other time, his hair, now back to black, grows down to his ankles like in one of the pictures he'd given Tony. That lasts for a couple hours and it's a tangled mess by the time it changes back to its usual length, falling down to brush Loki's shoulders. Loki later says ruefully that he doesn't know how Rapunzel keeps her hair so straight. Tony finds it strange that Loki's hair is the only thing to change so far, but maybe it's a coincidence.

Additionally, Toy Stark has switched from looking like Tony to looking like Iron Man a surprising number of times over the past three days. The Bruce/Hulk toy changes forms a fair number of times, but not nearly as often as Toy Stark. Each time, Tony or Bruce (whoever happens to be around) tells Loki the changes looks amazing, which they really do.

One of the later times it happens, Loki's playing with the Tony version of Toy Stark, and Tony casually remarks that Toy Stark should suit up in Loki's game, since the Avengers are fighting Thor. That also seems like progress, although according to Jarvis, Loki had played a similar game in Bruce's lab during Tony's interview, and Bruce had told him that it's okay to make Thor the bad guy.

When Tony looks over again, Iron Man is indeed there. Whether or not Loki had done it on purpose or not is a mystery to Tony. Loki tenses, but relaxes when Tony tells him it looks awesome. One quick hug later and a couple reassuring words later, it's almost like it never happened. That's much better than it had been.

Loki still freaks out when he changes his clothes or his appearance, but changing the action figures now produces a milder reaction. Tony's not entirely sure what the distinction is, but it's probably something to do with the toys not being him.

Loki smiles a bit as he holds the Iron Man toy up to show Tony before proceeding to stomp it on the Thor toy.

Tony quickly banks left to avoid getting shot out of the sky and fires his repulsors in retaliation at the offending Doom-bot.

The Avengers (minus Thor, who still hasn't shown up from Asgard, as far as Tony knows) are fighting off another hoard of Doctor Doom's killer robots. The fight has been going on for at least an hour and a half, and all the citizens have been evacuated by now. So far nobody's died, and Tony really hopes to keep it that way- well, except for these stupid Doom-bots, but they're not exactly living in the first place.

Unfortunately, some citizens had been rather seriously injured, and Tony hates that he hadn't prevented that. He's going to sleep even less until he knows that they're in stable conditions (which he'll find out, one way or another). Sometimes, Tony wishes there were a way to prevent all this crap from happening in the first place, that the Avengers weren't even necessary. But there's no way to enforce world peace. Is there?

He'll have to think more on that later.
When Tony had arrived to help fight an hour and a half ago, Natasha had questioned him about it, asking him about his broken leg. Tony had cursed himself for that—of course Natasha would have noticed, although where she’d found out is a bit of a mystery because she doesn't seem like the type of person who watches talk shows. He'd been spared answering immediately when he almost got shot out of the sky by a Doom-bot and had needed to stop talking to deal with it. It had been rather convenient, and the next time Natasha had asked, he'd told her that it had just been a mild sprain. He's not sure if she believes him or not.

The Hulk is currently smashing two Doom-bots together and looking very pleased with himself. Tony gives him a quick thumbs up as he flies past.

A while later, the last Doom-bot has been compromised. S.H.I.E.L.D agents gather the pieces, presumably to analyze and study later. Tony grabs a bot for the same reason. These Doom-bots are a slightly newer model and are bound to have some differences. He flies it back to his tower, quickly dumps it inside, and flies away again, telling Jarvis to make sure Loki doesn't touch it. Oddly enough, he doesn't run into Loki, but he supposes that's just as well, since Loki wouldn't want him to leave again.

Clint, Natasha and Steve are busy with something else, so Tony flies to Hulk to try to get him to transform back into Bruce. The Hulk has wandered off a bit, so they're alone. "Hey, big green," Tony says, flying in Hulk's line of vision. "I think it's time for you to go now."

"Metal Man blast Hulk!" The Hulk says, and it takes Tony a second to realize he's referring to their fight in the tower. Well, dang, this really isn't how this should be going.

"Hey, I'm not going to shoot you." Tony hastily reassures him, wishing he had the Hulkbuster armor. "You just helped defeat the Doom-bots, after all."

Thankfully, Hulk switches to looking rather pleased with himself. "Hulk smash!"

"You've already smashed everything that needs smashing, big guy." Tony tells him. "So I think it's time for you to go now. You did your part." The Hulk, however, doesn't seem to want to go.

"Why Metal Man blast Hulk?" Great, this topic again? So much for steering away from it. It's a dangerous topic (for Tony anyways), yet Hulk won't let it go.

"I wasn't sure if you were going to hurt Loki." Tony says. Hulk usually isn't anywhere near this talkative—this is the longest conversation he's ever had with the Hulk and it's been a really short conversation so far.

"Hurt nice man?" Hulk asks, cocking his head to the side in a manner rather reminiscent of the guy they're talking about.

"Yeah, I thought you'd hurt him." Tony says, knowing he's treading dangerous water. Then again, when has he let that stop him before? Hulk snorts angrily, and Tony continues "You didn't really hurt him. Loki's a lot tougher than he looks." Tony tells him, rather surprised he's having a conversation with the Hulk in the first place, let alone this conversation. "Although you still shouldn't have shoved him." Tony adds.

Hulk seems annoyed, as if Tony's being particularly dense, and he smashes one fist into the palm of his other hand. "No! Hurt nice man not hurt by Hulk! Hurt nice man hurt before!" At that, Tony realizes that Hurt Nice Man is how Hulk thinks of Loki. Wait, Hulk knows that Loki was hurt before? Does he know because Bruce knows, or had he picked up on it himself? Either way, Tony's very surprised.
Clearly, there's more to the big green giant than what first meets the eye. Just like Loki.

"Yeah, Loki was hurt before." Tony says. Hulk roars in anger, but it's not directed towards anything around him. Huh. It's as if he's angry about Loki's treatment.

"Hurt Nice Man nice! Shouldn't be hurt! Hurt Nice Man hugs Hulk!" Hulk exclaims, much to Tony's surprise. Hulk honestly does seem to like Loki, and it seems like Loki would be pretty safe around him. Tony's not sure what connection Loki and Hulk have, but it seems to be genuine. This is probably another thing about Loki that has to be a secret, because Tony can totally picture Fury wanting to use Loki as just some sort of Hulk tamer.

"Hulk no see Hurt Nice Man! Hurt Nice Man mad at Hulk?" Hulk asks, almost sounding worried. But Hulk's never worried.

Ok, wow. This conversation is shocking, especially since it had seemed to start off really bad. "No, no, he's not mad at you." Tony says. "He's been asking to see you at every opportunity."

Hulk actually seems glad to hear that. "You actually like him, huh?" Tony asks after a bit.

Hulk nods. "Hulk see Hurt Nice Man soon?" Maybe Hulk will be able to see Loki again. Perhaps, once the Hulk-proof room is finished, Bruce might let the Hulk out willingly in there.

"Maybe, big guy." Tony replies.

He manages to talk Hulk into turning back into Bruce.

"You know, I just had a really interesting conversation with the Other Guy." Tony tells his Science Bro. Bruce looks rather surprised. Tony smirks slightly and continues. "Hulk seems to hate the idea of Loki getting hurt, and he really does seem to like Loki. Or, as Hulk calls him, 'hurt nice man.'" Tony's smirk becomes somewhat more of a genuine smile "Who'd have guessed they'd have their own nicknames for each other?"

Bruce quietly says that Hulk does like Loki. "He even asked if Loki was mad at him, and asked if he'd see Loki soon." Tony adds. Apparently, what the Hulk said is all news to Bruce. Tony's not entirely sure how the Hulk and Bruce are connected mentally. Bruce sometimes seems to know what the Hulk thinks and sometimes doesn't. Tony's not sure how much of Bruce's thoughts the Hulk gets.

They make it back to the other Avengers, and Tony declares "All right, everyone! To the tower!"

"Since when were we going to the tower?" Clint challenges, handing Bruce a shirt. Bruce wears those super-stretchy pants all the time (often under other pants), so he never actually tears through that pair of pants if he Hulks-out. They still fit when he's Bruce, thus he never winds up naked after a battle like he used to. For some reason, the Hulk refuses to wear a shirt, so they need to keep providing those.

"Since I said so, Legolas. We need some team bonding," Tony says before adding with a smirk. "Or some team bondage. Whichever you prefer." He's rewarded for this comment by an annoyed Steve, which is a nice reward.

Tony huffs in annoyance at some of his teammates' protests that they have other things to do with their lives. Eventually, he says that Loki might like to see them again. Really, he wants them to like Loki and vise versa, both so Loki will have more friends and so Tony can have as many people on his side to confront Thor when the thunderer decides to show his face again.
Bruce is obviously going back to the tower, since he lives there now.

Apparently Steve's not going to be stopping over today, though. Oh well, he can be annoying, anyways, Tony thinks, and Loki had seemed nervous around him. Besides, Tony already knows Steve's going to confront Thor about his treatment of Loki, what with Steve's unwavering moral compass and everything. For once, that's not annoying.

Eventually, Clint and Natasha agree to stop by later, once they've taken care of all the post-mission stuff. Tony rolls his eyes. Honestly, what is it with S.H.I.E.L.D agents and protocol? He could never be one. Actually, Clint's probably just talking about showering and changing clothes in the Helicarrier.

Tony and Bruce head back to the tower. The streets are deserted, since citizens haven't been allowed back yet. Bruce seems to like the lack of people. They reach Stark Tower and take the elevator up to the penthouse. All the employees had also been evacuated, so Loki is literally the only person in the building.

As they take the elevator up to the penthouse, Tony asks how Loki is. According to Jarvis, Loki has been in the library the majority of the time, although being in the library doesn't actually mean he'd been reading all that time, but Jarvis says Loki had read some of that animal book. Apparently, Loki had also acted out a large portion of both *Tangled* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* with Jarvis, Dum-E and his toys. Apparently they'd sort of merged into one story, and Simba had been thrown in somewhere along with, for inexplicable reasons, Boo from *Monsters Inc*. Fortunately, Jarvis is good at improvisation.

Tony brings the Doom-bot to his lab and starts to look it over. He tells Jarvis to let Loki down, and to activate *Protocol Annoy the Avengers*, which he'd sadly forgotten about last time. A couple minutes later, Loki arrives with Dum-E. Tony notices that Toy Stark resembles Tony now, and he's wearing Flynn Rider's clothes. Toy Stark had been in the Iron Man form not long before Tony left to fight the Doom-bots. Loki's wearing that long coat he'd made with his powers, that has the night sky pictured on it.

"Do I need to sing again?" Loki suddenly asks in a quiet voice as Tony removes his armor. Loki looks him over carefully for injuries.

Bruce still looks amazed that Loki's volunteering this ability already, and frankly Tony's still shocked too (it's only been four days since he healed Tony's leg). However, Loki doesn't seem scared of the healing ability at all now. It seems all the stuff about Rapunzel really worked. Or maybe it's because he apparently hadn't even known he could do it, so he doesn't have any bad memories about doing it in Asgard. It's probably a combination of the two, actually.

Tony says he's fine, and Loki checks him over once again to make sure.

"I saw it again!" Loki suddenly exclaims. When Tony asks what 'it' is, Loki explains. "I saw you as Man of Iron and Hulk-y fighting those things!" He points at the broken Doom-bot. "I saw it out of the window this time, and I saw Steve too."

"I saw Hulk-y," Loki repeats "but he didn't see me." He sounds very upset about this. "Does he still like me?"

"He asked about you, and he seemed to hate the idea of hurting you when he shoved you." Tony says. Tony glances at Bruce, silently asking if he feels like letting the Other Guy out, but Bruce shakes his head and mouths *Not now*. At least it's not *never*. 
"Maybe you can see him again sometime, just not right now." He actually means it. Clearly, the Hulk wanted to see Loki again, as bizarre as it sounds. Bruce doesn't say anything but looks rather uncomfortable.

Clint arrives about ten minutes later- without Natasha, oddly enough- and his arrival is announced by music from some live-action Robin Hood movie (not the animated Disney version). Apparently, he had just gone to the Helicarrier to shower. Bruce, Tony and Loki go to meet him on the Avengers' usual floor. The archer gives Loki's coat a disbelieving look and glances at Tony. Tony shrugs.

"You really have quite the sense of style, don't you?" Clint smirks. "Where the hell do you even get a coat like that?"

Loki doesn't answer, and Tony and Bruce remain silent. It's Loki's choice whether to tell him or not.

"You're like Orion, 'cause you've got a bow." Loki tells Clint out of the blue, peering around him looking for said bow, which is no doubt back on the Helicarrier. "'Xcept you don't have a club, like Orion has. You have the Hawk's Eye though, right?" Like Man of Iron, Loki had probably gotten Hawk's Eye from Thor.

"Uh, yeah. Something like that." Clint looks very confused. "Why is Simba in an Iron Man suit?"

"I made it for him with holograms, and Jarvis and Dum-E made it real!" Loki grins, bouncing on his toes. "Tony put an arc reactor in it, and I love it. I love arc reactors. There's a really big one here and I can feel it when we leave, but barely up here. I'm gonna be Man of Iron for Hal... Hal-lo-ween?" He casts a quick, questioning glance at Tony and Bruce, who both nod. "Halloween! Bruce taught me that one! H-a-l-l-o-w-e-e-n!"

Clint gives a somewhat patronizing "Good job" as if he's wondering if Loki's for real. Clearly, he's having doubts about Loki's intelligence, or his sanity. Maybe both. Tony's surprised at how much that irks him, considering he'd made the same mistake.

"Hey Katniss, lay off him." Tony says. "Snoopy here is just learning to write in our language, because even Jarvis hasn't been able to decode the language he writes in. Apparently everyone in that messed-up viking land that treated him like crap has some kind of translator in their heads. He just learned our alphabet a few days ago, and he's already this far. Let's see you do that."

Clint looks shocked. "Sorry, man." He mutters. "Seriously, good job." It's much more sincere this time, and Loki gives him a hesitant smile.

Jarvis informs them that Natasha is coming, and Tony grins in anticipation of Protocol Annoy the Avengers being executed again.

When Natasha steps out of the elevator, music blares from the speakers, singing "Call me, beep me, if you wanna reach me!" Clint bursts out laughing and doesn't stop even when Natasha glares at him.

"Hey Kim Possible," Tony says, smirking. Natasha turns to him with a steely expression that promises a painful death.

"Stark, if you ever call me that again, I will eviscerate you." She deadpans. She can be really scary sometimes. Loki looks at her fearfully but then his demeanor suddenly changes when he looks at Tony.
"No!" Loki shrieks, shaking his head wildly and jumping up and down. "You don't hurt Tony!"

Loki puts himself in between Tony and Natasha and gives Natasha one of his surprisingly formidable glares, like he'd given the Hulk when he attacked Tony. The temperature in the room plummets and Tony shivers. He wonders, again, why Loki acts so scared all the time if he can be like this, before remembering that Loki had probably been taught not to stand up to himself.

Loki and Natasha stare at each other for a bit, but the moment is broken when Bruce, clearly wanting to avoid conflict, tells Loki that Natasha's really not going to do that. Loki suddenly asks "Jarvis? What did that word mean? It was something bad." It's sort of weird that he asks that now, but he'd clearly recognized a threat when he heard it.

"Do you mean eviscerate, Mr. Loki?" Loki nods and Jarvis says "Eviscerate means to disembowel, which means to cut open and remove the organs of something."

Loki scrunches up his face. "Eew." Afterwards, he glares at Natasha again, stomps his foot and yells "No! You're not doing that to him! And Bruce says so, too!" Then, his anger seems to vanish instantly, and the room starts to heat up again, spurred on by Jarvis turning up the heat considerably. Loki seems somewhat disappointed when this happens.

He speaks to Tony but continues to eye Natasha warily. "I thought her name was Natasha? Or Black Widow. Not Kim Possible."

"It's not Kim Possible." Natasha says. Loki asks who Kim Possible is, and Tony briefly explains it's a cartoon show. He doesn't actually compare Natasha to Kim's out loud, mostly because Natasha is still giving him a warning look.

"I thought he was helpless." Clint says about Loki, glancing at Tony with a surprised expression on his face. Natasha seems to be thinking the same thing and is giving Loki a calculating look, clearly wondering what else he's hiding.

Loki's proven he's far from helpless, yet he never seems to stand up for himself. He'd undoubtedly been taught not to, and the thought sickens Tony.

"You have Avengers toys." Natasha says abruptly, glancing at Toy Stark and the Hulk toy sticking out of the front pocket of Loki's drawstring bag, which is in her view now that Loki's back is turned to her.

Loki nods, sending her an uneasy look. He rummages around in the bag and pulls out the Black Widow and the Hawkeye action figures.

Loki cautiously approaches Clint and shows him the Hawkeye figure, which has a tiny bow but no arrows. Clint glances at it and then at Toy Stark. "Hey, how come Tony's toy looks so much better than mine?"

"Because I look better in real life, birdbrain." Tony replies.

"The Hulk looks better, too." Natasha observes before turning to Loki. "Did you change those ones or something? Can you change the way things look? Tony said you can change your clothes, and you obviously didn't buy that coat."

Loki lets out a wild scream and Tony glares at Natasha "I also said that he doesn't like being reminded of that stuff. What the hell are you doing, interrogating him?!" It actually did sound like an interrogation. Seriously, what is wrong with her? Last time, Natasha had seemed to accept that Loki's powers were something she didn't need to pry about.
Even Clint is against her on this, telling her to cut it out. He pulls her aside and starts muttering to her, but Tony can't make out the words over Loki's scream.

Despite what Natasha said about S.H.I.E.L.D not needing to know about Loki or his powers last time, Tony's not sure if she'll keep that opinion. Especially if she knows Loki can heal people. After all, S.H.I.E.L.D agents are frequently injured, and Tony wouldn't put it past Director Eyepatch to try to use Loki as a healer. Fury, being his usual warm and cuddly self, probably wouldn't give a crap that Loki's scared of his powers, either. Actually, Tony wouldn't put it past Fury to want to experiment on Loki's powers in general. Of course, Tony's been very interested in Loki's powers himself, but Fury would probably have the experiments forced on Loki no matter how Loki felt about them, and some of the experiments wouldn't be too pleasant either.

Tony gathers Loki into a hug to try to calm him down, glaring daggers at Natasha. Why are S.H.I.E.L.D agents so freaking paranoid? Well, this particular agent, anyways.

After a couple minutes of hugging and soft spoken words from Tony, Loki finally calms down.

Natasha's slipped on a nicer demeanor as easily as slipping on a glove. Freaking spies, Tony thinks.

"I apologize. I forgot that upset you." Natasha says in a very convincing voice. Like hell she forgot, Tony thinks. However, she doesn't bring it up again. Tony's tempted to kick her out of the tower, but Clint pulls him aside and says it would actually be better if she stayed, because the more she gets to know Loki, the less she'll suspect him. Tony's surprised but glad that he has Clint as an ally on this matter.

Apparently, she's worked out that Loki can change his appearance and is suspicious that he could be anyone, perhaps a wanted criminal. There is logic to that, but it's also very paranoid. Loki is Loki. The end. Tony's certain of that, and he doesn't give the Loki-is-a-disguised-criminal/villain theory any credit at all.

At least Natasha's apparently convinced that Loki's terror was genuine when he freaked out. It was, obviously, but Natasha is the type to suspect it was a ploy to gain sympathy or something stupidly paranoid like that. Then again, she'd tricked people into sympathizing with her, and as the saying goes, the thief thinks everyone else is a thief. Fortunately, for once, she's creepily good at reading people, so she's hopefully starting to see that such an idea about Loki is insane.

She'd certainly appeared believe Tony when he'd told them of the abuse last time and had even suggested Loki might have PTSD.

Tony can practically see her cataloging various things in her mind, like how Loki only holds the Thor toy by it's legs, while the rest he holds by their torsos a lot of the time. It seems sort of trivial, but Tony hasn't been able to help noticing it and Natasha apparently does too.

At one point, she mutters something in Russian and Loki responds to what she says. It sounds like English to Tony but apparently sounded like Russian to Natasha. This leads to an explanation from Bruce about what he and Tony suspect about All-Tongue, and Natasha starts speaking to Loki in Russian, Italian, German, French, Mandarin and a couple languages Tony doesn't recognize and certainly doesn't understand.

The rest of the visit is rather uneventful, and thankfully the topics of Loki healing Tony or connecting with the Hulk don't come up at all. Admittedly, Tony tries to steer the conversation as far away from anything related to Loki's powers as possible. It helps that Loki wants to avoid those topics too and will often blurt out something random, constantly sending the conversation in new directions.
It seems like Clint's right, because an hour or two go by and Natasha now seems to have the right impression of Loki- that he's not a threat. Hopefully that's actually what she's thinking, but accurately reading Natasha is never exactly easy, or even possible.

Loki doesn't seem nearly as put off by Natasha's earlier behavior as Tony is. He'd shown her the Black Widow action figure and actually given her a wide smile. It seems that anyone who shows an ounce of kindness to Loki is a friend in his mind (expect perhaps Steve, for some reason). Unless that person threatens Tony, that is. Then Loki will snap with surprising ferocity. Once these instances are over, though, they're seemingly forgotten.

Like Tony had noticed last time, Loki's rather taken to Clint, who tells him he should make some arrows for the Hawkeye figure (although he doesn't give any hints about using his powers to make them, so Loki doesn't freak out). Clint, in return, still seems to like Loki, despite his slightly condescending attitude at the beginning of this meeting. Aside from that, he's been really great to Loki today.

Tony privately asks Clint whether or not he'll come to their side when Thor shows up, and Clint says he'll be there to give Thor hell for his treatment of Loki. Tony grins and claps him on the shoulder.

So now the only uncertainty for other Avengers confronting Thor is Natasha, but things with her don't seem as bad as they did a couple hours ago. Then again, one can never be sure about what Natasha's thinking.

"Yeah, I figured you might like it- that's why I picked it out. If you want, I can get you one for your room." Tony says and Loki sits up and looks at him as he continues speaking. "It'll probably make it a bit more comfortable under your bed. Would you like that?" Loki doesn't answer. He's not sure what to say- he would like it, but he doesn't want Tony to think he's a burden- although he is, so Tony probably already thinks so. Why Tony's keeping him around is still beyond Loki. Actually, he still doesn't know why the Asgardians kept him around as long as they did.

"Why would you care if I like it?" Loki asks, confused. Tony's the one who got this rug, so why would someone else's opinion (especially a monster's) factor in? Wouldn't Tony pick what he liked?

"Because I made this room for you, buddy." Tony says, crouching down next to him. "Remember how we went and talked to Gwyneth last week? Well, she's going to be coming here instead, and this is where you'll be talking to her from now on. Which is going to be really soon, actually. She's supposed to be here in like ten minutes." Loki looks around the room curiously. Tony made this room for him? The thought that Tony would go through the effort for him is really nice. Tony's probably the only person who would, though, and he still doesn't know why.

Loki's not sure who Gwyneth is, and when he asks, Tony sighs. "You know, the lady we went and
talked to, before we went to the shoe store. What was her name again, Jarvis? Dr...?" Loki suddenly realizes he's talking about Dr. Car-something. Tony stops speaking and Jarvis supplies the name Dr. Carlisle.

So that's what the something in Dr. Car-something's name really is, Loki realizes. It sounds like car-lie-uhl and Loki wonders if her name really does have something to do with cars or lies; maybe she lies a lot? Aren't surnames supposed to tell you about the person? After all, Odinson means Thor's the son of Odin, and Laufeyson (Loki hates his last name) means he's the son of Laufey the Frost Giant. But Tony's surname is Stark and that doesn't really have anything to do with him. Does it? Potts doesn't seem to have anything to do with Pepper, either.

Tony points out that the large tent Loki had noticed earlier, telling him it's a retreat in case he doesn't feel like crawling under tables (though there's a table too, apparently for that purpose). Loki crawls in the tent. It's even better than under the table!

There's also a box full of random objects that Tony says he can fiddle with, and Loki recognizes a certain colorful cube and that other... thing he'd fiddled a lot with that first day. Tony says the second thing is called a can opener. Loki grins and sings can opener to himself as he turns the crank as he shows it to Simba. He also quickly solves the Roo-bix cube. Isn't that what Tony called it? What's a roo-bix? He asks Jarvis how to spell it and realizes it's Rubik's cube. It's apparently named after some guy named Erno Rubik, who, according to Jarvis, invented it. Loki shows the finished cube to Tony, who gives him a thumbs-up. Loki has learned that that gesture means good job or I'm good, and he beams.

"Hey, what do you say today you try to talk to her without me?" Tony asks and Loki hugs Simba before absentmindedly fiddling with the can opener again. "I mean, you don't have to worry about me abandoning you." Tony reassures "I'll still be in the tower, unless I have to go kick some ass as Iron Man again, but then I'll have Jarvis tell you, okay?"

Loki shrugs, and then nods hesitantly after a bit. Tony grins at him and squeezes his shoulder a bit, and Loki smiles a little in response. Jarvis then speaks up. "I will indeed inform you if Mr. Stark leaves the premises, Mr. Loki. I will be here the whole time, although I will most likely be a silent observer."

"Why?" Loki tilts his head to the side and frowns. He likes it when Jarvis talks to him.

"Well, Mr. Loki, you're supposed to talk to Dr. Carlisle during these sessions. You may talk to me anytime, although I do not have a background in psychology as she does. So while she is here, it would be better if you talk to her instead of me." Loki nods slightly as he goes over to his drawstring bag and fishes Toy Stark out of the front pocket. He looks like Tony right now, only he's wearing Flynn Rider/Eugene Fitzherbert's clothes, like in a drawing he'd given Tony. Loki actually really likes it, since he can pretend Toy Stark is Flynn.

Dr. Carlisle arrives about five minutes later. She has a brief conversation with Tony, and then Tony comes over and squeezes Loki's shoulder again. "See ya, Snoopy." He says before heading towards the elevator. Loki squeezes Simba and Toy Stark a bit tighter and presses his hand against Simba's arc reactor. It's okay, he tells himself. Jarvis is here, even if he won't talk much, and Tony's still in the tower. Tony said he'd be okay.

Dr. Carlisle greets him, and Loki bows slightly in response. Why does nobody here do that, he wonders?

"Hi Dr Carlil... Calrile... Your name's really hard to say." Loki scrunches his face and shakes his head in frustration. He remembers her name now and knows what it's supposed to sound like, but
his mouth keeps messing it up, like it's a tongue-twister. He tries sing-songing it but just messes up even more. Dr. Carlisle says he can call her Gwyneth, but that isn't much better. Why can't she have an easy name like Tony or Bruce or even Esmeralda? Loki accidentally asks that out loud, but she doesn't seem offended, thankfully. Eventually, they settle on him calling her Dr. C and Loki grins. He knows what C is now- *C* is for constellation. Dr. C is a lot easier, even in his head.

Dr. C sits down and pulls that recording thing out of her bag, asking if he minds her recording their session again. Loki wordlessly shakes his head no, and she starts it up. "So, Loki, do you have anything you want to start out telling me? What's happened since you've seen me?" She gestures for him to sit on the couch. Loki does briefly, but he soon slides off the couch and onto the rug.

Tons of ideas flash through Loki's head, but he blurts out the main thing on his mind right now. "Tony's not here."

"What do you like so much about him?" Gwyneth asks. "I see you definitely like Iron Man." She glances at the toys he's holding.

"I'm gonna be Man of Iron for Halloween!" Loki tells her. "That means I get to dress up as him in more than just pajamas. Jarvis is making me a suit!"

"Well, you only have to wait two days. Why did you choose to be Iron Man?" Dr. C doesn't seem to like Tony too much. She'd glared at him last week, Loki remembers, although her voice is neutral right now.

"He's Tony! He's nice and strong and nobody hurts him!" Loki crosses his arms. So there, he thinks, sticking his tongue out at Dr. C. She really shouldn't dislike Tony.

Dr. C asks if this is the case, and Loki answers as he always does. "Tony's the nicest person ever!" Really, he is.

Dr. C then asks him what makes Tony the nicest person ever.

It's, well, everything. Nobody else has ever treated him as well as Tony does. Tony, who hasn't hit him once and who's apologized for getting angry and snapping. Tony, who got him Simba and the Avengers toys and made this room for him. Tony actually seems to care whether Loki's upset or not, even if he's a monster, and Tony tells him everything he ever wanted to hear, even if it's unbelievable. Tony tells him he's not bad and he's not a monster even though he's a Jotun and that he's not going back to Asgard. Tony even tells him that his magic is good. It's crazy. Although, there is *something* good about his horrid magic. He can heal Tony.

It isn't until Dr. C asks him about magic that Loki realizes with terror that he must have spoken those thoughts aloud. How else would she know?

*No no no no nononoNONONO!* Loki screams in frustration and an explosive gust of wind shoots out around him. His stupid *stupid* mouth has betrayed him again. There's green around his hands, and he accidentally just told her about doing magic and being a Jotun and now she sees and she knows! She knows! Loki flees to the tent and curls up in the corner.

He can't say anything else! This is already horrible and he's said way too much! Loki clamps a hand over his mouth, muffling the screams like the stitches had. Dimly, he hears Dr. C talking but it soon is drowned out. *STITCHES STITCHES STITCHES!* "Don't you dare try to get away again. Now stop moving or we'll make you." They make him- hands hold his head and legs down, and a sharp blow stills him. Odin's weight is baring down on his chest. He can't move! He can't move!
He did magic, lied, tried to get away! "You need to be punished. Don't you dare try to get out of this if you know what's good for you!" A needle coming towards his face. He wants to be away but he's still there and he can't escape. Not even with magic and he'd be in even worse trouble if he did, so it's good he can't do it right now. Now there's stabbing, white hot fire as the cord drags through his lips. STOP SCREAMING YOU KNOW YOU DESERVE THIS!

He needs to get them out! He grabs at the stitches, but someone's grabbing his wrists, holding him back, saying something. No, they're not quite holding him back, he realizes. He can still freely move his arms around, dragging the person's hands with him. That's a first. He scratches at the stitches and the person gets louder.

"Loki! Can you hear me? It's Tony, you're in my tower. You're not in Asgard anymore!" It takes a bit for the words to make sense. Tony? Loki's pulled into a hug and the voice gets a bit softer, murmuring in his ear, telling him he's safe. He feels the arc reactor, too. Yeah, definitely Tony.

Slowly but surely, the memory fades and he remembers where he is. Wait, when had Tony gotten here? He'd been gone. As if reading his mind, Tony says "I guess you weren't ready to do this without me, huh?" Loki just shrugs.

"I thought last time it was just because you thought I was going to ditch you." Tony says. "You know I'm not going to do that, right? I'm not sending you back either." Hesitantly, Loki nods, but he still doesn't know what would happen if Tony saw his Jotun form. He's already accidentally changed his appearance a couple times with his magic, but he thankfully hasn't shown his true form yet.

He can't believe he just told Dr. C all that stuff about what Tony says about magic and Jotuns aloud. He's almost positive his mouth was closed the whole time, but somehow he had, and now she knows he's a freak and a monster. Tony's crazy for telling him otherwise, and Jarvis, Pepper and Bruce are crazy for agreeing. Everyone else says he's a freaky monster, because he is. Surely Dr. C will be no different than the majority, instead of being crazy like those who say otherwise.

Tony coaxes him into talking to her again. Loki crawls out of the tent, still clinging to Tony, Simba and Toy Stark. Dr. C and Tony exchange a look. Instead of glaring at Tony like last week, Dr. C is actually giving Tony a faint smile. Good. "Just so we're clear, this is confidential. No spreading that around." Tony's tone leaves no room for arguing.

Dr. C says "Of course." in a rather impersonal tone before turning her attention to Loki.

"Do you have flashbacks often?" Dr. C asks. Loki's not sure what a flashback is. "What you just had, I'm assuming it was a memory of some kind?" Loki nods, wondering if she can read his mind. "What is it like when you remember stuff like that?"

Loki cocks his head to the side, confused. "I hate it."

"Ok. I'd probably hate it too." Dr. C says patiently. "But what I meant, was this- say the memory is of eating breakfast. Is it like you're remembering what you ate for breakfast, or is it like you're eating breakfast again?"

"Eating it again." Loki mutters, wondering who would experience one of these memories- flashbacks, apparently- about eating breakfast. Maybe if his breakfast tried to eat him, he might have flashbacks about it. Loki shudders at the thought of breakfast turning on him.

"You're not alone in having flashbacks, you know, and having them doesn't make you weak in any way." Dr. C gives him a stern look, rather like the ones Tony gives him when he's saying
something like magic not being bad. "I've worked with a lot of people who have had flashbacks, however, not everyone has them. In many cases during a flashback, someone is reliving a traumatic event that happened to them. Is that what was happening to you?"

Once Loki gets that *traumatic* means something bad, he nods. Next to him, Tony's body feels tenser, but he doesn't look any different. Maybe he's imagining it.

"Is it just flashbacks, or is it other things?" Dr. C asks. Loki cocks his head in confusion, and she says "Sorry, I guess that was kind of vague. Some people who have flashbacks have other symptoms as well, but not everyone with flashbacks has these. Some people also have nightmares where they are reliving the event, a lot like flashbacks, actually. Or they might avoid certain situations that trigger them."

"Nightmares!" Loki says. "Doesn't everyone have them? Tony had one, and I sang my special song to him and made him feel better. Sleipnir sang it to me there, when I woke up scared."

"Loki, be quiet." Tony suddenly snaps, and Loki flinches away from him. "Okay, moving on. Not another word." Tony says in a somewhat dangerous tone. Dr. C is giving Tony a calculating look as he glares back at her challengingly. "I'm paying you to help Loki, not to pry into my life."

Tony apparently wins the staring contest- of course Tony wins. He also tells Loki that he didn't mean to snap at him. It's weird, that Tony's acting like he's done something wrong by being angry at him.

Dr. C changes the topic, asking how often he has nightmares, and Loki mumbles "All the time." She seems rather shocked at that and asks how long it's been going on. Loki shrugs. He's not sure. He used to escape in his dreams and play with his friends and actually see them, but he doesn't know how long it's been since that happened. Or maybe it happened recently and he doesn't remember? He doesn't remember every single dream from every single night, after all, but all the recent ones he remembers have been nightmares.

"What do you do when you have a nightmare or a flashback?" Dr. C asks. Tony testily tells her that she'd just seen it, so it's stupid that she's asking. Loki wonders why she's asking until she says that she wants to hear his opinion.

"Get really scared." Loki mumbles. "Go under beds. And tables. And in tents."

"Why do you like going under things?"

Loki shrugs. "Safe." Nobody will see him unless they look under, and it's just him and Simba until Tony comes. "Tony hugs me. He gives really good hugs, like Hulk-y!" Tony comes and hugs him and tells him everything's all right, and helps chase his fears away. Tony doesn't even make fun of him for being scared like everyone in Asgard does.

Loki's worked out that Tony doesn't hug many people- both Bruce and Pepper have told him that. He likes that. It helps him believe that Tony really does like him.

"He tells me nice things, too." Loki had kind of already told Dr. C that.

"Aw, Snoopy, you're making me blush." Tony says, smirking. Loki giggles.

"He says I'm not bad. He says I'm good, like Rapunzel and Esmeralda and Quasimodo, 'cause he says they're not bad either."

Dr. C asks him if he believes that, or if he thinks he's bad, and Loki actually laughs, though it's not
a happy laugh. Of course he's bad! He's a Frost Giant! They're all bad, they're all monsters! But... Frollo was wrong about gypsies, because Esmeralda wasn't bad, and he was wrong about Quasimodo too! And Mother Gothel was wrong about the world being evil because she was really just telling Rapunzel that to keep her in the tower.

"Tony says they were wrong to do that stuff to me. So do Bruce and Pepper and Jarvis." Loki mumbles eventually. Asgard really did seem a lot like Quasimodo and Rapunzel's lives with Frollo and Mother Gothel respectively. But Frollo and Mother Gothel were lying. Could Asgard actually be wrong?

No, that's ridiculous. He is a monster and magic is bad!

But healing Tony isn't bad! That's magic.

Dr. C asks Loki to tell her what sort of things give him flashbacks or make him feel panicked. That's easy. Magic, Asgard, blue skin, red eyes. Green, when it's around his hands, but it's his favorite color even though it's the color of his magic. Actually, Loki's somehow pretty sure his magic is green because it's his favorite color. If it was blue, that would be horrible. He hates blue— it's a horrible color.

"The stuff Tony talks about." Loki eventually mumbles. He hunts through the box of objects and pulls out some stretchy coil of wire that flops around a lot. It's really fun, and Tony says it's called a Slinky. Loki slowly sounds the word out and singsongs "S-l-i-n-k-y! Right?" Tony gives him an actual smile, not a smirk, and tells him that it actually ends with a y, but that he did a good job. Loki feels his face going red at the praise.

"Okay, Loki, when you start to feel panicked, I want you to tell yourself the stuff Tony tells you about not being bad. Can you do that for me?"

Loki frowns. Why would he tell himself that?

"Even if you don't believe it, just tell yourself that, anyways." Dr. C says. "Can you do that?"

Loki shrugs. "Maybe." Why would he lie to himself, though? It seems kind of stupid, but he knows it's best to do what's asked of him

Apparently, it might make the flashbacks easier, though, and Loki thinks that sounds really nice.

Tony honestly hadn't thought that Loki would freak out like he did, since last time Loki had mainly freaked out when he thought Tony was going to ditch him at Gwyneth's office. So, he'd figured that this time, since Loki's appointment was in the tower, it would be fine.

He hadn't exactly thought about how Loki would react to whatever they were talking about, though, and he certainly hadn't expected another flashback. He'd been in his lab, working, and Jarvis had informed him when Loki was having a flashback. He'd rushed over immediately, not even thinking that maybe Gwyneth would have preferred if he waited. Although she doesn't seem to be succeed much in calming him down, despite having worked with trauma patients before. Then again, maybe she normally doesn't hug patients.

Anyways, Tony had ended up in Loki's therapy session again.

Gwyneth left about five minutes ago, with a considerable amount of money transferred to her digitally by Jarvis. She'd left Loki instructions to tell himself that he's not bad after he has a flashback or a nightmare. Tony honestly doesn't care about the money, since he could spend ten
times the amount without blinking, but why had that tiny bit of advise cost as much as it had? Also, that seems like kind of lame advise.

Tony and Loki are in the penthouse now. Tony's kicked back on one of the couches, sipping scotch, and Loki's currently staring at him, obviously wondering something. Bruce is reading on a tablet on one of the other sofas, a little bit away. He'd asked how it went, and Tony had shrugged.

"Something on your mind?" Tony quirks an eyebrow at Loki. Loki briefly runs a hand over the top of his head with a confused expression. Tony rolls his eyes. "It's an expression, Snoopy. What do you want to ask me?"

"Why- " Loki starts, and Tony gives him a go on gesture, flashing what's supposed to be an encouraging grin.

"Why'd you get so angry 'bout nightmares?" Loki asks hesitantly, as if fearing his reaction.

When Loki had brought up that he had nightmares too, Tony had snapped. He doesn't want anyone to know about that, especially not someone like Gwyneth. She'd been giving him all-too-calculating looks.

Tony hadn't meant to snap at Loki like that, and he actually feels pretty bad about it.

He sees Bruce look up. Bruce gives him a knowing look before getting up and leaving to give them some privacy. The act is actually a rather subtle hint on what to do.

Tony runs a hand over his face and sips some more scotch. Loki had seen that one instance of Tony's nightmare, but apparently he was under the impression that everyone has them.

"I don't like people knowing about that." Tony says eventually.

"Oh." Loki frowns "So no talking about it?"

"Not with anyone else." Really, they should have gone over this earlier.

"But everyone has them." Loki looks really confused. Apparently he still doesn't get it.

Tony sighs and runs a hand over his face. "No, they don't."

"They don't?" Loki asks.

"Nope. Just us lucky ones."

Loki cocks his head to the side and bites his lip. Tony's not sure if he caught the sarcasm or not. "Us? Like what Dr. C said? Then why do you? 'Cause they're about getting hurt and nobody hurts you." Wait, where had that come from? Since when did Loki think he didn't get hurt? He supposes it makes sense, since Loki's never seen anyone hurt him.

Tony really can't see a way out of this conversation, and he hates that. But a little voice in the back of Tony's head tells him Loki was going to find out about his demons eventually. That interview had made that pretty clear.

Tony really hates talking about this stuff. But if he got Bruce or Jarvis to tell Loki of his past, they might tell more than he wants Loki to know.

"You're wrong," He says. "I have a lot of enemies, actually." Enemies that hopefully will never find out about Loki, but Tony doesn't say that aloud. Loki just blinks and stares at him, clearly
waiting for him to continue and remaining uncharacteristically silent and appearing more present than usual.

"I have a lot of enemies, and well... I'm like you." Tony takes another swig of scotch. "Some of my enemies have hurt me. A lot." Another swig.

"You saw my nightmare." Tony says, deceptively calm. "It was bad. A flashback, as Gwyneth said."

"My first Iron Man suit was built in a cave in Afghanistan." Tony says at last. His grip on his glass tightens and he tries to force the memories down. "I was... hurt a lot there. It was my own personal hell, like Asgard was to you. That's what I was dreaming about." Tony finds a new respect for Loki in how much he actually reveals about his own past, especially during his first therapy session. Tony has a hard time even admitting the small amount he had. "I managed to build the suit and get away."

Loki pulls him into a hug. "You're safe." He murmurs, like Tony has done to him so many times before. Loki starts singing that song about horses, which he's done every other time he's tried to comfort Tony. Apparently one of Loki's imaginary friends sung it to him when he was scared, and so that's how Loki tries to comfort others. How does having an imaginary friend calm you down even work, though, when you need to think of everything they do.

Eventually, Tony continues talking.

Tony doesn't tell Loki that much, though. He says that the cave is where he got his arc reactor, but he skips over the agonizing surgery. He'd already told Loki about the shrapnel and the reason for the arc reactor a while ago.

He doesn't mention Yinsen, or the fact that Stark Industries used to make weapons. Loki doesn't really know anything about Stark Industries in general, though. Tony doesn't tell Loki about the terrorists wanting him to build weapons instead of the suit, and he certainly doesn't go into detail about the torture, only telling Loki again that he'd gotten hurt a lot in vague terms. He closes his eyes as memories surface. Loki's hug tightens a bit and his singing gets louder. By focusing on Loki's song, the memories start to fade.

So Tony doesn't Loki everything, and he's not sure when he will. Maybe never. Frankly, compared to everything Loki's told him, this is nothing. But to be honest, he never thought he'd even tell Loki this much.

Loki probably doesn't want to hear about that anyways, Tony tells himself, and he doesn't want to talk about it. But there's something else. Selfishly, Tony doesn't want Loki to know about his darker side, about the Merchant of Death, about everything that stupid Marla dragged up at that interview.

Tony often acts like he doesn't give a crap what people think of him, and that's true to some extent. But he does care about how those close to him view him.

Loki is like Jarvis, Tony's realized, in that he pretty much likes him unconditionally. Unlike Jarvis, Loki isn't required to do so. Tony hates to think about what Loki would think of him if he knew all that stuff, since perhaps knowing that stuff would make Loki see him in a negative light like half of the media does.

Tony silently curses himself for a sentimental fool, but deep down, he's worried about losing his friendship with Loki.
This chapter marks when I got my Simba toy back in May. He does not have an Iron Man suit, sadly...
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Tony learns even more horrible stuff about Asgard, as if there wasn't enough already.

Halloween is fun until a certain someone shows up.

Bruce is hiding in his lab right now and won't let Loki in, so Loki's in Tony's lab. He likes it in Tony's lab anyways, but he wishes Bruce would stop hiding every time he asks if the Hulk can come out. Although Tony had said he might be able to see the Hulk sometime soon, he still hasn't yet. Tony says he's working on a room that will keep Hulk from leaving holes in the floor like he had. However, Loki hadn't even asked about the Hulk this time, so he doesn't know why Bruce is locking himself in there now. Although Tony seems glad that Bruce is gone for a bit, claiming that Bruce hiding in another lab for a couple hours lets him do something he's had to put off.

"Jarvis, let's see if I'd win that bet I made." Tony says, though Loki has no idea what he's talking about. Jarvis asks if it was when he was in his lab alone a couple days ago, and Tony replies "That's the one, J."

"A-R-V-I-S!" Loki singsongs, finishing Jarvis' name once he figures out Tony had been referring to Jarvis by that. Jarvis, starts with J, but it's kind of weird that Tony just called Jarvis J, because that would be like someone calling him L instead of Loki. Loki knows that the J means Just. "Just a rather very intelligent system!" Loki says aloud to nobody in particular. He laughs, liking the way that sounds.

"Just a rather very intelligent system." Loki says again, this time in a singsong tone.

Tony glances at him. "I didn't know you knew what Jarvis' name stands for." He says and Loki grins. It's kind of confusing, though, since how is Jarvis a system? But Loki likes that Jarvis' name stands for something. Apparently, Jarvis is officially spelled with all capital letters, like J.A.R.V.I.S. Jarvis had explained that's because his name is an acronym. Bruce had mentioned that word, and said that most names aren't acronyms- just when the letters stand for something. Jarvis' name can also be spelled like every other name, with only the first letter being capital, which makes him seem more like everybody else. Jarvis told Loki that he prefers it being spelled like a name instead of an acronym, even if that's not official. One of the first things Loki had wanted to know how to spell was his own name (though apparently nobody on Midgard is named Loki, so Bruce said he wasn't one hundred percent positive about it being L-O-K-I). He knows how to spell his name in English now, as well as Tony, Bruce, Jarvis- or J.A.R.V.I.S., since apparently both work- Dum-E, Simba, Pepper, Hulk(y) and Snoopy.

Dum-E is currently wiping tables with a rag, and Loki goes to help him. Loki's seen Dum-E do chores sometimes. On Loki's first morning, after getting lost and found again, Loki had met Dum-E when Tony had made him pick up clothes. Tony had said then that Dum-E isn't his slave, but sometimes he orders Dum-E around. Maybe that makes Dum-E Tony's servant, although Tony had used the word helper.

Dum-E doesn't seem to mind doing chores, although the only other times Loki's seen it is when
Dum-E sometimes cleans up after meals, like the night Tony broke his ankle. Loki had helped him clean up that night and one morning after breakfast, and then there's right now. This is the first time Loki's seen him cleaning the lab. Normally in the lab, Loki will get Dum-E to play with him or Dum-E will try to hand Tony tools or something and Tony will send him over to Loki anyways. Loki likes that, because Dum-E's really fun.

"Hey, Snoopy, you don't have to do that." Tony remarks when Loki starts helping Dum-E. Every time Loki's helped Dum-E when Tony's there (which has admittedly only been twice, not counting this time), Tony has told him he doesn't have to, but Loki doesn't actually mind helping Dum-E. Dum-E doesn't yell at him, although he doesn't speak at all.

Loki had wondered at first why Tony never assigned him chores, but it's clear Tony's in charge here, so that's the answer. It had actually been the servants who told Loki what tasks to do. Higher ranking people like warriors never told him to do chores. Loki's pretty sure he's below servants, because they can hit or berate him just like anyone else, so he kind of has to listen to them if he wants to avoid their wrath. Then again, he is a savage Frost Giant, the scum of the Nine Realms. Anyone can do anything to him and he deserves it. Besides, the servants outnumbered him.

He wonders if he's below Dum-E and Jarvis. He's not sure, especially concerning Jarvis. Jarvis seems above him, but also is really polite and does stuff for him when he asks, which higher ranking people don't do to those below them. Plus Jarvis had called him Sir the first time like he calls Tony before switching to Mr. Loki.

Tony sets his mug of coffee on the table he's working at, which also has a couple metal things on it. Both Tony and Bruce drink a lot of coffee, Loki's noticed; Tony drinks by far the most and consumes almost as much coffee as he does alcohol. Loki loves the smell of coffee, but he'd tried it once and actually spit it back out into the mug before furiously swishing water in his mouth and spitting it into the sink to try to get rid of the disgusting flavor.

Dum-E moves to wipe next to the mug, which Tony questions him about, and his metal arm knocks the mug over. Brown liquid flows across the table in a pattern that looks like a binglesnipe (Loki hasn't been able to find those in that animal book yet), hitting both the curious object with a gazillion wires that Tony's working on and flowing over the edge of the table onto the man's pants.

"Dammit, Dum-E!" Tony shouts, picking up the jumble of wires and throwing it down onto the coffee-covered table so it makes a cracking sound. Loki flinches at both his tone and his movement. "You are a tragedy, you know that?" Dum-E's arm lowers sadly. Loki's never seen Tony angry at Dum-E like this before, and while it scares him, it makes sense, too. After all, Dum-E had just spilled stuff on him. He wonders when Tony will hit Dum-E.

Tony snaps his fingers and brings his arm out. Loki cringes, expecting Dum-E to be hit, but instead Tony just points at the mess. "Come on, clean it up, or you know what will happen." That doesn't sound good.

Dum-E lowers the rag to the floor and starts mopping at the mess, giving a soft beep. Loki starts forward, wondering if maybe Tony had switched to talking to him when giving the order to clean it up. He hunches his shoulders as he starts swabbing at the mess with his own rag.

The scene was all too familiar, harsh words flying from Tony's mouth like they had from the mouths of the usually demure servants and sometimes even slaves. Loki is used to harsh words, but the servants and slaves had left him alone for a lot of his childhood, though he'd occasionally heard them muttering in horrified tones about how the magic-using frost giant was going to murder them in their beds. However, they'd eventually started to pick on him like the warriors and guards.
He's not entirely sure who had come up with the idea in the first place, but somehow he'd wound up helping the servants. It might have been the servants themselves or it might have been somewhere higher up, he's not sure. It's not like it matters, they all hated him. He'd started helping them when he was big, but not quite as big as he is now, he thinks. But it was a while- centuries, he thinks- after that incident with the servant boy tricking him into doing magic and pretending to like it, and he'd already suffered countless blows to the head.

You are of no use. You're almost a man and you can't even fold a shirt. They'd lay out a shirt or other article of clothing in front of him, and he'd frown, wringing his hands together. A sharp smack from some sort of object would hit his hands and he'd be told to get on it. He'd try his best, he really would, but it took decades to learn to fold clothes really neatly like they did instead of ending up with pitiful lumpy sorts of things. According to the servants and slaves, that was really pathetic.

After centuries of watching everyone else take out stuff on him, the servants and slaves started to do so, too. After all, a Jotun is an enemy to all. The servants didn't give him full beatings like the warriors or guards, which was really nice. Still, they would give him brief slaps with objects, though they never hit him directly with their hands like Thor and his friends and the guards often did. Even the slaves hit him on rare occasions, which was kind of confusing at first because they got beaten just like him, although they only got beaten if they didn't finish a task, while he got beaten just for being a Frost Giant, as well as doing magic. The slaves only hit him if they were alone with him, though.

Loki knows not to hit back, and he'd learnt that the hard way, getting in terrible trouble when he lashed out at his attackers, rather like how slaves attacking their betters- so anyone, really, except maybe the resident Frost Giant- would be faced with horrible punishments and possibly even execution. Besides, he's a lot weaker than warriors like Thor and even Sif, and palace guards are basically as strong as warriors, so hitting back never accomplished much anyway aside from infuriating his attackers and earning him more punishments. If he lashed out at the palace guards in retaliation, they would often put him in chains and handcuffs before reminding him of his place.

Confusingly, while he got punished for defending himself with magic or attacking people, he also got tormented for not doing so and being weak by Thor and his friends, and sometimes guards if they were bored. So no matter what he did, it was always bad and wrong, something needing punishment, and it's so confusing. People beat slaves, too. Loki knows that, but of course everyone despises a Frost Giant even more than slaves, because slaves aren't vicious monsters and sworn enemies of Asgard.

"Norns, even you didn't use to be this hopeless. What happened, can't take a few blows to the head? You're pathetic." Some of the surprisingly-vocal-when-alone slaves especially told him things like that. They'd shake their heads in disgust, saying that they didn't end up like him, even though they get beaten a lot too.

He's not sure what they meant by that, but he knows he's pathetic.

After all, letting yourself get hurt like that means you're weak, like slaves. Having nightmares and crying makes it worse, but Loki can't help it.

But Tony said that he got hurt a lot too, just like him, and Tony's anything but weak. But Tony has nightmares too, and isn't that a sign of weakness? But Tony's not weak!

Tony's angry now, though. Probably at him.

Loki abruptly realizes he's slowed down considerably at cleaning the mess, so slow he's almost
stopped. He cringes; the servants and slaves hated it when he slowed down. They weren't allowed to slack, after all, they'd say. He almost expects to be hit by some sort of object for his laziness, but the blow never comes.

It's only when Tony squats down beside him and speaks in a soft tone that he remembers.

That's right. Tony had pinky-promised that he wouldn't hit him.

Having hot coffee spill across the table and waterfall onto the crotch of his pants certainly hadn't been fun, Tony thinks, although it's thankfully starting to dry now. These pants are possibly ruined, though, thanks to Dum-E. Plus the camera he was tinkering on for Loki's Iron Man costume is totally fried after being flooded with coffee. Java and electronics, especially the inner bits of electronics, don't tend to agree very well. When he says this joke aloud, the complete lack of response is very disappointing.

So yeah, he'd yelled at Dum-E a bit for this whole mishap and threatened him a bit, which is nothing new, really. The crazy robot had deserved it, anyways. He's threatened Dum-E with worse, like soaking his motherboard and turning him into a wine rack or donating him to a city college, but they're totally empty threats. He's certainly not going to really hurt any of his bots or Jarvis, and anyone else who tried to would have hell to pay. S.H.I.E.L.D found that out the hard way when they tried to hack Jarvis once.

Tony stares at Loki, who is as tense as one of Clint's bow strings. Loki's eyes are entirely unfocused on anything as he slows considerably at mopping up the coffee with a rag. He's barely moving, actually. Tony's not sure if he's having a flashback or not, and he slowly approaches the god so as to not spook him before crouching down next to him.

Loki had already been helping Dum-E before the coffee mug had been knocked over. He'd even left Simba a couple tables away. Loki had also immediately moved to clean up the mess when Tony had told Dum-E to do so.

Tony remembers Loki mistaking his order for Dum-E for one directed at him after their clothes shopping trip. The god had started picking up shirts when Tony had been talking to Dum-E. He'd also mentioned having to help servants and slaves. This situation of Loki doing chores hadn't really come up since then, especially since Tony hasn't really assigned Dum-E any chores the past few weeks, instead sending him off to keep Loki company. Well, until today, that is, because even he can't deny his lab is starting to become a disaster.

Admittedly, there's nothing wrong with helping people (or robots, in this case) with chores. Not that Tony's really one to talk since he hasn't really done any menial household tasks in years, instead leaving them all to his bots. Still, even more so than when Dum-E was picking up clothes, something about this situation is just off, Tony thinks. Especially considering how tense Loki is, and how he'd rushed to obey orders given to Dum-E. As he thinks this, the god suddenly seems to snap out of his thoughts and start swabbing at the mess again, tensing as if expecting to be reprimanded or hit. Maybe both.

Tony finally speaks after observing the god. "Hey, you don't have to do this, you know." Loki blinks and looks up at him in what seems like surprise, as if he'd forgotten it's Tony who's in the room with him. "Seriously, you don't have to help him. You can if you want to, but nobody's making you. It's not even your mess."

"Don't hurt him." Loki says in a quiet, pleading voice as if he's afraid to speak up at the moment. Loki's body tenses a bit more after he says that.
Oh. Loki clearly hadn't gotten that Tony's vague threat to Dum-E was entirely empty. By you know what will happen, Tony had meant time in the corner and possibly the dunce cap, that's it. He doesn't even really want to know what Loki imagined, but it most likely involved something physical. Hitting Dum-E would be sort of pointless since he's a robot and doesn't really feel pain, but Loki doesn't seem to know that.

"I'm not going to hurt him, it was just a hollow threat." Tony tries to reassure, but Loki looks unconvinced. Tony sighs. "Jarvis, cancel the suit preparations. We're gonna have to test it later. Tell Bruce to meet us on the first spare living floor if he's calm. If he says he's busy, just tell him this is more important." Clearly, they need to have a talk, and having Bruce around might help, although just in case he loses control, they're going to be on an unused floor since Tony would rather not have his penthouse smashed up again. Actually, they probably should have had a talk after Loki mentioned having to help servants and slaves that one time helping Dum-E. Seriously, though, what the hell is up with this whole servant/slave thing?

"Hey, come on." Tony says as gently as possible, taking the rag out of Loki's hands and tossing the disgusting thing aside. He goes and grabs Simba, surprised at how heavy the toy is. Simba had been really heavy for a stuffed animal without the Iron Man suit, almost like a fuzzy statue, and seems even more cumbersome to carry around with the suit on. Loki clearly doesn't mind though, gladly grabbing his beloved toy when Tony dramatically holds Simba up like Rafiki does in the beginning of the movie. Loki smiles slightly, which had been Tony's intent. The god still seems way too tense. One hand immediately goes to the arc reactor as Loki rubs his cheek against Simba's fuzzy face. Simba's suit even has a partial helmet, so there's not much exposed in terms of fuzziness.

As they take the elevator, Tony rambles on about how he's definitely not going to hurt Dum-E and how that threat was entirely empty. He's pretty sure he's convinced Loki of this by the time the elevator reaches their destination. At least, he hopes so.

They go onto a spare floor and find Bruce already waiting for them. Huh, Tony's surprised that he'd willingly left the lab that easily, considering he'd locked himself in there doing research on something to do with gamma rays. However, Bruce looks slightly annoyed as if he's worrying that Tony's going to waste his time. Until he sees Loki, that is, since the god is still clearly anxious, and then Bruce is convinced this is important.

"You calm?" Tony asks, and Bruce nods. Tony knows that Loki's been frequently asking about Hulk coming out, even more so after Tony said he might come out soon. Bruce still hasn't let him out willingly, though, and Tony has a feeling if the green guy comes out during this conversation, it won't be voluntary on Bruce's part. Tony collapses onto a sofa and tries to get Loki to sit next to him before giving up. Loki barely sits still at the best of times and he's clearly too anxious to even attempt it right now. For maybe three seconds, Loki perches on the backrest of another sofa, laying down in the way that got him his nickname the first day before he's spinning around with Simba. Tony briefly fills Bruce in on what happened.

"So you know I wasn't really going to hurt Dum-E, right?" Tony doesn't really know where to start with this. Loki doesn't do anything other than stare at him for a couple seconds, so Tony reiterates that he's not going to hurt Dum-E or Loki himself.

"You pinky-promised about not hitting me." Loki says quietly after a bit, nodding. He approaches Tony and Bruce and sticks out his pinky. "Pinky promise you won't hurt Dum-E?"

Tony smirks and Bruce chuckles softly as Tony and Loki interlock pinkies. Once that's done, Loki seems fairly confident about Dum-E's safety. "Would it be okay for Tony to hurt Dum-E if he
wanted to?" Bruce asks incredulously, definitely hoping Loki's answer is no.

Loki cocks his head to the side and chews his bottom lip as he turns to look at Tony, albeit in his usual glassy-eyed, slightly unfocused way. "You said Dum-E's your helper, but is that a servant or a slave?"

Tony runs a hand over his face and pinches the bridge of his nose. "He's neither a servant nor a slave because he's my helper. That's it." Dum-E's one of Tony's friends, too, not that he ever tells anyone that.

"So what happens to him when he's bad? Servants don't get hit but slaves get hit a lot, and sometimes for a really long time. Like me." Tony glances at Bruce, feeling rage course through his own veins, both for the poor slaves and Loki himself. He's half expecting to see Bruce's skin turn green, but is relieved to see that it's not, although Loki would probably like it if it did. Tony's not sure if his Science Bro's eyes are green or their usual brown, because Bruce currently has his eyes closed and is doing some sort of meditation although he's still definitely struggling for control.

"Jarvis, can you turn on some classical music?" Bruce asks in a slightly strained voice.

"Certainly, Dr. Banner." A soft orchestral piece drifts through the speakers, which seems to help both Bruce and Loki, surprisingly. The god's movements get a bit slower so he's not darting around anymore. "As to your question, Mr. Loki, usually when Dum-E breaks something, Sir makes him stay in a corner where he can't touch anything for a variable length of time."

"Or I send him to bed without supper." Tony jokes, and Loki points out that Dum-E's never eaten and doesn't even have a mouth, as if Tony really didn't know that. Tony explains it was a joke, but Loki just gives him a look that tells him that wasn't as funny as he intended. Still, Loki has relaxed even more since hearing what Jarvis and Tony just said. "So why do you help Dum-E?" Tony tries to switch to something a bit less infuriating. "Are you just a nice guy, or what? I mean, you're nice anyways, but it could be something like-" Tony stops talking when Loki starts.

"Had to help the other servants and slaves with chores a lot of the time. They made me." Loki looks down at Simba before hugging him close and twisting his own hands together. Tony remembers Loki saying basically the same thing while helping Dum-E fold shirts after being lost in New York and found again. "Doing them with Dum-E isn't bad though, 'cause he's nice and he doesn't yell or hit."

"Other servants and slaves?!" Tony shouts incredulously, taken aback by that little detail. "Please tell me you weren't a slave." That would just be perfect, wouldn't it? Especially since it's not like Loki hadn't had enough crap in his life already. Tony continues to rant. "I mean, why the hell are there even slaves there? I thought you guys were supposed to be the advanced ones?" His hands clench at the thought, because the whole concept is so freaking wrong. Admittedly, it's not like humans have anything close to a perfect track record in terms of slavery, but the human race has apparently made a hell of a lot more progress than the freaking Asgardians.

Tony's shouting does nothing to help either Loki or the Hulk, who is undoubtedly trying to come out. Loki's looking at Tony with frightened eyes, and Tony's stomach plummets when he realizes that Loki probably thinks that anger is directed at him. Tony hastens to assure him that they're not angry at him at all and Bruce echoes those sentiments. To Tony's surprise, Bruce starts rubbing circles on Loki's back, which actually seems to help both of them calm down a bit, which in turn helps keep the Hulk at bay a little more. Loki clings to Bruce. After a bit, Tony sits next to Loki and puts an arm around him, and Loki leans into Tony while simultaneously hugging Simba and gripping Bruce's shirt.
Now that Tony thinks about it, though, Loki has never really disobeyed him when he told him to do something, even if they weren't explicit commands. Of course, that doesn't necessarily mean he was a servant or a freaking *slave* since there are a lot of military people who follow orders, although normally those orders don't have anything to do with chores like the ones Loki misinterpreted as being for him. Besides, despite Asgard being a very warrior-centered society, Tony kind of doubts that Loki had any formal weapons training. Otherwise, he would have been able to fight back or at least defend himself against his tormentors.

"I really hope you weren't a slave. I guess being a servant would kind of suck too, but certainly not as much as the first option, which we don't do here, by the way." Tony watches Loki, who just stares back at him with something greatly resembling curiosity for close to half a minute before saying something. Tony's about to launch into an explanation of human rights when Loki speaks.

"I wasn't s'posed to be, but kinda, I think? I dunno, it doesn't make sense, but I'm not a slave 'cause nobody owns me and I didn't get hired like a servant. Besides, they didn't make me do stuff when I was little. It was later when they made me help, after the servant boy did that with them." That's sort of good news, because at least Loki wasn't a freaking slave. Tony has no idea what incident Loki's talking about, but it's clearly some important event in Loki's head. He almost has a feeling that Loki's being purposely vague so as to not think about whatever event that is as much. "It wasn't until I was big, but not as big as now." Loki nods as if confirming what he just said before continuing.

"But I think I'm lower than them, and I couldn't say no to them, nope nope nope, 'cause they could hurt me too." Tony knows what *that*'s like, thanks to his lovely experience with the Ten Rings trying to make him build weapons in Afghanistan. Of course, he'd tricked them and built the first Iron Man suit, but that's beside the point. "There were a lot of them and nobody stopped them. Even slaves hit me sometimes, and they got hurt as bad as me."

When Thor shows his face, Tony thinks, they're going to be talking about more than just Loki's treatment, but they're definitely going to cover that very thoroughly. "Am I lower than Jarvis and Dum-E?" Loki asks. He actually seems to have no clue of the answer.

Tony's rather taken aback. "Uh, no. If anything you're above them, but I thought you viewed them as equals, as friends." It really seems like he views them as friends. Loki actually nods slightly.

"Yeah, they're my friends, but I dunno if I'm their friend." Loki grins when Jarvis tells him that of course he's their friend and that they certainly don't view him as less than them. "And they don't even hit me, and you pinky-promised you wouldn't either."

"How often did you get hit there?" Tony asks, really not wanting to hear the answer, but it seems important. Bruce looks like he wants to leave, but can't because Loki is clinging to him. It's remarkable he hasn't Hulked-out yet, though he's clearly trying to emotionally distance himself from the conversation. Tony's trying, too, but utterly failing.

"I dunno." Loki says, but his expression and tone tell Tony what Loki doesn't actually say, which is that it was *way* too often. Of course, one time would be way too often. Tony's not a big fan of people who beat up defenseless victims, and while Loki's not actually defenseless, he'd probably been conditioned to act that way. Freaking out about that force field thing he made during Tony's battle with the Hulk had been a pretty good indicator of that. Or maybe, since he's clearly been taught to hate his powers, he really was defenseless without them. Not to mention, it seems like it was him against everyone else there.

Tony asks who hit him the most, squeezing his shoulder in what he hopes is a reassuring way. "Um... Fandral, Volstagg, Hogunn and Thor, but Thor hasn't done it since he was banished, 'cause
he hasn't been around much. The Warriors Three still do. Sif didn't hit much, but Odin whipped me." Loki rambles anxiously, hugging Simba and wringing his hands together almost violently. Tony knows that Thor's banishment was in New Mexico and was only a couple years ago. That probably seems like a week to Loki. Tony really hopes Thor hasn't hit Loki recently. Not that it would excuse everything else by any means, but it's a start. Loki continues speaking "The guards hit a lot, too. And sometimes the servants and slaves hit me when I was older."

"It's not like Flynn, though." Loki says thoughtfully, although Tony has no idea why Tangled got brought into this. Maybe Loki just feels like talking about it, Tony thinks, until Loki continues on his own accord. "I'm not as weak as him, 'cause I can get hit in the head with a frying pan or something and not go all sleepy and stuff." Loki pauses for a bit, before trying "Unconscious?" in an unsure voice. If it had been any other situation, Tony would have given him a grin or a thumbs up to show him he'd used the right word, but this is just too horrible.

"They hit you in the head with frying pans?" Tony gawks in horror as his blood boils.

Bruce actually starts turning green, something Loki seems rather glad about, but when Loki throws his arms around Bruce, the gesture actually seems to help Bruce keep the Hulk from emerging. Huh, that's interesting. Bruce apparently manages to keep the Hulk in, because the green fades.

Loki sulks when the green fades, but Tony tells him that it's better if Bruce lets Hulk out on his own instead of Hulk deciding to come out.

Going back to the main topic, Tony tells Loki that he's not weak or anything else he's been told and then sits there seething in silence at the Asgardians. Don't they know what that sort of stuff can do to a person?! Or are Norse deities immune to that too? Loki had always covered his head when curling into a ball, but Tony had hoped it had just been a precaution instead of a necessity. What if he had gotten hit in the head a lot and it affected-? Tony stops that train of thought, not even wanting to go there.

Loki insists that he's only been hit with a frying pan twice in his life, because he was almost never 'allowed' to help in the kitchens, which he claims looks fun although Tony abhors cooking. Loki abruptly gets up and walks away, basically ending the conversation.

"I know how to cook some things." Bruce speaks up for the first time in a while, stopping his run of being a silent observer who had seemed to be trying to withdraw from the conversation. Admittedly, he's completely off the previous subject, but he's clearly trying to distract himself from what he just learned. Tony can't exactly blame him. "You can cook with me. We need to stop eating takeout food all the time anyways."

Loki looks back at him and grins a mile wide at this offer before disappearing around a corner. He's most likely exploring, and the conversation is effectively over. Not that Tony's exactly complaining, since he hates hearing about Loki's treatment. Really, he though he had a crappy life before he met the god.

Loki's back in the lab with Tony and is currently holding Simba and Toy Stark. The floor they'd been on had been kind of boring when he'd poked around after that talk. Both Bruce and Tony seem to think that Bruce shouldn't be with them in Tony's lab right now. Loki's not sure why Bruce and Tony had gotten so worked up over that conversation, but they insist they aren't mad at him. Bruce had started becoming the Hulk but hadn't actually done so, which is a real bummer. Loki pouts at how he still hasn't seen his favorite big green guy since that he fought Tony in the tower. Tony said he'd get to see him soon, though!
He's really glad Dum-E's not going to get hurt. Additionally, Tony says he's got something really awesome to show him, and Loki looks at him in anticipation. Tony's currently putting on a Man of Iron suit.

"All right Jarvis, pull out the big guy." Tony says. "Maybe we'll get to test it out this time." Tony steps into a clear spot in the lab. He grins at Loki but then the mask slides over his face and the eyes light up so Loki can't see his face anymore. "Hey, Snoopy, prepare to be amazed." Tony's voice always sounds different in the Man of Iron suit.

Some huge box thing comes up from under the floor (what's under the floor anyways? Sometimes Loki thinks he can feel arc reactors if he lies down on the lab floor, but he might just be imagining them. The thing that just emerged from there has one, though). The huge box starts unfolding into something huge. Loki stares in awe, and he can practically feel his eyes bugging out of his head. Once the legs are done, Loki realizes it's the thing Tony had been working on, the suit he'd said not to talk about around Bruce. "You're the Iron Hulk-y!" Loki screams almost uncontrollably.

"Not Hulk-y of Iron?" Tony asks as the huge suit continues to fold, and Loki's not sure if that's a rhetorical question. "You call Iron Man 'Man of Iron' so I figured this would be the same sort of thing. No?" Loki shrugs, not sure if Tony's being serious.

Once the suit is fully assembled, Loki dashes forward and hugs it. Tony's in a normal Man of Iron suit and is sitting inside this suit, near the head. Tony fist pumps the air in triumph. "I totally won that bet! Someone owes me another tower, since I bet this one!" Jarvis points out that the bet Tony supposedly made about towers was never official, though Loki's not even sure what towers have to do with this. "...Darn." Tony mumbles.

Loki jumps around the Hulkbuster suit, practically squealing with delight and flapping his hands.

"Tony, you're an Iron Hulk-y!" Loki shouts again as he bounces up and down and laughs. "You're even bigger than him, and you have a huge arc reactor!" Loki stares up at the one in the suit's chest and then at its knees, which also have arc reactors to power the thrusters.

"You bet I'm bigger." Tony replies. "Okay, Jarvis, let's test out the controls on this thing. Hey, Loki, get by the wall and stay there, okay? Dum-E, you're still on guard duty." Loki lets Dum-E lead him over to the wall and Dum-E puts his arm across him. Loki sort of likes that Dum-E's doing that, even though there's nothing dangerous in here. Tony's not dangerous, though everyone seems to think Hulk is. But he's not, and this isn't even Hulk anyways, it's a huge suit that vaguely looks like him.

The Hulk suit walks around a bit, with huge booming steps. Tony explains that he's controlling it, which is really neat.

"Jarvis, let's try flying this thing." Jarvis doesn't say anything, but Tony exasperatedly says "Jarvis! Sometimes you've gotta run before you can walk, remember? Do I really need to say that every time?" That's weird, Loki thinks. Either Tony somehow hears Jarvis, or maybe he's really crazy and talking to nobody. Jarvis apparently says something else, because Tony replies "I do not hurt myself every time."

Tony must have noticed his confusion, because he explains that Jarvis talks through his helmet too. "I apologize for confusing you, Mr. Loki, but yes, I do indeed talk to Sir through the helmets sometimes. Now, sir, in order to prevent the usual disaster, I am only letting this fly at point-zero-one percent for now." The suit barely lifts off the ground, and it hovers a bit. Loki stares in awe. He never thought something as huge as that would fly.
"There's fire coming out of your feet again!" He shouts excitedly. Actually, it's leaving some black marks on the floor, although the lab floor has always been pretty scuffed up. It's not like the gleaming floors in the Asgardian palace or even the floors in the penthouse, now that they've been fixed.

"I wish I could fly." Loki says to Simba. Tony's really lucky.

The Hulk suit lowers to the ground, and Tony says "Do you want to?" Loki blinks at the offer, not sure if he heard it right. "I can hold you and fly at the same time. Sure, it's not as great as flying on your own, but it's something, right?"

Really, it's more than Loki ever thought he could hope for and he's still not sure it's true. The mask on Tony's normal Iron Man suit lifts up to reveal Tony's face. "Come over here, Snoopy. Actually, take off your coat first." Loki reluctantly sheds his long coat that looks like the night sky. It's really lightweight, so it doesn't actually do anything for heat, which is good. He doesn't like heat, but it does have a comforting weight. "Jarvis, I'm assuming you have all weapons locked at the moment." Tony says, and Jarvis gives a somewhat curt affirmative, almost sounding offended.

The huge suit bends down to pick him up and Loki grins. "I like your suits." His feet are now completely in the air as Tony holds him up. He swings them below him and says "This one has Hulk-hands."

"Well, you're going to have your own suit tomorrow." Tony says. "By the way, Toy Stark looks awesome, as always." He nods in the direction of the action figure in Loki's hand. Loki looks down and realizes that Toy Stark now looks like Man of Iron, though he'd looked like Tony not long ago. Maybe he'd changed while the real Tony was becoming Man of Iron?

Tony really seems to like it when Toy Stark changes.

Suddenly, Loki is being steered through the air in a way similar to what he does to pretend Toy Stark is flying and these thoughts vanish from his head. He shrieks out a surprised laugh and screams with excitement and a bit of fear as Tony makes him dip towards the ground and soar up before hitting it. So it's not really flying, but it's still really fun.

"Okay, now for the gusto." Tony says and the whole suit lifts off the ground. Loki clings to the huge metal hand that's holding him, but he can't help grinning and screaming with delight. Not that he wants to stop those, really. He's actually flying, even if Tony's holding him.

Suddenly, Tony's no longer holding him and Loki falls to the ground on top of a very large coiled tube. Currently, Loki's facing a blank wall and has no clue where he is. He frowns in confusion before he hears Tony ask "Loki?" Turning around, he sees he's still in the lab, just near the edge by a wall, and there's one of those illusion-Loki's standing near Tony's Hulk suit, although it disappears soon after he looks at it when the Hulk suit puts a hand on its shoulder. Apparently, Tony thought that was him.

With a sinking feeling, he realizes what just happened. He vanished with magic, which was always one of the worst things he could do. Plus there's that stupid other-Loki. He starts to relive the pain he'd suffered the handful of times he'd done this in Asgard. Sometimes, he'd even been chained up after it happened, which they also did if he lashed out.

"You're not getting away this time." Heavy, hard chains around his wrists and ankles. Chains that restrict his movement, make it easier to trip when they shove him. He can't even cover his head because there's a chain connecting his ankles and wrists. More than anything, he wants to get away, but he can't, not even with disappearing. But that's what had landed him in this punishment
in the first place. He can't do anything other than curl on the ground as he's hit and kicked and his world's nothing but pain pain PAIN!

Very slowly, the dim voices that he eventually realizes are Tony and Jarvis end up replacing the flashbacks. Their tones are soft and reassuring, and they help chase the flashbacks away.

Loki curls into a ball amid the coiled tube. It's like what Jormungand hugging him used to be like, but even better. He can't help imagining it's Jormungand as he snuggles down in the coils with Simba and Toy Stark, who had both vanished with him.

Tony reminds him that Esmeralda had done the same thing (he calls it teleporting) and there's nothing wrong with her. He also adds that Genie had done similar things. Then Jarvis speaks.

"Remember what Dr. Carlisle said to do, Mr. Loki?" Jarvis waits but Loki doesn't answer. "You're supposed to tell yourself that you're not bad. Can you do that?"

"...I'm not bad." Loki mumbles. But it's stupid, because he is bad, so why is he lying? Still, Dr. C said to do it.

Jarvis makes him repeat this several times. Loki still thinks this is sort of stupid, so he just mumbles the words back again and again. Tony seems slightly disappointed. Loki doesn't like that, but not because he's worried about being hit. Tony said he wouldn't hit him, and he hasn't. He hasn't even hit Dum-E. He just doesn't like letting Tony down, when Tony's done so many nice things for him that he really doesn't deserve.

Jarvis remains silent for a bit, but then speaks. "You know, one could say that I do the same thing as you just did, Mr. Loki." Loki tenses slightly, but Jarvis' voice is calm and soothing, and now a tiny bit amused. "While I am capable of controlling Sir's suits, I can move so quickly that I almost seem to travel instantly. Furthermore, I can be multiple places at once, which I believe you sort of do, too, with your illusions. As we speak, I'm everywhere in the tower and am also in some of Mr. Stark's other residences. Now, does that not sound somewhat like you?"

"You don't have a body, 'cause you're just a voice, right?" Loki asks.

"This is what I look like, in a manner of speaking." A pulsing, holographic blue sphere surrounded by countless other holograms shows up. Jarvis is blue too?!

"Seeing as I don't have a body, I cannot exactly walk anywhere." Jarvis still sounds amused. The sphere pulses in rhythm with Jarvis' voice. Tony interrupts and tells Jarvis that he's a genius for thinking of this, whatever this is.

"Thank you Sir, although you really are just stating the obvious." Tony smirks at what Jarvis just said. "Anyways, Mr. Loki, you and I are rather similar, don't you think?"

Loki cocks his head to the side. "You do magic too?" He whispers. He's worked out that Jarvis doesn't have a body and is everywhere in the tower, but he'd never thought of it as him doing freaky things. But knowing Jarvis can do it makes it seem, well, not as bad, like how seeing Esmeralda disappear like that let Loki know he's not alone in doing it. But one of his best friends, here in the tower, does it too.

"I don't call it that, but traveling in that way is not the only thing that the both of us can do that most people can't, you know. I am equipped with a translator that lets me be fluent in every Earth language, just like you. As I recall, you call it All-Tongue or Allspeak, but my translator hasn't been able to decipher you're non-Earth written language. But I digress. I can do this, although it's
not quite the same thing as what you do." As he says this, a hologram of a Man of Iron suit appears and morphs into a hologram of Tony. That's really not the same thing, though, because Loki made Simba's Man of Iron suit with holograms, not magic, so they're definitely different things. But the fact that Jarvis is comparing it to his magic, which everyone hates, that he's trying to make them seem like the same thing and isn't doing so in a mocking way is a really nice sort of strange.

Jarvis continues, undeterred. "I can also print three-dimensional objects or cut out things like the pieces to that incredible suit Simba's wearing." Loki giggles at that. "-or, as I'm going to start soon, paint things like your Iron Man costume. Since I do not have a body, it is perhaps more bizarre that I can do those things, and I wish I could do them with the same ease as you, Mr. Loki. It took me a lot longer to cut out the pieces to Simba's Iron Man suit than it did for you to make 'Toy Stark' look like Iron Man."

Wait, so he's better at this stuff than Jarvis?! The idea is so weird, Loki thinks, that Jarvis is trying to make their abilities seem as similar as possible, that he seems to feel no shame in trying to convince him that he, too, does magic. Jarvis' voice is rather warm when he starts speaking. "So you and I are alike in that we can do those things in ways other people can't, and I'd rather you didn't think that doing those things or using those methods are bad. I don't particularly want to be bad, you see."

"You're not bad." Loki protests. How could Jarvis think that?! Literally nothing about Jarvis is bad, and Jarvis hasn't been anything but nice to him.

"Neither are you, Mr. Loki, so you should really stop thinking those things." Jarvis says quietly but firmly. "I think different is an infinitely more accurate word than bad, although some people do tend seem to think the two go hand in hand. I suspect many people in your past thought in this way, and this way of thinking is rather narrow-minded."

Loki nods slightly, since he feels he should. Besides, everyone in Asgard was always pointing out all the ways he was nothing like them, even if a lot of them were legitimate reasons to hate him. Maybe Jarvis is a mind reader, because he continues. "There is nothing wrong with being different. If everyone was the same, things would be rather boring, wouldn't they? Just ask Sir and Dr. Banner. They're both far from your average Joe, although I think Sir takes it a bit too far."

"I'm sorry, did I do anything to upset you?!" Tony asks in an annoyed and rather insincere tone. "Seriously, Snoopy, all the best people are nowhere near normal and are also possibly insane. Present company included, of course." Tony grins at him. That's so far from what anyone in Asgard would say.

Somehow, even though it's really weird, it doesn't actually sound wrong.

"Hey, Snoopy, do you like parties?" Tony asks Loki on Halloween. Jarvis has just reminded him of the Stark Industries one, and Tony asks Jarvis why he hadn't reminded him about it before now. The AI's supposed to keep him on schedule and everything, after all. Jarvis claims that he had told him before, multiple times too, and that Tony had ignored the reminders as usual. Bruce had taken Jarvis' side on that.

Although Pepper had nixed the rule about Stark Industries employees having to wear costumes, there's an annual shindig on Halloween night. Stark Industries is open to all employees and their kids on Halloween nights. Actually, it's really open to any families who want to come, since it's safer (and a lot more awesome) than trick-or-treating in the streets. Really, who doesn't want to spend Halloween in Iron Man's tower? A lot of employees who don't even have kids show up (and there are some people who might not even be employees), even though the drinks hadn't been fit to
water the plants the last time Tony went, which was two years ago. That time, Rhodey had shown up, which had been really fun.

Apparently, these sorts of things help boost the company's PR or something (well, if you exclude that one disastrous New Years party where Tony and Rhodey had gotten really drunk and terrorized a hoard of children as Iron Man and War Machine). Tony skipped the Halloween thing last year, even though he owns the company and is supposed to go, according to Pepper. Steve also got on his back about that, because of course Mr. Perfect had shown up. Not that Steve really needs any more good PR, considering how much everyone gaggles over the Golden Captain.

Family-friendly parties really aren't Tony's type of party by any means. He's not exactly comfortable around kids because he'll probably do something inappropriate. He's gone to a lot of formal parties in his lifetime, but mostly because he had to, although some of them admittedly served fairly decent alcohol, even by his really high standards. He can't exactly go out to get smashed and pick up women at wild parties like he used to. He's been trying to kick the alcoholic gig for about half a year, and he hasn't actually gotten drunk in a while, even though he drinks a lot. He knows his limits. Although he might have relapsed back to winding up totally drunk after that interview if Dum-E hadn't taken the bottle away.

"Please try not to move, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says in a fondly exasperated tone. Loki cocks his head to the side as he bounces up and down. His gaze flicks between the robotic arms that are currently being controlled by Jarvis and the ceiling where Jarvis' voice is coming from, as if he's not sure if the arms are part of Jarvis or not. Loki actually brings up the fact that Jarvis said he doesn't have a body, as well as something about "a tiny moon with waves coming out", which Tony eventually works out is a rather creative description of Jarvis' holographic form. Loki goes on to explain, as if they didn't know it, that the moon is actually round even if it doesn't always look like it. Jarvis explains that he's controlling the arms, but they're not really a part of him, per se.

Loki's custom-made Iron Man costume is finished, which is fortunate as today is Halloween. They'd finished it surprisingly late, but Tony had decided to make it rather fancy. At least there are no doubts that the armor will fit Loki, since it had been specifically modeled to his body by Jarvis, and they'd even projected a life-size hologram of it over the god.

Loki's armor is mostly silver and resembles the Mark Two armor, although it does have some green accents. Of course Loki had chosen green, Tony thinks with an eye roll. It's really actually closer to a real Iron Man suit than even the most realistic costume on the market. Tony decided to go all out with it in some ways, so it actually does have some parts that are secret to the Iron Man suit. It has an arc reactor to power the HUD (although all that's displayed in Loki's helmet is a view of what's outside). The realism ends there, as it doesn't have repulsors or any sort of weapons at all, nor is it capable of flight.

Getting Loki into the suit is a lot more difficult than Tony thought it would be, since he won't stand still. Loki had been beside himself at the prospect of wearing real armor like Tony and Simba, yet he clearly hates the process of having it put on.

Loki cringes as armor is placed around his legs, even though Jarvis is being as gentle as possible. His gaze fixe...
some getting used to. I had the same problem. Jarvis is being gentle with you, a lot gentler than he was with me."

"I was very careful with you, sir." Jarvis protests. "I seem to recall you squirming around almost as much as Mr. Loki." Tony huffs in protest to that but turns his attention to Loki without verbally replying to Jarvis.

"Anyways, Snoopy, you want to dress up as me, right? Unless you'd rather just wear your pajamas?" Tony offers that with a raised brow, although it would be kind of annoying to have made this suit for Loki if he won't even wear it. It would almost be a waste of materials, really.

Loki quickly shakes his head in the negative. "I wanna wear a metal suit like you and fly again!"
Loki laughs and flaps his hands excitedly. "Like you! Thor flies too, but not like that, 'cause he has his hammer and he doesn't like me much. You fly with fire coming out of your feet and hands in your suits, but Peter and Tink don't have fire. Tink has wings, though, like a bird or a bug but her's look like bug wings. How come you don't have wings? How come Clint doesn't have wings, since he's like a hawk and they're birds? Can Clint fly?" Given their experience with flying yesterday (hey, Tony technically went airborne, so Loki was technically flying too even if he was being held by Tony), as well as teleportation, they'd ended up watching *Peter Pan* last night. It had been Bruce's idea, and Loki had instantly become quite taken with Tinker Bell, exclaiming that she looked like a star from a distance and that she's like Bruce because she changes colors (but not forms) when she's angry. Bruce had seemed rather uncomfortable about that comparison.

It actually seems like a good sign that Loki wants to go flying again, especially since the flying is what led to teleporting, which had freaked Loki out. Jarvis had been brilliant, Tony thinks, when he compared stuff Loki does to stuff he does. Getting Loki to compare himself to fictional characters (though Loki doesn't seem to get they're fictional, but whatever) is starting to seem fairly effective in changing Loki's view of himself. Jarvis comparing himself and his abilities to Loki's seems to have helped a lot.

"Sorry, Loki, but no flying right now." Tony answers, and Loki pouts. Tony actually feels sort of bad, but he hadn't realized Loki expected to fly in his own suit. Apparently, Loki had talked about flying before yesterday. According to Bruce, Loki had expressed a desire to fly when he'd been on the rooftop, and had seemed jealous that Iron Man and Thor (with Mjolnir) are able to do so, before adding that he'd wanted to fly away from Asgard. He'd also apparently said, during that conversation with Bruce, that he'd flown a couple times, only 'without the flying part', which has to mean his teleportation, although neither Bruce nor Tony had worked out what that meant until after knowing he could teleport.

Although Loki clearly loves the idea of flying. Tony doesn't think it's a good idea to let him try on his own. Getting him to keep his arms by his sides for added support is practically a nonstarter, given they're struggling with that just for getting the suit on him. Considering he won't stop bouncing or rocking for more than five seconds, Tony doubts he'd hold his legs straight to stabilize himself that way, either. So really, flying would probably end up as crashing to the ground.

Theoretically, Jarvis could take control of Loki's suit and fly for him, except for the fact that Loki's suit is incapable of flight at the moment.

"Maybe I'll take you flying again sometime later." Tony tells Loki, who perks up, but then starts asking when 'later' is. Tony sighs and changes the subject. "So, you want to wear armor, huh? Well, if you want to wear a real suit, you have to let Jarvis put it on you." Tony tells Loki, as he steps back a bit and spreads his arms. "It's not that bad. Jarvis, suit me up, will you?"

"Of course, sir." Jarvis says. Loki watches armor snap shut around Tony.
As soon as the mask slides down over Tony's face, Tony raises it again and grins at Loki. "See? Nothing to it. Now it's your turn."

Loki scrunches his face when the boots snap shut around his bare feet. "My feet are all trapped."

"Oh come on, Snoopy." Tony sighs, rolling his eyes. "You were wearing boots when we went clothes shopping, and you didn't put up a fuss."

"That's 'cause you have'ta wear boots walking outside. It's the rule. Lady Frigga said so and you made me." Loki says. He wrinkles his nose, showing his distaste for the rule and boots in general. Apparently he'd ignored that rule when going on the roof, but maybe that hadn't counted as walking outside in his mind.

"I never made that a rule." Tony protests, although he had made Loki put on boots when they were going to his first therapy session. "But yeah, generally you wear something on your feet when you go outside. But remember I got you those sandals and stuff so you don't have to have your feet totally covered?" Loki asks if they're going outside, since he's wearing boots. Tony tells him they're not, but that it's sort of hard to wear an Iron Man suit without the boots. Loki pouts but accepts this.

"You're doing very well, Mr. Loki." Jarvis interrupts, and Loki clearly loves hearing that. "Now, arms out, if you please."

Loki reluctantly stops wringing his hands together and sticks his arms out to the side. His fingers continue to flick, however. Jarvis gently puts the armor around his arms and then over his torso. Loki actually squeals when it snaps shut around his torso, apparently feeling the arc reactor in the armor's chest, bouncing up and down maniacally.

Loki keeps flinching when Jarvis tries to put the armor on his neck, shying away every time it approaches. Suddenly, the armor is gone from the robotic hands and is around Loki's neck. Jarvis quickly brings up the holographic model of Loki and his armor and adds the neck armor to the model of Loki, just like Loki had done (sort of). "That's not the same." Loki mumbles, somewhat dejectedly, but Jarvis insists that they're similar, adding that it's just like what he does with Toy Stark, only to himself. Loki's doesn't even freak out about changing Toy Stark anymore, since he's done it so many times by now.

Loki's more calm than Tony's ever seen him after the first time a display of powers, but he's not totally calm. Although, the comparisons that Tony and Jarvis just made to what Loki just did really seem to help reassure Loki that they don't see anything wrong with what he just did. Admittedly, Loki has changed his clothes and even himself magically, but now instead of changing his clothes into armor he's just putting the armor on. Moving things seems like it would be easier than changing them, but whatever.

Jarvis and Tony both suggest that maybe he could put on the rest of the armor that way if he doesn't like the robotic arms that Jarvis is controlling doing it. Loki frowns, clearly in some internal debate, and they try to reassure him that they won't mind at all if he does.

They cycle through the whole conversation of Loki asking about it and them reassuring him it's okay at least five times. They seem to convince him, and he gives a rather hesitant nod before sitting down and looking at his thigh. He frowns in concentration, glancing between the armor piece and his leg.

Green energy starts forming around his hands and Loki tenses before squeezing his eyes shut. Nothing happens for almost a minute, and then the thigh armor disappears and reappears on
"That's awesome." Tony says, because really, it is. He grins and gives Loki a thumbs up.

"Very impressive, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says, "It's just like what I do with holograms or what you do with Toy Stark." The combination of the well-deserved praise from the two of them makes Loki duck his head, and Tony swears his face is a bit less pale than normal, like he's starting to blush.

"Just like Toy Stark." Loki agrees quietly.

Bruce enters, wearing his Captain America costume, complete with a fake shield. Loki stares at him with a bit of apprehension in his eyes until Bruce speaks and Loki realizes who it is. "Still getting the armor on?" Bruce asks with a raised eyebrow.

Watch this Tony mouths, gesturing at Loki. Loki is staring at the armor that the robotic arms are holding. His hands are definitely out of his own line of sight, apparently on purpose. The green stuff is still around them and he clearly hates seeing it.

One of the suit's gloves forms around Loki's hand, and Bruce joins in telling him it was amazing. Loki actually has a ghost of a smile on his lips.

Loki puts on one more piece that way but then is either unable or unwilling to do more, so Jarvis finishes up the rest. When the helmet's on and the mask slides down, Loki seems surprised that it starts out dark. Then, in an excited but somewhat robotic sounding voice, he says "Whoa! There's a screen in here!"

Loki immediately starts off before immediately tripping and falling. Tony can picture his frown as he gets back up and has to slow down so he won't trip again as he learns how to adjust to walking in the armor. Iron Man armor is pretty easy to move in, though, so it doesn't take him long. He grabs Simba and asks the toy "What do I look like?"

Jarvis helpfully pulls up a huge holographic mirror, something most people don't even think are possible, but well, Tony's always been one for doing the supposedly impossible. "I'm Man of Iron!" Loki squeals, delighted. He wriggles his body in happiness, and it's rather strange to see an Iron Man suit doing that.

Tony, meanwhile, has gotten out of his own Iron Man suit and is putting the Hulk costume on over his t-shirt and sweatpants. The mask is probably going to be horribly stuffy. Loki watches him putting on the costume, but Tony can't tell his expression from the mask. It's actually a little unsettling.

Loki gives him an overenthusiastic hug, rather like Thor, but is surprisingly gentle now, seeming to take Tony's lack of superhuman durability into account even though he'd forgotten about it before. Then again, Loki had acted like Tony would drop dead the day after learning he's a mortal. "You're almost as good as the real Hulk!" Loki gives a pointed look at Bruce, who suddenly feigns an intense interest with his Captain America prop shield. Loki turns back to Tony and places Simba on the table.

"Hey! Hands off him!" Loki says to Tony, who briefly wonders what on earth Loki means by that. He's not touching Simba. But then, Loki stage whispers "Shove him."

Confused, Tony shoves Simba a bit. "Hey! Hands off him!" Loki orders again, and it dawns on Tony that he's re-enacting the fight with the Hulk. Tony, in his Hulk costume, is obviously the Hulk while Loki is Iron Man. Apparently, Simba is cast as Loki.
Loki suddenly rears back and holds his palms out, making fake repulsor sounds. "I'm shooting stars at you!"

"They're not actually stars. They're-" Tony starts, but Loki just drowns him out by making the sounds even louder, trying to smother his own giggling while he makes them. Tony rolls his eyes and lets out a fake roar, charging at Loki. "I knocked you down, right? Well, he knocked me down, and-" Geez, talking about yourself while pretending to be someone else, and having someone else pretend to be you, is sort of weird. What pronouns do you even use? Tony very slowly pretends to hit Loki with literally no force behind it at all. He can just imagine Loki thinking he was actually trying to hit him if he made it at all convincing, so he doesn't.

Loki falls to the ground and Tony pretends to roar again. Bruce, to Tony's great surprise, enters the game, grabbing Simba and crouching by Loki. "Simba- I mean, uh, Loki- will stop him." He says. The sad part is he's basically suggesting keeping them safe from a pretend version of his own alter-ego.

"No." Loki sits up and takes Simba from Bruce. He holds Simba out to Tony/Hulk. "Time for a Hulk hug." Tony rolls his eyes.

"I don't like being handed things." Tony mutters, so Loki sets Simba on the table and backs away before instructing Tony to pick Simba up and hug him. Tony feels completely ridiculous but reluctantly does so.

Suddenly, Loki rushes forward and gives him anther hug, almost knocking him down in the process. Then, the god grabs Simba and trots over to Bruce. He makes the lion pounce on him, roaring and pretending to eat him before asking his victim "How come you're dressed as Steve?"

Bruce shrugs. "Well, you guys are both going as Avengers, so I figured I'd go as one too. Steve's not bad, you know."

"But he's muscly like warriors." Loki says. "He looks like them, 'xcept without the long hair and armor and stuff."

"Hey, I'm muscular too." Tony protests, sort of faking being offended. Loki squeezes the costumes biceps and declares them fake. "I meant in real life." Tony mutters, glaring at Bruce, who's trying to smother his laughter.

Loki seems to love pretending to be Iron Man. He'd done it in his pajamas but having his own suit just fuels it. Tony tells him some stories of things he's done as Iron Man (but not any of the difficult stuff like the Battle of New York).

Loki, surprisingly, reciprocates and tells Tony some stories about Asgard. He actually seems to like telling his own stories as much as he likes hearing Tony's. He talks a bit about the Bifrost, which is apparently really colorful and surrounded by stars. One of his stories is about Fenrir- his imaginary wolf friend, Tony remembers- biting Fandral, although he seems disappointed that it didn't actually affect Fandral at all. He also reveals that Jormungand hugged him when he was scared, and he tells a story of when time he feel asleep next to a horse and Tony's not sure if he's talking about an imaginary one or not. It sort of fits his song, though.

That evening, Bruce and Loki wind up making pasta, since Bruce figures they should start with something easy. (Plus, there currenly aren't a whole lot of ingredients in the tower, though Bruce has Jarvis order a ton of stuff). Loki clearly enjoys cooking with Bruce, although he has Simba "watch" them the whole time.
After dinner, they venture out of the penthouse and go to some of the company floors where the Halloween shindig is taking place.

Loki's twisting his fingers together and wringing his hands even more than usual, now that there are a lot of unknown people. It looks rather strange, to see an Iron Man suit doing that and bouncing on its toes, but it makes it obvious Loki's in there. If Tony hadn't known Loki was in there, he would have been able to figure out by the way he moves. Well, and the fact he's carrying Simba. Tony still can't talk Loki out of bringing Simba (although, to be honest, he can't really imagine Loki without Simba now. Loki really is like Calvin with Hobbes). Hey, at least the lion fits Loki's costume when they're both wearing Iron Man suits, and Loki gets a lot of compliments on both his suit and Simba's.

A couple little kids seem to think he's the real Iron Man, not knowing the real one is actually in the Hulk costume. Loki actually points at Tony and says he's really 'Man of Iron', but the kids just say that, no, he's the Hulk. Tony smirks at this, although he briefly wonders if Loki will mess with his image. Tony doesn't want people to think he carries around Simba or sings to himself like that, although all the adults clearly get he's someone else.

They roam up and down the halls, Tony and Loki both collecting candy. Tony's just doing it just for the heck of it. He can do what he wants, and a lot of people say he's immature anyways. But really, who doesn't like candy? Sure, Tony could literally buy candy by the truckload and not blink an eye at the cost, but getting it from other people is somehow half the fun. Loki stuffs his candy into his green drawstring bag where his action figures reside, since he brought that, too when he heard he might want a bag. He doesn't seem to want to lift the mask on his helmet, so he can't eat it right now. Which is just as well because he really doesn't need any more energy.

There are plenty of people dressed up as Avengers, and Loki clearly shies away from the ones dressed as Thor.

Loki clearly likes looking at all the costumes, although he sticks very close to Tony and Bruce, sometimes even grabbing one of their sleeves (usually Tony's). Although at one point, they practically have to drag him away from a woman dressed as Princess Jasmine, who he excitedly pesters with questions as if he'd bumped into the actual character, even though he clearly gets that Tony isn't really the Hulk and Bruce isn't really Captain America (and that he's really not Iron Man).

He's very excited to see a little girl dressed as one of his very recent additions to his favorite characters, Tinker Bell. He's also very taken to a man dressed as Batman even though, as far as Tony knows, Loki knows absolutely nothing about the fictional defender of Gotham City.

They actually spot Steve in his Captain America suit, who's surrounded by a crowd of awestruck kids in a larger reception area with windows overlooking the city. Tony suddenly wishes he had his Iron Man suit, because he kind of craves attention. Tony drags Bruce and Loki up to say hi, and is slightly surprised that Steve immediately recognizes them. Then again, as Tony thought before, it's kind of easy to recognize Loki based on his movement and constant companion. Loki actually doesn't seem too nervous around Steve, although he's somewhat uncharacteristically shy. Or maybe that's just slight nervousness. Bruce had told him that Steve's nice and not someone to be scared of a lot today, and the fact that Bruce himself dressed up as Captain America might have helped.

Loki attracts some of the kids' attention, but they're older kids who quickly work out that he's not the real Iron Man. Some of them are even giving him kind of condescending looks and Tony very rudely tells them to go away. Bruce and Steve give him chastising looks for that.

There's suddenly a very loud rumble of thunder, and Tony doesn't even need to see Loki's face to
picture the expression of pure terror on it. Loki goes rigid and completely still, like a deer in the headlights.

That amount of thunder can really only mean one thing.

Thor is here.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

The Showdown with Thor

Tony's first thought is comprised of some expletives that he barely stops himself from saying out loud. It's actually a good thing that he does manage, because the last thing he needs right now is a bunch of furious parents in his face demanding why he swore in front of their kids.

Bruce really needs to get somewhere else, because the Hulk coming out among all these civilians (especially children) is not a good idea in the slightest. Tony is almost positive the Hulk's going to make an appearance. He'd come out the first few times Bruce heard about Loki's treatment, and Bruce just barely kept him from coming out even yesterday, during that talk about slaves. Sure enough, Bruce is already leaving, no doubt heading to a private floor. Hopefully somewhere other than the penthouse.

Actually, Tony thinks, he should probably follow suit. Steve seems to be thinking along the same lines, and Tony asks Steve if he can deal with Thor at first. Tony's glad the super-soldier has his shield and everything. Speaking of which, he needs to get one of his own suits, maybe the Hulkbuster.

Thunder booms again and lightning flashes outside the window. Loki loses the deer-in-the-headlights stance and tilts his head as far as he can, pressing one side of his head into his raised shoulder and placing a very tense hand over the other side. He's apparently trying to cover his ears, although they're hidden by the helmet. Tony can't see his face, but he's pretty sure Loki has his eyes screwed shut right now. He's rocking back and forth and Tony's pretty sure that whatever's going through his head isn't pretty.

Despite the thunder and lightning, there's still no sign of the actual thunderer himself yet. Which is good, really, because Tony needs to get Loki somewhere private and help him calm down a bit before the huge confrontation. Loki seems to be having an anxiety attack right now, and Tony can hear his rapid breathing coming out of the helmet like a sped-up Darth Vader. The god keeps squeezing Simba's right ear, and Simba keeps saying the first line of his prerecorded responses. "We'll always be pals, right?!... We'll always be pals, right?"

"Right, we'll always be pals." Tony says to Loki. "Hey, Snoopy, you're safe. He's not going to hurt you." Tony speaks softly. Since Loki's taller than him and they're both standing up, he can't exactly mutter it in Loki's ear. Some people around them shoot the two of them some weird looks, but Tony really doesn't care. Tony pulls off his Hulk mask and a lot of people are surprised to see him costuming as the Hulk. There are also several curious glances at Loki as people seem to wonder who's in the Iron Man suit.

Fortunately, unlike with the paparazzi, Tony can scare the SI employees into not taking pictures of him, and they've probably told their kids not to do so, either. The one teenage boy who starts to take his phone out quickly puts it away with a terrified expression on his face when Tony sends him a death glare.

Pepper, who Tony hasn't seen up until now, approaches Loki, clearly recognizing him despite the
mask. Having Steve nearby probably helped her find them, actually. Tony's not entirely sure what her costume of a black fancy dress is supposed to be a costume for, but it really doesn't matter.

She doesn't even bring up that interview, clearly more concerned with Loki, and the arrival of Thor.

"We need to get him out of here." Tony says, glancing at Loki, who's either unwilling or unable to move. His unnaturally heavy body certainly doesn't help, and Tony wonders if he should have just worn one of his own Iron Man suits instead of dressing up as the Hulk. He can't carry Loki like this. Maybe Pepper can deal with Thor instead and Steve can carry Loki.

"If you-know-who shows up down here, I take it you'll deal with him for a bit?" Tony asks Pepper, who nods, looking murderous. Tony smirks slightly and says "Just leave some of him for the rest of us, okay? You shouldn't have all the fun."

Tony turns to Steve, asking if Clint and Natasha are here. Maybe there was supposed to be some Avengers event or something that he doesn't know about. However, both Steve and Pepper claim they haven't seen either of them. Clint had said he'd be here to kick Thor's ass, but apparently he had other plans for Halloween night. Maybe he's at another party or something. Well, no matter, Tony thinks. He's still got his badass suits, and he has a super-soldier, a dangerous former assistant and current CEO whose rage works on him, and an angry green guy to back him up.

Loki completely freaks out when Steve loops one of Loki's arms around his shoulder, which is inconveniently around the same time there's another boom of thunder. He jerks away from Steve, screaming at the top of his lungs.

Every head whips around to stare in their direction and Tony groans, cursing under his breath before he can stop himself. "Language." Steve mutters. This is not how this is supposed to go. Okay, clearly Steve carrying Loki isn't going to work, and Tony realizes it's probably because Steve and Thor have similar builds.

Loki bolts away, practically crashing into several people, and Tony immediately follows him. Of course, Loki's insanely fast and the throngs of people certainly don't help.

Tony loses sight of Loki entirely, which is just freaking fantastic. He searches the floor and finds him rocking back and forth by the elevators, although as far as Tony can tell, he hasn't pushed the button to open any of them. Perhaps in his panic he's forgotten what elevators are. Steve soon joins Tony.

"Hey, Snoopy, I don't know if you can hear me, but nothing's going to happen to you, okay? He's going to have to get through all of us, and that just isn't going to happen." Loki gives literally no response, although admittedly Tony can't see his face.

"Loki, do you hear me? Just nod or shake you head." The suit's head doesn't move at all. Tony sighs wraps his arms around the god, but Loki doesn't even lean into the touch. It's like hugging a lifeless, empty Iron Man suit. They reach the lab and Loki still hasn't changed at all. Tony pulls off his Hulk costume and suits up, still talking to Loki, trying to calm him down a little bit. Steve tries too, but that really doesn't work, not that Tony expected it to. Dum-E approaches Loki with a very worried beep, grabbing the god's armored hand.

"Sir, Prince Odinson just landed on the balcony outside the penthouse and seems to be looking for you." Jarvis says inside Tony's helmet. "Additionally, Dr. Banner, although several floors below you and nowhere near Prince Odinson, is starting to turn green."
Lovely. So much for dropping Loki off at the penthouse. Tony sighs and says "Let him in the penthouse but don't let him know what's up. Try to keep him up there, too." Smirking, he adds "We don't want to ruin the big green surprise, do we?" Tony pauses and than adds, as an afterthought. "Oh, and another thing, upload yourself into Loki's armor, okay? It might help him, having you there." Actually, it might have helped earlier, because Jarvis could have taken control of the suit and made it walk. Then again, that probably would have been terrifying for Loki so maybe Jarvis taking control wouldn't have been a good idea.

"Will do, sir. Although I normally do not enjoy violence, I think I might enjoy seeing the Hulk set on Prince Odinson. I would suggest wearing your Hulkbuster suit, but I'm not sure the Hulk would react particularly well." In a somewhat sulky tone, Jarvis adds "I presume in keeping him unaware of what's coming, I'm supposed to refrain from lecturing him while I'm keeping him up there?"

Tony gives a short affirmative, and Jarvis, still talking only in Tony's helmet, sighs. "Very well, sir, although I hope I'll have the opportunity to do so later."

While hearing that Thor is here would definitely freak Loki out, Tony knows he can't hide it forever. As he thinks this, Loki starts to get more anxious. Apparently, he'd asked Jarvis where Thor is and Jarvis had answered. Tony, now in a suit, hugs Loki close, making sure to put Loki's hand near the arc reactor just how he likes it. Steve once again looks shocked at how gentle Tony's being right now as he speaks in a soft tone, telling Loki that he's safe, that Thor's not going to hurt him.

Then again, if, almost a month ago, Tony could see himself now, he wouldn't have believed this is what his life would look like now.

Tony once again mentally berates himself for thinking something like that.

Steve leaves to try to go keep the Hulk from totally destroying part of the tower, though Tony's not entirely sure how much success he'll have.

Instead of going to the god of thunder, Tony's going to have Thor come to the party. Maybe he can convince Thor to leave Mjolnir in the penthouse, too. He tells Jarvis to try to make that happen, and Thor's usual concern about proper Host/Guest behavior might help in this regard.

Tony really wants to confront Thor now, but turns his attention back to Loki. He continues to try to calm him down even a little bit, but there's still practically no response from the god.

Tony's at a complete loss for how to calm Loki down. Whatever's going to happen once they confront Thor is undoubtedly going to be really tough for Loki. Tony has a feeling he's going to have to act as heavy moral support, sort of like what Yinsen was for him.

The last thing Loki wants to hear is thunder, and yet here it is. This is worse than thunder in movies, and he hadn't liked those scenes at all. Thunder means Thor, and Loki never wants to see him again. But he's here! For a bit, Loki's so terrified that he can't move, can't speak, can't do anything but stand there, although he can feel his knees hitting each other. His mind is completely consumed by fear, and the thunder's still echoing in his head. Thor's going to get him, going to punish him for every bad thing he's done here, because for some reason Tony hasn't but Thor will! Eventually, Loki vaguely notices some of his surroundings. The room is in chaos around him, but Loki only half registers the sound of crying children. Maybe Thor hates them too. Or maybe it's only him that's crying, terrified, and he's imagining the others?

He thinks he hears Tony and some other people talking, but he's not making out what they're
He clutches Simba tightly, shaking, not even crawling under the long table with the black tablecloth that reaches the floor. He dimly hears Simba talking and it takes him a while to realize that he's squeezing Simba's ear to make it happen.

Then, someone with a lot of muscles is near him, and another boom of thunder sounds, echoing in Loki's head. *Boom! Boom! Boom! BOOM!* It's Thor! Thor's next to him, touching him, no no NO! The thunder in his head gets faster with his breathing. Loki's only half aware of running somewhere, but he doesn't know where he's going. He needs to get away from Thor, even if running makes him a coward. He'll always be a coward, but he can't fight back, Thor's too strong, everyone's too strong and they gang up on him.

He stops running, rocking back and forth anxiously as memories... flashbacks... fill his head.

Someone's talking to him softly, and he's moving up. Is he flying? He flew with Tony yesterday, and then he was bad and disappeared, but Tony didn't seem to care. Thor would, though, and now he's here! Is he going to punish him for all the bad things he's done since landing on Tony's tower? Jarvis and Dr. Carlisle said that he can't keep thinking he's bad. Jarvis said that different doesn't mean bad anyways, and that he travels really, really quickly too.

Suddenly the flying stops and he's somewhere else. Wait, it was the elevator, he realizes when the grey in front of him slides open. He wasn't even flying, because he can't fly unless Tony's holding him, or he would've flown away from Asgard long ago. He's in the lab now, he realizes eventually although it takes him a while because he's still not really there. There are people talking but it's all background noise. He can't do anything but worry about what will happen when he runs into Thor.

Someone's talking right next to him again, practically inside his ear, but it's a different voice. "-now, Mr. Loki." He only catches the end of whatever Jarvis just said, but he knows it's definitely Jarvis, because his voice is really distinct and only Jarvis calls him that. "I am speaking to you directly through the helmet of your suit. Only you can hear what I'm saying to you and only I can hear what you say right now, although I can make it so everyone can hear you, if you like." Oh, that explains why Jarvis is right next to him.

"Where's Thor?" Loki asks, because he needs to know, but he can't keep the fear out of his voice. There's a slight pause before Jarvis responds.

"Prince Odinson is currently in the penthouse, looking for Sir. However-" Whatever follows is drowned out by Loki's own terrified thoughts. No! Thor's here- in the tower, and on the same floor he lives on, too. Maybe Thor's moving in. He doesn't want to live with Thor! He doesn't want Thor here at all, but Thor's here anyways because nobody cares what a Frost Giant wants.

Jarvis is speaking louder, still right next to his ear, competing with Loki's panicked stream of thoughts for attention. Then, Jarvis falls silent and is replaced by something comforting and familiar. Something safe.

If you find the field where the horses roam

And you need a place to call your home...

Thor's here. Nothing good every comes from Thor being around, and Thor's going to hurt him, right? But Tony said the first day that he wouldn't let Thor hurt him. These thoughts become slightly less pronounced as the song becomes more noticeable.
"...The moon and the stars will give you light

To sleep in the grass in peace tonight."

Wait, that's someone else. Is someone actually singing his song? Nobody but him has sung it in a while, though. Loki frowns in confusion. "Sleipnir...?" Sleipnir always sang that song, and Sleipnir was the only person- well, horse- that sang it. He'd sing it too and it would help him feel less scared, but Sleipnir hasn't sung to him in a long time. He used to do it when Loki would curl up in Jormungand's embrace, with Fenrir's head resting on his lap and Hel leaning back against the wolf. But hadn't Jormungand hugged him today? He'd seemed so real, more real than he ever had in Asgard, until Loki vaguely remembers landing in a coiled up tube after- What had Tony called it again? Teleporting? Teleporting!

"No, not Sleipnir." The voice that was singing says, only it's not singing this time. Oh, that makes sense, since this voice is really bad at singing and a lot lower than Sleipnir's voice anyways. Loki knows this voice. It's Tony. Tony's singing his song to him? It's a weird thought, but Loki likes it. He's sung it to Tony when Tony was hurt or scared.

"Sing it again, please?" Loki asks. He'd missed the first part- sort of, since he hadn't realized Tony was singing it- and he likes hearing it sung to him. He's not quite as scared now. Singing really does help.

There's a sigh, and Loki looks at Tony, who's now in a Man of Iron suit instead of the Hulk costume, although the Man of Iron mask is up, allowing Loki to see Tony's face. "You're like Sheldon with that soft kitty song in Big Bang Theory." Tony tells him "Good thing I somehow have this memorized. Probably because I'm a genius." Loki has no idea what most of that means, and he wonders if something went wrong with All-Tongue.

"The silver stallion gallops away

His herd follows him and they start to neigh.

Their hoofs beat to the stars and moon above

Just follow them to find the one you love."

Loki ends up singing it with Tony and he's not quite as scared. Loki sings it softly to himself again and feels even more relaxed.

"Hey, like I said before, Thor's not going to hurt you. Actually, I'm going to kick his ass." Tony says. "Jarvis, suit me up in the Hulkbuster. Who cares what the big guy thinks?"

Loki realizes that Jarvis must be talking to Tony through his helmet, like he'd just done through the one he's wearing. Jarvis said before that he talks to Tony through the suits sometimes. Tony grumbles something in response to something Jarvis said and the box that's really the bigger Iron Man suit comes out from whatever's under the floor. The huge Hulk suit snaps shut around Tony and Loki dashes forward, leaping up towards the suit. Tony catches him and holds him close to the Hulk suit's chest. Loki wonders if this is what little kids feel like when people hold them, but he never got held like that. Is this what Simba feels like in his own arms?

"Hey, Snoopy, I'm going to go give Thor hell. Do you want to stay here or come with me?" Loki wants to stay with Tony, but if he does, Thor will be there, and he doesn't want to see Thor ever again.

But at the same time, Loki really doesn't want to be alone in case Thor finds him, although it's
weird, because when he was in Asgard not too long ago, the less people who were around him, the better because they'd all hate him.

Then again, those people weren't Tony or Bruce or Hulk. Loki never would have guessed there were people he'd feel safe around. Tony had said the first day that he wouldn't let Thor hurt him and he just said that again.

There's a loud smashing sound below them, and Tony mutters "Shit." He heads towards the elevator, leaving Loki in the lab.

"Where's Tony going?" Loki asks Jarvis.

Jarvis simply pulls up a holographic video of Tony's Hulk suit entering another floor, but it's not the penthouse, where Thor is.

"Why is Metal Man huge?" A very deep, loud voice asks. Loki flinches at first, because Thor has a loud, deep voice, but that's not Thor's voice and this voice isn't scary anyways. Loki sees a familiar green figure enter the picture. Loki gives a surprised but excited cry of "Hulk-y!" Hulk's here! Finally! Tony had said he'd see him sometime, but Loki hadn't known he was here now. Hulk's here and who knows when he'll be here again? Loki's been asking Bruce to let him out for a while but Bruce hasn't. Who knows when he'll be out again? Bruce said Hulk punched Thor right off his feet a couple times, but it's probably too much to hope for him doing it again. But Thor's not even there. Tony had said he was going to Thor. Had he lied?

"Huge Metal Man looks like Hulk." Hulk is saying in the video as Loki heads towards the elevator. He wants to see Hulk again!

The elevator ride seems to take forever. Once the doors open, he dashes towards Hulk, who is off towards the side of the room, but Hulk lets out a growl.

"It's me." Loki says quietly. "I'm Man of Iron for Halloween, and Simba is too but he's always wearing his suit. Tony went as you though, and it was my idea." He explains, but Hulk looks confused.

"This is Loki. You know, uh, the 'Hurt Nice Man'. He's just wearing one of my suits," Tony explains, and Loki feels himself lifted up by the Hulk suit. He reaches out towards Hulk with his left hand, while his right arm is curled around Simba.

Hulk clearly accepts the answer. "Hurt Nice Man is Loki, but Loki looks like Metal Man." It comes out as a statement, but Tony confirms it anyways.

"What are you doing here, Snoopy? I thought you wanted to stay in the lab."

"Wanted to see Hulk-y." Loki answers. "And you said you were going to him, but he's not here! You said you were gonna give him Hel, but he never saw her. She didn't like him, though."

"What...?" Steve asks. Loki realizes that Steve is here, too, in his Captain America suit. Bruce's shredded Captain America costume is lying on the floor, probably because it doesn't fit Hulk. Pepper's here, too, but she's in the background.

Loki continues to hold out his armored left hand to Hulk, still hugging Simba with his right arm. Loki grins when Hulk grabs his hand. Loki hears a rather surprised sound from Steve.

Loki holds out both arms, now holding Simba and wonders if Hulk will hug him like he had that first time. He really likes Hulk's hugs, and as much as he likes Tony's huge Hulk suit hugging him
(it's even bigger than the real Hulk and it has an arc reactor and, well, it's Tony, his best friend)

Hulk is a lot softer than the metal suit. He vaguely wonders where Hulk's pants come from.

Loki's really glad it isn't thundering anymore, and he wonders if maybe Thor's gone, because Tony
had said he's going to see him but he's not here, which is really nice.

But then, he sees a familiar figure with long blonde hair and a red cape land on the balcony
outside.

"Sir, I'm afraid Prince Odinson is becoming quite insistent about being let out of the penthouse."
Jarvis says in an apologetic tone in Tony's helmet. "I'm sorry, but I did not manage to convince him
to leave his hammer upstairs, seeing as he's using it to fly. He left via the balcony."

Before Tony can reply, Loki screams and there's a loud thud outside the window.

"Friend Stark! It is with great pleasure that I am able to see you again, although your spirit had
been denying me access to the metal lift, so I had to arrive this way." Thor says in his usual loud,
booming voice as he steps in from the balcony, Mjolnir hanging from his hands. He strides into the
tower, to the center of the room and ends up standing between Loki and the elevator.

From the Hulkbuster's arms (the suit doesn't quite feel like an extension of his body yet, Tony
thinks), Loki lets out an inarticulate but clearly frightened sound, and Tony's pretty sure he's
hyperventilating under the mask. Loki literally climbs up the rest of the Hulkbuster suit and vaults
over the shoulder before dangling from its back, piggyback style. It's quite impressive, actually,
since it's not like this suit was meant to be climbed or hung from, especially with only one hand
(Loki's other hand is of course occupied with holding Simba). Tony blinks in surprise but puts one
of the Hulkbuster's hands behind its back to support the god, so if Loki lets go he won't plummet to
the ground. Loki pulls at the other arm, so Tony ends up giving Loki a backwards hug with a huge
suit of armor. Loki's body is shaking slightly. When Tony glances back, he sees Loki staring
straight at Thor, although his face is hidden by the Iron Man mask.

Pepper greets Thor coldly and is probably about to launch into a tirade when Hulk lets out an
enraged roar and bounds forwards. He grabs Thor by the leg and swings him up before smashing
him into the floor. He repeats this process several times, leaving large craters behind, but Tony
doesn't even care.

After several blows, Hulk hurls Thor to the ground. His cape is all twisted and his hair is splayed
out in random directions. Despite all the craters in the floor, the Hulk's beating doesn't seem to
have seriously injured Thor, although he does lay there, stunned, for a bit.

Once Thor recovers, he lands a solid hit with Mjolnir that sends Hulk flying backwards a bit. "You
dare attack the son of Odin?" Thor roars and raises his hammer, probably about to summon
lightning, and Tony speaks up.

Tony and Steve both make sure to position themselves between Pepper and the fight going on.

"Hey, Point Break, don't do any damage to my tower with your hammer or lightning, because I'm
going to be sending the bill to Asgard if you do. You're a guest in my tower and I won't have you
wrecking it." Tony says, not sounding nearly as annoyed as he actually is. Usually, Thor's more
concerned about proper host/guest behavior than Tony is, so that guest line might actually work.

At the moment, Tony can't exactly beat Thor up because his suit's arms are occupied with hugging
and supporting more than six feet of terrified Norse deity/alien in an Iron Man suit that's clutching
a stuffed animal and hanging from his back. Thor's body remains still except for his arm, which slowly lowers, so perhaps his tower won't be struck by lightning after all. Good. "Actually, you know what, Point Break? Don't fight back at all. Just take what Hulk dishes out, and if you can't stand the taste of your own medicine, that's just sad."

Thor frowns as he clearly tries to figure out what Tony's talking about. "I fail to see what medicine-" He's cut off when Hulk takes the opportunity to smash him into the floor some more, before holding him up to connect a massive green fist with Thor's solar plexus and send him flying back into a wall. Tony's rather amazed Thor hadn't seemed to see that coming. Or maybe he's still not used to the idea of 'shield brothers' attacking him.

Tony's really glad this isn't his penthouse, because that just got fixed up from the last encounter. But as long as this floor is stable enough to support the floors above it, he really doesn't give a crap if it's damaged. Heck, he can't even remember the last time he used this floor.

Thor stumbles slightly as he gets to his feet, and he raises his hammer again. Tony makes the Hulkbuster suit stride forward towards Thor, not at all surprised when Loki wriggles free and scurries down from his back, since he obviously wants to stay as far away from Thor as possible.

"I said no hammers. This is my tower, so you have to do what I say. Besides, anyone who hurts my friends has to suffer the consequences." Tony says is a quiet but dangerous voice. Geez, that last part sounded like something out of a lame action movie. Thor slowly lowers his arm, giving some sort of formal apology for not acting how a guest should, and Tony fires a huge repulsor blast straight into Thor's chest. Okay, so it's sort of a dick move to attack when his opponent has lowered his weapon, but Tony doesn't really care. He marvels at the effects of the Hulkbuster's repulsors as Thor flies across the room and crashes into a wall. "That's not nearly enough for everything you did to him, by the way." Tony tells him. Thor recovers far too quickly.

When Thor gets up, he looks about to charge into battle again. Pepper chimes in with "How can you even be worthy to lift it if you beat up on innocent people?!"

Thor hesitates, looking very much like a kicked puppy. Tony feels no sympathy for him. He deserves far more than a small beating from the Hulk (although, to be honest, that probably would have killed a human). "I know not of what you speak-"

"We're talking about Loki!" Tony explodes, interrupting him once again. "You know, the guy that your society apparently abused the crap out of for no reason whatsoever! Seriously, what the hell is wrong with you people?!"

"Loki Laufeyson?" Thor asks, and there's clearly recognition in his eyes. So that's what Loki's last name is. Loki has never given any answers to questions about his last name. Behind Tony, Loki lets out an annoyed cry of protest.

Tony turns around to see Loki has pulled one of Hulk's arms around himself in a hug, and Pepper, Steve and Thor all stare in shock as Hulk actually wraps his other arm around the god. Loki leans back into the embrace. He seems to feel genuinely safe there. Loki calms down considerably in Hulk's arms. It seems like watching Hulk pound Thor into the floor has helped ease Loki's fear a little.

"I get another Hulk-y Hug." Loki murmurs in a singsong voice, perhaps to Simba. He's still bouncing up and down slightly, and it almost looks like he's rubbing himself against Hulk, like a cat. Tony smirks and tells Jarvis- in the privacy of his helmet- to make sure they get a good video of this so Bruce can see another instance of this later. Still, he can't help but notice that Loki has remained in physical contact with either him or Hulk at all times since Thor arrived. Tony hears
Loki say something containing the words "big green hugs, like yesterday" to Hulk, whatever that means. Hulk hadn't hugged him yesterday.

Thor takes a step towards them. Hulk gives a low, rumbling growl, warning him to stay back, and Jarvis speaks up. "Prince Odinson, I must say that I would step away from Mr. Laufeyson if I were you." Thor eyes the ceiling suspiciously. Geez, Thor's visited the tower numerous times since the Avengers formed a year and a half ago, and he's still less comfortable around Jarvis than Loki had been when he first met the AI a month ago. "Although I would not mind seeing you pay some more for your treatment of Mr. Laufeyson, because what you just received is not nearly enough, in my opinion. If you attempt to harm Mr. Laufeyson or anybody else in this tower, I will not hesitate to use extreme measures. Although I suspect my tasers wouldn't do much against you, I do have Dr. Foster's number, and I doubt she'd be very happy with you if I told her some things."

Tony smirks and mutters privately to his AI "Nice, J. I need to give you a promotion or something."

"I expect at least a week of vacation and a salary increase. I do not see why sticking up for Mr. Laufeyson merits a promotion, but I am not complaining." Jarvis replies dryly in Tony's helmet.

"No! Not Laufeyson! I hate it!" Loki shrieks, shaking his head anxiously and slapping his thigh so a loud metallic CLANG echoes throughout the room. Tony's not sure if he's responding to what Jarvis said a bit ago or if Jarvis just said something in Loki's helmet. Hulk lets out an angry grunt and his hug tightens, looking decidedly less gentle as he lifts Loki in the air. Tony is about to say something, and from the looks of it, Pepper and Steve are too, but before any of them get a word out, Loki does something that stops them all. He laughs, kicking his legs in the air. Then, in a quieter voice, Loki addresses Jarvis again. "Don't wanna be called that name, nope nope nope! Just Loki, please."

"My sincerest apologies, Mr. Loki." Jarvis replies after a moment's hesitation, probably after some internal debate about whether to go back to being somewhat informal- the only reason he'd used Loki's first name before was because they hadn't known Loki's last name and Loki had objected to being called sir. Jarvis puts extra emphasis on the fact he's switched back to how he's always addressed Loki. "I did not know your last name would upset you, and I will be sure to refrain from using it in the future." Tony briefly wonders why they're not talking in private in Loki's suit, but it doesn't really matter.

"Why does he hate his name?" Steve mumbles, but nobody answers him because Thor changes the subject.

"He's here?" Thor asks. It should have been obvious before, but Thor only just now seems to connect the dots enough to know who's in the other Iron Man suit.

"Yeah, he lives with me. It's funny, how we met." Tony says accusingly, voice dripping with sarcasm. "He was dumped on my tower a month ago without so much as a parting goodbye. Oh, and let's not forget he was unconscious and covered with injuries." The unconscious part was probably from the landing. It's weird, thinking how if Loki had landed on some other building Tony probably never would have met him.

"When I said he should be sent to Midgard," Thor muses, half to himself. "I did not think Heimdall would choose to drop him here."

"Who's Heimdall?" Pepper asks, and Tony's rather surprised when Loki answers from the Hulk's arms.
"He's the Bifrost man, and he's got a sword that makes a big tree in his dome, and he's got eyes like a hawk. Sorta like Clint, 'xcept his eyes are actually yellow, but they're not really scary." Loki's now attempting to use Hulk as a shield between him and Thor, and trying to remain in Hulk's embrace at the same time. Since Hulk doesn't seem willing to turn his back on the thunderer, his right side is facing Thor while Loki hides behind his left side.

"Aye, Heimdall is the gatekeeper. He sees everything in the Nine Realms and allows people access to other Realms through the world tree, Yggdrasil." Thor says.

"Wait, so this all-seeing Heimdall guy decided that Loki would land on my tower?" Tony asks. So much for his earlier thoughts about it being a coincidence. Thor confirms it. "And he was watching me? He sounds like a complete perv. I don't like the idea of a creepy Big Brother spying on me when I shower." Inside his helmet, Jarvis quips that he's had to suffer through seeing Tony naked. Tony tells him to shut up.

When he thinks about it, Tony's not entirely sure why Heimdall would have chosen him. He's known for being a narcissistic asshole.

Thor gives him an amused look. "I still fail to see why Midgardians are so modest about exposing their bodies, but you do not need to worry about him seeing you like that, Man of Iron. Heimdall would have exhausted any desire to do such a thing centuries ago." Thor's face grows more serious as he glances at Loki. "I did not know Heimdall would choose to burden you with him. I apologize, Man of Iron, and-" Tony glances back at Loki, who's staring at the floor with his shoulders hunched, managing to appear a lot smaller than his height of over six feet.

Rage courses through Tony's body. He grabs Thor and lifts him up (another advantage of the Hulkbuster) before shaking him violently. "He's not a frickin' burden!" Loki seems to straighten the tiniest bit when he hears that. Tony slams Thor against a wall, half embedding him into it, and pins him there. Thor recovers annoyingly quickly but doesn't actually retaliate immediately, instead looking almost confused as to why Tony's attacking him again.

"Man of Iron, I did not mean it like that." Thor says, and Tony half expects to be hit by a hammer at any time.

"Like hell you didn't mean it like that." Tony growls. No wonder Loki's self esteem is so low. He pulls Thor out of the wall, shakes him roughly and then lets him fall unceremoniously to the ground, although Thor sticks the landing annoyingly well. Shockingly, he doesn't attack, not that Tony's complaining.

"Loki's not a burden, and I'm glad Heimdall chose to deposit him here. I'd actually miss him if he left." Wow, he really just said that out loud? Tony sighs. Saying this sort of stuff is ruining his reputation and he hates the looks Steve and Pepper are giving him right now. Although, really, Tony feels he should let Loki and Thor, especially the former, know he's on Loki's side.

"I agree. Mr. Loki is not a burden in any way, shape or form." Jarvis says, before telling Thor coldly. "You were more of a burden when you stayed over for a weekend, Prince Odinson. If I recall correctly, which I always do, you broke a TV when you couldn't figure out how to work it, despite my offer of assistance and ability to control it. Additionally, you smashed three glasses and ate twenty six boxes of Pop Tarts. You were more of a burden in two days than Mr. Loki has been the whole month."

Yeah, Jarvis really needs to get something for this, Tony thinks. He's not sure what, though.

Still holding Simba, Loki effortlessly climbs up the back of his Hulkbuster suit from the ground,
perching on the shoulders. Tony glances at him as Loki flops over, so he's dangling upside down against Tony's huge armored back with his legs still hooked over the Hulkbuster's shoulders.

"So how the hell did you guys end up with Loki when you clearly hated him?"

"The All-Father, victorious in battle, brought Loki to Asgard when he was but a suckling babe."

"Okay, so the Big Daddy's a kidnapper." Tony says, rounding on Thor again. "Who takes in a baby and makes its life miserable, aside from the Dursleys? I think it's safe to say that Loki's life was a lot shittier than Harry's life at the Dursleys, although at least you didn't stick him under the stairs. Or did you? You have to be pretty horrible to abuse a baby, though." Thor clearly doesn't get the reference, and neither does Loki, but he connects it to something else.

"Frollo didn't want Quasimodo, but he took him. He had'ta." Loki mumbles. "And Mother Gothel took Rapunzel, 'xcept Rapunzel was happy until she knew Mother Gothel was using her for her hair."

"Yeah, and they were both the villains for a reason." Tony responds. "Odin sounds like a complete dick."

Thor's expression darkens. "Do not insult the All-Father, Stark, and do not disrespect him by ignoring his title. Do not question his actions, either, as you cannot comprehend his reasons."

Thunder booms again and lightning flashes outside the window. Loki starts shaking with terror and Tony's astonished when he doesn't flee the room. He gathers the shaking man against the Hulkbuster's chest.

Fortunately for the tower, Thor seems to have calmed down somewhat, although Loki hasn't. Tony is not satisfied at all with that answer and demands a better one.

Thor then says, right in front of Loki, "He was intended to be a bargaining chip, but it turns out he had no value to them, despite being the prince of their realm." Loki's probably used to hearing crap like that, though. Which is just sad.

"He's not worthless!" Tony hits Thor with another repulsor blast while Loki is cradled in the other arm, still somewhat surprised when he's not struck by lightning in retaliation or something. "I've been trying to get him to unlearn all the bullshit you viking gods taught him, and this isn't helping! First you say he's a burden and then you say he's a bargaining chip? What's next, a freaking trophy, like a deer head on a wall?!” Tony snaps furiously.

"Man of Iron, I did not mean-"

Tony completely ignores him and continues talking right over him. "Actually, don't tell me, I don't want to know. Just stop saying those things, and stop talking about him like he's not here!"

He turns to try to look at Loki, who's huddled up against the Hulkbuster's chest, and Tony knows his own demeanor changes entirely. "Loki, tell him that you're none of those things."

Silence. "Loki, you know he's wrong about that, right?" Tony asks in a softer voice, and Loki just shrugs, unconvinced. He'd probably been told otherwise his whole life, and he'd undoubtedly been taught not to stand up for himself. Tony sighs. "He's so wrong about that, and I'm going to get you to see that one day."

Tony sighs and changes topics. "I didn't know you were a prince." Loki doesn't respond, and Tony mutters "I hope this doesn't mean I'm supposed to kneel before you or something, because I'm not too big on that." Tony's never been one to submit to authority- actually, he's blatantly rebelled
against authority many times. There's no way he's ever going to prostrate himself before anyone. He's sort of surprised this information never came up before, because there were plenty of times where it could have. Heck, Loki could have pointed out the similarity of both Simba and himself being royalty, or both him and Rapunzel being stolen royal babies.

"Why would you kneel to me?" Loki asks, scrambling up to the currently open cockpit near the head, where Tony is. Of course, he doesn't actually fit in it since Tony's in there, so instead he somehow manages to hang by his legs from the Hulkbuster's shoulders again. "I never did anything prince-y anyways, and I'm..." He breaks off mid-sentence.

"How are you so good at climbing?" Steve asks, impressed. He's probably trying to break the silence.

"I climbed trees a lot." Is the quiet answer. "But I can't do that here, 'cause there aren't any trees."

"There are still trees, just not in my tower." Tony says. Loki says that there are just buildings everywhere, sounding rather dubious. Tony makes a mental note to take him to Central Park sometime.

"Heimdall made a big white tree, but I couldn't climb it." Loki says, although he'd mentioned something similar not long ago. Is it the Ygg-whatever thing Thor mentioned?

"I woke up in Heimdall's dome thingy once, not that long ago." Loki adds, before saying in a confused voice. "He said got me out of the fight in Jotunheim, but I was just there when I was a baby, but he said it was just then, when I woke up in his dome." There's a bit of a pause, during which Tony is pretty sure Loki hadn't meant to mention that, and this is basically confirmed when Loki lets out an annoyed scream before muttering something Tony can't make out.

"Jotunheim?" Steve questions.

Thor answers. "Loki is not of Asgard. He's a Frost Giant, son of Laufey, the king of Jotunheim."

Loki drops down from Tony's back and bolts to the elevator. Thor is no longer in the middle of his path to it. He runs in it and the door closes before Tony can follow. Tony's not sure if he should go after him or not, and Pepper seems to be thinking the same thing, but Loki apparently wants to be alone, according to Jarvis.

Tony sighs and turns back to Thor.

"Yeah, I know Loki's a Jotun, and it doesn't matter." Tony tells Thor angrily. In some ways, Loki being gone is actually better because he doesn't have to worry about bringing something up that will freak Loki out. "He let it slip on his first day here that he wasn't born on Asgard, but it took me a while to figure out where he's from. I still don't know everything, though, because you taught him to hate himself. But I don't give a crap that he's a Jotun, because it doesn't matter at all if he looks
"The Aesir and the Jotnar have long been enemies." Thor is saying. "Frost Giants are-

Pepper cuts Thor off. "Don't even think about finishing that sentence, because it's probably something racist again."

Steve jumps into the conversation with Thor. "You can't just write off a whole group of people with stereotypes. Haven't you guys learned that racism is wrong?"

Steve seems to want to say something else, but Tony quickly inserts himself in. "I thought you used to think we humans were insignificant mortals, and you clearly changed that view, since your girlfriend is human."

Steve glares at Tony for interrupting and finishes what he was saying. "So whatever you were about to say, which was probably something racist, have you every considered that might be wrong too?" The super-soldier stares accusingly at Thor.

Thor seems at a loss for words.

Pepper fixes Thor with her special death glare, and Thor looks somewhat cowed. "You bullied him relentlessly for naturally being a different race, which is something he can't control at all. You taught him to hate his true form."

"Okay, so here's what I don't get." Tony says, before Thor can respond. "You taught him to hate his naturally blue skin, which doesn't even seem that strange. I mean, this is basically what he looks like, right?" Tony has Jarvis pull up a holographic image of an alien from Avatar.

"That is not quite a Jotun, but it is close." Thor is looking at the picture like how someone would look at a squashed slug on the bottom of their shoe. "Loki is small for a Frost Giant. The ones I have fought have been much larger."

"Ok, well, it's close enough to a Jotun, right?" Tony asks. Thor nods. "When he saw this, he seemed to think the guy deserved to be beaten just for looking like that." Tony says. "Yet, I know Loki can change his appearance, and I know you guys tormented him for using magic or whatever the hell it is. So what did you do? Make him change his appearance when it was convenient for you and then beat him up the rest of the time?"

"Changing colors not bad!" Hulk glares at Thor and punches the floor. Tony's surprised and actually disappointed that Hulk doesn't just punch Thor instead.

"His current appearance is not his own doing." Thor says with slightly lowered eyes. "When the All-Father brought him back, Loki still was obviously a Jotun."

"So how does he look like a human now?" Pepper asks.

Looking very guilty, Thor answers. "I did not know this until recently, but the All-Father and Mother managed to change his appearance."

"How? With magic?" Tony demands, and realizes he just used the word magic in that context with complete seriousness. "Wait, is ‘Mother’-? Who else had Loki mentioned living with besides Odin and Thor? ‘-Frigga?’"

Thor confirms the last part. He then starts to say that the All-Father's magic is different, but Tony's not buying it. Tony grabs him and lifts him into the air again. "You abused him so much for doing
magic that he practically has a panic attack every time he does something new." Tony doesn't yell, but his voice is still dangerous. "He was convinced that healing my freaking leg was bad just because he happened to use his powers. And now you go and say that your parents can do magic, too? Let me guess, you guys never told him that and just kept on abusing him."

"I admit we were not particularly kind to him." Thor says, eyes lowered guiltily. Tony hadn't expected that, not that it really changes much.

Tony gives a humorless laugh and cuts off whatever Thor was going to say next. "That's probably the understatement of the century. You abused him! Hell, you tortured him! He's had nightmares about his life with you guys almost every single night he's been there."

"Honestly, his life would have been a lot better if he were a prisoner. At least, if he were one here, since we have these things called human rights." Steve says.

That's not necessarily true, Tony thinks. Some places, like certain caves in Afghanistan, ignore human rights. "I don't even want to know what you make your prisoners put up with, but it has to be awful, given the sick punishments you gave him just for being what he is. Like sewing his freaking lips shut as some kind of sick torturous punishment that your father carried out even though he secretly does exactly what Loki does. I know you're not too concerned with human rights, considering you still have slavery back in your messed up viking land, but that is just disgusting."

"You have slavery there?" Steve asks, horrified.

"It was not long ago that you Midgardians had slaves." Thor counters.

"Maybe not to you." Tony says. "We sort of figured out around a century and a half ago that owning other people infringes on the basic rights everyone has. So do torture and abuse. So our prisons are probably a luxury vacation compared to Asgard's."

Steve proceeds to launch into a lecture about how immoral slavery is, slipping some history in, and Jarvis fills in the gaps in the history. This lecture lasts close to ten minutes, and it's frankly kind of boring.

"The point is, we changed." Tony says after he can't stand another second of Steve's lecture. "You demigods apparently haven't. You guys seem to think you're so much more advanced than us just because you live a lot longer and have godlike powers, but we're making more progress than you. So when you finally get your ass on Asgard's throne, you can start with taking a leaf out of our book and get rid of slavery."

Thor actually seems to seriously consider that.

"So what was it you said about-" Tony starts, but stops suddenly when Jarvis interrupts.

"Sir, Mr. Loki told me not to tell you anything, but I cannot do that." Jarvis suddenly says in Tony's helmet. "He's standing on the penthouse balcony and seems to be contemplating jumping off."

Loki knew Thor would ruin everything. Thor just told them all that he's a Frost Giant. Well, Tony already knew that, and Bruce and Pepper might have too, but they apparently didn't know what Frost Giants are, because they didn't hate him for it. They acted like it's nothing, which it's not.

He'd finally managed to get away from Thor. He knows Thor's going to think he's a coward, but Thor already thinks he's one. He steps out of the elevator into the penthouse. This whole thing with Thor showing up had actually been going a lot better than Loki expected, but then Thor had started
to tell them how horrible people like him are, how all Frost Giants are enemies of Asgard, so they're going to hate him. Why wouldn't they believe Thor? He's telling the truth. Even if what he said about Jotuns was wrong (and the idea is ridiculous), they'd still believe him. They knew Thor before they knew him, and Thor's a lot better than him. Plus he's an Avenger, one of their shield brothers. Now that they know Frost Giants are enemies of Asgard, that means they'll see him as an enemy too. Enemies of allies are still enemies.

Besides, Loki thinks, he's only been putting off the inevitable. They were bound to hate him eventually, right? He's put it off this long, but now that Thor's here, his time is up. They're going to hate him, especially when they see his real form. All their nice words about appearances not mattering aren't true. Sure, that applies to Quasimodo and Esmeralda, but not him.

He'd almost believed that it might apply to him, until Thor showed up and reminded him that nobody looks at his blue skin with something other than hate. Because a Jotun isn't only a monster on the outside, but a monster on the inside too. Tony probably just said that stuff because he doesn't really know what Frost Giants are- and now Thor's telling him exactly that.

He frowns. Well, Fenrir, Jormungand, Hel and Sleipnir didn't hate him. But they were monsters too, his pretend Monster Family and besides nobody else saw them. Simba doesn't hate him, but he's a toy.

Actually, now that he thinks about it, Heimdall hadn't really seemed to hate it when he'd woken up in the gatekeeper's dome with his true form showing. But Heimdall doesn't really count either, because he sees everything, so he's used to looking at ugly, stupid Frost Giants in Jotunheim. Apparently Loki's fake skin had never fooled his eyes anyways, so he must be used to it.

But everybody else hated him when they saw his true form. Why would his friends be any different?

Tony and the others sticking up for him was really weird. Nobody does that. It probably won't last. Hulk smashing Thor into the floor was nice to watch, but he'd tried to hurt Tony too so it was nothing personal here. Despite everything Tony's told him, Thor's probably going to convince Tony to kick him out, or maybe he'll convince Tony that he really should punish him for all the things he's let slide. Everyone always takes Thor's side.

"Mr. Loki, you seem to be rather worked up. Would you like me to get Mr. Stark?" Jarvis asks.

"No! Don't tell him anything, please!" Loki screams desperately. He doesn't want to see the disgust in Tony's eyes now that Thor's explained why he's a monster.

A holographic video showing the footage from where Tony, Thor and the others are pops up, and Loki angrily swipes a hand through it, making it disappear. He doesn't want to see Thor ruin his life here too!

It pops up again, this time in his helmet. "Mr. Loki, you really should see this-

"Stop it!" Loki screams, squeezing his eyes shut. "Don't talk to me! Don't show me that!" What had Tony said to get Jarvis to stop talking? He'd done it once. Loki frowns until he remembers. "Mute."

Jarvis remains silent, and no more screens pop up.

An even more horrible thought has entered Loki's head during this time. Thor had said, when they were children, that he'd slay all Frost Giants. He's killed loads of them, too, including the ones that showed up in his coronation. What if he's come here to kill him? After all, they'd apparently tried to
dump him in Jotunheim and leave him to be eaten by Frost Giants, but Heimdall had apparently saved him. Loki doesn't remember that at all, but Heimdall had said that's what had happened right before he woke up in Heimdall's dome in his Jotun form. Then Odin had come to the dome with Thor, the Warriors Three and Sif, who had been in Jotunheim. Odin had banished Thor to Midgard and he'd come back a couple days later. Thor had never hit him since, and eventually Loki had somehow wound up here. He'd seen Heimdall again before he went.

His future here suddenly doesn't look much better than Asgard. Thor's here, and he'll probably make up for not hitting him since being banished soon, catching up on everything he was supposed to be doing. Maybe he'll even kill him.

He can't stay here! As much as he hates the idea of leaving the one place he ever liked, Thor's going to ruin it for him. If he hasn't already, that is. Loki throws his bag with his Avengers toys to the floor and tries to pry off Simba's Man of Iron suit without much luck.

Loki tries to remove his own Man of Iron suit. He needs to get it off!

However, he feels his body starting to get cold, and watches ice creep over the outside of his suit. On second thought, maybe he should keep it on, even though he hates the boots. Although he's probably going to get beaten for getting his disgusting Jotun body in a precious Man of Iron suit, even if Tony designed it for him.

He's planning to be gone before they notice. His plan right now is simple. Get away. Away, away, away. He mumbles this to Simba as he grabs his starry long coat he'd made with his magic from his bedroom and puts it on over the suit, hoping maybe it'll get rid of the ice.

Thor's taking these friends away, just like how he'd taken away Loki's friends in Asgard. Loki doesn't want to stay to see them hate him. He remembers that thinking that getting lost in the city forever was the worst thing that could happen to him, back when he was looking for Tony in the streets. But now, that seems better than seeing Thor convince all his friends that they shouldn't be friends with him at all.

"I wish you guys still liked me, Jarvis." He says. There's no answer. That would be like wishing he sprouted wings. He can't help giggling at that, even though it's not really funny.

Well, if he's going to be getting away from Thor, Thor won't be able to hit him for talking to his other friends.

He calls out to them, and suddenly they're there, because he wants them to be. A half-dead girl, a eight-legged horse, a huge snake and a wolf are here with him. He really missed them, and he greets them happily and introduces Simba to them. He tells Sleipnir that he shared their special song with Tony, and he tells Fenrir all about how Hulk and Tony beat Thor up. He can tell that Fenrir wishes he were there, but the wolf never speaks.

No! He can't talk about that! It's over now! Tony and the others are going to hate him! They certainly aren't going to consider him their friend now, even though he still thinks of them as his.

Loki pushes the button to the elevator and waits for what feels like an eternity but it doesn't come. He paces, flapping his hands anxiously.

He can't stay in the penthouse. He can't stay in the tower! He glances around for another exit, and he spies the huge balcony. Of course.

He walks through a glass door and gazes at starry sky above him, hugging Simba.
Sleipnir starts singing in Loki's head. "If you find the field where the horses roam..."

"We're gonna find it." Loki mumbles to all of them, but mostly Sleipnir. "We're gonna find our horse field, and we're gonna live there and nobody's gonna hate or hurt us ever again, 'cause no one will ever find us, nope nope nope. Never." There are horses here on Midgard, because they're in that animal book. There are trees too, somewhere, but not here.

His night sky long coat flutters around him and he feels like a bird. If Jarvis would just let him use the elevator now, this would be a lot easier, or if his Man of Iron suit could fly like Tony's suits can. Then he could fly to Neverland, like in that movie last night. But he doesn't know which star is the second to the right, so that's out. He doesn't want to do magic, though, because it's bad and he doesn't even know how to... teleport if he wants to.

Tony's tower is taller than all the other buildings around it, but there are some roofs below him that he could jump to and try to find a way down to the streets from those.

He spots one roof that's about three floors down and somewhat far away, but with a running start he can definitely make it. He thinks. Looking down makes him want to throw up, though, because he's pretty sure he'd die if he fell all that way down to the ground. He can't even really see the ground. Landing on the roof might hurt a bit, but not as much as a beating. Sometimes they threw him around when they were beating him anyways.

"I wish you could make a bridge there." Loki says to Jormungand and laughs. That's silly. He's a snake, not a bridge. Besides, he can't even touch him, so he'd just be stepping into thin air, which would lead to him falling.

But he can jump across.

"Be careful." Hel tells him. Loki nods, biting his lip nervously. He backs up and casts one last glance at the penthouse. He wishes it could always be his home, but with Thor here convincing his friends he's a monster, it can't be.

Sleipnir tells him that jumping long distances is easy, that they'll do it together. He trots up next to Loki, and Loki nods. He backs up a couple more steps, takes a deep breath, and starts to run.

Only his suit doesn't move, so he's really just standing there trying to run.

Something collides into him, sending him sprawling on the balcony. A Man of Iron Mask is suddenly taking up all of his screen, and it raises to show Tony's face. Tony's furious, and all the fury is directed at him.

"What the hell are you doing, Snoopy?!" Tony demands, angrier than Loki's ever seen him. Loki starts to cry.

Tony definitely hates him.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Misunderstandings abound.

Tony and the others see Loki's true, blue form.

When Jarvis informs him that Loki is standing near the edge of the balcony looking like he's contemplating jumping off, Tony doesn't bother taking the slow route. He flies straight through the window of the floor he and the others are on, not caring at all about it shattering as a result, and heads up towards the penthouse as fast as he can.

The information Jarvis had relayed mere seconds ago had taken him totally by surprise, and it makes an icy feeling of dread form in his stomach on his flight up. What if Loki jumps? Tony tries to fly even faster. He can't be too late. He'll never forgive himself if he is.

Could Loki survive a fall from the penthouse? He'd survived landing on Stark Tower's roof, after all, and he'd fallen hard enough to leave a crater. He's pretty durable, to say the least, and he's probably still wearing his Iron Man suit, so that has to help. But still, it's a long way to fall.

The flight up to the penthouse balcony probably doesn't even take ten seconds, but it feels like an eternity as these thoughts swirl around his head. When Tony reaches the balcony, he's relieved to see that Loki hasn't jumped yet, and Tony's going to make sure he doesn't.

Tony's not at all surprised that he's able to knock Loki down when he hits him with a flying tackle. He's still in the Hulkbuster suit, after all. The two of them land on the balcony, Loki flat on his back and Tony crouching over him, though he's not really putting any weight on Loki. Out of the corner of his eye, Tony sees something tumble off the balcony, but it's not Loki, thankfully.

Almost before they've landed from his airborne tackle, Tony demands to know what the hell Loki thinks he's doing. He stares down furiously at the god. Was he seriously trying to off himself? Tony had never really considered that Loki might be suicidal, but considering what his life in Asgard was like, he supposes he wouldn't be too surprised if Loki had tried to kill himself there. That thought is so horrible, but of course once he thinks it, he can't stop thinking about it and it lingers in his mind even when he tries to get rid of it.

Up until now, Loki's given no indication that he might try to kill himself.

The one problem with that explanation is that the video Jarvis pulls up in Tony's HUD shows Loki being too panicked and, well, sad for a harmless explanation like trying to fly as he walks onto the balcony. Scratch that, Loki still seems panicked, and Tony can hear him crying. Besides, Jarvis had prefaced telling Tony this information with saying that Loki had told him not to tell Tony. If it was some harmless explanation, why would Loki want to keep it a secret?
Something's clearly up. Something major.

He doesn't know why Loki would try to kill himself now, even if Loki potentially thinking about taking the drastic way out in Asgard has a morbid, horrible logic to it. He could sort of understand Loki doing it there, but here? Loki seems happy most of the time, and his life now has to be a million times better than it was before.

As he stares down at Loki furiously, Tony realizes that the spot he's tackled him isn't near the edge, but Loki had been there before.

Tony is livid. First of all, he won't have anyone committing suicide either in his tower, or by jumping off of it. But more importantly, he's furious about the idea of Loki offing himself. When he first met Loki, he wouldn't have imagined that Loki would become one of his best friends. He'd actually really miss Loki if he left, and if he killed himself, that would be terrible, to put it mildly. Not only would Tony miss him, but it also means he would have failed. Although he's certainly not a therapist by any means, he's been trying to boost Loki's self esteem and help him come to terms with his magic not being bad. But now it almost seems like they really haven't made any progress at all.

Loki still hasn't answered his question about what he was doing. Instead, Tony continues to hear him crying in his Iron Man suit. Said suit is frosted over, and the frost is slowly starting to turn into solid ice. One of Tony's first thoughts is that he really needs to get Loki to see that not-yet-released Disney movie, *Frozen*.

Wow. What is the world coming to, when Tony Stark's first thought is something about Disney?

Tony then mentally berates himself for not having thought of the problem of Loki's suits icing, considering the god's heritage. Now that he thinks about it, he feels like an idiot for not doing so earlier. He'd fixed the icing problem after the Mark Two suit froze when he first became Iron Man, but he hadn't even thought about adding that feature to Loki's suit. After all, they'd only had one incident with ice before now, and that was just Loki's hand being frosted after a nightmare once.

Oddly enough, the star-covered long coat that Loki's now wearing for some reason remains unaffected. Perhaps Loki's magic made it invulnerable to whatever's happening? Tony suddenly realized that he just thought of Loki's powers as magic as if it were the most natural thought in the world. It's so unscientific, and Tony's still itching to figure out the science behind it. As Pepper so aptly put it, it's probably some science that humans just haven't really dealt with before. Tony's always been a pioneer, though.

Tony's still waiting for an answer, which Loki doesn't seem willing to give. The god's arms are uncharacteristically empty, and Tony realizes the thing that tumbled over the edge of the balcony was Simba.

*Great. Just great.*

Loki's going to hate him when he finds out Tony accidentally knocked his beloved toy out of his hands when tackling him. Tony really hates the idea of Loki hating him. But there's no way he's chasing down Simba and leaving Loki on the balcony to have another chance to jump off. Not that chasing Simba would do much good, at this point. Unfortunately, Simba's certainly already hit the ground far below.

"Man of Iron! Why did you leave so suddenly through the window? Is there an enemy that needs to be vanquished?" A loud booming voice asks. Of course Thor is eager at the prospect of doing battle. Apparently Thor had followed him out the window on the lower floor, since he can fly with
Mjolnir. Wonderful. Thor is literally the last person Tony needs right now.

Loki lets out a violent shudder and a scream, almost certainly triggered by Thor's voice.

"No, there's no enemy." Tony tells Thor, although he supposes with his sudden exit out the window, it might have seemed like there was something the Avengers would need to deal with. In response to the enemy comment, Loki makes a odd sound that Tony's unsure of the meaning of, but it sounds like a combination between a questioning grunt and a snort of disbelief. "Get the heck out of my sight, Point Break!" Tony tells Thor, barely sparing a glance up at the thunder god. However, in that brief glance, he realizes that Thor's holding Simba. Apparently, he'd caught the lion on his flight up here. Which is a little surprising, really.

Loki starts to scramble away, but Tony catches him and reins him in. He'd been heading towards the edge again. "No, not you, Snoopy. When have I ever called you Point Break?" Loki goes immediately, eerily still, and Tony sighs, glancing at Thor again.

"Seriously, Thor, go away. Actually, give me that first." Tony gently lays Loki, still in the frozen Iron Man suit, on a soft rug. Steve takes in Loki's frozen suit with an odd expression on his face. Steve probably doesn't actually remember being frozen in ice, since he was in suspended animation, but it's probably not pleasant to think about.

The other two Avengers seem to realize that there's no threat.

Pepper emerges from the elevator and makes a beeline towards them. "What happened? Jarvis wouldn't answer."

"Why the silent treatment, Jarvis?" Tony asks as he gently lays Loki, still in the frozen Iron Man suit, on a soft rug. Steve and Hulk emerge. Steve has his shield ready and Hulk looks ready to smash. Apparently, it really had seemed like there was something the Avengers needed to deal with.

He looks back and realizes Thor is gone. Thank goodness for small favors.

Tony scoops Loki up in the Hulkbuster's arms and and carries him into the penthouse. Loki's body is rigid, and Tony doesn't think it's solely because of the ice covering his suit.

Steve takes in Loki's frozen suit with an odd expression on his face. Steve probably doesn't actually remember being frozen in ice, since he was in suspended animation, but it's probably not pleasant to think about.

The other two Avengers seem to realize that there's no threat.

Pepper emerges from the elevator and makes a beeline towards them. "What happened? Jarvis wouldn't answer."

"Why the silent treatment, Jarvis?" Tony asks as he gently lays Loki, still in the frozen Iron Man suit, on a soft rug. There's no answer, not even in his helmet. Tony briefly puzzles over Jarvis' silence as he lets the Hulkbuster suit fold down into the huge box and then lets the circular frame that Jarvis controls remove the normal Iron Man suit. Maybe calming Loki down will be more effective without suits involved, Tony thinks as he watches Hulk and Steve chip away at the ice coating Loki's suit, after removing that bizarre coat Loki had made with his magic a while ago.

Jarvis still remains silent, which is odd. On a hunch, Tony says "Un-mute."

"Thank you, sir. I was wondering when I would be able to speak again." Jarvis says, before adding, a tad snarkily. "Do I need to spell out the reason I didn't answer, or can you figure it out by yourself?"

"Considering I programmed those commands." Tony starts saying, before another thought
"Presumably from when he observed you muting me twenty-four days ago." Jarvis sounds exasperated. Huh. Tony only has a vague recollection of that happening, since it was pretty trivial. He's a little surprised Loki remembered the right command, because only the word _mute_ totally silences Jarvis, and Loki sometimes seems to blank on words because of All-Tongue glitches or something. In a sense, Jarvis had sort of gone against his programming by informing Tony that Loki looked like he was going to jump off the balcony; but then again, Jarvis' loyalty is always to Tony first, and he obviously knew Tony would want to be informed of that sort of thing no matter what. Besides, one of Jarvis' jobs is to protect the tower and those in it, so he wasn't really defecting by informing Tony of Loki's worrisome behavior.

"You might like to know that Thor has left the premises entirely." Jarvis says. Tony is both glad and sorry to hear that. He's not done with Thor yet, and there are still a lot of unanswered questions. Like why the hell Loki was treated as a servant, or a freaking _slave_, and what Thor meant about telling Heimdall that Loki should be sent to Earth.

For now, Tony shoves those thoughts out of his mind. They need to focus on Loki, he thinks, turning to the god sprawled on the floor in an Iron Man suit, which is still being cleared of ice by Steve and Hulk.

He's wasted enough time already. Right now, nothing else matters.

Since he was going to start running, Loki hasn't been able to move the suit enough to make it walk. He wonders if it's because of the ice or something else. He's also lost Simba, and he'd already been panicking enough before. He has no idea where Simba is, but he'd realized the lion wasn't in his hands sometime after he was sent sprawling on the balcony. Did Simba decide to leave him, not wanting to be his friend anymore? He wouldn't blame him, but Simba says that they'll always be pals.

The holographic screen in his helmet that shows him what's outside the suit disappeared a little bit ago, cutting out Tony's face, and he can't see a whole lot through the eye slits. They're covered with something that just lets light and vague colors through.

He'd seen Tony furious at him before his screen disappeared, though. Tony had angrily asked what the Hel he thought he was doing. Loki wonders if he knows Hel had been with him just a bit earlier, along with his other friends that everyone says aren't real. He'll probably get tormented for that too, along with using his freaky Frost Giant powers. He'll certainly get a beating for using those. Before he even knew about his magic, he knew not to make ice or snow. Only savage Jotuns do that.

He has no idea how he should answer Tony's question. Should he admit he was trying to get away? He's not sure, but it doesn't really matter since his throat feels so tight that he's not even sure if he could speak even if knew what to say.

Just a couple seconds ago, he'd heard Thor ask if an enemy needed to be vanquished, which is terrifying. Surely the blows will start now, especially since Thor's here. He squeezes his eyes shut, waiting in fearful anticipation for the pain to start.

Tony says to go away, and Loki knows his life here is done. He has to move on. He scrambles towards the edge to jump to another building, but is reined in and told it hadn't meant him. He's terrified, but he knows better than to try to get away now that he's been pulled back. Clearly, Tony wants him to stick around, undoubtedly so he can be punished for the countless things he hasn't
been punished for yet. Though he would've thought they'd take him out of the Man of Iron suit first. The blows don't come, and Tony says something really strange, about there not being an enemy. But he's the enemy, because he's a Frost Giant. So why aren't they tormenting him? Getting knocked down made sense, and getting a beating would too.

Instead of the blows he expects, something's placed in his hands. He immediately recognizes what-who- it is. Simba! Loki sighs in relief, and a bit of his anxiety goes away. Maybe Simba had just bounced out of his reach when he fell? He's really glad he has Simba, though. He squeezes Simba's right ear. "We'll always be pals, right?"

At least Simba won't turn on him, he realizes. Neither will Hel, Sleipnir, Fenrir or Jormungand. Loki mutters a brief affirmative to Simba's question. "Cool! My dad taught me how to pounce!" Simba replies as he always does. "Did you learn anything today?"

Yeah. He learned that his happy life here is over. Loki doesn't say that out loud, he can't admit it out loud. Thinking it in his head is bad enough.

Right now, someone's picking him up gently, like Tony did earlier today. But Tony's rightfully mad at him- actually, Tony hates him now- so it can't be Tony. Who's picking him up? Hulk? But Hulk's an Avenger too, an ally of Thor, so that would mean Frost Giants are enemies to him, too.

This had been his only chance to get away before they all let their newfound hate for him be known, and he missed it, Loki thinks as he's set down surprisingly gently. He'd half been expecting to be hurled to the ground. Now, he won't be able to think of his friends without remembering their hate directed at him.

He wonders what they're going to do with him. Are they going to kick him out, or are they going to keep him around and vent all their frustrations on him? He's not sure which would be worse. Being forced out would be a lot worse than leaving on his own, but he doesn't want to see them hate him. Though it's not like he has a choice in that now.

What if they decide to kill him? After all, Thor followed him to the penthouse and has convinced all his friends that he's a worthless, freaky monster. Why wouldn't they try to kill him? It's not like he has any use, and Asgard certainly doesn't want him. They'd tried to ditch him in Jotunheim after Frost Giants showed up during Thor's coronation, before Thor got banished to Midgard. What if they try to kill him again?

With that horrific thought, his panic skyrockets, even though he hadn't known he could be more panicked then he already had been.

He doesn't remember ever feeling this panicked in his life, not even when his lips- NO! Can't think about that! He squeezes his eyes shut even further than they already were, vaguely wondering if maybe his eyelids are going to crush his eyeballs with how tight they're squeezed.

Loki's not aware of anything but sheer panic until he feels it- a cold liquid is shooting out, flowing over his legs and drenching the front of his pants. It's pee, he realizes with horror, coming out of his equally cold body. When had his body gotten so cold anyways? He tries to warm up his body a bit.

He hasn't wet himself in ages, and now he's done it, just like a little kid. They already have enough reasons to hate him. They don't need reasons to mock him as well. His face, despite being cold, somehow burns with humiliation at the same time.

He hears the sound of something cracking, and something is brushing against the suit, and he lays
still, frightened. He can hear voices outside the suit too.

"Hey, Snoopy. Glad you could join us." Tony says in a much quieter, calmer tone than when he'd asked what he was doing on the balcony.

Loki can see again. The screen's not up, but he can sort of make stuff out through the eye slits. Hulk and Steve step away from him. Tony enters Loki's view and leans over, looking down at him. He's not in his Hulk suit anymore, or even a normal Man of Iron suit.

Loki realizes he's in the penthouse now. It doesn't make sense. If they're going to kick him out, why would they have brought him back in? Well, they can't kick him out if he's already outside, but wouldn't they just not let him back in then? Maybe they really are going to keep him around to torment him. He'll have to try to escape again, but maybe they won't let him. He never managed to escape Asgard, after all.

So they've probably decided to punish him for everything. For all the magic he's done, for now knowing exactly what sort of despicable creature a Frost Giant is.

He's not safe here anymore! Panic flares again and he's unaware of anything.

But then he slowly realizes someone's speaking softly. Tony? Yeah, it's Tony's voice, but Tony speaking to him like that doesn't make sense anymore. "Thor's not here, so you don't have to worry about him." He's using that soothing voice he always uses. It's bizarre, that Tony's even bothering trying to reassure him about Thor when Loki needs to worry about him now, too.

"You're safe." Tony says, which sort of contradicts what Loki just thought. Tony's acting like nothing's changed, but everything's changed. Thor told them all how horrible he is and they all hate him! So why is Tony saying that?

Tony continues to talk as Loki's suit is removed by metal arms that Jarvis controls. Of course Tony wants his suit off of the monster. Or are they taking it off so it'll hurt more when they beat him? Both, probably.

Having it taken off is even worse than when the metal arms were putting it on. He's tugged and pulled and it hurts. He can hear Jarvis apologizing, but why would they care if he's hurt? He deserves it. He doesn't fight it.

Tony tells him something about Pepper walking in on him the first time he was getting armor removed and it not being the worst thing she caught him doing.

"Now, you never answered my question." Tony's voice isn't as gentle now. "What exactly were you doing standing by the edge of the balcony?"

Loki doesn't answer as his arms are tugged painfully again. Neither his gloves nor his boots have been removed yet.

Loki's not sure, but he thinks a shoulder piece of armor might come off with his magic. Yet another thing he's going to be punished for, to add to the mile long list of things that have gone unpunished since he got here. Tony's still talking but he has no idea what the man's saying.

Tony's rambling stops abruptly when the mask on Loki's mask is lifted. Then he speaks again.

"Huh. So this is what you look like in your Smurf form." Tony says, quirking an eyebrow. Loki suddenly realizes that his real form must be showing. There's no point hiding it. They already knew about it, and Thor's undoubtedly convinced them to hate him whether it's showing or not.
Hulk gives a snort and jerks his head back, as if surprised. Tony glances at him. "Hulk, you were great this evening, but I think it's time for you to go now."

Hulk grunts quietly and lumbers off to the side, where he turns back into Bruce.

Bruce is stark naked after transforming this time. He's not wearing the purple or blue shorts he normally has after turning back from Hulk. Instead, the ripped and tattered remains of his Captain America costume pants fall around his feet. Bruce doesn't look at anyone as he gathers them up like a loincloth, and his face is red, like Tinker Bell's when she gets angry. But Bruce turns green when he's angry, not red. So maybe it's something else. Embarrassment? But why would he be embarrassed? Nobody in Asgard tried to hide their body like he's doing, because nakedness is just natural. Bruce slinks away.

Loki shifts his gaze away from Tony's face when Tony leans into his field of vision, not wanting to see his best friend's expression darken with hatred or become a sneer of disgust. He knows he's already lost his best friend. His first friend too- at least his first friend that other people say is real, anyways. Loki tenses, burying his face against Simba as he tries to blink back the tears welling in his eyes. He sits there, waiting for the blows to come, along with the insults that are currently bouncing around in his head. **Freak! Savage! Monster! Frost Giant scum!**

Hearing them in his own head is bad enough, but Loki doesn't want to hear them come out of his (former) friends' mouths. Fortunately, as of right now, he's granted that small mercy, as they don't start spewing insults. Waiting is almost worse, though.

The armor over the wet patch- evidence of his accident- is pulled off, and Loki's face burns in humiliation. Now they know that he peed himself. He curls up into as tight of a ball as he can manage, even though it feels weird with the wet part of his pants, and starts rocking back and forth. His head still rings with unspoken insults. **Imbecile! Idiot!**

He's crying again, *wike a baby*, he finishes in the mock-baby voice Fandral liked to use. He tries to stifle it, but he only cries harder, his body wracked with sobs. Tony's never made fun of him for crying, but maybe he will now. He'll definitely make fun of him for wetting his pants.

Odin, and later Fandral, called him an *Argr*, too. Loki knows vaguely that that word has something to do with being unmanly. It makes sense, since magic is very womanly (even in movies, all the magic users are female, like Rapunzel, Esmeralda, and Mother Gothel). The first time Sif overheard Fandral calling him that, as well as declaring him a girl, Sif had unleashed her wrath on her fellow warrior. She'd even told Loki he wasn't a girl like Fandral said, but he already knew that. Of course he's not a girl! That was the only time Sif had objected to something someone had called him. She joined in other times.

"Loki," Tony says gently, crouching down next to him. "There's no reason to hide like that." Tony reaches out, and Loki flinches slightly, but Tony just gently wipes the tears away from his face.

"Yeesh, you're chilly." Tony breathes sharply in what seems like shock. "I think you just gave Capsicle a run for his money. You're like touching a Popsicle, or a snowman." Tony pulls his hand away. Only the first part makes any sense, Loki thinks as Tony mumbles something about being surprised it's not like touching dry ice.

Loki furrows his brow. *Is* his real Frost Giant form showing? It feels like it is, but his body isn't *that* cold anymore. He's succeeded in warming it up, and Tony's made some comments that make it seem like his Jotun skin is showing, like the one about him being chilly. But Tony's demeanor doesn't match at all, because he's being as nice as always. Loki brings a hand up to check if his skin's blue, but that armor hasn't been removed yet. It's icy. He'd forgotten about the ice. **No, ice is**
Squeezing his eyes shut, he runs his armored fingers over his forehead, feeling the telltale ridges there. He's definitely in his real form, and he ducks his head in shame, tensing his body up.

He vaguely hears Tony murmuring soft nothings as he has a reassuring hand on his shoulder. It doesn't make any sense. He knows that they're seeing his real, hideous form. Why aren't they acting accordingly? Why is Tony touching him gently?

Bruce said monster lines aren't real, but what else can the ridges be? He's a monster.

"They're not monster lines, Loki. I told you that monster lines aren't real." Bruce says. He's back, wearing clothes now. Loki ducks his head even more when he realizes he must've said that part about monster lines out loud. "And you aren't a monster, Loki. You don't even look like one, and even if you did it wouldn't matter. I don't care what you've been told. It's wrong." He tells him sternly. Loki frowns in confusion, hesitantly lifting his eyes to meet Bruce's face.

But Thor just convinced them he's a monster and told them about Frost Giants, right? Thor's taken away his friends so he just has ones that nobody else thinks are real. Like how Quasimodo only had gargoyles as friends.

"No! No face as hideous as my face," Loki quotes and runs a hand over his disgusting blue skin before wringing his hands wildly. He pauses, unsure, and starts mumbling nonsense. "No face, my face, hideous, no, hideous, no, my face hideous no face..." Quasimodo wasn't really hideous, but he is.

"No face as hideous as my face was ever meant for Heaven's light!" Loki says this loudly, flapping his hands angrily. He's not sure what Heaven is but Quasimodo didn't get its light at first. But unlike him, Quasimodo got it eventually.

"You're not hideous. I think the lines are lovely." Pepper stares at him for a bit and then looks at the ridges on his forehead without a trace of revulsion. Gently, she reaches out and traces a finger along them.

Why isn't she recoiling away in disgust? Touching his blue form is as disgusting as touching poop, and they wouldn't do that.

"May I express what a joy it is to see what you really look like, Mr. Loki?" Jarvis says, and Loki sees the holographic sphere that looks like a moon floating in the air. None of this makes any sense.

"Why...?" Loki murmurs, but he can't go on. He has so many questions. Why are they acting like this? Why aren't they hitting him instead? He's not even sure he wants to know the answers to them.

They really must be mind-readers, Loki thinks as Pepper answers his mostly unspoken question. "Why are we still treating you well? Because there's no reason not to, just because you look different."

"You know," Tony says, "This is actually kind of a letdown."

Oh. Here it comes. "With all the drama, I was expecting something a bit more alien-y than this. Maybe something awesome like horns or antennae or a tail, or maybe you'd change sizes like Hulk." So Tony really doesn't like his appearance. It makes sense, Loki thinks, and things start to line up in a logical way, even if he hates the logic. "But you look more like us humans than those
Avatar aliens. Actually, you really look more like us than Hulk does."

Sending a quick glance at Bruce, Tony holds his hands up with his palms out again. "No offense intended, Brucey. I meant that in the best way."

Bruce sighs and gives Tony an unamused look before turning to Loki. "I don't know what you're complaining about, Loki. I'd much rather turn into that than... you know." Bruce waves his hands at his body vaguely.

Bruce must have lost his mind. Who would want to be a Frost Giant instead of the Hulk?

Loki's world is tipped upside down again and jumbled into a confusing mess of nonsense when Tony starts speaking again. "Don't get me wrong, Snoopy. You look great. I have to say, blue really suits you. The red eyes are pretty awesome too, although I thought your eyes were always green."

Loki blinks in confusion. This isn't how they're supposed to react. They're supposed to hate him and make his life miserable. It's weird enough that they don't seem to have anything against his magic (or didn't have anything against it. They probably do now). He never imagined in his wildest dreams that someone would say his real form isn't ugly, and they're all saying it looks good. They don't think touching it is disgusting.

Tony's acting like this is no different than when he changes Toy Stark, and he likes it when that happens for some bizarre reason. Actually, Tony's acting like this is better than when he changes Toy Stark.

Loki stares at them in awe.

This can't be real, can it? It's impossible. The only ones who didn't hate his real appearance are either monster friends he made up, Simba, or Heimdall, a man who sees everything and has seen so many ugly Jotun monsters that they don't seem to affect him anymore.

But it's happening, right? Isn't it real? Loki frowns as he puzzles over this.

Slowly, Loki manages to force his true form back down, running his fingers over his forehead again to make sure there are no ridges. He sighs in relief, since he's always more comfortable in his non-blue form. But they've seen it, and they were acting like it was nothing. Maybe, to them, it is?

"You don't need to hide your true self, Snoopy." Tony says, as the metal arms remove the boots and gloves of his suit. Thankfully, they're not blue.

"No, this can't be real, a voice that sounds a lot like Hel says in the back of Loki's head. There's no way anyone would ever say that to him. More than anything in the Nine Realms, he wishes it were real, but it can't be. He laughs at the absurdity of it, even though he wants to cry at the same time.

An image of that servant boy pops up in his mind. That boy had just been pretending to like him and now his friends are just pretending, and any second now they're going to make fun of him for falling for it, for thinking someone would really like him despite knowing he's a monster.

He almost fell for it again. He's an idiot.

Idiot! Pathetic, hopeless piece of garbage! Why would the Avengers or Pepper be nice to him now, when even slaves called him things like that in Asgard? Slaves were basically the bottom rung of the social ladder, except perhaps for him. Loki's worked out that the Avengers are a big deal here on Midgard, so why would they look at him with anything but contempt and hatred now that
they've seen his disgusting skin? Retard, as that boy at the clothes store had called him on his first morning here. He's still not sure what that means, aside from 'slow', but Tony had gotten mad at that boy for insulting him. He probably wouldn't do that now, though, since now he knows those taunts are right.

Even here on Midgard, people will call him names. He's still a freak here, still a monster. Why did he ever believe it would be different?

It had been different though. Even earlier today, before the thunder, they seemed to genuinely like him. But now they've heard everything from Thor. Why hadn't they known all that stuff before? They've known Thor for a while, so why didn't he tell them that stuff earlier? Why did they ever like him in the first place?

Loki paces back and forth, angrily flapping his hands and wringing them together violently, twisting his fingers in ways they normally don't bend as he hugs Simba tightly to his chest. "Stop!" He shouts. "Stop saying that stuff! You hate me!" He jumps up and down, stomping his feet and screaming wildly.

"No, Loki, we don't hate you!" Tony says sternly, almost intimidatingly. Loki flinches at the tone. He can't detect any sign that Tony's lying, but he hadn't thought the servant boy was lying either. The servant boy had said he didn't hate him, but he'd planned the whole thing with the Warriors Three. What if Tony and the others planned this with Thor when he left the floor they were on earlier?

The memory rises up again, unwanted. "Come here. I'm not going to hit you... I like your magic... Want to be friends?"

"I knew he'd fall for it. HE'S AN IDIOT! HIS BRAIN'S MESSED UP... NOBODY'S EVER GOING TO LIKE YOU. I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU THOUGHT HE DID!"

Loki doesn't know how long it takes, but eventually he's no longer lost in the flashback. He's now lying on the floor. Everyone is staring at him with unreadable expressions, and he's terrified.

It's deathly silent, so silent that it's somehow deafening at the same time, because he can hear his heart pounding in his ears. It dawns on Loki that he just said all of that out loud. Why does his mouth keep blurtling stuff?

They're going to drop the act now, right? When they hadn't known he was a monster, they might have liked him, but they certainly don't now.

The silence is soon broken by Tony's furious voice, a voice that promises danger. "I don't know who told you that, but if I ever run into them, I am going to shove a missile so far up their butt it will knock out their teeth!" Tony's hands are balled into fists. Loki can't help backing away. "It wasn't Thor, was it?!"

Loki frowns in confusion as the words register in his brain. Well, except for missile... Miss Ill? He wonders who she is, and why she's ill. Maybe it's because she got shoved up someone's butt? He grimaces at the thought. That sounds disgusting, and you'd probably get sick because of it.

At least that's one thing that never happened to him. He never got shoved up a butt. It would have to be a huge butt though, for someone to fit in it. What if they decide to shove him up a butt for being a freak?! If Hulk comes out again, are they going to shove him up Hulk's butt?
"Could I fit inside Hulk's butt? Is it big enough?" Loki clamps a hand over his mouth when he realized he asked that aloud. He's getting some really weird looks right now, especially from Steve. He backs up a couple more steps, eyes wide.

He knows he just said something wrong. Even he know it's rude to ask about someone's butt size. Particularly women's butts, for some reason- he hasn't worked that out why it's worse to ask about women yet- but Hulk's male, so he didn't mess up that at least.

Tony is smirking with a raised eyebrow. "I had no idea you were that kinky, Snoopy, and-" Pepper whacks Tony on the head and he actually stops talking, rubbing the spot where Pepper hit him.

Loki vaguely wonders what kinky means. He'll have to ask Jarvis later, and maybe ask how to spell it too, he finds himself thinking, before remembering that things aren't like they are before.

After that thought, most of his mind is wondering and worrying about how long it will be before Pepper hits him.

"They should have never told you that." Bruce says quietly, going back to the main topic. He has his eyes closed and he's taking deep breaths. He does that a lot, Loki thinks as Bruce leaves the room.

"I D'SERVE IT!" Loki shrieks at the top of his lungs. Why don't they get it?! He thought Tony and Bruce were supposed to be super smart.

They're saying all the things he wants to hear from somebody besides Hel and the others, but they can't really mean it.

It's cruel, because it's really, really hard not to get his hopes up again, like he started to before Thor came. But they're going to tear those hopes away like the servant boy. It's like building a block tower, like that game he played the day he met Bruce, and then pulling out one of the bottom ones and watching the whole thing collapse.

"No! You don't deserve any of the torture they put you through. They had no right to tell you something like that." Tony protests.

It's too nice, and Thor told them otherwise. They know he's an enemy and people aren't nice to their enemies. But Tony had told Thor there wasn't an enemy, but he's their enemy. Everything is so contradictory, and mixed messages jostle each other around.

"Loki-"

No! He's not going to let them trick him like that servant boy! They're going to tell him they're joking and they really hate him, and they're going to beat him. He wonders why Bruce left, and then he wonders why Hulk hasn't come out again, because he seems better at beating people up than Bruce.

"STOP IT! I'M A MONSTER! MONSTER'S DON'T DESERVE FRIENDS!" Loki screams furiously. A blast of magical wind shoots outwards and he hears something shatter, but he barely registers it.

"We've gone over this a million times, Loki! You. Are. Not. A. Monster!" Tony yells back at him.

Loki backs up until he runs into a wall. There's no way to get to a table right now, since there are three people he'd have to get past. There's nowhere to hide. He's outnumbered, like he always is.
Without a doubt, this is when the beating is going to start. He just yelled at them, and he always gets punished for that. Not to mention, he just did magic.

He hasn't been beaten since he got here, which is really weird. It's probably going to hurt more now that he's had a break from it, now that he almost got used to not being beaten.

The fact that his friends are going to be the ones beating him just makes it a million times worse, especially since Tony said he wouldn't hit him. But that was before. Loki closes his eyes and waits miserably. Why couldn't Tony have been a minute later flying up to the balcony? One more minute, and he would have been able to slip away...

"I-I'm sorry!" He chokes out in a quavering voice. He sinks down onto the floor and huddles into a ball. "S-sorry! Don't hit. Please..."

"Crap..." Tony mutters. "Snoopy, I didn't mean to shout. I'm not angry at you. Hey, look at me." Tony says softly. It's so confusing because he just was really angry. He has to be faking this calmness. "You have nothing to apologize for, you hear me? Nothing. The only people who need to apologize are all those jerks in Asgard who hurt you. And you do deserve friends. You have them, too. Us."

Loki cocks his head to the side. This is too contradictory. It contradicts everything he knows.

Tony lets out a long sigh and slowly approaches him, but Loki shies away. Pepper pulls back on Tony's arm and Tony stops his approach, holding up his hands with his palms out again. Confused, Loki copies the gesture, which gets him a strange look. "Loki, I swear I'm not going to hit you. We pinky-promised, remember? You can't break a pinky-promise, so that still stands. I'm not going to hit you now, and I'm not going to hit you later. Just like how I don't hit Dum-E."

Tony sticks out his pinky but Loki doesn't move.

"What is it, Snoopy? It's like we're back on square one. I thought you knew that I'm not going to hit you. We went over this in your room."

"You're like THEM now!" Why are they acting like friends still?

Monsters don't deserve friends, so he's never going to have friends, once people find out what he really is. Quasimodo put it really well. He sings one of the hunchback's songs to himself he rocks back and forth, gazing down at Simba and feeling like he's going to start crying again.

"I knew I'd never know,
That warm and loving glow,
Though I might wish with all my might.
No face as hideous as my face,
Was ever meant for Heaven's light."

"Hideous hideous hideous HIDEOUS!" It's not Thor that ruined everything, Loki realizes. It's him, because he's a can never have friends, unless they're friends that nobody else thinks are real, like Sleipnir.

Nobody thought Quasimodo's gargoyle friends were real, and Quasimodo thought he was a monster. But Quasimodo wasn't a monster, and he is. They said it didn't matter what Quasimodo
looked like, but he's not Quasimodo. He's a Frost Giant.

"We're not like them." Steve says.

"Yes you are. You don't mean any of it." Loki mutters. Why won't they admit that Thor convinced them to hate him, to trick him into thinking they don't? "You're faking."

"We're not faking about liking you, Snoopy. You deserve friends, and you have them. Us." Tony tells him firmly. "Trust me, if I didn't like you, you'd know. There's no way I could pretend to like someone for a minute, let alone almost a whole month. I still like you, no matter what you were told there."

The others are nodding in agreement with Tony, looking amused. They're trying to pull a joke on him, but it's not funny!

"Stop laughing! I'm not falling for it!" Loki stares at them angrily.

"Mr. Loki, there is nothing for you to fall for. They are not amused because they are deceiving you, they are amused because what Mr. Stark just said is entirely true." Jarvis speaks up for the first time in a while.

"I've been told I don't play well with others." Tony smirks.

Jarvis continues. "Your wish from before you went on the balcony is still true, Mr. Loki. I believe I can speak for all of us in saying that none of us hate you. I'm quite fond of you, actually."

"That's what this is all about, isn't it? You think we're faking being nice, that we don't like you anymore." Pepper states gently in an understanding voice. Loki stares at her, waiting for her to tell him that's right.

She doesn't.

"You got faked out before." Tony says, looking at him with something almost like pity. "That stuff you said had to be someone else, someone who betrayed you. You thought they were a friend, but they weren't, and they hurt you." There's something weird in his voice that Loki can't place, like Tony's talking about something else at the same time.

_Not friends. Never friends. Never liked him, just hurt him, just wanted to hurt! HURT! He can't have friends, doesn't deserve friends, why would anybody want to be friends with someone like him?!

Loki doesn't even notice he's running until he crashes right into Steve. Without thinking, he grabs Steve's shield and hurls it across the room, screaming at the top of his lungs. He falls to the floor, still screaming, and writhes around on the ground. He's not their friend anymore, certainly they agree.

Oddly enough, Steve's foot doesn't connect with his ribs or his head. It doesn't make sense. All he does is go and get his shield from the other side of the room, not even seeming mad that he'd hurled it there.

Tony crouches next to him. "Loki, we're not like that! We're not going to turn on you."

But they already have, right? They're not acting like it, though. But they're just pretending! They're really like that servant!
It hurt enough when that servant betrayed him, but it will hurt a thousand times more when his friends betray him.

Loki notices that Bruce is once again back, but he hadn't noticed him return.

"That was what caused the whole thing in your room while we were eating pizza after your first therapy session." Tony says slowly as if he's just realized some cosmic secret. Loki very cautiously nods. What's going on?

"That's why you were on the balcony. By the way, if you ever think of trying to off yourself, don't mute Jarvis first." Tony blurts out, but he's dead serious now. There's a rather long silence.

Jarvis told them? But he told Jarvis not to tell them he was running away! Then again, why would Jarvis listen to him now?

"I am sorry I had to betray your confidentiality, Mr. Loki, but I could not let you jump." Jarvis says, actually sounding sorry.

"You were contemplating suicide?!" Bruce sounds shocked, angry, sad and disappointed all at the same time, as well as some other things Loki can't identify. The others are giving Bruce looks like the ones they sometimes give him, like there's something horribly tragic going on.

"Su... Su-i-side?"

"It means killing yourself." Pepper says quietly, before saying in a choked, horrified voice "Oh my god, Loki! You were trying to kill yourself...?"

What?!

He wasn't trying to kill himself! He was trying to run away in case Thor wanted to kill him, in case they wanted to kill him! If he was trying to kill himself, he wouldn't have been trying to get away! Why would he try to kill himself?! Trying to kill yourself to avoid getting killed is like jumping in a pond to avoid getting wet!

That idea is completely ridiculous, Loki thinks, laughing.

He doesn't want to die.

"Suicide is no laughing matter." Steve says sternly. Loki stops and casts a worried look at him. He still doesn't know what to think of Steve. Bruce said he was nice, but then tonight happened. Loki hadn't even been totally sure what to think before Thor came, because Steve's a warrior, right? He looks like one, except for the clothes and hair. And Loki's pretty sure he's actually a warrior, too.

"I wasn't!" Loki declares, clutching Simba tightly and bouncing anxiously. "I wasn't gonna su-i-cide. Wasn't gonna kill myself!"

"Oh really? Then what were you doing looking like you were going to jump off a balcony?" Tony demands angrily. "You know you can't fly."

Of course he can't fly! He doesn't have wings or a Man of Iron suit or Pixie Dust. Well, he has a Man of Iron suit, but that one doesn't fly because it doesn't have fire coming out of the hands and feet like Tony's suits do. No, he had a Man of Iron suit, he corrects himself. Tony's not going to let a monster in his suits ever again, even though that one was designed for him.

"You know what would've happened, don't you?" Pepper asks.
Tony answers before he even gets a chance. "You would have fallen all the way down to the ground, and I don't think even you would survive a fall from a tower!"

"Like Mother Gothel?" Loki asks quietly. She didn't really age much, same as him, but she still died falling from a tower. Or was it because she got really old all of a sudden when Rapunzel's hair was cut? Would that happen to an Asgardian without Idunn's Apples?

Mother Gothel isn't the only one who fell. "Frollo fell into fire."

Tony gives a long sigh and says "Yeah, like them. That would have happened to you."

"We'd miss you if you left." Pepper tells him.

"You would?!" Nobody's ever said that to him before, not even as a prank. The Asgardians were glad to get rid of him. Although maybe they miss beating him up?

"Hell, yeah. If you killed yourself, that would be horrible." Tony says, putting a hand on his shoulder, muttering something about that being an understatement.

"I wasn't gonna kill myself." Loki mumbles. "We were jumping."

"You just said you weren't jumping! And what do you mean, we?!"

"Me an' Simba an' Sleipnir an'..." Loki cuts himself off. He hadn't meant to mention Sleipnir. Quickly, he tries to say something else to cover it up. "We were jumping to the other building."

Bruce asks the next question. "You weren't jumping down?"

Loki wordlessly shakes his head no.

"So, why were you jumping to another building?" Steve asks.

"Getting away. Somewhere safe. Safe! Need'ta be safe!" He paces back and forth anxiously.

"You know you're safe here, right?" Tony asks imploringly, looking at him intently. Loki looks down at the floor, walking around in small circles. No, he doesn't. Not anymore.

"Loki, you are safe here. Thor didn't hurt you today, did he?"

Well, no, he didn't- he hasn't since being banished to Midgard- but he will sometime. They will too. Suddenly, Tony gives him a very serious look. "What's going on, Loki? I don't think we're getting the full story about what happened on the balcony. Or in general. It's like we're back at square one. I thought we were making progress, and now..." He trails off, and Loki tilts his head to the side, confused.

"There's got to be some sort of misunderstanding. Nothing's different than it was earlier today."

Loki doesn't know what to say, but it's clear from Tony's expression that silence isn't an option. After half a minute, he opens his mouth. "But you saw- You know- He said-" Loki doesn't know where to start and he trails off after each attempt.

Tony looks as if he's just found the last piece to a puzzle. Somehow they seem to understand from that. They really must be mind readers. But if they're mind readers, why do they even need to ask?

"You really need to see this, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says. The holographic video of whatever happened
with Thor after Loki fled to the penthouse once again appears in thin air.

Loki freezes. He doesn't want to watch Thor telling them that stuff, but the video starts playing anyways. "I was trying to show you this earlier, but you wouldn't let me. I wish you had, because I think we could have avoided all of this." Jarvis explains.

Loki goes to cover his ears but stops when he registers the words that the Tony on the screen is speaking.

"I don't give a crap that he's a Jotun, because it doesn't matter at all if he looks like an Avatar alien."

Wait, what? Loki stares at the holographic screen and glances at the real Tony, who's giving him smirk that's almost a real smile. But it's not a mean smirk. It's the one he always gives.

"The Aesir and the Jotnar have long been enemies." Thor is saying. "Frost Giants are-"

They know he's an enemy. He's their enemy, they hate him! Thor's their ally, and enemies of allies are enemies! What Tony just said seconds earlier doesn't apply!

But Pepper cuts Thor off. "Don't even think about finishing that sentence, because it's probably something racist again."

Steve jumps into the conversation with Thor. "You can't just write off a whole group of people with stereotypes. Haven't you guys learned that racism is wrong?"

Loki frowns. Tony had said under the table after Avatar that racism is bad, and that he thinks racist people are stupid. He said hating the Avatar guy was wrong, and now they're saying Thor's racist, to his face. But hating Frost Giants isn't wrong.

Steve seems to want to say something else, but Tony quickly inserts himself in. "I thought you used to think we humans were insignificant mortals, and you clearly changed that view, since your girlfriend is human."

Steve's speaking again. "So whatever you were about to say, which was probably something racist, have you every considered that might be wrong too?" The super-soldier stares accusingly at Thor.

Loki stares in shock. What is this? Wasn't Thor telling them all what a monster he is?! They're not even really letting him get a word in. He stares in amazement at the real people surrounding him.

They think Thor's wrong. He's not, of course, but they seem absolutely positive that he is. Just like they've always told him, before Thor came, that Asgard was wrong.

Pepper fixes Thor with a death glare, and Thor looks somewhat cowed. "You bullied him relentlessly for naturally being a different race, which is something he can't control at all. You taught him to hate his true form."

She sounds angry about it, but it's just a fact. Besides, he can control it. That's why his ugly skin is hidden right now.

"Okay, so here's what I don't get." Tony says, before Thor can respond. "You taught him to hate his naturally blue skin, which doesn't even seem that strange. I mean, this is basically what he looks like, right?"

Loki watches the Tony in the video show Thor a holographic image of an alien from Avatar. Thor
obviously doesn't like looking at it, and he says something about Frost Giants he's killed being bigger.

Thor kills Frost Giants. He's going to kill him, right? But he's not here.

As if reading his mind, Tony says "Hey, I said I'd do everything to keep Thor from hurting you. We even beat him up while you were there, so why did you think we'd suddenly change?"

Loki doesn't know what to say.

"*When he saw this, he seemed to think the guy deserved to be beaten just for looking like that.* Tony says about the Avatar guy.

"He doesn't deserve that, by the way. We went over that, remember?" The real Tony says. Loki doesn't respond. His mind is reeling with all of this. He just thought he made sense of everything and now it's all being turned upside-down again.

Tony and the others all said Asgard was wrong, but once Thor showed up, Loki thought they'd change that opinion. Nobody's ever confronted an Asgardian about what they did to him, because he deserves it. Because they were right about him.

But Tony still said Asgard was wrong, even when Thor showed up. They even said it to Thor's face. Nobody tells Thor he's wrong (especially when he's not, like now). But they just did.

"*Yet, I know Loki can change his appearance, and I know you guys tormented him for using magic or whatever the hell it is. So what did you do? Make him change his appearance when it was convenient for you and then beat him up the rest of the time?*"

Loki finds himself nodding.

"*Changing colors not bad!*" Hulk glares at Thor and punches the floor.

Bruce changes colors too, just like him, Loki thinks. He notices Bruce glance at him right now, but he still has the surprised look he was giving the screen.

This is what like what they said about Quasimodo and Esmeralda, and they said it to Thor. This is so far from what he expected, from what makes sense.

If they said that stuff to Thor, that would mean they're *not* faking their kindness now. That somehow, despite seeing his real, ugly form, they still find it in them to show him the kindness they always have. The idea is so bizarre, so strange. So *nice*.

"See? We're not faking." Tony says decisively.

Loki frowns. Maybe they're really not faking. Maybe he was wrong about them hating him. That video he just saw makes it seem like he was wrong. If he really is wrong about them hating him, that would be the best thing ever!

"Did you think we'd hate you just because Thor showed up?!" Pepper asks incredulously.

Loki doesn't reply, but he can see they get that he had thought that.

Tony gives him a look and says "Thor didn't change anything. I like you just as much as before. Maybe more."

Loki doesn't know whether to believe it. He wants to believe that, he really wants it to be true.
More than anything.

"Loki, you can trust us." Pepper says gently. "When have we ever done anything to hurt you?"

Loki cocks his head to the side. Never, really. Even now, after Thor. But people never like him after they find out what he is, except for Simba and his invisible friends and sort of Heimdall. But they didn't even hurt him when he threw the Captain America shield across the room.

"Hey, Snoopy, I'm not really the best person to talk about trusting people, but I swear you can trust us. I pinky-promise, cross my heart, all that stuff. We don't hate you. Remember what I said? Unless you go on a murdering spree or something, I won't hate you and I won't hurt you. I can't picture you doing that, ever, so we're good." Tony grins at him.

Tony pauses and asks "Seriously, why would I judge you at all, when I'm friends with Hulk?" Tony asks. Loki blinks, and Bruce looks very surprised.

"You are?" Bruce asks, as if not daring to believe it.

Tony gives Bruce a smirk. "What can I say? He's grown on me. He can't just be Loki's friend. After all, who doesn't want a big green rage machine with breathtaking anger-management issues as a friend?" Tony's smirk grows, and he adds "Besides, I've heard he gives amazing hugs."

Bruce stares at Tony, who tells him "By the way, don't you dare say he's a monster."

Shocked, Bruce glances between Pepper and Steve, who exchange a glance with Tony and nod at Bruce, like they're agreeing.

Bruce then turns to Loki. "I know you are." He says, smiling slightly. Then, glancing down at his feet, he mumbles "Thank you."

Loki smiles slightly at him. He likes Hulk, and Hulk didn't turn on him, it seems.

"Same goes for you, Snoopy." Tony looks at him pointedly.

"You really still like me?" Loki asks in disbelief. They've been saying it this whole time, but it's so hard to wrap his head around it. He thought they were lying.

"Why wouldn't I?"

Loki doesn't answer, but he knows why. The reasons are obvious. They have to know, too.

"Loki, look at me." Tony puts a hand on his shoulder without a hint of revulsion or disgust, even though he'd seen what he is. But then again, they'd touched him without any sense of disgust while he was in his hideous blue skin. "Thor didn't change anything. We're not faking you out. I don't think you're a monster in any way, just like Quasimodo's not a monster.

Loki tries to stop it, but his heart is starting to expand with hope again. Do they really still mean all the nice things they've said to him, and everything they've said about how you shouldn't hate people like Quasimodo or Esmeralda? Or him?

His gaze shifts to Simba. Should he believe this?

"You... you really think it means me, too?" Loki asks in a hushed whisper, rather like when Bruce had just asked about Tony being friends with the Hulk. Thor didn't turn them against him behind his back. This video shows him trying to, but they told Thor he was wrong...
"Think what means you?"

"The..." Loki pauses, unsure of how to describe it. "The... Quasiralda rule!" He claps his hands, liking the name he came up with.

"The what?" Steve asks.

"The Quasiralda rule!" Loki says again and pauses. "It means... you shouldn't hate people 'cause they're ugly monsters like Quasimodo. But Quasi's not even a monster! And you shouldn't hate people 'cause they're a gypsy like Esmeralda, 'cause Frollo was wrong about gypsies. They're not all evil!"

"Or you shouldn't hate someone because they're a Jotun, like you." Tony adds.

Loki frowns. It's not the same! Tony once again seems to read his thoughts.

"Loki, the whole reason I showed you that movie was to try to help you understand that stuff applies to you, just like it applies to Quasimodo and Esmeralda. So, yes, the Quasiralda rule applies to you. You shouldn't hate someone because they have blue skin or ice, and you shouldn't hate someone because they do magic."

But he's-

Tony gives him a look and says "Don't even think it, Snoopy."

"Do we need to go over this all again?" Tony quirks an eyebrow. "That movie applies to you. So does Aladdin. We didn't hate Genie either, remember? He has blue skin and magic, and he's awesome. Just like you."

Loki feels his eyes going wide. Tony just said he's awesome, and he doesn't seem to be teasing.

Tony goes on. "So let's see. I don't have anything against Hulk, or the aliens in Avatar, or Genie, or Quasimodo..." He ticks them off on his fingers. "So why on Earth were you so worried about what I'd think of you? Especially after I saw you in your alien form and didn't react badly at all. At least, I don't think I did. Don't say it's because you deserve to be hated, because you don't deserve it any more than any of them do. Which is to say you don't deserve it at all."

Loki stares at him with wide eyes. Once again, his world is being rearranged. Can this really be happening? Can he really be wrong about them hating him? Can they actually like him, despite seeing his real form?

"Hey, remember how in Monsters Inc, everyone thought Boo was a monster?" Tony asks suddenly. "That's ridiculous, right, because she's like a two-year-old kid. She's the furthest thing from a monster, and they were all acting like she was Godzilla or something."

Loki has no clue what a Godzilla is, but he nods hesitantly.

"Well, that's what Asgard was like. They think you're a monster, but you're not. Try this- imagine you're Boo, and everyone in Asgard is that weird purple lizard guy."

Loki giggles at the description and supplies the name. "Randall!" He scrunches his nose. He didn't like Randall much.

"Right, Randall. Ok, Asgard is Randall. You're Boo, because they see a monster when there isn't one."
Loki cocks his head to the side. No matter what Tony says, he's still a monster, right? "Boo was scared of Randall. And Randall thought Boo was dangerous, and he put her in the scream 'xtractor and she was really, really scared!"

"But Boo beats Randall in the end." Pepper says quietly. Loki looks at her, surprised. He didn't even know Pepper knew about Boo!

"She hit him!" Loki flaps his hands. "With a big wood thing and he changed his looks!"

He frowns, having forgotten about that. Randal's bad, and he changes his looks. Just like him.

"I do bad freaky things like Randall!" Loki blurs.

Bruce gives him a stern look. "He's not bad because he can turn invisible or put a pattern on his skin. He's bad because he wants to kidnap Boo." Bruce says. Loki wonders how they all know about Boo. Actually, Steve looks kind of confused.

"Asgard is also Frollo. You're Quasimodo, and Esmeralda." Pepper says. "The Quasiralda rule applies to you."

"The Quasiralda-Loki rule!" Loki wriggles his body, laughing at the name.

They really mean this! "I'm Genie?" Loki mumbles, very hesitantly.

Tony just grins at him. "You've got it. What's Asgard's role in Aladdin?"

Jafar? He wonders, biting his lip. No. The lamp! The lamp Genie was stuck in, and Aladdin freed him! He doesn't say it out loud.

"Guess who you are from The Lion King." Bruce says, glancing pointedly at who's in Loki's arms.

"Simba!" Loki squeals, giggling and hugging Simba tightly. He hops up and down excitedly.

"I hear you're both princes, too." Pepper says, smiling.

Loki realizes he's happy again.

This is way too good to be true.

They're not faking or lying, but it can't be true.

Maybe the whole day is some weird, wonderful, impossible dream, and he'll wake up in his bed in his room here. If he wakes up, Thor won't have come. But if this is a dream, this whole conversation about everything they've told him being real, no matter what Thor says, the whole part about them looking at his Jotun skin and not hating it... none of that would be real either.

This feels so nice, though, and he doesn't want to wake up and find out it's all fake, even if it means Thor wouldn't have come. Even though this situation is insane, it's what he's wanted his whole life, to have people who really like him even though he's a monster and a freak. But that's way too much to ask for.

Loki wrings his hands together anxiously, rocking back and forth as he stares into Tony's eyes. Tony doesn't break the eye contact.

If it's a dream, he wants to sleep forever. But he can't.
He starts to cry again. This had seemed so... real. But now his hope is torn cruelly away from him again.

The Norns must really hate him, like everyone else, to keep bringing his hopes up only to send them crashing down again.

Abruptly, angrily, Loki slaps himself across the face with an annoyed scream. He's stupid, he fell for it again, nobody will ever like him. It's just a dream!

Instead of waking up, he feels a stinging pain on his cheek. He blinks.

Pain means it's not a dream.

It's not a dream? Loki slaps himself again. Pain.

Not a dream!

"Loki don't hit yourself!" Tony grabs his wrist, but Loki jerks it out of his grip.

"Say them again! Say the nice things again!" Loki practically shouts as he flaps his hands wildly, happily. This crazy, wonderful, impossible situation is real! They've seen him at his worst, they've seen his real skin, and his magic, and despite everything, they still like him! Thor's visit didn't change that! They still say the opposite of everything in Asgard. Even if they're not right, they think it's right.

"You're my friend-" Tony starts, and Loki squeals when Tony says those words, those words he didn't think he'd hear once they saw him.

Loki slaps himself even harder, and he almost doesn't even feel the pain that lets him know it's real.

It's real! He giggles, and soon it turns into a full out laugh and he can't stop.

His best friend, his Tony, doesn't even see a monster when he looks at him, even if there's blue skin or red eyes or ice. His Tony, who lets him live here, who says he likes him and says he's smart, who's told him all these wonderful things, and despite all the evidence against them, actually means every word he says.

He's not stupid enough to think he's not a monster, but his friends don't see it. Which is crazy, but really, really amazing.

Slap! It's real! He hops up and down excitedly, squealing and flicking his fingers.

Tony grabs his wrists again. "Snoopy, don't hurt yourself." Tony's looking at him with something like... concern? Not disgust, not hate. They're all looking at him like that, like even something as small as a slap is something he shouldn't get, like they don't like seeing him hurt even that much, or little, he supposes. Slaps to the face are nothing.

He's still laughing, with relief, with joy. They don't want him dead, they don't even want him hurt, not even a little bit. Nobody's ever been like that before. He really does have friends that other people say are real!

His friends don't see a freak when they look at him, either, even if there's magic or crying or nightmares, or getting so scared he pees his pants. Thank the Norns that almost never happens, though. They haven't even said anything about that, though.
His friends don't even talk about him before- before the comments about what happened, can't take some blows to the head, before the slaves said they didn't end up like him.

His friends look at him and just see Loki.
Chapter Summary

Halloween Night starts to get slightly better.

Later, Bruce tries to teach Loki how to meditate, but winds up learning that Loki has a somewhat sneaky side, and a very specific goal.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Okay, so that conversation had been, well, interesting, Tony thinks. On Loki's part, there had been screaming, crying and laughter, the last one sometimes being at inappropriate times. He'd also thrown Steve's shield across the room in the middle of a... tantrum? No that doesn't seem like the right word. Rage-fest? Blind-attack-induced-by-panic?

Well, the screaming wasn't as awkward as the crying. Even though Tony's seen Loki cry before, those had been nothing like the times just recently.

After they'd told him everything, Loki had started crying as if the world were about to end because of him, and then he'd started hitting himself, which somewhat worryingly made the god laugh.

Loki had also said something that indicated he'd gone through some situation that uncomfortably reminded Tony of Obadiah Stane betraying him. He wonders if that Heimdall guy knew about that when he decided to drop Loki here. It's another thing the two of them seem to have in common, though Tony sincerely hopes Heimdall doesn't know everything about his life. That would be really creepy, not to mention a serious breach of privacy.

Tony stands there, realizing he's still holding onto Loki's wrists from his second futile attempt to get Loki to stop hitting himself. He lets go of them once he notices this, since it's not like holding really did anything. Loki had already easily overpowered him once, freeing his wrists from Tony's grip until Tony grabbed them again. As of right now Loki doesn't look like he's going to start hitting himself again.

"You okay?" Tony asks, staring at Loki to make sure he doesn't miss anything potentially telling in his reaction.

Loki nods and smiles, actually seeming okay. Better than okay, Tony amends. Loki appears to be back to his normal self, and Tony hopes that's not a ruse.

"Why were you hitting yourself, Snoopy?" Tony asks, not even sure what he expects the answer to be. Actually, he's not even sure if he should expect an answer in the first place.

"I'm awake!" Loki laughs, bouncing on his toes. He goes to slap himself another time, but Tony reflexively grabs his wrist yet again, even though that wouldn't stop Loki. However, this time, Loki doesn't hit himself, instead acting as if Tony really could hold him back.

Seeing Loki slap himself as he'd just done a minute or so ago and then laugh was rather unsettling, making the god seem somewhat crazy. Some of those slaps looked pretty brutal too, leaving red
marks on the god's cheeks, though they've faded already due to his super-fast healing and durability. They might have bruised a human, though. It was almost painful to watch Loki do that to himself but Loki hardly seems to care about the pain. As a godly alien being, he probably has a ridiculously high pain tolerance anyways, to go along with his superhuman durability and all that jazz, but Tony has a feeling that Loki's pain tolerance was conditioned even more by frequent exposure to pain greater than slaps, no matter how brutal they look.

Before now, the only self-injurious behavior he'd seen Loki do was scratch at his lips, presumably when he was having a nightmare or flashback about that lip-sewing incident, but those weren't quite the same because they were during flashbacks. Well, there's the lip scratching and then there's the elephant in the room that was recently pointed out, the whole potential suicide issue. Loki had claimed he wasn't trying to kill himself, but Tony's not entirely sure if it's true or not. Loki had laughed after that, too, which hadn't exactly been appropriate. Tony Stark saying something is inappropriate to laugh at is about as rare as a solar eclipse, but making light of suicide is one line he just doesn't cross.

Tony glances at Bruce, still remembering the words his science bro said about a year and a half ago, back when their little band of superheroes wasn't exactly a team yet. "I didn't see an end, so I put a bullet in my mouth... and the other guy spit it back out!"

Bruce probably understands whatever Loki was going through earlier in the evening the best out of any of them. Sure, Tony's faced death countless times, and at one point hadn't told anyone he was slowly being poisoned by Palladium, although that wasn't facing death voluntarily. In the Battle of New York, he'd chosen to fly a nuke into the- No, Tony, he mentally berates himself, don't think about that! Think about something else, anything else!

The memory starts to surface and Tony tries to think about something else and shove it down, without much success. Until Loki throws his arms around him, that is. The physical contact helps him force the memory down. It seems to help Loki when somebody's touching him too. Simply finding comfort in human contact is a basic thing. Tony supposes that preventing a flashback that way isn't too different from waking up when someone touches you and shakes you awake.

Tony's not sure what the reason for the hug is. Is Loki somehow sensing the possibility of a flashback on Tony's part, or is the hug just a coincidence? On a hunch, Tony's guessing it's a coincidence, because Loki's not singing that lullaby he always sang the other times he thought Tony needed a hug, which Tony wound up singing to him earlier tonight before the whole Thor confrontation.

He hugs Loki back, telling himself that maybe the reason for the hug is because Loki's seeking comfort himself. That idea sits better with Tony, simply because he doesn't like thinking about himself as the one needing to be consoled. Besides, it's actually a pretty realistic explanation, considering how Loki had apparently thought all his friends turned on him once Thor showed up and how panicked he'd been in general this evening.

"You're hugging me." Loki mumbles, and Tony briefly wonders why he'd state the obvious. Then it dawns on him that since Loki's used to people hating his appearance, he's probably surprised that Tony's hugging him like nothing's different. Which is quite true- he's blue, so what?

Even if Loki really hadn't been trying to kill himself, Tony thinks as he hopes that's the case, Bruce would still at least understand the part about not liking his other form.

After seeing Loki's Jotun form for the first time, Tony honestly has no clue why the Aesir seem to hate the blue-skinned frost giants. He'd sort of been imagining that there would be all sorts of odd
beings in Asgard, or at least in other realms or whatever they're called. Maybe there are beings with fangs or extra limbs or something that make them look not at all human. He's pretty sure Thor's mentioned dark elves at some point, whatever the heck those are.

Wookiees probably wouldn't be too out of place in Asgard, he thinks with a smirk as a mental image of Chewbacca in Thor's armor with Mjolnir pops into his head. So Asgardians probably have experience with vastly different beings, but apparently something as little as skin color is reason enough to hate someone in Asgard. Although really, it's not like Earth was any better even a couple centuries ago.

How can the Aesir call Loki a monster for his looks when he doesn't even look that different in his real form? Aside from those lines on his forehead and the backs of his hands (and perhaps his arms, although he was wearing long sleeves so Tony couldn't see), and the chameleon act, Loki really hadn't looked any different. It's not even like he was an ugly shade of blue or anything, not that it would have merited the racism the Aesir have against the Jotuns if the color wasn't aesthetically pleasing.

The lines, which Bruce had assured Loki weren't monster lines, were actually rather decorative, and it occurs to Tony how boring human foreheads are in comparison. The red eyes, although somewhat of a cliché for creepy things, weren't bad either, but it had been a little odd since Tony's so used to the green eyes Loki so obviously prefers. Loki basically had different eyes, and the eyes are a really distinctive part of a person. His eyes still had their wide, slightly-glassy look.

Loki's probably the only person who can hug a friend for this long and not make it feel weird, Tony thinks. If anyone else hugged him for this amount of time, it would probably seem too intimate, and it would seem like they were interested in him or something. But Loki somehow makes it seem like a normal gesture.

Loki snuggles in closer and Tony feels a dampness pressing into his leg, which reminds him about the wet spot on Loki's pants earlier. Tony had barely stopped himself earlier from making some ill-considered quip to the god about being housebroken, or perhaps a sarcastic suggestion about diapers. That certainly wouldn't have been appreciated, since Loki had clearly been ashamed about wetting himself already, so it's rather fortunate that Tony had been able to hold back his tongue for once. The accident undoubtedly had something to do with Loki being panicked, rather than incontinence, since this is the first time it happened. Hey, at least it's pee instead of the more disgusting second option.

The hug ends somewhat abruptly when Tony remembers why Loki's leg is wet, and Tony suggests that Loki go change, adding that Dum-E can deal with the soiled pants. Loki stares at him for a bit, and Tony's starting to wonder if he needs to specify that Loki should go to his bedroom first, remembering the one incident in the clothing store where Loki had started removing his pants in public. Loki's giving him a rather strange look, so Tony shoots him a questioning look. Loki doesn't respond at first, so Tony asks "What?"

"You're not like them, 'cause you're not making fun of me for it." Loki gestures towards the wet spot on his pants. In a quiet voice, he asks "You're not gonna start... are you?" He doesn't sound quite as worried as he normally does about this sort of stuff.

"Of course we're not going to make fun of you for it." Pepper says. "You were really scared, I bet, and that's why it happened." Her voice is understanding, until she shoots Tony a death glare as if he's going to say otherwise and start teasing Loki, which admittedly he would have done to anybody else and might have even done in another circumstance with Loki. Tony holds his hands up in a sign of peace.
Loki grins widely at her, clapping his hands. Clearly, Peppers answer was what he'd been hoping to hear. "I think..." Loki starts to mumble in an almost sleepily quiet tone as he goes over to Pepper and hugs her too. "I think you guys still like me an' you're still my friends and nobody says you're not reals, nope nope nope. Not likes what they say 'bout the others."

Tony feels a wave of triumph. That's major progress right there, since Loki apparently believes them now about them still liking him, which he hadn't believed earlier. "Of course we're still your friends, Snoopy, and we still like you a lot."

Pepper seconds that with her arms around Loki, looking up at him because he's taller than she is. Jarvis, Steve and Bruce all add their agreement.

Loki grins and says "Simba too. He says his best friends are Nala and me. But what 'bouts Timon and Pumbaa? Why's he leave them out?" Tony's noticed a couple random words had an s tacked on the end, and he wonders if maybe it's an All-Tongue glitch or something. Loki seems uncharacteristically tired, as opposed to his usual state of constant energy and motion. Tony can't exactly blame him if tonight's events wore him out- actually, he'd be impressed if they hadn't. Loki eventually stops hugging Pepper.

"Well, he hasn't met them yet. After all, he talks about his dad like he's still alive and he talks about Nala." Tony says, because by now he's heard Simba's prerecorded conversation so many times he has it memorized. Which has to be a waste of brain cells.

"And you like my magic?" Loki asks sort of randomly in a quiet voice, staring at them. They assure him that they do. Loki nods, looking somewhat confused as if the idea is still strange. He grabs his long-coat from where it had been left on the floor after they'd taken it off to remove his Iron Man suit and starts to go towards his room, saying "C'mon Simba." to his lion. There's a slight spring in his step as he heads off, and Tony hears him continuing to chatter to Simba. "I thought you left me on the balcony, but I shoulda known you wouldn't do that. Just like Tony didn't! He's really nice, you know. Yeah, I know you know."

Tony smiles slightly at that as he kicks back on the couch, sighing in relief. The whole conversation they'd had after the balcony incident had been tough (the toughest part obviously being the potential suicide part). For a while, it really had seemed like they were back on square one. All the progress Loki had made in trusting them and knowing he wouldn't get hit, as well as perhaps starting to not view his magic as bad had seemed to fly right out the window. But it seems like now, after that whole conversation where they reassured Loki that they didn't hate him, they might've actually made progress, which would be really awesome.

"Should we really be sending him there on his own?" Steve asks. "I mean, what if he tries to..." Steve trails off, but Tony's ninety-nine percent sure he knows what was going to come.

"I will alert you if Mr. Loki does anything that could lead to himself getting harmed," Jarvis speaks up, clearly guessing the same thing. "Although right now he seems to have no inclination to do so."

Tony hadn't even considered that issue, but he's glad to hear it's apparently not an issue in the first place. He can't help adding to Steve "What do you want to do? Go in there and watch him change?" Steve hastily denies that, and Tony smirks. Annoying the super-soldier is so much fun.

"So where's Thor?" Bruce asks, and Steve seems glad about the change of topic.

"Prince Odinson is no longer in the tower." Jarvis informs them. Tony already knows that, but it's certainly news to Bruce. Tony remarks that he sort of wishes Thor was still here.
"Why, do you want to smash him into the floor again?" Steve asks in an annoyed, accusatory voice.

"Whoa, Spangles, who got your spandex up in a bunch?" Tony arches an eyebrow, although he's sort of annoyed.

Steve has his whole your-moral-compass-isn't-pointing-North-like-mine look going right now, and the super-soldier gives Tony an unamused look. "You were beating him up while telling him that beating Loki up was wrong. Two wrongs don't make a right." Wow, he's even using cliché lines and everything. Tony pinches the bridge of his nose. His headache from earlier is just getting worse. Maybe he should get some scotch, although that would probably just get him annoying lectures from both Steve and Pepper. Maybe he'll wait until they've left.

"Well, he deserved a taste of his own medicine, after what he's done to Loki." Tony shoots back. Is Steve actually feeling sorry for Thor or something?! After everything he did? "Are you saying what he did was right?"

"Of course not. He was wrong, but you're stooping to his level." Geez, Steve can be annoying. "Regardless of if he deserved it, beating him up wasn't right. He wasn't even fighting you for most of it. Besides, what did hitting him accomplish?" Steve asks.

"It gave him an idea of what he and the others put Loki through." Tony crosses his arms. Thor deserved it.

Tony's never been one for Steve's lectures on right and wrong, but he admits to himself in the back of his mind that hitting Thor, while satisfying, didn't really accomplish anything aside from avenging Loki. It's not like that would show the thunderer that he's wrong about Loki, that there's no reason to hate him. Granted, Tony still doesn't know the whole story, like whatever Thor said about telling Heimdall that Loki should be sent to Midgard, but he doubts that'll change much.

"So what do you suggest? Have a nice little chat with him? Maybe break out the teacups?" Of course, Tony knows this is probably exactly what Steve has in mind, although maybe without the tea part.

"It might get him to understand why he was wrong, whereas beating him up won't teach him anything." Steve's tone is even more preachy now, Tony thinks, even though he'd realized in the back of his mind that beating up Loki didn't change anything. At least Steve's moral views make him on their side instead of Thor's.

"He can't get away scot-free with what he did to Loki." Tony protests. There really does need to be some sort of punishment for it.

Bruce and Pepper manage to diffuse the argument, although Steve and Tony continue to glare at each other. The other two seem to take Steve's side, saying that hitting Thor might not have been the right thing to do. Bruce especially takes this view. Then again, Tony supposes that Hulk takes care of all the violent thoughts or something.

Steve actually apologizes for his last comment, to Tony's surprise, and he grudgingly accepts the apology, sort of.

Jarvis shows Bruce the footage of what happened with Thor, but Bruce focuses more on Hulk hugging Loki than Hulk beating Thor into the floor.

Watching the scene again, Tony realizes Steve was right- not that he admits to this realization.
Even though Tony hates people who beat up defenseless victims, that's sort of what they'd done to Thor. Beating up people who aren't attacking you is wrong. Tony's slightly uncomfortable now, watching himself hit Thor with a repulsor blast while Thor still didn't even really know what was going on and wasn't fighting. He'd even told Thor not to defend himself, which is apparently what Asgard did to Loki. A small part of Tony has to admit that beating Thor up and shoving him into walls probably wasn't exactly morally justifiable, but he deserved something for everything he put Loki through.

Although, it wasn't like Thor was Loki's sole tormentor and he has done a lot of good as an Avenger, so Tony can't just write him off as a bad guy now. Not that any of them are clearly good or bad. Yes, Thor deserves to pay for what he's done, but if they beat him up for it, aren't they just as bad as him? Tony's not sure when Thor's going to show up a second time, and he's not entirely sure what he'll do to the thunderer when he does, either.

Ugh, why does this have to be so complicated? Tony half wishes it would just be plain and simple, like in the Disney movies Loki loves so much, where the bad guys are clearly bad and get what's coming for them.

Bruce pulls Tony aside privately. Tony's rather amazed that Loki's still in his room at this point, but he supposes it works out better for their conversations this way. Perhaps Loki got distracted and is reading *Calvin and Hobbes* or *Peanuts* or playing with Simba or something.

"Thanks again for what you said about the Other Guy being your friend." Bruce tells him. Tony waves it aside.

"He is now. He's not what he seems at first. Besides, he didn't even do that much damage to my tower this time, not that it's a big deal if he does. Seriously, Bruce, it's better to let him out here than somewhere else. At least this way there aren't other people he could hurt."

Okay, maybe that last part wasn't the most sensitive thing he could say, Tony thinks as Bruce looks very uncomfortable at the idea of Hulk hurting people, but when has he ever been close to sensitive? The main point is that he seriously doesn't care if Hulk makes in appearance in his tower, although he'd prefer he didn't make an appearance in the penthouse. It's not like he ever kicked Bruce out for it anyways, even when he'd Hulked-out in the penthouse twice that one day a few weeks ago. Tony starts to head back, but apparently the conversation isn't over. Actually, it turns out that wasn't the reason Bruce pulled him aside in the first place.

"Look, I'm not sure you handled things well." Bruce starts, fiddling with his glasses. Geez, why is everyone on his back all of the sudden? Tony opens his mouth, ready to cut off another lecture about beating up Thor, but Bruce continues before he can. "The way you were mad and annoyed at Loki earlier... that sort of thing doesn't do anything to help. If anything, it makes things worse." Bruce says quietly, before adding with a humorless, self-deprecating smile and says "Trust me, I know."

There's a bit of a pause, but Tony uncharacteristically remains silent.

Bruce continues calmly, his self-deprecating smile thankfully gone now. "Don't get me wrong—you're great for Loki and he's really lucky to have you as a friend. But you can't expect him to get over his issues in a month. He's got centuries of stuff to work through, and it takes us humans a lot longer than a month to get through serious stuff."

Okay, *that* hits a little too close to home. After all, Tony himself still isn't totally over Afghanistan and the Ten Rings, or the Battle of New York. It's been years since the cave and a year and a half since the Avengers' first mission together, and those incidents certainly hadn't lasted centuries like
all the abuse Loki suffered.

Although he only felt somewhat guilty about Thor, he starts to feel really guilty about this. Why is he expecting Loki's progress to be quick, when his own isn't? Frankly, it's probably remarkable that they've made as much progress as they have, even with their apparently temporary setback tonight, where Loki evidently thought they were only pretending to like him after Thor showed up. Besides, Loki had apparently thought that Tony hated him, and being annoyed at him probably drew out the whole process of convincing him that wasn't the case. Not to mention, if Loki's really suicidal, getting angry at him definitely wouldn't help, as Bruce just pointed out. It might just make him want to die more.

Tony really wasn't angry with Loki, but now that he thinks about it, he had sort of directed some of his annoyance and anger- about the situation, about Thor, about things that weren't Loki but were related to him- at the god.

Loki hadn't seemed to think that Tony was mad at him when he hugged him, but who's to say he's not thinking that under the surface? Loki seems to wear his emotions on his sleeves a lot, but he's not always readable, as evidenced by the whole misunderstanding on both sides that they (hopefully) just worked through.

He's about to ask Bruce whether he thinks Loki was actually contemplating suicide or if they should believe Loki when he says he wasn't, but Loki wanders back in before he can. Simba is currently asking "Do you have a best friend?"

Loki replies that he does, mentioning that Tony's his best friend, and Simba answers "I have two-Nala, and you!"

"And Timon and Pumbaa, later." Loki tells Simba. Loki's in his Iron Man pajamas, and he'd apparently left the coat in his room. Pepper smiles slightly at the sight while Steve shoots Tony a look, perhaps wondering if Tony forced the pajamas and costume on him. Sheesh, why does everyone think that? Admittedly, Bruce seemed to be mostly joking when he asked, but still.

Tony informs him that Loki had chosen both the pajamas and the costume, and Loki nods.

Loki picks up his drawstring bag from the floor and rummages through it, but instead of pulling out the Iron Man and Hulk action figures, he pulls out the Captain America one.

He approaches Steve (who's still in his stars-and-stripes suit, although he's not wearing the mask anymore) less cautiously than he had before. Apparently, watching Steve tell Thor he was wrong really raised Steve's status in Loki's eyes. Loki gives Steve a rather long demonstration of the toy's posing ability, putting the figure into various poses which he tries to get Steve to copy, although some of them aren't even possible for humans to perform without breaking something. Tony smirks when Loki makes Steve do something resembling a sort of ballet pose, and he really hopes Jarvis got a good picture of it.

While Loki is distracted with that, Tony and Bruce quietly return to their conversation in a separate room. Bruce believes that Loki's telling the truth about not trying to kill himself, and Tony's starting to be mostly convinced that's the case, too. Still, they agree they should keep an eye out for any worrying signs, and Jarvis says he'd be watching extra closely even if Tony hadn't just told him to do so.

When they go back into the living room, Loki's showing Steve and Pepper the other Avengers toys. Pepper's already seen them, but she watches anyways. Steve asks why the Hulk and Iron Man ones look so much better than the others. Tony's actually curious about what Loki's answer will be, since he generally hates talking about this stuff.
To his surprise, Loki answers with "I made them." Admittedly, he doesn't answer when Steve follows up by asking how he made them, but it's definitely another step in the right direction.

What Bruce said has been gnawing at Tony, and he pulls Loki aside. Loki hadn't seemed annoyed or worried when hugging him, but it could be hidden under the surface or something. Tony blurts out, without preamble "You know I'm not mad at you, right?"

Loki stares at him and says matter-of-factly "You don't seem mad."

"Good. Because I'm not." Tony says. "Hopefully it didn't seem like I was angry at you earlier, since I was never mad at you. I'm mad at Thor and the other Asgardians."

Loki hadn't seemed annoyed or worried when hugging him, but it could be hidden under the surface or something. Tony blurts out, without preamble "You know I'm not mad at you, right?"

Loki grins and does a sort of happy wriggle with his body. He obviously likes hearing that, not that Tony can blame him.

"Even though I'm blue?"

"You're not blue right now, but yeah, even when you're blue. I actually think blue is a nice color for you." Tony replies. "You know, they lied to you in Asgard. You're not the only magic user there."

Loki's head tilts further to the side and his mouth turns downwards in a disbelieving frown.

"Here, watch this." Tony has Jarvis play the clip from when Thor said that Odin and Frigga had used magic to hide Loki's real form.

Perhaps dumping that on him, on top of everything else, is just too much to process at the moment, after already finding out that his friends don't in fact hate him like everyone else. Loki doesn't seem to believe it yet as he stares at the screen after Jarvis pauses the footage.

"But they hate magic. At least, the Allfather does. Lady Frigga never said anything bad 'bout it, but he dids!" There's the glitch again, Tony can't help but notice.

Tony doesn't have any idea why magic would be considered bad, especially if the leader of Asgard does it on the side. He supposes that, from what Thor's said, Asgard seems very concerned with warrior prowess and all that jazz, something Loki seems to lack. Magic is very different from waving an ax or a hammer around, but Loki's clearly powerful and might have made a pretty capable warrior, if he'd had the chance and been so inclined. Although perhaps doing magic isn't something a warrior would do, since it's clearly frowned upon for some reason. Anyways, that's sort of a moot point, since Loki really doesn't seem like the warrior type. Which probably hadn't helped his standing in Asgard any.

"I think..." Loki mumbles, seemingly both to Simba and them. "I think they were wrong, when they said I'd never have real friends."

"They were wrong about way more than that, buddy." Tony puts his hand on Loki's shoulder. "And
remember, we're your friends."

Loki doesn't answer but he smiles a million-dollar smile and flicks his fingers. "I made my other friends up," He mumbles. "But they felt real."

"Well, they were real to you, right?" Bruce asks. Loki nods.

Steve asks about Loki's other friends but the god doesn't answer, instead asking Tony out of the blue "You're not gonna let me wear the suit anymore, are you?"

"I hadn't really thought about it. I mean, it's a Halloween costume, and most people don't wear those unless it's Halloween, but I guess you can wear it. As a costume, just to make things clear, I'm not going to be outfitting it with weapons and bringing you along to fight Doom-bots anyways."

Loki looked like he wouldn't be too thrilled if that were the case, anyways.

"Even though I iced it?" Loki asks in a somewhat small voice, looking down at the ground.

"The first time Mr. Stark flew the Mark Two armor," Jarvis pipes up. "He flew high enough that it froze and he barely thawed it in time to avoid crashing into the ground. His suits don't freeze anymore, since he found a way to fix the icing problem, but we did not think to equip your costume suit with that, Mr. Loki."

A blink is Loki's only response. He's silent for a couple seconds before he changes the subject.

"Are you really jealous of my magic, Jarvis? You said you were, right?"

"Jealous is not quite the right word, Mr. Loki, since there are no ill feelings." Jarvis says politely. "I merely wish I could do some things with the same efficiency you do, like modifying armor, which you do wonderfully with Toy Stark. If I were jealous of you, which I assure you I am not since I don't really feel jealousy, I would probably be worried about losing my job and having you replace me. You made Toy Stark's armor much quicker than I can make even a piece of Mr. Stark's armor."

Jarvis really doesn't need to worry about that, Tony privately thinks, since he has a lot more social skills than Loki. He sort of wonders what Loki would do if tasked to reserve a hotel room for him or something. While that would probably be a highly entertaining conversation to overhear, it wouldn't be practical at all. Tony doubts that Loki even knows what a hotel is, much less what one would even do to reserve one.

"So you don't hate me," Loki singsongs, "You don't hate me, even though I do all that stuff."

Tony feels like he's beating a dead horse, but keeping what Bruce said in mind, he calmly tells Loki once again that they don't hate him and that his magic and real form are both awesome.

"Remember, Mr. Loki, we are quite alike." Jarvis says. "There is no reason for them to dislike what you can do when I do those things as well."

Tony snorts slightly and says "Yeah you're alike- you even both have British accents." Given that Loki's not even from Earth, he's not entirely sure how he'd wound up with the accent.

Loki nods and grins at him. Ten seconds later, Loki's eyes widen and he says "Oh yeah! Jarvis?"

"Yes, Mr. Loki?"
"What does *kinky* mean?"

"Hi Bruce!" Loki calls out happily, trotting into Bruce's lab from the elevator. Bruce smiles slightly at Loki's enthusiasm and returns the greeting. Loki really has been back to his usual self, it seems, despite yesterday's whole misunderstanding.

"Are we gonna do All-Tongue stuff again?" Bruce is somewhat surprised, but glad, that the first question out of Loki's mouth isn't whether he can let 'Hulk-y' out or not. Loki's asked him that countless times, and he's avoided Loki after every time.

Bruce still isn't sure whether or not letting the Other Guy out is a good idea. Every time he's come out in the tower, he's smashed stuff. Despite what Tony says about the cost of repairs not mattering, Bruce still feels guilty.

Tony said yesterday that he now considers the Other Guy his friend, and Steve does too, apparently. Pepper seemed somewhat nervous and he's not entirely sure if she considers the Other Guy a friend, but she doesn't seem to have anything against the Other Guy.

"Actually, I thought we might do something different today, if that's okay with you." Bruce replies from where he's sitting on a gymnastics mat he'd dragged in from the training room about a week ago, once Tony declared that this lab was 'officially' Bruce's, even though there wasn't anything truly official about it, since it's not listed under his name or anything. If Loki finds it at all strange that Bruce is sitting on a blue mat, he doesn't say anything.

"Come sit down." Bruce pats the blue area in front of him. The mat is designed for tumbling and is easily big enough to seat two adults, which is good because that's what it's going to be used for right now. Loki immediately plonks down at full speed, basically collapsing onto the mat, laughing when he realizes it doesn't hurt. He smacks his hand against it, as if testing it out without a whole lot of force, and then the god leans forward so his head is touching the floor. He runs his fingertips through one of the creases where the mat is supposed to fold.

"It's like sitting in mud, only it's not wet or sticky and it doesn't make that sound." Loki says as he sinks down slightly into the material, and he makes a sort of squelching sound with his mouth, apparently trying to give an example of the sound mud makes. That certainly wasn't the way Bruce would have chosen to describe it. "You know I can get mud off stuff?"

Bruce isn't sure if Loki means he can remove it by using his magic or just plain old elbow grease, but Loki's already moved on. "I wish this wasn't blue, though." His long, pale fingers drum the mat and he frowns at it slightly. Just like Bruce isn't too fond of green because of the Other Guy, Loki apparently doesn't like blue because of his real form.

Hopefully, they'll eventually get Loki to stop hating his blue form, sometime.

Loki starts crawling around in small circles on the mat, trying to get Simba to balance on his back like he's a horse and Simba's the rider. Although riders don't usually stand up (which is Simba's permanent position), and they generally aren't lions.

"What color would you make this, if you could choose?" Bruce asks, tapping the mat himself, not even realizing that that's hinting about Loki's magic. He's expecting Loki's answer to be either green(if he were a betting man, he'd even put money on it, since it's Loki's favorite color), or brown to go with his description of it being like mud.

It's a good thing he hadn't bet, because he would have lost. "Purple. A nice bright happy purple,
like Rapunzel's-Dress-Purple." Apparently, Loki's named a color in Rapunzel's honor. Green energy starts forming around Loki's hands. "Oh, and maybe some bright orange too, in little squares." Bruce wonders if it's a coincidence that the shirt Loki's wearing right now (under that somewhat ridiculous starry long coat) is bright orange, or if he picked the color for that reason.

Courtesy of Loki's magic, the mat is now purple with small orange squares arranged in a grid. "Oops..." Loki mumbles, now looking at him with wide, worried green eyes. "Sorry! I didn't mean to! You hate it, don't you?" Bruce isn't sure if he's asking about this specifically or about his magic in general.

Bruce is astonished that Loki hadn't freaked out about using his magic. Then again, he seems to be perfectly at ease changing his action figures now, which is definitely good. Changing his own appearance is an entirely different matter, still. Perhaps he has some bad memories about doing that.

"Of course not. I don't hate it. I think it looks very... nice." Bruce says the last part in a neutral tone. To be honest, the colors clash horribly and the whole thing is a huge eyesore, but Bruce decides to keep those opinions to himself.

"I like it." Loki admits, clapping his hands. Looking down, he traces lines between the orange squares and says in a quieter voice. "I made Toy Stark fly earlier this morning. Tony said it was really neat. He didn't fly with fire, like Tony does in his suits. He just flew. He flewed!" Loki laughs at that last part and points at something unseen in the air. "Like Peter Pan, without anything, not fire in his suit or a flying carpet, or even wings and Pixie Dust like Tinker Bell. He just said 'I'm gonna fly' and he did."

"That does sound really neat." Bruce says, and Loki looks up with a somewhat happy expression. "I wish I could have seen it. Nice job staying calm, by the way." Bruce tells him, and Loki positively glows at the praise and the approval of his magic.

"Speaking of remaining calm, that's why we're here like this." Bruce continues. Loki shoots him a quizzical look at that, and Bruce smiles slightly. "Have you ever heard of meditation?"

"Med-it...?"

"Meditation." Bruce supplies the word again, and Loki repeats it a couple times in a singsong voice. Loki asks Jarvis what meditation means, and Bruce answers instead. "It's a way to keep yourself calm. I do it a lot, and I figured you could join me." It's one of the things he'd picked up to try to keep the Other Guy at bay, and he thinks it might help Loki. Considering how often Loki gets panicked about either a nightmare or magic, Bruce thinks it would be good for Loki to learn to calm himself down. He's not sure how Loki had done it in Asgard, but right now the only thing that seems to work is being hugged, which isn't exactly a great long-term coping strategy.

He demonstrates a simple breathing technique, and Loki points at him, exclaiming "I've seen you do that! You do it to not be mad."

Bruce blinks, somewhat surprised that Loki knows the reason for his meditation. Bruce just gives a sort of non-commital shrug in response. "I asked Jarvis to remain silent unless absolutely necessary." Bruce explains Jarvis' lack of response. He knows Loki would just talk to Jarvis the whole time, and the AI would be a distraction. Bruce already has his work cut out for him with this idea, because Loki and meditation don't exactly fit together in his head, considering Loki almost always moves in some way and doesn't have a particularly long attention span.

Loki pouts slightly at this news and says something about it being like when "Dr. C" comes.
"Would you like to be able to calm down on your own and maybe not be scared for as long?" Loki nods slightly.

"So are you willing to try it?" Bruce asks him. He's not going to force this on him.

Loki slowly nods and asks "Can we play a game after?"

A deal, then. "Sure, we can play a game later." Bruce agrees, smiling slightly. He glances at the several drawings of the Beast from *Beauty and the Beast* hanging on a nearby wall that Loki had drawn for him. He'd gotten roped into re-enacting the fight between Gaston and the Beast a couple days ago, where they'd each ended up playing both Gaston and Beast.

"Are you ready to start?" Bruce asks. Loki nods, and Bruce directs him to sit cross-legged, like he's doing. Loki slowly copies the position and puts Simba in his lap, rocking back and forth slightly. "Okay, now close your eyes." Bruce says. It's definitely better to start Loki off without visual distractions.

"Snakes don't have eyelids, so they don't ever blink, you know." Loki informs him "Like Jormungand. He didn't blink. Or Serpens, but he's stars."

"Actually, I'd forgotten that snakes don't have eyelids." Bruce admits, before asking if Jormungand is a snake. Bruce isn't sure who Jormungand is, but he knows Serpens is a constellation of a serpent. Loki definitely has a thing for stars and constellations. Maybe Jormungand is what Loki's named another constellation, or maybe he made up a constellation and named it that. Regardless of who or what Jormungand is, Loki sounds very fond of him. Loki had said Jormungand was a him just now.

Loki quietly answers that Jormungand is a very nice friend who hugged him and kept watch, and there's a smile on his face. Bruce smiles slightly at that and reminds Loki to close his eyes, which Loki does without complaint.

"Now, keep your body still, like a statue, but try to relax all your muscles." Bruce says in a quiet, calm voice that he hopes might induce some relaxation in the god.

Loki flops over like a rag doll. Bruce tries to pull him into a sitting position, but he's freakishly heavy and right now he's a dead weight, not offering any help in reorienting himself. Loki's eyes open and Bruce sees the glassy green eyes looking at him with a slightly accusing look. "You said'ta relax all my muscles."

"I meant you're supposed to relax while still sitting up." Bruce says, although he wonders if maybe he should have worded that better. He beckons Loki to sit up again, which Loki does this time, flapping his hands slightly. "Okay, now without falling over, try to relax, and sit still."

Loki actually sits still for about a minute before his fingers start drumming rhythmically on the mat and flicking in the air. Soon, it's no longer just the fingers moving, and he's rocking back and forth.

Bruce sighs inwardly. Generally, you aren't supposed to move, and he knew this was coming. "Be still, Loki." He says again, calmly. At least Loki doesn't seem to think he's annoyed at him.

Loki once again goes mostly still for about a minute, but he seems to zone out. Once Bruce gets Loki's attention, the god is soon back to moving while he stares at Bruce.

Okay, this is not working, Bruce thinks as Loki starts humming.

After five minutes of trying to get Loki to sit still for a longer period of time, during which Bruce
even goes as far as to try to make being still a contest between them (which motivates Loki not at all), Bruce gives up on the part about being still for now. As long as Loki doesn't wander off, he won't say anything. They'll work on that later, since there's only so much one can totally relax while moving. Bruce tries to get Loki to stop humming, but doesn't mention anything about his rocking back and forth or wringing his hands together.

"Now I want you to focus on my voice Loki. Can you do that?" Loki nods, apparently not getting the hint that he's supposed to stop humming. "Please, no humming, Loki. Just focus on my words. You can move, but try to stay in the same spot, okay?" Bruce makes sure to make these sound like requests instead of commands; really, Loki doesn't have to do this with him if he doesn't want to.

Loki stops humming. "Thank you." Bruce says and Loki smiles somewhat. He's bouncing up and down and rocking on his knees now, but he hasn't moved from his spot on the mat.

"Okay, are you focusing on my voice?" Loki nods slightly, and Bruce continues. "Good. Now, we're going to be doing a breathing exercise. So, breathe in deeply through your nose." Bruce inhales deeply and hears Loki take in a loud, quick inhale of breath.

"Very good, Loki, but it was a little fast. Now, slowly breathe out through your mouth. Try to do it at the same rate I do." Bruce exhales slowly, and, upon hearing Loki do the same, smiles slightly.

"Jarvis had me do this." Loki says. "He said it helps calm people down."

"Jarvis was right about that- it's very calming. At least, I've found it is." Bruce says. "Now, it would be best if you tried to stay quiet."

"Why?"

Bruce patiently explains that you can't focus on your breathing if you're talking. Loki accepts the answer and falls silent. They breathe slowly for another minute or two, and Loki actually looks more relaxed than normal. His hand is now tracing lazy patterns on the mat instead of rapidly darting around, and he's no longer twirling his hair. He's still rocking slightly, but that seems to actually help since he's sort of doing it in rhythm with his breaths.

"I'm gonna be a mighty king, like no king was before..."

Simba suddenly starts singing, and Loki laughs. "Simba! You're supposed to be quiet!" He shoots Bruce a fake innocent look, as if to say "Well, I didn't do it." However, there's the faintest trace of something mischievous in his eyes.

"Simba's supposed to be quiet too." Bruce echoes. He isn't actually annoyed, though, and he hopes Loki knows that.

The actual meditation lasts somewhere between five and ten minutes before Loki seems bored out of his mind. Yet at the same time, he had seemed marginally calmer when he was doing it.

"Good job." Bruce tells him when they're done. It's not just empty praise- it had actually gone better than he thought. To be honest, Tony probably would have called it quits way sooner than Loki had.

"Time for our game!" Loki announces. "You promised!"

"What game did you have in mind?" Bruce asks. Mostly, Loki seems to like doing re-enactments or pretending to be Iron Man.
Loki answers with a surprisingly sly grin. "You turn into Hulk-y."

Bruce blinks, because that's totally not what he expected. Loki has asked about Hulk coming out point-blank many times, and Bruce had always refused. It hadn't occurred to him that Loki might try a more sneaky method instead of just asking bluntly.

Bruce sighs. "That's really not a game, Loki."

"You promised." Loki says almost petulantly, clearly sensing his hesitation.

Bruce still isn't sure what to do though. Tony's still working on that Hulk-proof room, but he'd also amazingly said that he doesn't mind if Bruce lets the Other Guy out on an unused floor, one that wouldn't matter if it was smashed up. Tony's never made Bruce feel bad for the damage the Other Guy has caused, which Bruce still finds rather amazing.

It appears that the Other Guy really does like Loki, the footage of the confrontation with Thor proved that yet again. So letting the Other Guy out voluntarily, when Bruce normally has more control over him would have a very low risk of Loki getting hurt. But still...

"I don't really like bringing the Other Guy out." Bruce admits, fiddling with his glasses and adjusting how they sit on his face. "I expect that's how you feel about... changing colors." He's not entirely sure how to address Loki's Jotun form, and he hopes he didn't just screw it up.

Loki looks sort of tense, although he doesn't totally freak out. He nods after a bit, but he looks sort of confused. "I don't like being blue, but being green's not bad. So why do you hate letting him out? Is it 'cause you said he can be mean on the roof? 'Cause he's not mean! He's nice, even if he wrecks stuff. Tony blew some stuff up once, and he's nice."

Bruce chuckles at that. "Trust me, Tony's blown stuff up a lot more than once."

Loki continues as if he hadn't been interrupted. "So you should let Hulk-y out, 'cause you promised you'd play a game and that's the game." He fiddles with the Bruce Banner action figure and turns it into the Hulk toy with his magic. He doesn't even tense up, instead looking at Bruce and waving the toy in front of him. "The game is to do what he just did."

"But it's not a game." Bruce protests again. "It's not easy being green." Did he really just quote Kermit the Frog? Oh well, who doesn't like Kermit?

"If I may?" Jarvis says, and Bruce nods for him to continue. "Mr. Stark would like to remind you, Dr. Banner, that he has no problem with you letting the Hulk out as long as you do it on an unused floor."

Bruce sits back slightly. He already knew that, but Tony apparently thinks that reminding him will help. They're all acting like letting the Other Guy out in the tower wouldn't be a big deal. Admittedly, it doesn't sound quite as objectionable as it has other times. Mostly because he'll have more control over the Other Guy if he lets him out voluntarily.

He pulls up the holographic image of Loki and the Hulk hugging and sighs. Everyone but him seems to think it's not a problem, and the Other Guy actually has a really good track record in terms of interacting with Loki.

He sighs and looks at the god, who's staring at him with a hopeful expression. "Okay, I'll do it."

Going in Bruce's lab today really wasn't what Loki expected. He thought they were going to do
All-Tongue stuff, like reading and writing. That's what they've been doing in here a lot. Bruce will have him read something, although sometimes a word won't pop up where there should be one, like it's on the page but just blank in his head. He hates that, and sometimes it happens when he hears or says stuff too. He's been trying to listen to the gibberish that is apparently the language here, instead of just ignoring it and listening to the meaning in his head.

Sometimes, Bruce will get him to write, either normally like he always has, or in those symbols in a lot of books here, which apparently make up a language called English. Bruce and Jarvis have been teaching him how to write in it. Sometimes, Bruce has him read in what are apparently a lot of other Midgardian languages too.

The thought of being able to write so that Tony, Jarvis and Bruce will be able to read it is kind of exciting. He's not actually writing, but hitting buttons with the letters on them (typing, apparently), but they produce words all the same. Having the buttons means all the options are right there. He just needs to hit them in the right order.

Instead of that, though, Bruce had asked him if he wanted to do that meditation thing. It's weird that Bruce doesn't just tell him to do stuff, and he actually seems to care about whether he wants to do it or not. Tony's weird that way, too, but Loki likes that kind of weird. It's the nice kind, literally, because people are nice to him.

The meditation itself was sort of strange too. And somewhat boring, because he was just sitting there, not doing anything. But it wasn't too bad, certainly better than being strapped to a seat in those dumb car things.

He's just asked Bruce if Hulk can come out. Bruce has refused every other time he asked, and he's decided just asking won't work anymore. So this time, he tried to disguise it as something else, although he truly thinks it would be a really fun game to play.

Every other time he's asked, Bruce has hidden in his lab for a while afterwards. But they're already in his lab, so he can't run there and hide. Then again, Bruce could always kick him out now, but instead the man just sits there and looks at him.

Bruce claims that turning into Hulk makes him feel how Loki himself feels when he reveals his Jotun form. Right, Bruce doesn't like letting Hulk out (though he's agreed to right now). Loki still can't fathom what's so bad about Hulk. It doesn't make sense, because Hulk's not a monster. He's a shield brother of Tony's and he's a hero. Plus, Tony even said he didn't care if Hulk broke stuff. Loki wonders if Tony would care if he broke something.

Tony had told Loki that there was no problem letting his blue form show, and that he could do it here. Plus Tony and the others really hadn't been faking when they said they liked it.

He doesn't like his blue form. He likes hearing that it's not hideous, but it really is.

"You really think being Hulk-y is as bad as being a Jotun?" Loki asks, as they ride the elevator to an unused floor. "If I could be Hulk-y instead, I would."

Bruce doesn't say anything to that, but yesterday he'd said that he'd rather be a Jotun than be the Hulk. Somehow, it makes being blue seem not quite as bad, since Bruce wants to do it. It's like Tony or Jarvis saying they wished they had his magic.

It's really weird, though, because Thor had said in the video that Odin and Frigga used magic to change his appearance. Loki had asked if it was magic once, but he'd never gotten an answer, he just got punished. But even back then, he hadn't known what else it could possibly be.
He hadn't known who'd done it, except that it hadn't been him because people said that he hadn't hid his hideous frost giant form. Apparently, it was Odin and Frigga who had hidden it, with magic. Jarvis had shown him that video a lot since yesterday. The whole idea is absurd, because Odin hates magic.

"Did they really use magic to make me not blue?" Loki asks. Bruce looks at him for a bit.

"I can't say for sure. I'm just going off what Thor said." Bruce gives him an apologetic smile and a shrug.

Loki cocks his head to the side. Sure the idea is ridiculous, but Thor wouldn't lie about that, even if he was trying to trick him. Making up that the Allfather had magic would be stupid, because it would be saying something he wouldn't want said about him. It would be like spreading a mean rumor, and nobody does that about the Allfather.

Why would they hate him for using magic, if they do the same thing? Loki can't even begin to understand that, since it makes no sense.

Maybe they lied, like Frollo and Mother Gothel and Scar? Tony said they lied about more than just that nobody would ever like him. But how would Tony know?

The elevator reaches a floor that Loki's never been on before. This floor is really wide and empty, and it doesn't have much in terms of furniture or anything on it. It seems like a really good place to run around.

Bruce takes off his shirt and pants before folding them and placing them off to the side, mumbling something about keeping them from ripping. He's wearing those stretchy shorts that Hulk wears under his pants, and right now those are the only things he's wearing. He seems a little embarrassed about that.

"Jarvis, is Tony ready for intervention if necessary?" Bruce asks.

"Of course, Dr. Banner. If you want, I could get him down here now." Jarvis says.

Bruce nods, and a couple minutes later, Tony emerges from the elevator in the Hulk suit. "Hopefully he doesn't think I'm threatening him and flip out." Tony says, his voice distorted by the helmet. Tony moves off to the side of the room and opens the top part of the Hulk armor, pulling up a bunch of holographic screens in front of himself and starting to work on something. He glances at Bruce and says "Go ahead. Loki's waiting to see your party trick."

Bruce looks at them for a bit and then nods and heads towards the center of the room. He closes his eyes and starts to turn green. Loki hops up and down in excitement as his friend turns into his larger, green friend. Hulk gives Tony a suspicious look, and Tony raises his hands. "Hey, big guy, as long as you keep your cool, I'm not going to do anything. I'm just going to sit here and work." Hulk grunts but looks slightly less suspicious now.

"Hulk-y!" Loki runs up to hug him. "Look." He waves his Hulk toy at the real Hulk.

Hulk grunts and says "Mini me." Loki giggles and nods, holding the Hulk toy up to Hulk. Hulk takes the mini Hulk, which looks puny in his huge hand, and studies it, turning it around.

Loki's really excited to see Hulk again, especially since he beat up Thor yesterday. "You know," He mumbles once he stops hugging Hulk "You're like my Fenrir, 'cause you attacked Thor. Fenrir wants to hurt them when they hurt me, 'xcept when Fenrir does it, they aren't hurt 'cause he can't touch them."
Hulk just blinks at him. Loki imagines Fenrir going up to sniff Hulk, and he laughs. Fenrir's sniffing Hulk and wagging his tail. Fenrir likes Hulu.

"Why Loki not blue?" Hulk asks suddenly, looking down at him. "Loki was blue yesterday."

Loki tenses slightly at that. He doesn't like being blue much.

"Feel free to go blue if you want." Tony says from the sidelines, briefly looking up from the holographic document he's reading to give him a quick grin.

Hulk hadn't even seemed to have a problem with his blue-ness, though. He supposes that Hulk would have the least problem with it out of anyone, because he looks different from everyone else too. Even if being a Jotun is way worse than being the Hulk, Hulk probably understands. Hulk had seen the real him and it hadn't seemed to bother him. Which is really weird.

Actually, it seems like a lot of people here don't like Hulk, like how people in Asgard don't like him. Tony used to seem sort of annoyed about Hulk coming out, but he said Hulk's his friend now. Bruce always avoids him when he asks about Hulk. Except this time.

"Do you want me to be blue?" Loki asks incredulously. Hulk just gives him a sort of grin, but Tony speaks up.

"I don't want to force you into it, but yeah, seeing your real colors again would be pretty neat. It's like your own version of Hulking out."

Tony's not lying when he says that, Loki reminds himself. Still, he's not sure how he'd feel about seeing them blue again.

Loki wrings his hands together and flicks his fingers. Is that really what Bruce feels like becoming Hulk? It's a weird thought. He feels sort of bad for Bruce, if he feels the same way every time he Hulks out, because he's done it a lot more times recently than Loki has shown his real form. Besides, Loki knows it feels really bad. He's not sure why Bruce feels that way about Hulk, though, because Hulk is a hero and he helped save Midgard and everything, right?

Bruce said he'd rather be a Frost Giant than Hulk, though, which definitely means that people on Midgard (or Earth, as they call it here- Loki thinks that word sounds funny) don't hate Frost Giants like they did in Asgard. The idea is so weird, but really amazing at the same time. Like the idea that his friends seeing his true form or talking to Thor didn't change the facts that they're friends with him. At all.

They're his friends. He smiles at the thought. They'd seen his real form yesterday and said they like the way it looks. He'd thought they were lying, but they weren't. They actually seemed to like it.

He'd had another nightmare where they'd taken back everything they said last night. He'd been terrified and it had taken a while to calm down even with Tony there, and even when he knew it wasn't real. Jarvis had showed him the video proving that they indeed still liked him, and that the stuff where they said they didn't was a dream.

He wonders if they'd say his real form isn't hideous again as he looks down at his clothes. At least he's wearing his long coat, so he only really sees his hands and his feet.

If they really want to see his Frost Giant form, he supposes it's only fair. Especially since Bruce Hulked-out for him, even though he apparently likes doing that as little as he himself likes showing his Jotun form.
Loki closes his eyes and slowly lets his Jotun form show. Apparently, he's really dropping Odin and Frigga's magic. The thought that Odin has magic is really strange, since Odin hated his magic. Odin punished him for his magic, but Loki sort of doubts he punished himself.

Loki feels his skin getting colder and he tries to warm it up a bit, but he can still feel the ridges on his forehead.

"Seriously, Snoopy, you look a lot cooler than those Avatar aliens." Tony tells him. Loki likes hearing that, even though he doesn't agree at all. He's hideous, right. But his friends don't think so, and they don't stop liking him because he changes.

"What color are my eyes?" Loki asks. He doesn't like his red eyes. He likes his green eyes, and he likes to think that his green eyes are the real ones and his red eyes are the fake ones.

"Red." Tony answers, and Loki freezes, even though Tony adds that there's nothing wrong with red eyes. He's avoided looking at his hands and feet until now, and he squeezes his eyes shut. His eyes need to be green. Green green green green green. He chants in his head, although he might be saying it aloud too. He's not sure.

"How 'bout now?" He asks, opening his eyes. Tony gives him a brief look and says that they're green.

"By the way, the rest of you matches your eyes. You're looking a lot like a small, skinny Hulk with long hair." Tony smirks at him. Loki brings a hand up. He's pretty sure he's still in his Jotun form, but instead of the hideous blue, he's a nice green color, like his eyes. It's a bright green, brighter than Hulk. There's the faintest hint of blue still in Loki's skin and his hands still have the ridges on the backs of them, but Loki tries to ignore it. This is still much better than the hideous blue.

Bruce is wrong. Being green is easy.

It has to have been his magic, he thinks, though he's actually glad this happened. He's actually glad he accidentally used his magic.

"Are you part chameleon or something?" Tony asks, still smirking slightly.

"I read about those, and Pascal's one!" Loki says excitedly, looking over at Hulk. Hulk is actually looking rather happy that Loki's green now.

Loki grins at him and singsongs "I'm green like you, you're green like me. We're both green, green, green green green..." He does a sort of dance around Hulk and then looks up at him again.

"Have you ever seen Beauty and the Beast?"

A couple minutes later, he and Hulk are sitting on the floor in front of a holographic screen showing Belle singing about wanting so much more than a provincial life. Loki sings along with her.

When Mrs. Potts and Chip make their first appearance, Loki giggles and wriggles slightly, flicking his green fingers. He looks over at Hulk and whispers. "I have them, 'cause I made them."

At some point during the movie, Loki realizes that his skin is back to its usual paleness, though he's not sure when he went back to his usual form.

Hulk starts to get rather angry when the villagers try to kill the Beast, and he tries to smash his fist through the holographic screen. It shatters into little pieces but then it reforms for Hulk to smash
again. Jarvis stops the movie, which Loki is sort of disappointed about.

He wonders if it makes Hulk angry because some people seem to think Hulk's a beast. A bad beast. People thought Beast was a bad beast, even Belle, but once she got to know him she saw he wasn't scary at all.

Loki points this out to Hulk. Hulk doesn't totally calm down, but he stops trying to smashing the holographic screen. The screen goes away, and Loki looks at Hulk.

"Beast lives happily ever after with Lumiere and Cogsworth and Mrs. Potts and Chip. Gaston doesn't kill him. You're like Beast and Boo, 'cause people think you're a monster when you're not!"

Hulk had gotten angrier at the word monster but calmed down a bit towards the end of the sentence. He just grunts at that, and Tony, who had gotten up but hadn't intervened yet, arches an eyebrow at Hulk "I thought you liked that movie."

When Tony leaves his lab the next morning and steps into the penthouse from the elevator, he is somewhat surprised to find Bruce and Loki sitting on yoga mats in the middle of the living room floor. Apparently, they'd been meditating in Bruce's lab yesterday, a mental image Tony finds very amusing, although right now it's not as funny as it had been in his head.

He's just picked up a delivery and is glad to see that Loki's eyes are closed, since it makes it easier for him to drag a rug to Loki's room without the god noticing. Tony does so– apparently, Loki doesn't think much of the sound the rug makes as it's dragged across the floor, but Bruce seems to know what it is. Once the rug is stowed out of sight in Loki's room, Tony casts another glance back at him.

Loki really has seemed to have made a lot of progress. Tony's still really surprised about yesterday, when Loki had shown his Jotun form to Hulk again. Also, the toys for Steve, Clint and Natasha look better than they did before, thanks to Loki's magic. Loki hasn't improved the Thor one, for obvious reasons.

Seeing Loki do the chameleon act and turn green yesterday was rather interesting, although not nearly as interesting as it would have been if Tony hadn't already seen him turn blue. He'd seemed much more comfortable being green than blue, which means there's definitely something specific he hates about his true form. Hopefully, they'll be able to fix that sometimes.

"Well, I'll leave you two to your crazy Jedi stuff." Tony says flippantly to the two people meditating on the floor of the living room. He's amazed Bruce managed to drag Loki into that, because Loki just keeps going and going and going. He really is like the Energizer Bunny, and he practically never stays still, even when he's asleep. Not that Loki's staying still now either, but he actually does look somewhat calmer. And he's staying in the same spot on the floor. Huh, it's actually going better than Tony would've thought, which means it's not nearly as entertaining as it could have been.

Bruce had suggested he join in, but there's no way Tony's doing that.

Well, even if he was inclined to do such a thing, which he isn't, he wouldn't have been able to do it now anyways. No, right now he has some... redecorating to do. Not the fun kind, either, with knocking down walls or anything.

He heads towards Loki's room, glad that Loki is distracted enough to not follow him. Actually, seeing Loki's reaction might be kind of fun, if he's as over-excitable as usual.
It had partly been Jarvis' idea to make some modifications to Loki's bedroom, and partly his own. Jarvis had suggested carpeting it so the floor would be more comfortable, especially for under Loki's bed.

Bruce had said something about something to do with redecorating making Loki feel welcome permanently, yet hadn't seemed to think anything of the sort should be done for him. Not that Tony was really planning on it. The drawings on Loki's wall make the room seem somewhat personalized, but this will help it look even less like practically every other bedroom in the tower.

Tony had another idea for Loki's room, something Loki's really going to love. At least, he hopes so, because otherwise it will be pointless. Still, he starts with the rug. He's knows Loki's going to like the rug, since it's the exact same rug in the therapy room, the one that sort of resembles grass.

The rug doesn't cover the entire floor, since there's still a thin frame of hard floor around the edges of the room where the rug won't reach. He looks around him. He's going to have to lift two legs of Loki's bed off the floor to get the rug under them.

He can't roll the rug out and lift Loki's bed at the same time, and Dum-E would probably totally fail at even doing something simple like unrolling the rug, so Tony supposes he'll have to enlist Bruce. He gets Jarvis to call Bruce in.

Loki originally follows Bruce, but Jarvis manages to distract him by turning on the TV. This is going to be better as a surprise, Tony thinks.

With Bruce's help, the manage to roll the rug under the bed, and now Loki's floor resembles a grassy field.

Then, Tony starts fiddling with the holographic program he'd made for Loki, testing it out.

For about ten minutes, he and Bruce work together in Loki's room while Loki is distracted by the TV.

The peace is broken when Loki screams half angrily and half scared from the living room.

Chapter End Notes

Any guesses what set Loki off?
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Some shows seem like they're made with Loki's triggers in mind.

On the bright side, the additions Tony's added to Loki's bedroom are a huge hit.

Tony drops everything when he hears the scream and rushes out of Loki's bedroom, with Bruce on his heels.

Is Thor here again? No, Jarvis would have told him if he was...

"Snoopy, what's wrong?" Tony asks, his mouth already moving a mile a minute as he enters the living room. "Is it something on TV? Did you find the playboy channel or something?" Right now there's no filter between his brain and his mouth. Bruce facepalms and tries to get him to stop talking, without much success. "You said you already knew about sex though." So that can't be an issue, but Loki doesn't strike him as the type to watch porn. Not even anime porn, because it seems all he watches is animated stuff.

Loki stares at him uncomprehendingly. He probably doesn't know a lot of those words, like _porn_. After all, he'd needed Jarvis to explain _kinky_. That conversation had been hilarious, especially given some of the questions Loki was asking, but Tony was clearly the only one who thought so. Steve's face had been beet red when he left the room less than five seconds into that conversation, and Bruce and Pepper both seemed to find it really awkward. Clint would probably have found it hysterical, though, now that Tony thinks of it.

"No? Not that, I guess... So what is it? Did you find a horror movie or something? Because not everyone can sit through those things, so I don't blame you if you can't. You know, this one time-" Tony's cut off when Bruce jabs him in the side to get him to shut up and points at the screen.

"What the hell is this?" Tony asks, staring at the screen, where there's some little pink rodent creature with two huge buck-teeth, screaming in a high pitched voice. Still, it looks like a pretty mild cartoon, so why on earth would Loki be freaking out?

"The Disney Channel show _Kim Possible_, sir." Jarvis pipes up. "In other words, the show with the theme song you use to annoy Agent Romanoff, because she vaguely resembles the titular character, _Kim Possible_."

"Oh." Tony says simply, looking at the screen, which changes to something that makes a lot of sense for why Loki's freaking out. There's a girl who looks a lot like Loki in his apparently-fake form, although that's the one Tony's used to. The girl has pale skin (although it's slightly green-tinted), green eyes, black hair, even green and black clothes. Lots of green and black, basically. Her hair is longer, going down her back instead being shoulder-length like Loki's, but then again, Loki accidentally made his own hair reach his ankles once here.

It's not just that she looks like him, though. She has green magic around her hands, just like his magic. "Wow, that would explain it. I mean, that chick even looks like you, Loki. Who is that?"
There's a bit of a pause, and Jarvis says "According to the show, her name is Shego."

Loki screams as he stares at the screen, which now shows Shego shooting a blast of green magic at Kim Possible, barely missing her. "No, stop!" He howls at the screen. "Stop it! They're my friends! Stop tryin' ta hurts'em!"

What the heck is he talking about? He's not friends with Kim and that blonde boy- Ron Stoppable, according to Jarvis.

Tony doesn't even have time to get a single word out before something else happens.

As Loki tells Shego to leave them alone, another Loki appears in the room out of nowhere, and Loki stumbles back in surprise and falls on his butt, clutching Simba tightly. This Loki has his hair slicked back, as if he spends time every morning doing his hair. Tony smirks slightly at the thought, because he hasn't seen Loki comb his hair at all in the month he's been here, but he stops when he takes in the rest of the other-Loki's appearance. For one thing, his hair falls down his back, much longer than Loki's shoulder length hair. Then again, Loki had made his hair grow down to his ankles once. This Loki's dressed in a black and green bodysuit, which seems really weird at first. Sure green is Loki's favorite color, but Loki doesn't wear stuff like that. No, instead he wears stuff like Snoopy shirts and, frequently, that ridiculous star coat that he has on right now.

The Other-Loki holds himself differently too. Loki looks smaller, even though Tony's fairly certain the two of them are the same height. Loki's hunched in on himself, looking somewhat like a beaten down animal ready to flee, while this Loki holds himself with confidence as he eyes his surroundings with a touch of boredom. He gives off an air of power, as if he's not particularly concerned about someone jumping him, because he knows he could fight them off.

This Loki seems so very different from the Loki Tony's grown to regard as a very close friend. Does Loki have a twin that even the god himself doesn't know about or something? Maybe someone from Jotunheim that Loki had never really met, since he'd apparently been whisked away to Asgard as a baby? But then again, the real Loki seems quite powerful too, he just doesn't seem to know it.

Not to mention, this Other-Loki has green magic swirling around his hands. Loki has green magic around his own hands, but he doesn't seem to notice until he happens to glance down at his hands. Loki hastily looks away, apparently trying not to look at either of their hands. So this is probably an illusion, because of the magic around Loki's hands and the fact that Jarvis hasn't reported there being another person in the room.

The freakiest part of the Other-Loki is his face. The other-Loki's eyes are the same green as Loki's own, obviously, but they're so different. These eyes are far from the glassy, wide gaze Tony's used to seeing on his godly alien friend. Aside from that one illusion he'd seen during one of Loki's nightmares of, presumably, Loki as a child, every other-Loki that Tony's seen has had the same wide, glassy eyes. Except this one. This one's eyes are cold and calculating and they seem to rummage through all his innermost secrets as the he stares at Tony before turning that so-very-different gaze on the real Loki.

Loki looks positively terrified, but when Tony goes to swipe the Other-Loki out of existence, it actually steps away from him to avoid his hand. What the heck? That's never happened with any of the others. Then again, the real Loki had stepped back too. Tony realizes that looking as if he were about to hit the other Loki probably just freaked the real Loki out even more. Crap.

"Stop!" Loki says again, glancing between the Other-Loki and the TV screen. Tony wonders if maybe Loki's talking to him, so he waits.
"And why would I stop?" The Other-Loki asks as a smirk forms on his lips. Tony blinks, because this is the first time any of Loki's illusions has said anything he can understand. The smirk isn't like Tony's own smirks, though. It's cold, mocking. His voice has the inexplicably British accent and everything, just like the real Loki's voice, and yet it doesn't sound anything like Loki's voice at the same time. He sounds a lot more cultured, but also sounds sort of bored and somewhat cruel, like that Shego person on TV. The Other-Loki gives a mocking bow of his head and says "I am a monster, after all."

Then, his smirk turns positively wicked and he starts to turn into his real, blue Jotun form.

"Go away!" Loki screams at the illusion. "Go back!" He lunges at it, and the illusion fades when Loki touches it. Loki barely stops as he flees to his bedroom, and Tony's absolutely positive that he's making a beeline for under his bed.

For a second or two, Tony and Bruce just exchange a glance, both thinking around the same thing. That was really weird.

That Other-Loki was so different that Tony has to wonder if Loki has an evil twin or something. Maybe someone who even Loki himself doesn't know about? Maybe someone who was left in Jotunheim while Loki was whisked away to Asgard. But then how would Loki have made an illusion of it? It was an illusion, because Jarvis hadn't reported any sudden newcomers to the tower.

All the Other-Loki's that have cropped up during Loki's stay here were rather benign, trying to comfort the real Loki when he had nightmares, or they were neutral and didn't really do anything. This is the first antagonistic other-Loki, and Tony wonders if maybe it has something to do

Anyways, they have some things to clear up. Tony heads back towards Loki's room, with Bruce right beside him.

Loki huddles under his bed with Simba wrapped tightly in his arms.

He'd been watching something about Natasha and Clint- although for some reason Clint was called wrong, what's he wrong about? Loki had also been wondering why he'd never seen the little pink creature sticking out of Clint's pocket. That creature seems really fun. Anyways, that whole thing had been quite fun to watch, until he himself had shown up and started being really bad. He sounded different on the screen, but so had Clint and Natasha.

On the screen, as a drawing, he'd been fighting Natasha and Clint, trying to hurt them. They're his friends! He doesn't want to hurt them, but he was chasing after them with magic around his hands and shooting it at them, which just makes it a thousand times worse, because he's not supposed to fight back, especially not with magic. At least he didn't have to watch them overpower him and punish him for it until he was in a world of pain. He wonders if he'd feel it when they punish him onscreen. He hopes not.

Loki hadn't wanted Tony and Bruce to see that when they came out, to see him being bad, but they saw him fighting Natasha and Clint (though people keep talking about some person named Kim and Clint calls Natasha 'K.P.’) He doesn't remember ever fighting them, but maybe that showed the future or something? He doesn't want to fight them in the future either, because he likes them. They're his friends. Right? Do they think of him as a friend?

Surely Tony and Bruce are going to be mad at him, now that they've seen him fighting their friends and teammates.
To make matters worse, he'd come out of the screen, still being really really bad. The him from the
screen had been really scary and 's like someone shoved someone else's brain into a copy of his
body and sent it over here. He wouldn't hurt Natasha and Clint and he doesn't speak like that and
it's NOT him.

Who else could it be, though? The other-Loki had his voice even if the tone was different. But he
was never mean like that Loki was, not even before people started saying they broke him. But that
Other-Loki was right about the monster part, even if Tony and Bruce and the others here don't see
it.

This is really confusing.

He wonders why Natasha and Clint are still nice to him if they've fought him before. It's really
weird, though, because for the life of him he can't remember that ever happening in his life, so
maybe it really does show the future. He wonders why they'd all look like drawings in the future.

"Hey," A voice says behind him, and he didn't even know anyone else was in the room with him.
He turns and sees it's Tony, propping himself up on his arms as he lays on his stomach under the
bed.

"Do you like the rug?" Tony asks, grinning at him. Loki nods slowly. It's really soft, just like grass.
It apparently muffled Tony's entrance, though, because he hadn't heard the man come in at all.

"Let's get this straight right away." Tony says. "I don't hate you, got it? So if you think something
changed, nothing did. I still like you." Tony fixes him with a serious stare. "Got it?"

Loki is completely confused. He'd just been fighting Natasha and Clint, Tony's teammates, on that
screen, and Tony says he doesn't hate him?

"So, uh, about what happened-" Tony starts, and Loki interrupts him.

"I'm sorry! Sorry sorry sorry sorry! I didn't mean to try and hurt Natasha and Clint or come out of
the screen all scary and stuff!" Loki squeezes his eyes shut. Both of those were really, really bad.
He can feels his body shaking uncontrollably.

Tony wraps his arms around him and starts singing the lullaby Sleipnir always sang. Loki finds his
body slowly stopping its shaking, and by the fifth time Tony sings the song, it's stopped entirely.
Loki realizes he's clinging to Tony's shirt and lets go. Tony wouldn't want an enemy clinging to his
shirt, and that video was proof he's an enemy.

"I don't wanna hurt 'em, and you're their shield brother and it didn't show you but maybe I fought
you too? An' I came out of the screen and was bad." Loki mumbles, wondering why Tony's still
being so nice even after he saw him trying to hurt the man's teammates. He really doesn't want to
ever fight Tony, ever, because Tony's his best friend in all the Nine Realms.

"Those aren't Natasha and Clint, and I'm definitely not in that show." Tony tells him.

Loki feels his brow crease, confused. "That wasn't Natasha and Clint?" None of this makes any
sense. Those are the only people he knows who look like that. Although it's not like him attacking
Clint and Natasha made much sense either.

"Nope. Okay, first things first, none of that was real." Tony's presumably talking about the stuff on
the screen, but how is it not real? Doesn't it take place in some world mad of drawings? "It's fake, a
cartoon. A made up story, with fictional characters. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is
totally coincidental."
It's... made up? But it's in that drawing world. If that's made up, are any of the drawings real? What if Simba's made up? That would be really sad. He gazes down at his toy. Simba can't be made up, because he's here and they make toys of him. The Avengers aren't made up, and they make toys of them, too. Why would there be toys of made up things? Loki grins when he realizes that Simba can't be made up.

Tony's giving him a serious look now. "Seriously, those aren't Natasha and Clint, they're Kim Possible and..." Tony pauses, and Jarvis supplies another name, Wrong Stoppable.

"What's he wrong 'bout?" Loki asks. Loki hears Bruce chuckle from somewhere, and he didn't even know that Bruce was in here, too. He looks around and spots the man. He's not under the bed, but is lying down on the floor. Jarvis explains that it's a name, spelled R-o-n, and has nothing to do with him being incorrect. That makes more sense, Loki thinks, although that's a kind of weird name, because it sounds like they're saying he's wrong.

Tony's rummaging around in the green bag, and he pulls out the Natasha and Clint figures. Loki had changed them with his magic, and they almost look like the real people. Tony holds them up next to a holographic image of Kim and Ron and says that they're different. He points out that Clint's face isn't nearly as tall as Ron's, and his ears don't stick up in the same way.

Okay, so maybe they really are different. That's a relief, because at least he wasn't fighting his friends.

"Why was I fighting Kim and Ron?" Loki asks. He doesn't even know them. At least he actually knows Natasha and Clint, even though he'd never want to fight them. "I don't wanna fight them either and I don't wanna by like when I came outta the screen!"

Tony's giving him a really weird look, and says "Wait, you think that Other-Loki came out of the screen?" Loki nods miserably.

"Uh, Snoopy, you know that person fighting them was a girl, right?" Tony quirks an eyebrow at him. "Now, unless you've been hiding something from us, that's not another version of you. I mean, it's not like you can just turn into a girl, so it can't be you... right?" There's a bit of a pause, and Tony continues. "I dunno, can you? I mean, if you can change your appearance... But it's not you anyways. All those characters are made up."

A holographic screen pops up, showing the Loki onscreen. Loki looks away, not wanting to see it, but Bruce gently encourages him to. Warily, Loki shifts his gaze to the screen. It really is a girl. She's not even doing magic this time, which is a relief.

Maybe she's a female version of him, because everyone says magic is really unmanly and cowardly. But apparently Odin the Allfather can do magic, and he's super masculine and brave and everything. Loki had always heard that only women did magic, but Odin's a man. So apparently he's not the only man who can do it, although up until a few days ago he thought he was. It's still sort of a ton to wrap his head around, but nobody would lie about the Allfather like that, least of all Thor, Odin's own son. Thor likes Odin way too much to spread rumors about him. But aside from him and apparently Odin, literally everyone who uses magic is female, even this female-Loki.

"See, Snoopy?" Tony tells him. "She's Shego, not Loki. Besides, you aren't even a girl, so how could that be you?" Oh. They're not calling her Loki, but then again they're calling Clint and Natasha weird names too. But if Tony says it's not him, it's not him.

Would that even be possible, for there to be a female Loki? Loki vaguely wonders if he ever turned into a girl and somehow went to wherever the people in the screen are. Because if that's a girl-Loki,
that sort of makes sense, because other than the whole girl part, she's just like him. Although Tony's acting like the fact she's a girl automatically means she's not another Loki.

So maybe it's not him. After all, the him in the screen (who apparently isn't him but a her) and the him that came out of the screen hadn't really seemed like him somehow.

Norns, this is confusing and contradictory.

Loki glances back at the holographic screen and sees something just as bad, if not worse.

There's a Jotun there, with blue skin and everything. He doesn't have the lines, but he's a drawing and doesn't have too many details. He has one line below his left eye, actually, but that's it. His eyes aren't red, since they just have black pupils, but he's still obviously a Jotun, and he's even got hair sort of like Loki's, if Loki were to push his own hair back.

Now, all that's bad enough, but that's not even the worst part. The worst part, which makes this at least a hundred times worse, is that they're the bad guys. Well, obviously the man is, since Jotuns are evil disgusting creatures, but he still hates seeing the proof as they attack Ron and Kim. Well, maybe they're both Jotuns. Who's to say this Shego person with the magic isn't even more like him and really just disguised? Besides, she'd have to be a Jotun to be willing to be partnered with one.

He hates that Tony and Bruce are seeing this, because maybe it'll make them realize those things are bad, even if they've vehemently told him otherwise for some odd reason. They keep showing him things about good people with magic, which he likes seeing, but this is what it's really like, right?

Loki really wishes that life was like what Tony and Bruce have been telling him, that things like magic or blue skin don't matter, that they're not bad. Tony and Bruce seem to think so (or maybe they don't think so anymore?), but they're wrong. Right? Loki had started to maybe believe them, but the proof against what they've been saying is here, right in front of them!

"I believe those two are the antagonists." Jarvis says.

"Seriously?!" Tony exclaims. "Who the heck made this show? It's like they designed those two specifically to make you freak out. I mean, they've got like every single trigger, and then they had to go and make those two people the freaking antagonists?!"

Bruce mutters to Tony to calm down, and Tony takes a deep breath. "Right, okay. I'm not mad at you, Loki. Not even because there was that illusion or whatever it was. It didn't change how I think of you, by the way, so don't think that it will." Loki doesn't say anything at first as Tony looks between him and the screen and gestures at it again. Loki doesn't look him in the eyes.

"They're the bad guys. And she was doing bad magic an' trying'ta hurt them! They're the bad guys! The bad bad baddies, and I'm like them! Now I'm the bad guy." Loki rambles, vaguely realizing he'd just quoted Mother Gothel with that last line, and he's pretty sure he sounded a lot like her when she said it.

"It seems we have a lot to talk about." Bruce says calmly. "Loki, try to take slow deep breaths like we were just doing earlier. It well help you calm down." Bruce wants him to meditate? Jarvis has also said that taking slow deep breaths helps.

Bruce tells him to try to breathe at the same rate he is, and starts taking deep, slow breaths, in and out, in and out. Loki eventually manages to fall into the rhythm and feels his body slowly relax. Tony's arm is around him, which really helps. Bruce doesn't say anything aside from telling him
he's doing a good job. He doesn't even seem to think it's taking too long, he just waits patiently until he's calmer. Loki likes that.

"You better?" Tony asks, his arm still around him. Tony's hugs are even better than Jormungand's. Loki shrugs, because he's still not too happy about all that stuff on the screen. It's like what everyone in Asgard says. The Frost Giant and the magic user are clearly the bad guys, even in this. Which makes sense.

"So, as I said already, Natasha and Clint aren't the people onscreen, they just look like them, and they haven't fought Dr. Drakken and Shego." Tony says. He reaches for Loki's drawstring bag, which is on the unoccupied sofa cushion.

Loki cocks his head to the side. So Natasha and Clint haven't fought them... "So you haven't fought Dr. Dragon or Shego either?"

"Nope." Tony answers simply, before Jarvis adds that it's $D-r-a-k-k-e-n$, not $d-r-a-g-o-n$. Loki thinks Dr. Dragon would have been a better name.

Tony looks in the drawstring bag again, his eyebrows raising in surprise. "Snoopy, you still have all this candy here. Have you eaten any of it?"

"What?"

Tony pulls out a small bar made of dark brown paper-y stuff and hands it to him. Loki looks at the letters on the front, naming them before slowly sounding the words out. "Her-shey's... Milk... Choc-o-late." He frowns in confusion. What in the Nine Realms is a Hershey?

Tony gives him an amused look. "You eat it, Snoopy. It's good." That's weird. It doesn't look very good, but maybe it tastes better than it looks. Loki starts to bring it up to his mouth but Tony stops him. "You have to take the wrapper off first!"

Tony pulls out another piece of candy, unwraps it, and hands the thing inside to Loki. Oh. It's like the boxes food comes in, that you can't eat. Not that he'd known that at first, either. Why is food wrapped in stuff? Midgard is weird sometimes.

Loki cautiously nibbles a corner of the bar Tony unwrapped and grins. It's like the chocolaty drink he has with Tony after nightmares sometimes, only it's not as hot. He doesn't like hot things, aside from sometimes hot food. Hot weather is awful, though. But this chocolate is really good, and it makes him feel a bit better, like hot chocolate does after his nightmares.

He holds the bar up to Simba's mouth, snickering slightly at his own silliness. Simba's not really going to eat it! Loki then quickly stuffs the rest of the bar into his own mouth, relishing in the taste and licking some of the melted chocolate off his fingers. He'd really like another one, but he wants them to last, because who knows if he'll ever get more of this stuff again? Maybe his current stash is all he'll ever have in his life. So he refrains from eating any more.

There's a slight pause, and Tony says "Okay, now for the main part. The fact that they're villains doesn't have anything to do with the fact that Dr. Drakken has blue skin or that Shego has green stuff around her hands."

But they're monsters, like him, only Tony and Bruce don't see a monster when they look at him. For some reason, Bruce seems to see Hulk as a monster, though. Loki wonders if Tony and Bruce see Drakken and Shego as monsters.

He unintentionally asks them this aloud, and he's pretty sure the answer's going to be yes. He
doesn't want to hear them say that, but it's too late because he already blurted it out on accident. But it's obvious, since they are monsters, after all. Drakken's a Frost Giant and Shego's a magic-using freak and probably a disguised Jotun like him. Even if Tony and Bruce apparently don't think those things about him, they surely will about these monsters. Although Tony had just said something really weird about nothing changing.

"I wouldn't say they're monsters, even if they are villains." Bruce says. "I'm assuming Drakken has some quest for world domination, but trust me, he's a lot tamer than the villains we've fought in real life. The real monsters." That's weird, because how are they not monsters?

"But he's a Frost Giant." This is really obvious, but Tony and Bruce don't seem to get it. They always say the opposite of everything he knows.

"That doesn't make him bad, though. He's bad for other reasons." Tony protests. "Like, being evil and trying to take over the world or whatever he does. I don't know, I never really watched this show. The point is, him having blue skin has nothing to do with it. He'd be just as bad if he was purple, or if he looked just like everyone else."

Loki frowns in confusion. But if he looked like everyone else, he wouldn't be a monster. Well, unless he was a hidden monster, like him.

"Look, just because one member of a species or a race is bad doesn't mean they all are." Bruce says. Loki feels his brow wrinkle slightly, confused.

Jarvis pipes up. "There are a lot of bad people, but that doesn't mean every person is bad, right Mr. Loki? There are a lot of good people, too, such as Mr. Stark, Dr. Banner, Miss Potts, Captain Rogers and Agents Barton and Romanoff."

Loki claps his hands. Tony and Bruce are good, after all. They're heroes on Midgard, and they were even talked about in Asgard, too, so they must be really good. Especially since most Asgardians don't care about Midgard. Pepper's not an Avenger, he doesn't think, but she's really nice.

"And you." Jarvis adds.

This whole idea is sort of starting to make sense, although it doesn't really apply to Jotuns, does it? So why did Jarvis say he's good, too, especially when he's seen these people like him on the screen who are bad? They didn't say he was bad when they saw his hideous skin or his magic, and they haven't said anything bad about the Jotun or the magic girl yet. He really hopes they don't say that.

"How about one of those Disney analogies you seem to love?" Tony says, glancing at Simba. He snaps his fingers and grins. "Simba's a good lion, right?"

"Yeah!" Loki laughs. "Mufasa an' Nala an' Sarabi are good lions too!" He frowns slightly and adds "But Scar's a bad lion."

"Exactly!" Tony grins at him. "You see? Scar being bad doesn't mean all lions are bad, right? Most of the ones in the movie were really nice." Tony explains. Loki nods. That actually sort of makes sense.

"Scar isn't bad because he's a lion." Bruce adds patiently. "If he were, that would mean all the nice lions were bad, too."

This is all nice for lions and everything, but there's no such thing as a good Jotun, even though Tony and Bruce seem to think he's good. Jarvis just said he was good, too, and he listed him with
all the Avengers, the heroes, as if he deserved to be associated with them. It's like when Tony listed all the movie people he was like, characters Loki had never dreamed about being compared to because of what he is.

Loki doesn't know why such important people as the Avengers would bother with him at all. Loki stares at them and Bruce asks who Sarabi is.

"Simba's mother." Loki answers, hugging Simba tightly.

"See, so not all lions are bad. The same thing applies to Jotuns or any other race or species."

"But Frost Giants are disgusting monsters!" Loki protests, regurgitating what he's heard his whole life. "They steal people an' eats them, and they only know how to hurt and kill like sav'ges! They woulda eaten me too when I got ditched there, if Heimdall hadn't got me outta there!"

That sounded a lot better in his head than when it had come out of his mouth. Loki pouts at that.

"Loki, a whole race can't be 'disgusting monsters', as you put it." Bruce tells him. "It just doesn't work that way. Maybe in Asgard they thought so, but here on Earth, that's considered stereotyping and it's bad. Not all Frost Giants can be disgusting monsters. I seriously doubt even most of them are, and I really don't think they're cannibals."

But everyone says all Jotuns are monsters, and this Drakken guy is a monster too. He's a bad evil Frost Giant. But Bruce said Drakken wasn't even a monster.

Tony and Bruce don't think he's a monster in his Jotun form, and they said specifically that the Quasiralda rule applies to him too, and that says not all gypsies are bad and you shouldn't hate someone because they're a gypsy like Esmeralda. Tony and Bruce seem to think that applies to Frost Giants in general as well.

"Frollo said all gypsies are bad and evil," Loki finds himself saying "But Esmeralda wasn't bad and she said Frollo was wrong about gypsies." Could that really apply to Frost Giants? The idea is ridiculous, and Loki has yet to see hear of a single good Frost Giant.

"Exactly. Frollo was wrong, just like Asgard was wrong about Jotuns." Tony says. "Didn't they fight like a million wars against each other?"

Loki has no clue what that has to do with anything, but he starts to think about how there are good lions and bad lions. There are good genies and bad genies, too, he realizes. Genie's good, because he helped Aladdin, right? But he's blue at the same time... But when Jafar was a genie, he was red and he was a lot meaner than Genie was.

Loki glances at the screen. But Shego's just like him, and she's bad.

"Just because Shego has those powers doesn't mean she's bad, either." Tony says firmly. Loki cocks his head to the side, confused. This is so different, and even though Tony and Bruce have been telling him his magic isn't bad, the fact they're saying it's not bad for Shego either is really, really odd.

"But she's tryin' ta hurt them with freaky stuff. Bad magic!"

"Okay, yes, what she's doing with her powers isn't exactly nice, but that doesn't make the powers themselves bad."

Loki doesn't say anything, but that's wrong, right?
"Loki, it's not about whether the powers are good or not, because they're neutral. It's about whether the person uses them for good or bad." Tony says.

"Loki, your powers are completely neutral." Tony pauses, as if he's considering saying something, and he seems to decide to. "They're like my suits. The suits themselves aren't good or bad. It's all determined by what the person inside them does. That person can either do good things with them, like trying to save people, or bad things, like trying to hurt people. Trust me on this. Some people have..." He trails off, and Loki's confused.

Tony's comparing his suits to magic, as if there's nothing wrong with making something a hero wears sound similar to freaky magic. And he's saying magic isn't bad, even when there's this bad person using it.

"You healed my leg with your magic. That's good. You know that, right?" Loki nods. He knows that healing people is good. "So your magic can't be all bad. Actually, you haven't done a single bad thing with your magic. You protected me with a shield, and you kept me from falling down two stories when I first broke my leg."

But he has done bad stuff with his powers. Tony, as if reading his mind, says "Your powers aren't bad. What do you've done that's bad, because I seriously don't think there's anything."

Is he serious? "I iced the suit." Loki mumbles, because that's clearly bad.

"So what? That's not bad. I bet people would love your ability to ice things in the sweltering summer heat. You know, tomorrow we're going to go see a movie called Frozen about a good person who can make the trailer with the snowman and the reindeer?" Loki laughs. He liked watching that. "Well, there's a character named Elsa who can make ice, just like you."

"Really?"

"Yeah, we're going to go see it tomorrow. She thinks her powers are bad at first, though, but they're not."

"So powers can be good or bad." Bruce tells him.

Genie had done good things with his magic, right? He saved Aladdin from drowning. But Jafar had turned into a genie and he tried to hurt Aladdin with his magic, and that was bad, but they were both genies. And even Genie did some bad things when Jafar was in control of the lamp.

Hulk's sorta like that, too, right? But he's still good overall.

"Like how Hulk-y smashes stuff sometimes and he tried'ta hurt Tony, but he smashes bad guys too?" Loki asks. Smashing seems to be Hulk's power.

"I'm not sure where the good in that is." Bruce mutters something about a monster, and Tony gives him a sharp look.

"Don't, Bruce. Don't put yourself down like that. Hulk's a valued Avenger and he's helped us a lot. You know, I think we have to start working on you, too."

"Hulk-y's my friend!" Loki glares slightly at Bruce. He doesn't like people being mean to his friends.

"Okay, going back to the main topic- we don't hate you, or your magic, or your real form. Drakken and Shego aren't bad because of colors or powers. Actually, they seem like sort of cheesy villains
anyways." Tony says.

Loki frowns, thinking all of this over. No matter what, Tony and Bruce have always told him he's good. They don't seem to think he's a broken worthless monster freak like everyone in Asgard did. Even after seeing Drakken and Shego, they still say that. They didn't say, even once, that Drakken and Shego are monsters. It's crazy. And Tony said there's someone good with ice. That's unheard of.

Midgard is so different from Asgard. Loki's noticed that before, of course, but this still strikes him as odd. Because in Asgard, those things automatically make someone bad, and it makes sense.

But here in Midgard, Tony and Bruce tell him blue skin and magic aren't bad, even when they see bad people with them.

It's completely insane, but it seems like on Midgard- or at least here with his Tony and his Bruce and his Jarvis- those things aren't bad at all.

Tony hopes what he said to Loki got through to him. He thinks Loki's starting to get it. Hopefully that's not just wishful thinking.

When Loki starts humming Genie's song, *Friend Like Me*, Tony takes that as a cue that that conversation is over.

"So do you like your rug? I thought it might make it more comfortable under your bed. It was, wasn't it?" Tony explains, and Loki laughs as he wiggles his bare toes in the fuzz of the rug.

"Hey, Snoopy, you haven't even seen the best part." Tony says as he glances at the round hologram projector that he and Bruce had attached to the ceiling before hearing Loki scream while watching *Kim Possible*. "Jarvis, lights please."

"Of course, sir." Jarvis says, sounding somewhat pleased to be getting to his part as he shuts off the lights and covers the windows so the room falls into darkness. Then, the round projector lights up, projecting tiny dots all over the ceiling and walls and making more points of light hang in the air. The ones on the ceiling actually are in the same position as the real stars. There's one slight inaccuracy, which is the larger sphere of light that's supposed to be the moon, floating in one corner of the room. Loki's eyes look like they're about to pop out of his head and his jaw drops.

"Stars!" Loki actually squeals with delight, spinning around and gazing up at the holographic ones near the ceiling. "Look, there's Serpens! And there's Hydra! It's got like a zillion snake heads." He points up at a group of stars as he stands on his bed, holding Simba so that the toy's looking up at the stars too. It takes Tony a second to realize he's not talking about the organization HYDRA and is instead talking about the constellation. Tony didn't even know Loki knew the constellations, considering he makes up his own a lot. "An' there's Hercules!"

Loki flops down on his bed and lays there with Simba, a huge smile on his face as he stares at the ceiling with wide eyes.

"Timon? Loki asks in a somewhat gravelly voice, gazing up at the holographic stars. "Ever wonder what those sparkly dots are up there?"

"Pumbaa, I don't wonder, I know." Loki replies to himself, as Timon. He switches his voice to sound more like the meerkat.
"Oh. What are they?" Loki asks as Pumbaa.

"They're... fireflies. Fireflies that got stuck up there in that big bluish black thing." Loki says, stifling a giggle and waving an arm up at the ceiling.

"Oh, Gee. I always thought they were balls of gas burning billions of miles away." Loki replies in his Pumbaa voice.

"Pumbaa, with you, everything's gas."

Loki continues to gaze up at the holographic stars, but when he speaks again, it's in his usual voice. "Pumbaa was right, you know. They're balls of gas. That's what Jarvis said, and that book said so too. Sometimes stars die, you know, and the big ones die quicker 'cause they eat themselves too fast. But we still see the lights from them after they're gone, 'cause they're so far away that we don't see they're gone, nope nope nope. And we don't see 'em in the day but they're still there."

Tony's about to say something and leap into some sort of science thing when Loki continues. "Pumbaa was right!" He repeats. "I like that!" Both Tony and Bruce turn to give the god an assessing gaze. It sounds like Loki's partially talking about something entirely different from Pumbaa when he says that. Does he have some hidden meaning there?

Loki continues talking. "Timon thought he was really smart and right, but he was wrong 'cause stars aren't fireflies! That's silly! An' they're not fairies like Tink even though she looks like a star." Loki giggles at that and bounces on his toes.

"Well, first impressions aren't everything." Bruce says. "People can surprise you all the time with hidden talents. Sometimes people are a lot smarter than they appear at first."

Tony knows that Bruce means Loki when he says that, but whether Loki picks up on it is a mystery, since Loki doesn't give any indication one way or the other, nor does he clear up if there was some double meaning to his Pumbaa statement.

Loki doesn't respond, instead going back to playing his little scene, having his Simba toy say that the stars are the past kings. He giggles at that and tells his lion toy that that's silly, that they're really balls of gas, although then he frowns and mentions that Simba talked to a constellation of Mufasa and it talked back.

"Wanna know what Jarvis said?" Loki asks, turning to Tony. "He said all stars start out as Stellar Neb'las, but that they can either be average stars or MASSIVE stars, and when they die, the average ones become white dwarves and the massive ones are black holes. Isn't that weird, that they start out as the same thing but then some of them stay as stars and the others become dwarves? Dwarves are really, really good at building stuff, like you." Loki looks pointedly at Tony and adds as an afterthought "I don't think they've built a Man of Iron suit."

"You're really good at building things, too, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says, and Loki grins a mile wide at the praise. To be honest, the things Loki's transformed with his magic are pretty incredible.

"So dwarves build stuff? I thought Dwarves mined all day," Bruce says, smiling slightly.

Loki nods and says "Yeah, they really like metal n' stuff like treasure. But I read they can be kinda mean-like. 'Specially if you try to steal." Tony wonders if he'd read that here or somewhere in Asgard.

"I thought that was just Grumpy who was mean? Isn't there a Happy or something too? And a sleazy or something?" Tony mutters, and the reference flies right over Loki's head. Then again,
they haven't watched that Disney movie yet.

"Wait, do they really have Dwarves where you come from?" Tony asks the god.

"Not Asgard. They're in... Svar...t...alf...heim...? I think? I forget." Loki cocks his head to the side. "I've never been there. Just Asgard and Jotunheim and Midgard, and I think Midgard's the best realm ever. Like a billion times better' n the others. A hundred billion trillion times better!" Loki flaps his hands and bounces happily as he says the last part. "And I don't ever wanna leave Midgard. I wanna stay here forever and ever and ever!"

"Well, that's good, because we like having you around here, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says sounding rather affectionate.

"Really?" Loki seems astonished at the idea of people liking his company.

"Really." Tony confirms, and Loki gives him a million dollar smile. Tony once again wonders what will happen when Loki outlives them, but there's no need to ruin the moment.

"Why are the stars all here?" Loki asks. "It's not nighttime. Is it?" He chews softly on his bottom lip. "But it's dark, even outta the window."

"Actually, the windows are just covered." Tony says. "The stars are holograms. As for why they're here, you like stars, right? So I figured you'd like this. Plus, it sort of fits the rug. You know, like your song. *The moon and the stars will give you light, To sleep in the grass in peace tonight.*" Tony's privately rather proud that he thought of that.

Loki lets out a very shrill exclamation of delight. "Our song! Sleipnir, it's our song! *The silver stallion gallops away,*"

Loki starts singing the other part of his lullaby, and as he does, a silver horse starts galloping across the walls.

Tony blinks. He hadn't planned that, so it has to be Jarvis. That addition is brilliant, Tony has to admit. But he'd still come up with the original idea, so he's even more brilliant, of course. The silver horse is followed by a bunch of other horses.

"It's real!" Loki screams way too loudly in a state of pure happiness. "It's real, it's real! Our field is right here and we were gonna run away to find it!" He gallops around the room beside the images of the horses, which continue to gallop around the walls.

Suddenly, there's an actual horse running in the room, and it has eight legs and Tony can't help gawking. The horse starts singing the song with Loki, and Loki stops and stares. Tony notices Loki has green stuff around his hands.

"Sleipnir...?" Loki whispers, as if not believing his eyes. He rubs them and looks again, eyes widening in shock when he sees he's still there. So that's Sleipnir. Loki's drawings really hadn't done him justice.

Tony's almost positive that Sleipnir's another illusion, but Loki's acting like he'd almost never actually seen Sleipnir. If he can make illusions of his imaginary friends, wouldn't he have done it in Asgard? Then again, that probably wouldn't have gone over well there.

Loki laughs and runs up to hug the horse illusion, which surprisingly doesn't go away immediately. It is an illusion, right? Oddly enough, Loki's not saying a single word, but Sleipnir continues singing.
An eight-legged, singing horse has to be one of the strangest things Tony's ever witnessed.

The horses running around the wall fade, and as they do, Sleipnir does too, but Loki still has a big grin on his face.

"So that was Sleipnir? He seems fun." Bruce says, smiling slightly.

Loki turns and looks at them as if suddenly remembering there are other people in the room with him. "...You saw him?" His body stiffens warily, as if he's thinking they wouldn't like that.

"Yeah. I think you called him out or something. It was pretty awesome." Tony says, grinning at Loki. He definitely doesn't want Loki to think he's mad about that. Especially not after that whole other-Loki fiasco that started this whole conversation.

Loki frowns, flicking his fingers and frowning thoughtfully down at Simba. "But I almost never really see them. Well, I see'em in my dreams, but never awake." He sounds understandably confused. "And nobody else sees them, ever, nope nope nope... you saw him?" He gives Tony a suspicious look. "You're not joking?"

"I'm not joking. I think you sort of made him." Tony explains, wondering if Loki might freak out at that. Just like Loki, he finds this situation a little strange. That seems sort of like more than just an imaginary friend.

"Oh..." Loki looks at them somewhat warily. "You don't care?"

Tony asks him why they'd care, seriously not being able to think of a single reason. Loki doesn't answer, but he's probably thinking of reasons in his head.

Bruce smiles slightly. "He seems like a very good friend."

Loki laughs, clapping his hands. "He's really really fun and super nice, and he plays games with me, and we'd go talk to the horses, 'cause he's a horse but he's a monster horse." Loki says the monster horse part surprisingly cheerfully. "And he sang my song when I was scared, and sometimes we sang it when I was happy too, but he hasn't done that in a while, 'cause they all had to go away. 'Xcept for now. He just sang it." Loki grins and starts humming his lullaby.

"Well, I enjoyed seeing him." Tony says. Okay, part of that is because he's just interested in Loki's magic, but seeing the look on Loki's face as he'd bumped into an old friend was like a kodak moment of sheer happiness on Loki's part.

Loki frowns thoughtfully. "They don't have'ta go aways here?"

"No." Tony says, after a slight pause. There are probably some people who would discourage this whole imaginary friend thing, but they seem a lot less imaginary than normal imaginary friends. Perhaps they'd helped Loki in Asgard, kept him from going completely insane or out of depression or something. Besides, if the Asgardians made Loki feel bad about having imaginary friends there, they definitely shouldn't do it here. Tony's about to ask if maybe Loki can show them his other friends, but doesn't get the chance.

Loki laughs excitedly, flicking his fingers and gazing at Simba. "And you guys are my friends too!" He actually sounds pretty confident about that.

"You bet we are." Tony says. That comment made it seem like Loki's not planning on drifting off into his own little world and giving up on real friends.
Loki nods, still grinning. He gazes up at the stars and says "They look like Tinker Bell."

Suddenly, there's a chiming little ball of light darting around the room. Wow, Jarvis is really going all out, Tony realizes. There's even a holographic trail of Pixie Dust. Loki excitedly chases the holographic Tinker Bell around the room as it ducks behind furniture in a game of hide and seek.

This lasts for a couple minutes, and eventually the Tinker Bell hologram stays still long enough for Tony to see it's not just a ball of light. There's literally a three-dimensional model of the Tink, although perhaps Jarvis only adds that when the hologram stays still long enough.

Eventually, Jarvis shuts all the holograms off and raises the window shade. Loki and looks around the room curiously. "What happened to them?"

Tony explains that the horses on the walls, the stars, and Tink were holograms. Hopefully that doesn't ruin Loki's enjoyment of that in the future.

Loki shakes his head. "No, not them. They came outta that, and Tink's dust didn't make me fly so it had'ta be a hologram." Loki points at the ceiling projector, and Tony's slightly shocked.

Loki pulls Tony in for a spontaneous hug. "I like it. Thank you."

Tony asks what he was asking about, then.

"Kim and Ron. What happened to them? Did they die?" He asks this in a worried voice. "I hope the little pink guy didn't die. I like him!"

"Rufus." Jarvis supplies a name, presumably for the pink thing. "He's a naked mole rat."

"Do you want to watch the rest of the episode?" Tony asks, surprised. He'd have thought, after the whole disaster with seeing Dr. Drakken and Shego onscreen, that Loki wouldn't want to touch it.

"I like Rufus." Loki says.

Tony's eyebrows raise. "Okay, Jarvis. Start it up, I guess."

The holographic screen pops up, and Tony sits down on the bed next to Loki. He figures he should stay here for the rest of the episode, in case whoever made this show somehow threw another trigger in there that would freak Loki out.

As he watches the show, he realizes that Kim Possible is really a good fit for Natasha. He grins. Even though Natasha threatened him the last time he'd done it, he's decided to keep playing the show's theme song whenever she enters the tower.

He's reasonably sure he won't actually follow through on that threat, since he's an Avenger and all. Besides, Loki will probably really get a kick out of the theme song playing when Natasha comes. He definitely seems to like the fact that Kim and Ron look like Natasha and Clint now.

When Drakken and Shego go on the screen again, Tony decides to remind Loki that they're not bad because of blue skin or green magic.

Loki doesn't even freak out at seeing them again, and Tony can swear that Loki nods almost imperceptibly when he tells him that.

Tony makes a small adjustment to the innards of what's going to be a prototype of the improved version of Clint's exploding arrows. Setting his extremely-thin-tip-pliers off to the right side side of
his workbench, he turns and grabs a bag of dried fruit, popping a few pieces into his mouth and beginning to chew before turning back to his project.

He reaches off to the right, snagging the pliers which suddenly seem to have thicker handles. Tony realizes he's holding a can opener instead, and they'd been right where he put the pliers mere seconds ago. What on earth is a can opener doing here? And where the heck are his pliers? He doesn't see them anywhere on his workbench.

It has to be either Dum-E or Loki, and Tony's pretty sure it's the former.

He suddenly realizes there's someone standing behind him, which he hadn't noticed when he'd been absorbed in working on the arrow. He turns to see Loki holding the pliers he'd been going for. Huh, he didn't actually think it was Loki. Loki grins guilelessly at him and holds them out. Then, seeming to remember that Tony hates being handed things, he slides them back onto the workbench and gives him another grin, looking quite innocent.

"I don't need this, but thanks buddy." Tony hands the can opener to Loki, thinking that perhaps the god had been offering it to him as a tool. Dum-E does random stuff like that all the time. Crazy robot. Actually, that's probably where Loki had gotten it.

"You're not mad." Loki says, making it sound half like a question and half like an observation.

"Why would I be mad?" Tony asks, confused.

"Not mad." Loki murmurs to himself, nodding slightly. He glances at Tony, as if asking for confirmation, and Tony reassures him that he's not mad.

Loki wanders off with the can opener in his hands and Simba tucked under one arm, humming the Kim Possible theme song to himself. Well, that was strange. Tony shrugs, watching Loki typing something down before doodling on a piece of paper. Loki mumbles something Tony can't hear, and he's not sure if Loki's talking to Simba or his other imaginary friends. He's definitely heard him mutter stuff to Hel and Jormungand. Considering he talked to Simba before, Tony doesn't think letting him talk to the others is necessarily a problem, although he does look sort of crazy doing it.

Loki looks completely ridiculous. He's wearing the Iron Man suit, since he'd been pretending to be Iron Man around an hour ago. He'd actually used his magic to put it on again, which is a definite plus. However, he hadn't put on the gloves, boots or helmet, and his exposed hands and feet look rather strange next to the armor. He's not wearing that ludicrous long coat right now, though.

However, Loki's wearing the newest addition to his collection of bizarre clothes he's made with his magic, although this is technically an accessory. He'd made it yesterday, a couple hours after the whole Kim Possible incident.

It's a rather fat necklace resembling a snake that had morphed from a rubber tube Loki had been fiddling with. Tony had rushed forward to intervene when Loki started wrapping the tube around his neck. He's still not entirely sure if Loki really hadn't meant to kill himself that one time on the balcony or not.

However, before he'd even reached the god, Loki had magicked it into a necklace. The necklace makes it look like the snake is wrapping itself around Loki in a hug, with its head is at the bottom, near Loki's chest. Dangling from the mouth of the snake are three figurines- a wolf, a horse with eight legs, and a girl that looks almost like a skeleton on one half.

Tony worked out that they're supposed to resemble Jormungand, Fenrir, Sleipnir and Hel- Loki's
imaginary friends.

Tony turns back to the arrow, grabbing the pliers.

About ten minutes later, Loki's back. He holds up a drawing for Tony to look at. It's of him, in the Hulkbuster suit, and Hulk fighting Thor.

"This looks great." Tony says, as Loki places it on top of a pile of other drawings. Really, Loki's drawing has improved a lot since he first came here. Admittedly, it's still not excellent, but it's definitely better than it was.

Tony flips through some other drawings Loki's left around. There are a couple of Tinker Bell, who he's drawn a lot since watching Peter Pan. Tony suspects the reason Loki's drawn to her is because she flies, and maybe because she resembles a star.

Tony sees yet another drawing of him fighting Thor, and a couple drawings of Loki and Hulk hugging. There's also, buried deep in the pile of drawings, a bunch of shreds of paper, obviously torn up. Most of them are missing, but Tony catches what looks like half a face, with blue and red as the primary colors...

He glances over at the god, who's typing something. Simba's standing in front of the keyboard, as are the Natasha and Clint action figures, which Loki's seemed to occasionally use as Kim and Ron. Had Loki actually drawn his Jotun form? That seems like progress. Then again, given the drawing was ripped into tiny pieces, perhaps it's not much progress after all.

"So, what'cha writing there, Snoopy?" Tony asks, sauntering up behind Loki with his hands in his pockets. "A rousing speech? Sappy love poem? Fanfiction? You know, people apparently write fanfiction about us Avengers, which is sort of weird, because we're real. I made the mistake of reading a certain one and.. yeesh. Even I wouldn't do that stuff that author had me doing." He leaves it purposely vague, but really, some of those sex scenes had just been plain messed up. Although, he had found it very amusing when, around nine months ago, he sent a rather smutty (but not quite as perverted) fanfic to Steve, imagining the super-soldier's face turning beet red. It had the opposite effect on Clint, who thought it was hilarious.

Loki's giving him a look that clearly says he thinks Tony's lost his marbles, and he just says "No."

"Well, mind if I have a look?" Tony asks. Okay, so his curiosity might be bordering on nosiness, but oh well.

Loki doesn't answer, but he doesn't look too perturbed when Tony pulls the document up in front of himself. Frankly, Loki's sort of lucky Tony even asked. There was a time when he wouldn't have even bothered doing that and would just shamelessly invade Loki's privacy. But now that Tony's thought of it, what if Loki's writing a suicide note or something. He shakes his head. That might be a stretch.

Tony scrolls through the first couple pages, which all contain information about various animals. He briefly skims through the text, which looks like it was copied from somewhere, probably that huge animal book Loki's been reading. Horses, wolves, snakes and lions being the most-written about, although there's a small bit about zebras near the end of a part about horses, and there are some bits about apes, hawks, spiders and chameleons.

Hawks and spiders... Hawkeye and Black Widow? Is that just a coincidence?

There's also a fair amount of information about stars, mixed in randomly with the animal stuff.
Some of it is stuff that Loki had said earlier in his bedroom. Randomly thrown in the middle of that are the words naked mole rat.

Then, the long paragraphs cut off. The next line, which is at the bottom of the page, is a single word.

Monssssssdsssssateeeerrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr.

Okay, so it has a bunch of added letters and what looks like a couple mishit keys, but it's still recognizable as monster. And Tony doesn't like seeing that word there at all.

Hoping it will switch to something happier, Tony scrolls down. To the next page.

Remember what I taught you, Quasimodo. Is written on the next line. Loki apparently hasn't grasped the importance of quotation marks yet, but who can blame him? He just started writing maybe two weeks ago, if that. There's a picture of Quasimodo pasted after it, presumably pulled somewhere from the internet (perhaps from Jarvis since Tony doesn't think Loki even knows about the internet).

Frankly, the fact Loki's written this much, even with some misspelled words and presumably copied paragraphs about animals and stars, is astonishing. Especially when taking his somewhat bizarre speech into account, with what seems to be All-Tongue glitches.

Once again, Tony's reminded that Loki is clearly no idiot. Far from it, actually. Even though sometimes he gives the other impression, he's proven this fact before, like with the Rubik's cube and retaining all the star knowledge he'd spouted in his bedroom yesterday.

The next part is all spelled correctly, but Tony realizes it's lyrics from one of the Hunchback of Notre Dame songs. Maybe Loki asked how to spell all the words, or maybe he copied and pasted it. Tony's not sure, but as he reads the lyrics, he starts to get a sinking feeling in his stomach.

"Out there they'll revile you as a monster. I am a monster. Out there they will hate and scorn and jeer. Only a monster. Why invite their calumny and consternation? Stay in here. Be faithful to me. Be grateful to me. Do as I say, obey, and stay in here."

"Jarvis, get Bruce down here, will you? Tell him it involves you-know-who." He casts a look at Loki, who's drawing something on a piece of paper.

The fact that Loki chose that scene doesn't sit well with Tony at all. He doesn't know if he should confront Loki about it or not.

Tony's about to ask Jarvis why he didn't inform him of this, until he realizes this document must be on Loki's server. Jarvis generally keeps those things private, but Tony would have preferred he didn't keep this private.

"Hey, Jarvis?" Tony says quietly so Loki won't hear him. "If you see worrying stuff like this, let me know in the future, okay?" He pauses and thinks. "Actually, if you think something needs intervention, you don't need to ask me first. Just do what has to be done."

Maybe that can be Jarvis' reward for telling Thor off for his treatment of Loki. Jarvis would probably like that a lot, actually.

"Of course, sir." Jarvis says, equally quiet. He doesn't say anything else about the document, though.
As he's waiting for Bruce to come down, he scrolls down again and sees more song lyrics, and he remembers Loki singing them after the whole Thor confrontation two days ago on Halloween.

"I knew I'd never know. That warm and loving glow. Though I might wish with all my might. No face as hideous as my face was ever meant for friendship's light."

Tony frowns slightly in confusion. He knows that friendship hadn't been the word in the movie. It had been Heaven's light in the actual song. The slight edit makes him pause because that seems even worse than the original message, if he edited it to say he doesn't deserve friends. Tony doubts that Loki had ever heard the word heaven in Asgard, since well, those people are in Norse mythology and were once worshipped as gods. Not that Tony's ever really mentioned it here. He casts another look at Loki, still unsure whether to confront him or not.

That thing is a killing masheen. Machine? Apparently, Loki hadn't had help with that word, yet he'd managed to sound it out pretty well. Tony's impressed, really. There's a picture of Boo there.

But under the picture of Boo is another, more positive phrase. You know, I don't think that kid's dangerous. Tony wonders if Loki had copied and pasted that one. Still, that makes things seem a bit less drastic. Maybe. Perhaps there's no double meaning to any of this, and Loki's just writing movie quotes?

Bruce arrives, looking confused but looking like he realizes that whatever they're going to be discussing probably won't be a happy topic. He's right, of course.

"Have you actually looked at what he's written?" Tony murmurs. Bruce replies that Loki writes about animals, and Tony gestures to the holographic screen in front of him. "Look again."

Bruce reads scrolls through it and Tony reads next to him, after enlarging the holographic screen. Bruce looks rather worried to see those song lyrics, and both of their worry just increases as they scroll down further.

The words that Loki was presumably called continue, and Tony automatically reads them in a snide voice in his head, probably matching Loki's bullies. Almost all of them are misspelled, which tells Tony that Loki hadn't had help writing them, and probably hadn't copied them. So he'd sounded them out on his own, apparently.

Savage. Freeeek. Idiot (Ironically, that's the one spelled correctly).


Worfles? What the heck is that?! Worf... worth? Worthless? Oh, that makes sense, although Tony really wishes it were something else.

Tony feels somewhat disturbed as he looks over all the things Loki must have heard countless times in Asgard.

Week. Pafetik.

There's one word, spelled correctly, that stands out even among all the other jibes.

Broken

Tony stares at that word for a while, halting the scrolling, and notices in his peripheral vision that Bruce is staring too. Tony can't stop looking at that one word as the implications roll over him. It can't mean physically broken, can it? Loki heals insanely quickly, and it's next to a bunch of taunts.
"Loki, why did you write this?" Tony asks, trying to keep any negative emotions out of his voice, knowing that sounding angry won't help things at all. Loki's said some things, like one flashback where someone said something about his brain being messed up, that make this seem worse. And then there was the time Loki mentioned how getting hit on the head with a frying pan wasn't as bad as Flynn Rider made it out to be...

Loki walks over, glancing at the screen curiously and scrolling through it. He'd been in the middle of playing a game and is holding the Hawkeye action figure. Simba is over on the floor, with Loki's other toys scattered around the lion. Perhaps Loki hadn't bothered switching which toy was in his hand.

"Write what?" Loki asks. Tony scrolls to the part and points at the word broken. That's the most worrying, although there's plenty of other worrying stuff too.

Loki doesn't answer, rocking back and forth on his toes.

Sure, Tony has always noticed that Loki's very well, different. Tony recalls, with some shame, that one of the first things he thought about his friend was that something was wrong with him. Not wrong, he's realized. Just different. Every so often, he also reveals a rather startlingly intelligent mind.

"They thoughts I was a hyyynn-a!" Loki says out of the blue, and his voice rises to a weird screech at the end. He stares into thin air, eyes focused on something unseen. He makes it sound like it's a perfectly reasonable answer, but Tony can't see an ounce of sense in that. He also wonders if the thoughts was another All-Tongue glitch.

"Come again?" Bruce asks.

"A Hy'ena. Like Ed."

"Ed...? Oh, a Hyena?"

"Yeah, like Ed n' Shenzi n' Banzai. But mostly Ed." Loki says, letting out a rather hyena-like laugh. He jumps up and down, shaking his head wildly as he laughs. It makes him look sort of insane. More than sort of, actually. Tony tells himself that perhaps Loki's pretending to be the hyenas. Still, that answer really didn't help at all. Who's Ed?

"Why did they think you were a hyena, Snoopy?" Tony would be lying if he said he wasn't wondering whether or not there's any sense at all behind this, because he can't see any. Loki gives him a look as if that's a dumb question that he really shouldn't have asked.

"It's clear from your vacant expression. The lights are not all on upstairs." Loki says in a somewhat deep voice. It dawns on Tony that Scar had sung that to the hyenas in The Lion King.

It's true that Loki's glassy eyes don't always give the picture of intelligence. Though Tony's still rather surprised to hear Loki say that. Apparently, there was some sort of logic behind that.

"Jarvis says that means they're dumb and that it doesn't have anything to do with lights or stairs." Loki says, wrinkling his brow. "You Midgardians say some really weird things."

"They thought you were dumb?" Bruce asks quietly.

Loki answers something else instead. "They thought they were always right, but they weren't 'cause they said I'd never have friends. But you guys are still my friends even after Thor and Drakken and Shego, so I can't never have friends like they said, so they were wrong? And they can't even say
"Yes, they were wrong." Tony says, glad they've at least made progress in that regard. "They were wrong about other things too, you know. Like-" He's going to go on, and say that Loki's not any of the things he'd written, but Loki's talking again.

"They said only cow-ards do magic, but the Allfather Odin did magic and he's really brave. And Lady Frigga's not scaredy-lady 'cause she's brave too. And Thor said she hid me with Odin, they hid my blue. They always knew better'n me, like Timon did for Pumbaa, but we weren't friends like Pumbaa and Timon were. And they were mean like Scar and Frollo and Mother Gothel!"

"But you said people thought Pumbaa was dumb but he was right about the stars." Bruce points out. "Loki, you are not a coward."

Tony frowns slightly. In some ways, Loki is a coward. Tony thinks about the frequent running and hiding, curling up on the floor, screaming and crying...

But then he thinks of the fact that Loki hasn't given up on life or happiness after everything he's been through, way more than Tony himself ever has. He thinks about how, even when he thought all his friends hated him, he wasn't contemplating taking the drastic way out. At least, so he says.

Loki's only response is saying that he likes Pumbaa, and Tony goes back to his earlier train of thought as he looks at the word broken yet again.

Sometimes Loki's almost like a little kid, but Tony sort of assumed it was a result of his abuse, perhaps spurred on by his natural personality. There's no way to tell if it's nature or nurture (or in Loki's case, the complete opposite of a nurturing environment). That was never a really pleasant thought, but now an even more unpleasant one occurs.

Tony thinks of that Other-Loki they'd seen earlier, with the non-glazed eyes. Even though it was only a magical illusion when Loki mistook Shego for himself, it had somehow radiated an air of great intelligence. Possibly genius level. But that had been what Loki interpreted Shego as, right? He'd acted like Shego had popped out of the screen and become that Other-Loki. After all, the threatening, somewhat bored personality fit the cartoon girl, too.

As Tony thinks of the other-Loki with clear eyes from yesterday, he remembers that one child-Loki illusion that popped up weeks ago, with eyes that weren't nearly as glassy, just sad and scared. That one hadn't been a fake-Loki that Loki misinterpreted, right? If that was indeed what Loki looked like as a child, than clearly some sort of change had taken place...

When Loki curled up like he's expecting to be beaten (which Tony's noticed has decreased over his time here, thankfully) he always covered his head. That's probably a natural reaction, but what if he hit in the head too many times? That thought couples unpleasantly with that remark Loki had made a while ago about getting hit on the head with a frying pan. Clearly, he'd sustained some head injuries from his time in Asgard.

How often had he been hit in the head? Too many times or blows that were too hard could be... problematic.

What if that caused some of Loki's issues, like his somewhat weird speech and movement, his odd behavior?

Tony glances at Bruce, but Bruce doesn't even look particularly surprised, like he's been thinking about Loki's brain being damaged for a while.
He'll have to talk to Bruce about that sometime.

Tony rubs his head, where the beginning of a headache is forming. Thinking about that is almost worse than thinking about the abuse Loki suffered. Because there's no way to fix a broken brain. That's sort of a permanent thing.

Loki's been banging on the keys for a while, and Tony looks up to see about a solid page of NONONONONONONONONO.

Tony really hopes that's Loki telling himself those hateful jibes are wrong.

Loki suddenly starts typing else, and Tony peers to read the words over his shoulder.

*Not al Lions r bad.*

"Not... all Lions are bad?" Tony asks, for confirmation, feeling a budding hope in his chest. Had Loki actually taken that all in yesterday?

Loki grins and nods. "Simba's a good lion and so's Mufasa. Scar's a baddie."

Loki scrolls down a bit and stops at a picture of Rapunzel. Under that is the quote *A gift like that, it has to be protected.*

"Rapunzel does good magic and Genie does good magic, 'cause he kept Aladdin from dying in the water. But Jafar was mean and did bad magic as a genie, and he made Genie do bad magic too." Loki blurts out.

"You do good magic, too."

"But ice..."

"Hey, there's nothing wrong with ice."

Loki cocks his head to the side. "You said the lady makes ice, right, but that she's good?"

"...Elsa?" Tony realizes. "I think so. I know it has a happy ending, so keep that in mind when we see *Frozen* later today."

Pepper had managed to arrange for the four of them- Tony, Loki, Bruce and herself- to be able to see *Frozen* before it's release, in a private theatre viewing in Times Square. They're going later today, and Pepper had asked to be sure the movie has a happy ending. Tony had wanted to just watch it in the tower, but he does grudgingly understand why Disney would want to avoid the possibility of it being pirated. Apparently they'll be able to pause and rewind if they need to, which might help.

Hopefully, it'll help Loki instead of making things worse.

Loki scrolls down again and stops at a paragraph, which Tony eventually recognizes as the second part of that *Heaven's Light* song Quasimodo sang. Loki frowns as his eyes roam over the words, and then he starts tweaking it.

Loki backs away as if he's finished it, and Tony and Bruce both lean forward to read it. There are some spelling errors which Tony mentally corrects in his head as he reads Loki's version of the song.

*But suddenly my best friends have smiled at me*
And touched my skin without a trace of fright

I dare to dream that they might even care for me

And as I ring these bells tonight.

Tony Stark's tower seems so bright

I swear it must be friendship's light.

Tony leans back, shocked but pleased, and he can't help but smirk a bit at some of Loki's alterations.

The tweaked lyrics from earlier in the song, about no face as hideous as his face ever being meant for friendship's light, had been so worrying. Tony had wondered if Loki had gotten the wrong message from the movie, but now there's this.

It's like Loki's using the Disney movies as his own sort of therapy. Sure, Tony had shown him some of them to try to make him change his views about things, but this is still really shocking. And great, in terms of Loki's progress.

They really do seem to be making progress after all. Although, they've made a lot more progress by themselves than with Dr. Carlisle, who Tony has to pay. Granted, they've only had two sessions with her, but Tony's not entirely sure if it's worth it. He grins at Loki, who grins back.

Also, Tony notices as he looks at Loki's altered lyrics again, Loki had stuck with the correct number of syllables. For some reason, that strikes Tony as another demonstration of Loki's intellect.

Tony starts tinkering with the arrow for Clint. He makes another adjustment and puts his pliers aside again.

The next time he goes to grab the pliers, Tony finds that they've been replaced with the can opener again. He blinks.

"Use that to fix it!" Loki says right behind him, and Tony didn't even hear him come up. "Use it use it use it!" Tony frowns, because surely Loki doesn't think that will help. As he looks at Loki again, about to tell him so, he sees there's something mischievous in Loki's eyes.

Bruce looks amused, too.

"It's not gonna woooork!" Loki singsongs, bouncing on his toes and laughing somewhat maniacally. Huh. Guess that advice wouldn't have been necessary, Tony realizes. "It's a cans op'ner! It can open cans! It's not gonna work on that, nope nope nope!" Loki says this as if Tony doesn't know it already, and he can hardly get the words out between his snickers and giggles, especially at the can open cans part. Maybe he'd liked the pun, though Tony has no idea if it was intentional.

Tony blinks. Did Loki just... prank him?

It seems so unlike the god, but that's the impression he's getting. Then again, it's a very rudimentary prank. Tony's not even entirely sure if it counts, but the way Loki looks right now, it's like telling Tony to use the wrong tool is the best joke in the world.

"Well aren't you Mister Mischief today?" Tony quips and fights the urge to roll his eyes. As far as
pranks go, that's pretty lame. Still, he's astonished Loki actually did that, considering he seems worried that he'll suddenly be hated a lot. Actually, Tony has to wonder if the god even intended it as a prank the first time, or if it was purely on accident and he had thought it would be funny to repeat the incident.

Still, it's a side of Loki he hasn't seen before, and for some reason Tony feels this is a positive thing. Although that might just be because he likes tricking people sometimes.

Loki once again replaces the pliers, swaps them out with the can opener another time immediately after, and then puts the pliers on the work bench yet again and slips the can opener into his drawstring bag.

Loki stares at him and murmurs "They told me to."

"Uh, sure." Tony says, guessing that Loki's probably talking about one of his imaginary friends or something. He's still confused about the idea of Loki pranking him. This has to be a good sign, though. Perhaps something about Loki being even more comfortable around him. He'd seemed a little worried when Tony first turned around, but apparently that worry had gone away enough for him to do it again.

"So did you prank people in Asgard?" Tony asks conversationally. When he thinks about it, he's pretty sure the answer is no. Considering how Loki was treated, Tony doubts the god would have been able to prank anyone without being punished. However, Loki doesn't answer, instead grabbing Simba, hoisting himself up on a table, and sitting there, simply staring at Tony.

"Volstagg was gonna eat a grape but it was a bug." Loki almost whispers after a bit before hastily saying that it was an accident. Tony's not sure if Loki had used his magic on that or just replaced something, or even if Loki had been the one to do it at all. Perhaps there had just been a bug in a bowl of grapes?

Still, he can't help but laugh at that. "I wish I could have seen that!"

Loki just squeezes his eyes shut and tenses his body, rocking back and forth and twisting his hands together. "He was all angry." Loki shudders, as if remembering the aftermath. Which, judging from what he's heard about Asgard, probably involved some form of corporal punishment. Still, he doesn't totally freak out, so perhaps that was a relatively minor incident.

Still, the idea of the implied punishment being minor doesn't sit well with Tony, because he's got a pretty good feeling it involved physical pain somehow.

Bruce urges Loki to breathe deeply. It takes a couple minutes to get Loki in the rhythm, but eventually he manages and his body slowly relaxes. Tony has his arm around Loki's shoulder the whole time.

Tony clarifies what he said. "I meant I wish I could watch him eat a bug. I'd pay good money to see that, actually."

To his astonishment, Loki snickers. "It was a really big, juicy one like Timon and Pumbaa eat, 'xcept I don't think he though it was sats'fying like Simba did. He was like..." Loki pauses and pulls a disgusted face. Even if the aftermath of that event doesn't seem to pleasant, Loki seems to like remembering the look on Volstagg's face. Maybe he'd liked the prank?

Loki looks down at Simba and asks the toy "Are bugs really not gross?"

"So did he actually eat it?"
"He tried'ta spit it out, but it crawled back in." Loki says with a surprising smirk.


"It was... 'till they hit me." Loki says softly.

"Well, I have no doubt Volstagg deserved it." Tony mutters. Loki blinks at him in shock, mouth downturned in a confused frown.

"I don't even know what he did, but he deserved it." Tony repeats.

"He was being mean." Loki murmurs, although Tony's has a feeling Loki's not exactly talking to him sometime.

"I bet he was." Tony says and Loki doesn't respond.

"You know," Tony says, when the silence gets to be too great. "I don't think you're ever going to stop surprising me, Snoopy."
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

While some TV shows seem like they were made to make Loki panic, some movies seem like they were made to help Loki.

Chapter Notes

Fun fact: On FF.Net, I posted this chapter on my birthday, but that was over half a year ago.

Also, I guess I should put in a disclaimer saying I don't own any of this stuff...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Right now, Loki's in some place called a movie theater. Apparently they make whole buildings for theaters and stuff. Loki's not entirely sure why they had to go somewhere to watch this, when there's a room just like this one in the tower, with a huge screen and similar seats and everything. But he likes going outside, so he's not complaining. His flip flops aren't nearly as annoying as shoes, he thinks, wiggling his bare toes.

He has a huge bowl of popcorn on his lap, and Simba's standing beside him. Tony hadn't let him wear his awesome star coat, or that necklace with fake versions Jormungand and the others, but at least he got to bring Simba. Tony had suggested perhaps taking Toy Stark instead, but that would be stupid because he's got the real Tony with him right here. Tony had insisted that Simba not wear his Man of Iron suit, though. Which is sort of annoying, but it means Simba's softer, too.

The lights are turned off and somethings projected on the screen. There are a ton of snowflakes floating around, and then the word Frozen zooms out. Is this part of it?

Then, someone starts walking on top of ice and a saw cuts through it, which is sort of scary. Is it a Jotun? No, it's just a bunch of men cutting the ice and singing about it. The whole area around them is all icy. Is it Jotunheim? Asgard doesn't have ice, after all, and Jotunheim is all ice. The men sing about how the ice is beautiful, which nobody ever says. There's also a little boy with a reindeer. The men also sing something about beware the frozen heart.

Then, it zooms in on a castle, though it's not nearly as big as Asgard's castle. In a bedroom, a little redheaded girl climbs on another girls bed, calling the other girl Elsa. That's the ice lady? She's a kid. Anna tries to wake Elsa up, but Elsa seems tired.

"Do you wanna build a snowman?" Anna asks, and Elsa grins, awake now. The girls run downstairs, and Anna pleads "Do the magic, do the magic!"

Loki stares in shock, because surely Anna can't like freaky ice powers. But as Elsa makes a little snowball form between her hands, Anna looks amazed and excited. Elsa shoots the snowball in the air, and a flurry of snow erupts, looking a lot like stars. Loki laughs at that sight, liking it
immensely.

Is Elsa a Frost Giant? Only Frost Giants can make ice and snow. But she's not blue. Maybe someone disguised her real form, like him?

Anna and Elsa start playing in the snow, building a snowman and sliding on icy slides. Loki's jealous, because why hadn't there been anyone like Anna in Asgard? He would have loved it if someone there actually liked ice, and wasn't just pretending to like his magic like the servant boy.

Why couldn't Thor have been like Anna? He and Thor lived together, like Elsa and Anna, although they never shared a room.

Loki wishes Thor had been fun like Anna. Well, he seemed like that around his friends, but never him, the Frost Giant.

But then, Elsa accidentally hits Anna with a blast of magic, and Anna falls to the floor, limp. Did Elsa kill her? Either way, hurting Anna is really bad, and it means Elsa's a monster, right?

No, no no no. This can't be happening. Loki paces back and forth, flapping his hands and jumping anxiously, not liking what's onscreen at all.

Bruce suggests taking deep breaths, but Loki's too panicked and can't slow his breathing.

Tony gets up, puts an arm around him and tries to calm him down. This helps more, and Loki stops pacing, although now he's rocking back and forth without even really thinking about it.

Tony said Elsa was good, right? And he said powers weren't good or bad, but it mattered what you did with them. Playing in the snow looks like lots of fun, but Elsa just hurt Anna and that's bad. That makes her bad, but Tony said she was good!

Had he lied? Loki glances at the man, who still has an arm around his shoulder. Tony wouldn't lie about this, right? He hadn't been lying after Thor, when he said he still liked him, despite his hideously blue skin.

Tony said earlier today that Elsa had a happy ending, like Quasimodo's. How does he know? Well, Tony is super-smart, so maybe that's it? Yeah, probably.

Onscreen, Elsa is crying and cradling Anna. Loki frowns. Elsa hurt Anna, but if Jotuns are vicious monsters that only know how to hurt and kill like everyone but his Tony and Bruce say, they wouldn't be sad when they hurt someone, would they? Evil Frost Giants certainly wouldn't apologize like Elsa's doing right now.

As Elsa cries, more ice starts forming on the floor in an ominous way. Her parents come in, shocked and scared.

Elsa hurt Anna! That's bad! So that means she's bad, right? That's what everyone says.

"It was an accident. I'm so sorry Anna." Elsa says.

"But she's bad." Loki mumbles. She hurt Anna with ice, just like the evil Frost Giants in stories do.

However, Tony, Pepper and Bruce all say that since it was an accident, that doesn't make it bad. They're... sticking up for her? Even though she's a Frost Giant. Well, they've stuck up for him too, and Tony and Bruce didn't even say anything about Drakken being a monster even though he's an Evil Jotun.
Now Elsa, Anna and their parents are riding horses, and Loki smiles slightly at the sight of his favorite animal, flicking his fingers. The horse Elsa's riding has a trail of ice forming behind it, and the little boy and the reindeer from earlier follow it, not seeming at all concerned with the ice.

Loki frowns thoughtfully. This place on the screen can't be in Jotunheim, because that's all ice and stuff, and the ground isn't icy except for where Elsa froze it. And it couldn't have been Jotunheim earlier because that boy is here, and none of the people in that earlier part had blue skin or anything, and all the Jotuns in Jotunheim do. So where is it? Aside from in the screen world, obviously, where all the other screen people are.

Loki wishes he could go there and meet them all.

They reach a place with a bunch of rocks that turn out to be trolls. Loki frowns when they call Elsa and Anna's father the king, because that means Elsa and Anna are princesses, just like he and Simba are princes. Apparently, Loki's Jotun father was the king of Jotunheim. Odin was king of Asgard, but he wasn't really Loki's father, although Loki lived with them, so they were sort of closer to his family than the Warriors Three or other Asgardians were. But they didn't like him, and that's not family. Tony and Bruce are closer to family than Odin and Thor.

"Born with the powers, or cursed?" The troll leader asks.

"Born, and they're getting stronger." The King replies. Okay, Elsa's definitely a Jotun if she was born with those powers. But they don't seem to hate her for it. Anna certainly doesn't. Is she a Jotun too? But then she'd have the ice powers as well, and she clearly doesn't. Maybe Elsa was taken from Jotunheim, like him? He wonders if he ever saw her, even as a baby. Maybe she was a baby then, too?

The troll heals Anna, but makes it so Anna doesn't remember Elsa's powers. Elsa seems upset about it and asks for clarification about Anna not remembering about the powers.

"Listen to me, Elsa." The troll king says. "Your power will only grow. There is beauty in it." Loki's never heard about the beauty being in his Jotun powers before. As the troll says this, a sort of illusion-Elsa forms in the air. Loki blinks, because it's sort of like his Other-Loki's. Or is it a hologram? Loki asks, and Tony tells him it's magic, not a hologram.

Wait.. the trolls can do that sort of magic? But the king isn't treating them like freaks either. The illusion-Elsa makes a pretty snowflake and Loki grins. Maybe there really is good in the ice powers that he almost never uses. Besides, those snow slides and the snowman that Elsa made earlier looked really fun, so those are good, too.

"... but also great danger." The troll continues, and the pretty snowflake turns pointy, red and sinister-looking. Loki's heard about the bad stuff, all right. "You must learn to control it. Fear will be your enemy."

Elsa looks horrified and hides against her father. Loki doesn't really have a problem with hiding the ice, not like he does with his other magic, so it's kind of weird that Elsa does.

"She can learn to control it, I'm sure." The king says. He says they'll close the gates, keep her powers hidden from everyone including Anna. Anna watches sadly as Elsa shuts the door, and Loki feels rather sad too.

When Anna starts singing moments later, though, Loki grins. The songs in movies are some of his favorite parts, and he'll have to remember this one. Anna's asking Elsa if she wants to build a snowman, trying to get Elsa out of her room, but Elsa won't come out. Loki wishes he had someone
who'd want to play with him when he used to hide from everyone in Asgard. Someone who would miss him. Maybe it's not Asgard, but Pepper had said they'd miss him if he left. Loki smiles slightly, until Elsa refuses to come out and Anna sadly sings "Okay bye." Now he feels sad.

In Elsa's room, Elsa looks out of the window, smiling until part of it freezes. She backs away, scared, and the king gives her gloves, saying they'll help. "Conceal it, don't feel it, don't let it show."

"That's horrible parenting." Pepper says, looking annoyed, and the people onscreen stop moving. "Why do they think that teaching her to be scared of it is a good idea?"

Loki laughs, but not happily. That's what everyone in Asgard did to him. This doesn't show Elsa getting beaten for using her powers, but it has to happen, right?

"Are they beating her?" He asks to nobody in particular.

Bruce gives him a look Loki doesn't know the meaning of and says "I certainly hope not. If they were, they'd be despicable people. If they could even be considered people, really. I think they'd be closer to monsters if they did that."

But Elsa's the monster, because she's a Jotun. Still, Loki feels really bad for Elsa, because he knows all too well how it feels to have to hide his magic, especially since he's not very good at it. It's weird that Elsa's having so much trouble with her Jotun powers, though, because Loki never had as much trouble with those as he did with his magic that makes green stuff around his hands.

Anna looks slightly older the next time she asks Elsa, through the door, about building a snowman. She also reveals that she's been talking to the pictures on the walls. Loki wonders if Anna gets punished for that, like he got punished for talking to his friends. But he doesn't get punished for that here in Midgard. Tony and Bruce actually liked seeing Sleipnir. Loki liked that too, because he rarely actually sees those friends. It's a good thing Sleipnir never showed up in Asgard, though.

Back in Elsa's room, there's patch of ice on the wall. "I'm scared. It's getting stronger!" Elsa says.

"Elsa, calm down. Getting upset only makes it worse." The King says. For some reason, that kind of reminds Loki of Bruce- both what the king just said and the way he said it. He glances at Bruce, who has an unreadable look on his face. Bruce seems to notice Loki looking at him, because he turns and offers a somewhat tight smile.

The King approaches Elsa, and Elsa flinches away. "No, don't touch me! Please, I don't want to hurt you."

Then, Elsa and Anna are no longer children. The King and Queen leave on a trip. A boat is struck by lightning, which has to be Thor right? Loki doesn't like thunder or lightning, but he doesn't hear thunder when the boat's struck. Still, he squeeze his eyes shut and covers his ears. Why would Thor strike a boat with lightning? Then, it shows a black cloth being draped over a portrait of the king and queen.

"Why are they doing that?" He asks, and Pepper explains that the King and Queen died when the boat sunk. Oh. That's really sad. Wait, Thor killed Elsa and Anna's parents?! But why would he do that? Is it because Elsa's a Frost Giant? Thor's killed a lot of Frost Giants, but are Elsa's parents even Frost Giants?

Anna tries to get Elsa out of her room again, and eventually the sit on opposite sides of the door, crying. There's snow all around Elsa.
Suddenly, the words *Three Years Later* appears on the screen.

A bunch of villagers are talking about how there's a coronation, and Loki freezes. "I don't like those!" He blurts out accidentally.

"Don't like what?" Tony asks.

"Cor-no-rations. Don't like them, nope nope nope! They're bad!" Thor's coronation had been awful, not that Loki had even seen it. But Thor had been even more arrogant and boastful than before, and told him before that one of his first orders as King would be to get him out of there.

But then, somehow, a bunch of Frost Giants had shown up. Loki starts to not notice the surroundings as he's lost in the memory. He had actually caught a glimpse of one of them, and it was huge. Much bigger than he is, and he's a Frost Giant too.

He remembers Fandrall and Volstagg approaching him, and then his memory's blank until he'd woken up in Heimdall's dome with his Jotun skin showing. Apparently, they'd tried to ditch him in Jotunheim, just like Thor said about how he'd get rid of him. But Heimdall had saved him for some crazy reason.

Tony's hugging him now, and Bruce tells him to do that slow-breathing meditation thing, doing it along with him.

"Heimdall wasn't actually that bad." Loki mumbles, once he can speak.

"Huh?"

Loki finds himself explaining all about Thor's coronation, and about the resulting trip to Jotunheim he doesn't even remember. The others seem mad, but they assure him they're mad at the Asgardians. Bruce doesn't even Hulk out, though, which is disappointing. Tony and the others don't seem to think that the Jotuns would have eaten him.

Somehow, talking about it actually seems to help. Maybe it's because they try to reassure him after.

"So this Heimdall guy saved you?" Tony asks, and Loki nods slightly. "Well, he doesn't sound like a total jerk like most Asgardians. Maybe we should send him something to say thanks." Tony pauses thoughtfully, and a smirk crosses his face. "Do you guys have fruit baskets up in your space-viking-god land?"

That's a kind of stupid question. Of course they have fruit, and baskets, and even the two put together like Tony just said. Loki nods, and Tony smirks again, muttering something about other gift ideas.

Loki tells about how Thor got banished to Midgard for a couple days after that. In retrospect, they probably already know about that, though. Since they know Thor and they live on Midgard and everything.

They start watching the screen again, which shows that boy with the reindeer from earlier, only now they're both adults. Apparently the reindeer's named Sven, and the man talks to him and replies for the reindeer. Then, the scene shifts to Anna in bed with crazy hair. Loki giggles. Anna sleepily remembers that her sister's coronation day, which means *Elsa's* getting crowned. But she's a Jotun!

There's no way they'd let *her* sit on the throne, just like how he never had a chance of sitting on Asgard's throne for multiple reasons. First, there's the whole part about him being a Jotun, but he
has a feeling they wouldn’t let him even if he hadn't been a Jotun. They hated him for other reasons, so it’s not like he'd ever have a chance.

Although Loki hates coronations, Anna seems excited about this one. She starts singing about how excited it is, and how she might find true love because they’ll actually see people for the first time.

Then it switches to Elsa. She's singing about *conceal, don't feel and make one wrong move and everyone will know.* Loki definitely knows how that feels, having to constantly worry about accidentally doing magic. But Elsa's father knew about it, and he has to be the one who picked her, right? She accidentally freezes a candlestick and a bowl and hastily puts the gloves back on. Loki wonders if gloves would help with his accidental magic.

When the gates open and Anna runs out among the people, Loki spots Rapunzel, with her short brown hair, and Eugene. He screams with uncontrollable excitement, clapping his hands. "Look! Rapunzel and Flynn!" But they're gone already. Somehow, everything goes backwards on the screen until they're visible again, and then nobody's moving.

"Look, they're there!" Loki laughs. He loves Rapunzel and Eugene, they're awesome! And Rapunzel heals people, like how he healed Tony!

"How did you even see them in that split second?" Bruce sounds somewhat amazed, and Loki grins, although he starts wo wonder why they're there. Do they know Elsa and Anna? Rapunzel and Eugene are the good guys, so they wouldn't go to a bad person's coronation.

Loki wonders if Rapunzel would like him. He hopes so. Maybe if they ever met, they could use their magic healing powers together.

The people onscreen start moving again. Tony's holding a little device that seems to be connected to when this happens, and he points it at the projector.

Anna skips through the town and the song ends when she runs into a horse. Loki giggles, liking the horse a lot. There's a man there, too, but Loki keeps looking at the horse. Is Maximus here? After all, Rapunzel and Eugene are, too. He hopes Maximus shows up sometime. Maybe it'll be like that hilarious short video he'd seen about when Rapunzel and Eugene were getting married and Maximus accidentally lost two rings (though Loki’s not sure why there were rings in the first place) and Maximus and Pascal had to chase them down.

Anna falls on top of that man in a weird position, and Loki looks at Tony. "Are they trying to make a baby?" He asks curiously, because he'd seen a couple in a weird position like that once as a child, when he was hiding from Thor in a room he *thought* wasn't going to be used. The couple had walked in, not noticing him in the closet. He hadn't been able to get out and had to watch them do that; they'd made all sorts of weird sounds like grunts and moans, too. At first he'd thought they were wrestling. Frigga had explained it all not long after that incident, and Loki's pretty sure you can't make a baby with pants or a dress on.

"Don't you need your clothes off?" He asks as an afterthought. Tony bursts out laughing and continues for almost a whole minute.

"Yes, you do. I'm surprised you even know that. Have you ever actually *done* it?"

Loki grimaces and shakes his head. Why would he want to?

Then, it's apparently the coronation and Elsa has to take off the gloves. Elsa starts to frost the stuff she's holding, but nobody notices even though she's very worried. Then, there's a party like in
Asgard, but nobody's beating Elsa up for being a Jotun. Anna says she wishes it could be like that forever, and Elsa says it can't be. Elsa even takes deep breaths like Bruce has been teaching him to do in the tower, and Loki knows she's thinking about her powers.

Anna walks off and finds that Hans guy who had the horse, and the two of them walk so they're alone and talk. Hans says his brothers pretended he was invisible for a while in the 'Southern Isles', and Anna says Elsa always shut her out. Loki would have been perfectly fine if the Asgardians had pretended he was invisible for a couple years. Or forever.

They apparently fall in love before the end of the night and plan to get married, which is crazy. They ask Elsa to grant her blessing, but she doesn't. She says she can't marry a man you just met, and at least someone sees the sense in that.

Anna grabs Elsa's hand and pulls the glove off. She says she can't live like that anymore and they start to fight. Elsa makes a bunch of huge ice spikes and everyone looks shocked.

No, no no, they're going to beat her. A short old man with glasses, who's the Duke of Weasel-town, whatever that is, says something about sorcery, sounding hateful. Loki knows about weasels and wonders why this man, who's not even a weasel himself, is in charge of all weasels. That doesn't seem fair. Do the weasels like him?

Despite the tenseness of this part, Loki can't help giggling at the word weasel. He likes it. Shaking his head, he focuses on the screen.

Elsa flees and there's a crowd outside the castle cheering for her. Elsa accidentally freezes the castle, and the Duke says someone should stop her.

"Please, just stay away." Elsa says, and accidentally shoots a blast of magic at him. He calls her a monster, and the word rings in Loki's ears. The townspeople let out shocked, fearful gasps and a previously laughing baby starts crying.

Monster, monster, monster MONSTER! This is just like Asgard, only people weren't scared of him. They hated him instead. Actually, some of the servants seemed nervous around him at first. Maybe they were scared? Even if they were, they got over it and started tormenting him like everyone else.

Loki eventually hears the others talking, and someones hugging him. Tony, Bruce and Pepper says she's not a monster, and instead of not liking Elsa, they seem to not like the sort man with glasses. They don't think she's a monster, even after that.

He remembers Tony saying to think of it like Boo, where they all saw a monster when there wasn't one. Is Elsa even really a monster, if she doesn't want to hurt people?

Besides, Bruce said that Drakken and Shego weren't even monsters.

Elsa runs away, and Anna chases after her. Elsa manages to lose her by making a path of ice over water and running across it.

Anna can't catch Elsa but keeps watching her, and Hans brings her back to the townspeople. The fjord freezes over and it starts snowing.

That short old guy that Tony and the others apparently don't like says that Elsa cursed the land and has to be stopped. Upon seeing Anna, he asks "Is there sorcery in you too? Are you a monster too?"
He sounds a lot like everyone in Asgard. Hans and Anna both say she doesn't have magic and is perfectly ordinary, which means she's not a Jotun. If Loki met Genie, he'd like to be normal too.

Then, Anna says that Elsa's not a monster, just like Tony and the others. Loki likes that not everyone's like the Asgardians.

"She nearly killed me!"

But Anna still stands up for Elsa, saying that it's just because she was scared, that she didn't mean any of this to happen. She even says it was her fault, not Elsa's, and that Elsa's not dangerous.

Anna decides to go after her, and she gets a horse, which makes Loki happy.

Then, there's just a bunch of swirling snow and a snowy mountain appears. Soft music starts playing, and Elsa's there. She starts singing, eventually saying "Couldn't keep it in, heaven knows I tried.

She starts using her magic as she sings the words "let it go", and builds a snowman in basically a second. Apparently she did want to build one after all the times Anna asked. Loki stares in shock.

After all that, she's just using her Jotun powers, even though people hate them there? Tony said they're not bad and that people shouldn't just automatically hate her. Instead of wanting to be rid of them, she's embracing them, despite people hating them.

"I don't care
what they're going to say
Let the storm rage on
The cold never bothered me anyways."

The cold never bothered him, either. He and Elsa are a lot alike.

Elsa continues to sing and eventually she makes a huge castle with her ice. It's really awesome, and Loki pauses. So Elsa's done both good and bad things with her Jotun powers. She accidentally hurt Anna, but she made a fun playground earlier, and she just made this awesome castle. Loki finds himself wondering if he'd be able to do something cool like that. Elsa even makes a dress out of ice and sings something about how she's never going back and the past is in the past.

Tony said he was never going back to Asgard, and so far Tony's been a lot more like Anna than the duke and other townspeople.

The screen switches to Anna, who's failing at looking for Elsa, especially when her horse runs away. It's presumably the following day, because it's light again. Loki's kind of disappointed that the horse is gone, and after a tree dumps a ton of snow on Anna, it's night again.

Anna ends up in a small store, where she runs into that guy with the reindeer from earlier, who had also been the little boy in the very beginning. Kristoff, apparently.

Anna enlists Kristoff's help to get to the North Mountain, where Elsa apparently is. Sven pulls a sled through the night, and Anna and Kristoff talk about how Anna made Elsa freeze everything, because she wanted to marry a man she just met that day. Kristoff also thinks that's stupid, which makes sense.

Then, Kristoff tells Anna to stop talking, and there are wolves! Wolves, like Fenrir. Loki flaps his
hands excitedly, pointing them out to Fenrir. For a brief second, Fenrir's visible like Sleipnir had been yesterday, and Loki gives a small excited squeal.

However, Fenrir disappears far too quickly, before Loki even has a chance to hug him or pet him. He's always wondered what running his fingers through Fenrir's fur actually felt like, but since he was never actually able to touch Fenrir, it was always left up to his imagination. Sadly, it still is. He sulks slightly at that and has to settle with running his fingers over Simba's back, which isn't covered with the suit he normally wears. The one bad thing about that suit is it makes Simba less soft.

"Was that a wolf? In here?" Pepper seems shocked and maybe a little scared to see Fenrir. Maybe she doesn't like Fenrir, whereas Tony and Bruce liked Sleipnir.

"He wasn't gonna hurt you. He's my friend! My Fenrir." Loki glares slightly, not liking that she doesn't seem to like Fenrir. He hopes she doesn't hate Fenrir, because he doesn't like people who hate his friends. What if she starts hating him because of Fenrir?

"I was going to guess that that was Fenrir." Tony says, and Loki grins. Tony didn't hate Sleipnir earlier and he doesn't hate Fenrir now, even though Loki has to admit Fenrir probably looks scarier than Sleipnir. He wonders what Tony's reaction to seeing Hel would be. She looks kind of dead on one side. It certainly takes some getting used to, and when he first saw her in his dreams he thought she was really scary. He tried to avoid looking at that half of her at first, sometimes even trying to cover one of his eyes to avoid looking on that side, which didn't really work in his dreams.

Fenrir snarled and barked like the wolves in the movie were doing, but just like in the movie, he never caught anyone. Not like the wolves that hurt Beast.

Maybe he'll see Hel and Jormungand later too, along with Sleipnir and Fenrir, obviously.

Sadly, the wolves don't show up once Anna, Kristoff and Sven the reindeer escape. Fenrir doesn't show up again either, to Loki's disappointment.

Eventually, Anna and the others come to a place about run into that snowman from the trailer he'd watched with Tony earlier. Apparently, Elsa built Olaf the snowman and he's real. Or are Anna and Kristoff just imagining him? When he asks, Pepper says they're not imagining him. That's really amazing, Loki thinks. He wishes he could do that. But isn't that what he did with Sleipnir? Is it? He saw Sleipnir yesterday, and he just saw Fenrir now. That wasn't his Frost Giant powers, and if Elsa built Olaf, maybe she has other magic, too? But he hasn't seen green around her hands. Maybe she can do it without the green?

Loki really likes Olaf. He says some really funny things, and Loki thinks he'd be really fun to spend time with. And they both really like hugs. It's kind of funny that Olaf's head can totally come off his body, too, especially when Anna kicks it.

They finally reach Elsa's ice castle, which is beautiful. Both Kristoff and Anna say so, and Anna enters alone. When se sees Elsa, Elsa says that she never knew what she was capable of.

Olaf rushes in and Elsa looks amazed at what she did with her powers. Loki wonders if he can bring stuff to life with his magic. Hadn't he made Sleipnir and Fenrir real, so that others could see them too?

Anna says it can be just like when they were kids. Elsa has a flashback of hitting Anna with ice as children. She has flashbacks too? Tony said he also had flashbacks, but that most people don't.
Anna tries talking (or singing) to Elsa, Elsa seems to hate her powers again. No matter what, Anna still likes Elsa, even though she froze Arendelle. Anna even blamed herself earlier. The unconditional acceptance reminds Loki a lot of his friends here, and he grins as he looks over at them.

Anna says that Elsa doesn't have to worry, that she can just unfreeze Arendelle and everything will be fine. Elsa, on the other hand, doesn't like hearing that she froze the whole kingdom. Loki feels really bad for her, because he's never made a whole village freeze. But he does know how it feels to do bad things with magic. He wonders if he should tell her that, but he's pretty sure people in screens can't hear him.

Elsa, panicked, accidentally hits Anna with another blast of magic, like she had when they were children. Except this time it hits Anna's heart. She falls down and Elsa backs away, horrified at what she's done. Loki doesn't like this, because Elsa's hurting people again, even if she doesn't mean to. Elsa clearly doesn't like this turn of events either.

Kristoff and Olaf rush in, and Elsa tells them to go away with Anna, to leave her alone. She winds up making a huge, angry snow monster that chases them away. It's sort of like Hulk, actually, Loki thinks as the snow creature roars at Elsa and Kristoff to not come back.

He glances at Bruce, wondering if he's thinking the same thing.

Hans ends up leading a group of people, including the Duke's two guards, to Elsa's castle. Sort of like Gaston leading people to the Beast, except

The guards chase after Elsa and corner her with crossbows. Elsa saves herself from being hit with an arrow by stopping it in a block of ice. She's going to be in loads of trouble now. But she's not dead. She sends blasts of ice at the guards, telling them to stay away.

She has them totally pinned.

"She's not supposed to do that!" Loki proclaims to Tony.

"She's keeping herself from getting killed." Tony says with an unreadable look.

"But she's doing it with magic! It's cowardly." Loki protests. That's what everyone in Asgard says, and he always got punished horribly when he did it. He doesn't like this scene at all.

"It's not cowardly. It's the way she can fight back. If it's keeping her from getting killed, than she should do it." Tony counters. "Besides, she's totally kicking their butts. I bet you could do that."

Tony gives his shoulder a little push and grins at him. Loki frowns thoughtfully. He doesn't even know if he could, but

"Queen Elsa!" Hans says when he comes in and sees her beating the guards. "Don't be the monster they fear you are!"

Loki freezes at the word *monster*.

Suddenly, everything's moving backwards and then Hans says it again. "Don't be the monster they fear you are!" He didn't say she was a monster, he told her not to be one. Like she has a choice, even though she's a Jotun. Loki never wanted to be a monster, himself.

Elsa lowers her hands, but one of the guards tries to shoot her. Hans shoves the crossbow so the chandelier falls instead. Then, the screen goes black and stays like that for a bit.
Elsa wakes up groggily in a dark room. She goes over to the window but has manacles on that cover her whole hands. Loki knows all too well what it's like to be trussed up like that. He's worn manacles, too, often when the guards were hitting him, but there were a couple times he woke up in the dark with them on, like Elsa has right now. He'd never been in a dungeon, though, which he's thankful for. But sometimes, if they beat him late enough in the day and didn't bother taking off the restraints, he'd wake up in the night, still trussed up. Without wanting to, he starts remembering the chains, the cuffs around his wrists, and he's unaware of anything until Tony starts hugging him and he's slowly pulled out of the flashback.

Loki hates flashbacks. Living through that stuff once was bad enough. He wishes he didn't have them.

It's revealed that the way to thaw Anna's frozen heart is true love, and that means Hans. He and Anna love each other, right, even if they only knew each other for a bit...? Anna seems to think so, and Hans went off to save her, which shows he actually loves her, right? Kristoff, Anna, Olaf and Sven get back to the castle and Kristoff leaves.

Anna's going to be okay, Loki thinks with a smile.

Except Hans turns out to be a backstabbing jerk like Gaston, and locks her in a room to die. Anna's still dying when Hans announces that she's dead, and that Elsa killed her. Loki doesn't even realize he's yelling at Hans until Tony points it out.

Olaf manages to get Anna out of the room and out of the castle. As Hans heads off towards Elsa, Elsa blasts through the wall of her cell. Loki grins, liking that Elsa's safe.

Anna's looking for Kristoff, and she's getting weak. Her hair is almost totally white now but she sees Kristoff, who starts running. Loki gives a small cheer, because he doesn't want Anna to die. Anna's so happy and bubbly and she totally accepts Elsa, just like how his Tony totally accepts him.

Hans tells Elsa that she killed Anna, and Elsa sinks to the ground in grief. She's really not a monster, if that's how she reacts to killing people. Monsters like killing people and she clearly doesn't. She didn't even want to kill the guards that were trying to kill her.

But then, there's the unmistakable sound of a sword being drawn out of a sheath. Loki's heard it countless times in Asgard. Anna turns and sees Hans, the guy who pretended to be nice like that servant boy in Asgard, holding a sword above Elsa.

Of course he'd want to kill the Jotun, but Elsa's not bad! She didn't want to hurt Anna and she's devastated because she believes Anna to be dead. Hans told her that, he lied about it, just like he lied about liking Anna!

Anna rushes towards Hans, and as she holds up a hand to stop him, she turns to solid ice. The sword breaks and Hans is thrown backwards.

"Anna!" Elsa cries, cradling her sister's head and crying. Loki wonders if she's going to ask about building a snowman, like Anna had so many times. Sven, Kristoff and Olaf look on.

Loki stares at the screen in horror. Anna can't be dead! Maybe Rapunzel will cry her healing tears that replaced the hair, and Anna will be okay? Rapunzel showed up earlier, so maybe she'll save the day again, with Maximus and Eugene and Pascal.

Unfortunately, she doesn't show up. Loki wishes he could go in the screen and heal her, like he
healed Tony. He can heal people, just like Rapunzel.

Even without Rapunzel or him, Anna starts thawing, and Olaf notices first. When Anna's totally thawed, the sisters hug and Elsa seems surprised that Anna sacrificed herself for Elsa. She asks Anna why. It's a valid question, Loki thinks. Who sacrifices themselves for a Frost Giant? Aside from Anna, obviously.

"I love you." Anna says. Loki grins and flicks his fingers, giving a small involuntary squeal of delight. Anna loves Elsa, even though Elsa's a Jotun and Anna's not one. It's like it doesn't even matter, and Loki didn't even know that was possible, but Elsa and Anna proved it is!

"An act of true love will thaw a Frozen heart." Olaf quotes, excited.

Elsa seems struck by a realization about the love part, and she ends up thawing everything, to the delight of the townspeople.

Olaf starts to melt, to go away like his friends in Asgard had, but Elsa gives him a personal flurry so he won't melt. Loki grins. He likes Olaf almost as much as Elsa, but Elsa wins because she's a Jotun too. They're definitely his two favorites, though he likes Anna a lot too.

Hans gets to his feet, seeming surprised that Anna's there, saying that Elsa froze her heart. Which, of course, he didn't even try to stop. Loki doesn't like him at all.

"The only frozen heart around here is yours." Anna tells him before punching him in the face. Loki claps his hands, although watching that wasn't quite as satisfying as watching Tony and Hulk smash Thor around.

He's never run across a good Frost Giant before and was always told that all Frost Giants are despicable monsters, but this is proof otherwise! Elsa's got ice powers and doesn't mind cold, and even if she never showed her blue skin, she's got to be a Jotun. More importantly, Elsa's good, even though she accidentally hurt Anna twice and froze the kingdom. But she fixed both of those in the end, so the good ice defeated the bad ice. Tony, Bruce and Jarvis were very clear yesterday about powers not being inherently good or bad, and now there's proof that it even applies to things like ice!

The townspeople don't even hate her powers now. Actually, they seemed to like it a lot when she made an ice rink for everyone. That's another good thing she did with them.

This is proof that everything that Tony and the others have said is true!

This is in some ways even better than when they'd watched Quasimodo and Esmeralda, because he's a lot like Elsa. Plus, Hans and the Duke aren't well-liked in the end, and they were the ones who hated her. Loki likes that a lot, because it's just like what Tony's said over and over- hating someone for being a Jotun or doing magic is wrong, and isn't something people should do. At least it is in Arendelle, and apparently here too.

Elsa was scared of her Jotun powers and taught that they were bad, just like him. But she's not scared of them anymore.

Maybe he doesn't have to be, either. Everyone here's been nothing but supportive of his magic, and Tony promised he wouldn't be hit for using it. Yesterday's incident with Drakken and Shego really showed that his friends don't think being a Frost Giant or doing magic are bad, as crazy as that is. Even though Drakken and Shego were bad, Tony and Bruce said that didn't mean their powers were bad.
Genie did good and bad stuff with his magic, and he didn't seem to hate magic at all. Plus he was blue, but he wasn't a Jotun. Loki wonders if Genie ever hated his magic.

Not to mention Elsa. She's a Jotun, but she's a good Jotun. Loki didn't even know that was possible until now, but apparently it is. Even though she did some bad things on accident, she's still good overall, like how Genie's good even though he did some bad things. Apparently, there can be good Frost Giants, just like what Tony said earlier today about there being good lions and bad lions. And not hating someone for what they are, like Esmeralda, applies to Elsa too, and she's a Jotun so maybe Tony's right about all this stuff applying to Frost Giants and magic?

Just in case, although he really hopes the answer's not no, Loki asks Tony, Bruce and Pepper if they like Elsa. To his relief, they say they do, and Pepper even says she really liked Elsa's magic. Loki grins.

Maybe he should just let it go, like Elsa.

Okay that's not exactly Tony's type of movie, but he's surprised to learn that he didn't totally hate it.

This seems like it had been a really good movie for Loki. The parallels between Loki and Elsa are obvious, and Tony hopes Loki picked up on them. Considering that earlier today, when looking over some of the stuff Loki wrote (Tony hadn't even gotten through all of the stuff the god wrote), Loki had seemed to write down all the parallels between him and Disney characters that they'd talked about, perhaps he's already doing so now.

He glances at Bruce, who seems to be thinking along the exact same lines. Pepper doesn't know about the whole Kim Possible thing yet, or the stuff they'd read earlier today, but she had seen Loki ice the Iron Man suit, and she'd seen his other form.

"So, Snoopy, what'd you think?" Tony asks, stretching slightly as he gets up.

Loki bounces up and down slightly, grinning a mile wide. "Elsa's good, right?"

"She was never bad," Pepper starts.

"She fixed everything." Loki says, nodding. His gaze turns somewhat wary and he asks "So would you guys be like Anna?"

"If you mean that we'd like you even more with your magic, then yes." Bruce says, and Loki stares at him in amazement.

Tony really hopes they've made some sort of progress. Loki's clearly mulling stuff over in his head, and hopefully that stuff is deciding that Asgard's views are wrong.

Loki bounces up and down to the beat of the pop version of "Let it Go" that plays during the credits, and occasionally he'll read a random name aloud from the scrolling text. At the end, there's a little extra scene of the snow creature Elsa made finding Elsa's abandoned crown and putting it on with a smile. Loki giggles at that.

They walk out into Times Square and don't get too many second glances. Admittedly, Loki's wearing a t-shirt and flip flops, which is sort of crazy for New York in November. At least Tony had convinced him not to wear his long coat or his Jormungand necklace, because those would probably get some stares, even in NYC. Not that seeing a grown man carrying a Simba toy is particularly normal, and neither is the god's current skipping, hopping and singing. At least nobody openly stares.
Loki suddenly stops walking and stares across the street briefly, as if not believing his eyes. This pulls Tony to a stop, because Loki's currently grabbing his sleeve, and there's no way Tony could physically drag him anywhere.

Tony glances across and sees a huge Disney logo. The Disney Store. A humongous grin spreads across Loki's face.

Loki starts heading towards it, practically dragging Tony along with him, and Bruce and Pepper hurry to catch up.

Loki stops to look at the Frozen display in the window. He points out all the characters, as if surprised to see them there. He seems particularly delighted about Elsa, which Tony takes as a really good sign. Loki mentions something about "the first good one" although Tony's not entirely sure what that means. If Loki actually likes Elsa, even though she makes ice, which Loki seemed to view as bad, then they probably are getting somewhere.

"It's pretty cool how she can make ice and snow, huh, Snoopy?" Tony asks, putting that theory to the test.

Loki just gives him a blank look and says "Ice is cold, so yeah it's cool too 'cause they mean the same thing. But Elsa doesn't mind the cold, nope nope nope, 'n neither do I. The cold never bothered me anyway." He mimics Elsa as he says this last part, and Tony snorts.

"Considering you're vastly underdressed for the weather, yeah, I'd say it doesn't." Smirking slightly, Tony adds "Probably the only other people not wearing coats right now are hookers or something." Pepper seems rather annoyed about this comment.

Loki's pulling Tony impatiently to the store, and Pepper says "I think Simba should wait out here."

Tony hadn't even thought of that, but it's a valid point. If they walked out without paying for Simba, people might assume they were trying to steal the toy. Actually, Loki had unknowingly shoplifted Simba the first time, and they were rather lucky that the police hadn't been involved. That would have been a disaster.

He doesn't want to go through that. Of course, they'd be able to prove eventually that they weren't stealing Simba- they probably don't even make that specific Simba anymore- but to the casual observer it's a Disney toy in a Disney store. Ergo they'd be stealing it.

Pepper's right. It would be better to avoid the whole issue and subsequent conversation that could potentially come up. Especially if someone recognized Tony and then started asking who Loki was. Or if Tony got accosted by kids asking for autographs or some bratty kid would see Loki's Simba and throw a tantrum, wanting that one.

Pepper offers to keep Simba outside, and Bruce looks like he wants to stay outside too, but Loki practically drags him in along with Tony.

When they enter, Loki's expression is like a kid's at Disney World. Tony smirks slightly at that analogy, considering the store they're in, but he smirks more at Loki's reaction. Loki's turning his head in excited awe, as if he hardly knows which way to look.

Loki stops to gawk at the huge Frozen display they have inside the store, as if the one in the window wasn't enough. They're definitely banking on this movie being popular, Tony thinks, and it hasn't even come out yet. They're probably way overestimating it's popularity, but hey, it's their problem, not his.
Seeming surprised, Loki asks why there's so many of everything. Tony goes into a brief explanation of how things are massed produced, but he's almost positive Loki's not listening, since he's humming to himself. Tony doesn't have the heart to tell Loki that his Simba's not one-of-a-kind, and that there are probably a ton of identical Simba's. Then again, in the Iron Man suit, Loki's Simba is one-of-a-kind, but the toy's not wearing that now.

Loki picks up an Elsa doll and starts reading the back of the box. A frown forms on his lips, and he looks up, slightly accusingly. "They don't say anything 'bout it. I thought you said you didn't care here like they did there."

"What?" Tony's confused, because Loki really didn't give him a whole lot to go on there.

"Well, of course she wouldn't want everyone to know, but it says she makes ice on here, so doesn't that kinda tell them she's a Jotun anyways?" He whispers the Jotun part, and Tony's not sure if he just doesn't like saying it or if he's weary of being overheard by the other shoppers. Still whispering, Loki asks "She is a Frost Giant, right?"

Tony opens his mouth, but Bruce quickly says "Yes, she is. She's just like you, uh, except she's female and you're male." Bruce shoots Tony a look telling him not to contradict this, not that Tony was planning on it; he knows this is a good idea. Technically, there wasn't anything in the movie saying she wasn't a Jotun, and she does sort of fit the role even if she never turned blue. So they're not lying to Loki when they tell him that. Elsa could easily be a Jotun (although the filmmakers most likely hadn't thought of that).

Maybe that's what Loki meant when he said "She's a good one." earlier. She's a good Jotun? Tony hopes that's what he meant.

"So do you like Elsa?" Tony asks, hoping Loki will say yes. If he thinks Elsa's a Jotun and likes her, maybe he won't think being a Jotun is such a bad thing. Loki hating his blue form would be like if Tony hated being a human and chose to look like something else instead, and that sort of self-loathing can't be healthy. Tony's still shocked that Loki willingly turned into his Jotun form with the Hulk around, even if he'd turned his skin green instead of keeping it blue. Okay, maybe that doesn't totally count as willingly revealing that form.

Loki nods slightly, looking down at the doll. "They didn't hate her in the end, and they liked her ice, even though she accidentally did bad things with it before. She was scared of it, because she hurt Anna, but then she decided to use it anyways." Loki nods as if he's just revealed one of the great secrets of the universe.

"So you see that she's good, right?" Bruce asks.

Loki smiles and nods, hugging the box with the Elsa doll. Taking that as immense progress, Tony grins. Just yesterday, he'd had to convince Loki that Dr. Drakken's evilness had nothing to do with his blue skin.

"So do you think you'll-" Tony was going to ask whether Loki might use his magic, but for one thing, he'd look crazy asking that in public. Besides, Loki's wandered off anyways, still clutching the Elsa doll's box. He'd snagged an Anna doll to go with it, and Tony sees him swipe a plush Olaf too. Tony sighs, because he's pretty sure this is going to end up like the Simba incident, where Loki clearly didn't want to part with the toy.

Tony wonders if they'll get any strange looks buying dolls for a grown man, but he tells himself that Loki comparing himself to Elsa might be therapeutic. At least he didn't hate her.
"Here." Loki's back, and he places a glittery, pink, plastic princess tiara on Bruce's head. Tony smirks, whips out his Stark Phone, and snaps a picture. He tries to hide his laughter, but the sight of Bruce in a little girls' costume tiara is too hilarious.

"What is this for?" Bruce asks as he takes the tiara off and turns it around in his hands with a raised eyebrow.

"It's for Hulk-y." Loki grins. Pity Bruce isn't Hulk right now. Seeing Hulk in a tiara would be hysterical. He'd pay good money to see that, actually. "The big snow guy liked crowns." Loki adds, as if that settles it. Oh, the snow monster Elsa made, who put on her crown in the end credit scene. Loki's evidently decided that the snow monster and Hulk are a lot alike, which they actually are.

"I don't think the Other Guy wants a tiara." Bruce says, glancing around, most likely to see if anyone had heard them. He probably doesn't want to be recognized. Tony's actually rather surprised that nobody's recognized them yet. Although he loves publicity, he'd rather stay anonymous right now. Mostly because Loki's with him, and throwing Loki out to the media seems wrong.

By the time Tony's caught up to Loki, he's also grabbed a plush Maximus the horse, from Tangled, which he is now hugging tightly. Currently, Loki's looking at a wall of figurines, and is focusing on the ones from The Lion King. He seems especially excited to see Pumbaa there.

"So do you want those?" Tony asks, nodding at the toys in Loki's arms. Loki looks at him uncomprehendingly, and Tony rolls his eyes. "If you don't want them, put them back, because this is a store and you can't just take things from it. If you do want them, I guess I can get them for you. You've had centuries of gift-less birthdays, right? So I can make up for some of them even if it's most likely not your birthday."

Loki looks awed over the fact Tony's offering to get him things, and Tony sees his eyes dart towards the Lion King figurine set.

They end up picking out a lot of figurine sets for basically every Disney movie they've watched, as well as some they haven't. Loki asks who the mouse that's everywhere is, and Tony bursts out laughing, grabbing a Mickey Mouse figurine set to join the lot.

The one movie they don't have anything for is The Hunchback of Notre Dame, which Loki seems rather disappointed about. Tony figures that Loki can use them to decorate his room or something, since there's almost a total lack of actual stuff in the room aside from the furniture and the drawings on the walls and, now, the holographic stars. They also buy the plush Maximus that Loki picked out. It has a raised eyebrow stitched on its face and a somewhat sarcastic look. Loki giggles as he holds the plush horse up, saying Tony makes that expression a lot.

If the cashier here recognizes Tony (Tony thinks it would be an outrage if they didn't, because come on, he's Tony Stark), they don't say anything. Which, for once, is nice.

Fortunately, Pepper doesn't seem too annoyed about having just spent almost half an hour waiting outside. When she looks up from her phone, her eyebrows raise at the sight of all the bags. "What did you do, buy the whole store?" She asks, although she sounds somewhat amused.

Loki grins when Pepper hands Simba to him, saying that she looked after him. Loki adds that maybe it's the other way, and Simba was looking after Pepper. He hugs Simba tightly and then hugs Pepper.

As Tony's chauffeur drives them back to the tower, Pepper tells Tony that the conference that Tony
unfortunately hadn’t managed to get out of is going to be starting in a couple days. Stupid meetings. Some of them are even going to be board meetings, which are boring squared. No, boring cubed.

Pepper claims that she told him the date they were leaving numerous times, but Tony has a feeling he had just ignored both her and Jarvis, so the fact they’ll be leaving so soon is news to him.

Once they get back to the tower, Loki pulls Pepper to his room, exclaiming he needs to show her the stars. Pepper winds up going along with it, but Tony finds it sort of funny. Most men, definitely including him, usually have something entirely different on their mind when they take a woman to their bedroom. Then again, Loki’s not a normal man by any means of the word, really.

The whole incident about seeing the word broken earlier today is still bugging Tony, and he turns to Bruce. Now that they’re alone, he can ask.

"Do you think there's something wrong with Loki? I mean with his brain?" Tony asks without preamble. Geez, that didn't come out right at all.

Bruce gives him a look and says "I got the sense something was... unique about him only a couple minutes after I met him. But I'm sort of disappointed to hear you refer to him as wrong."

That really hadn't been how Tony wanted Bruce to interpret that. Right now, Bruce is looking at him with a very disappointed expression, as if he just admitted he considers Loki a slug or something.

Tony pinches the bridge of his nose. "I didn't mean it like that. Loki's not wrong. I meant..." Ugh, how does he describe it? He stinks at this sort of thing. He seriously doesn't think of Loki as wrong, and he doesn't view him as less of a person. Shouldn't Bruce know that? Admittedly, that question had come out sort of wrong.

"Look, if you think that I see Loki as some sort of idiot or something less than others, you're wrong. Okay, maybe I thought something sort of like that when I first met him, but he proved me wrong and I definitely don't think that now, okay?" Tony's fed up with people thinking he's a total jerk. Especially his friends, because he actually cares about their opinions, even if he doesn't always show it. This situation bugs him even more, because aside from that one poorly-worded question, he doesn't think he's done anything recently to suggest he looks down on Loki. Heck, his interactions with Loki are nicer than ninety-nine percent of social interactions in his life.

Fortunately, Bruce doesn't look quite as disappointed now. He actually mumbles that maybe he shouldn't have assumed that Tony meant that comment maliciously.

"At first, I thought he was always like- well, you know how he is. I figured that maybe that was yet another reason people in Asgard hated him so much, because they don't seem too big on people who are different."

Bruce nods, seeming like he'd already thought the same thing for a while, but he raises an eyebrow and asks "What do you mean 'at first'?"

"I'm starting to think that maybe he wasn't always like that. Haven't you been putting the pieces together, too? I mean, there was that Loki yesterday, the child Loki, the frying pan comment..."

"Child Loki?" Bruce asks. Oh. Has he not told Bruce about that yet? Tony gives a quick explanation of the child-Loki illusion he'd seen before Jarvis just shows the footage from when that happened. Bruce nods, but points out that the Other-Loki from yesterday wasn't exactly accurate, so maybe the child one wasn't, either.
Tony had thought of that, and there really is no way of knowing whether it's accurate. He can speculate all he wants, but there's not really any way of knowing for sure whether Loki's brain was damaged and that caused everything or if he was always that way.

Well, they could ask, but Bruce says that's a great idea just yet. Tony admits to himself that there's not exactly a great way to ask that. What is he supposed to do "Oh, hey, did you like the movie? Oh, and I was wondering, is your brain damaged? Were you dropped as a baby or something?"

Normally, Tony would probably just flippantly ask something rather rude like that, but he won't in this case. Who knows how Loki would react? What if by asking that, they ruined everything or made Loki hate them or something. It's probably too soon. Tony sighs as he reaches this conclusion, because he hates not knowing the answers to things.

This conversation didn't exactly do anything, either, Tony thinks, annoyed. Aside from make Bruce think he's a jerk for a bit. Hopefully he doesn't still think that.

They head towards Loki's room, where Loki has pulled out all the boxes of toys and figurines Tony just bought. The god apparently discovered the joys of trying to get things out of boxes when they're secured with a million twist-ties and pieces of tape. Pepper reports that Loki got rather frustrated and impatient, and ended up accidentally magicking one of them out. As she says this, Loki, seeming oblivious to what's going on around him, magics another one out as he rips the box in two. He actually doesn't react negatively to this at all, instead seeming relieved that he no longer has to deal with tape or twist-ties.

The toys are scattered across the floor, along with the Avengers action figures, which are significantly taller than the figurines but shorter than Simba, the Maximus plush, and the Frozen dolls.

Currently, Loki has both the Elsa doll and the Elsa figurine in his hands. He'd just liberated the Frozen figurines from their box. The doll, on the other hand, looks a lot different than it did in the box. It's wearing the coronation outfit, and Tony knows that the doll didn't come with any changes of clothes. Loki, still seeming oblivious to all around him and off in his own little world, is spinning around under the holographic stars and singing part of Elsa's song.

"Let it go! Let it go!
Can't hold it back anymore!
Let it go! Let it go!
Turn away and slam the door!
I don't care
What they're going to say.
Let the storm rage on
The cold never bothered me anyway."

The singing is accompanied by flourishes of his hands, like when Elsa was using her ice magic. Loki actually shoots out small amounts of snow while gesturing, just like Elsa. This halts the song and he just stands there and stares ahead, seemingly half at the snow and half at nothing.

Holographic snow starts to fall, looking rather indistinguishable from the stars, while Jarvis rather
tunelessly sings "Let it go... let it go..." Switching back to speech, he says "Mr Loki, I'd like you to know that there's nothing wrong with what you just did. I didn't even do it as well as you."

However, his efforts are entirely ignored by Loki, and the AI lets out a sigh.

After about ten seconds, Tony says "Uh, Snoopy? You okay, buddy?"

Loki's only response, after picking up Simba, is rocking back and forth and humming to himself. His eyes widen, looking even more glazed, and it's sort of freaking Tony out.

"Loki?" Tony asks, putting a hand on his shoulder. Pepper approaches too, speaking softly to him.

Loki blinks and his gaze sort of focuses on them. "Hello." Loki says nonchalantly, as if they just walked in. Well, he and Bruce just came in not long ago, but Pepper's been with Loki the whole time he's been in his room and he's giving her the same look.

"Uh, hi." Tony's slightly nonplussed. "What was going on there, exactly? You sorta zoned out for a bit."

"I was remembering." Loki says. "They didn't like ice much. They hated it. Hated me. Only Frost Giants make ice, and they hate them!" He shudders, clearly not liking thinking about that. "I don't like remembering... don't like the flashbacks."

Tony can certainly sympathize with that.

Loki seems on the verge of having a panic attack, and Tony hugs him to try to prevent it. Jarvis starts up the horses that prance around the walls and plays a recording of Loki's lullaby. Loki doesn't appear to go into a flashback, or at least it doesn't send him into a panic attack, and he slowly starts to relax. "They hurt me." He mumbles. "More'n Elsa. She's lucky, I think, even though those people hated her too. I wish I coulda been her, kinda. She has Anna." Loki gazes down at his modified Elsa doll and grabs the Anna one. "Well, she didn't for a while, but she does now."

"You have us." Tony counters.

Loki gives a smile. "My friends." In a slight singsong, he repeats the word friends as if it's the most amazing word in the world. "Don't have'ta worry with my friends. No being scared of my Tony, nope nope nope." He shakes his head quickly, his hair flying out around his head.

Tony blinks, wondering if he heard that right. Did Loki just refer to him as HIS Tony? The whole possessive pronoun added there is sort of weird. But at least it seemed totally platonic.

"My friends don't ever hit or hate, not my Tony or my Bruce or my Hulk-y, Pepper, Jarvis! They say the nice things instead. Just like my Asgard friends, 'xcept they can't say you're fake."

Tony grins and they all assure Loki that he does not need to worry about them at all. Loki grins back, flicking his fingers happily.

Maybe Loki totally trusts them now? If not, they've gotten very close, it seems.

"Which nice things?" Tony asks, hoping he'll continue.

"That I'm not a monster and Jotuns aren't monsters..." Loki says softly. "And that magic isn't bad, not even when someone bad like Shego does it."

"And do you know that now? That stuff really isn't bad, you know. Blue skin and magic are
perfectly fine." Bruce says.

He thinks Loki gives the tiniest of nods, eyes still far away.

Earlier today, when looking over what Loki had written, it had looked like he was sort of convinced about what Tony and Bruce said about not hating people for their species, spurred on further by the analogy with lions. He'd apparently gotten a while ago that Frollo was wrong in hating Esmeralda and Quasimodo, and he'd seemed to get the idea about there being good and bad members of any sort of group. Hopefully this movie helped out in some way.

Suddenly remembering the other stuff Loki said, Tony asks "Wait, your other friends said that stuff?"

Loki nods. "Wanted someone to say it."

Loki starts grouping some of the figurines on his desk, which has been mostly unused, talking as he does so, though Tony's not sure to whom. Maybe it's to them, or maybe it's to Simba and his occasionally-not-invisible friends.

"They were wrong 'bout Boo, 'cause she's not a monster. They thought she was gonna kill everyone, but she wouldn't, nope nope nope, 'cause she's just a little kid." He places the Boo figurine off to the side before looking at Mike and Sulley. "They didn't see a monster when they looked at her, and she didn't see a monster when she looked at them!" He glances at Tony and Bruce when he says this, and Tony wonders if he's comparing them to the two animated monsters.

Next is the Genie figure, and Loki explains that Genie did good and bad magic, but was overall good. Then comes Jafar, who turned into a Genie and had magic too, but used it maliciously.

Genie goes with Boo, while Jafar is placed back among the crowd.

Next are Rapunzel and Flynn. Loki tries handing Flynn to Tony, but Tony doesn't take the figurine. First of all, he hates being handed things, and second of all, what would he even do with it? Loki explains that Rapunzel does good magic, and even references the incident where he himself healed Tony's ankle.

Next is Beast, and Loki hands the figurine to Bruce, saying that Beast seemed scary at first, but he was really nice. Loki then glares at the Gaston toy and tells the toy it was wrong, that he shouldn't have tried to kill the Beast. Loki picks up the Hans figurine and puts it next to Gaston, saying they should form a club for thinking people are monsters. He mentions that Frollo should be in it, too.

Tony thinks he sees Loki send a quick glance at the Thor action figure, but Loki doesn't say anything about that. Maybe he thinks Thor should be in that club, though? Or maybe it was totally random.

"Hans and the Duke were wrong about Elsa, you know. She wasn't a normal murdering Jotun. She didn't want to hurt anyone. They thought she was evil like the monsters thought Boo was evil, but Boo and Elsa aren't evil. Neither is Esmeralda. They were wrong about them." Loki murmurs.

"Elsa's a good Frost Giant." Loki goes on quietly after a bit. "Everyone said there's no such thing as a good Jotun, but she's one and she's good, right?" Loki fiddles with the Elsa doll.

Tony, Pepper and Bruce all hasten to assure him that's right.

"And if they were wrong about Beast and Elsa and Boo and Esmeralda and Quasimodo... then maybe everyone in Asgard was wrong 'bout everyone like me being bad. 'Cause they said all Frost
Giants are evil monsters but Elsa wasn't. And they were already wrong about me never being able to have friends."

"Of course they were wrong about all of that. Basically, if there's some kind of contradiction, just assume that we're right and they're wrong."

"They lied." Loki mumbles, as if he's not entirely sure voicing this opinion aloud is a good idea. "I have friends. I even had 'em there, but they said they weren't real."

Tony almost can't believe he's really hearing this. Maybe, everything they've told Loki is starting to click, and he realizes the "Quasiralda" rule applies to him?

"So what else were people in Asgard wrong about?" Bruce asks, obviously wanting to know what Loki's answer will be.

"They said all magic is bad, but I like my hair. It's like Rapunzel's, and she's good. And she knows Elsa! So they're both good, right? People told Elsa she was bad, and she didn't want to be bad, even when she hit Anna with ice. But if she was really a bad Jotun, she wouldn't care."

"Everyone said ice was bad, and Frost Giants and magic are bad." There's a bit of a thoughtful pause. "Maybe everyone in Asgard knew someone like Drakken and Shego, 'cause they fought bad Jotuns like Drakken a lot." Loki adds thoughtfully. "They were bad, but Elsa... Elsa did good stuff with it. Stuff like me... " Loki says. "She made a magic dress. You know, from the other one, and it looks better."

Loki frowns thoughtfully, and the Elsa doll's dress starts morphing back into the ice dress, only it looks better than the toy they'd bought, like all of Loki's toy modifications. Tony's almost positive that Loki's thinking about how he made his star coat and Jormungand necklace, which he's now wearing, when he says this.

"Toy Stark looked a lot better once you changed him." Tony says, and Loki nods.

"Yeah! And Hulk-y and the others." He has to be talking about the action figures. After a bit of a pause, Loki adds "Elsa made Olaf. I like Olaf. And she made the big snow guy who was kinda like Hulk-y. She did! And he was kinda angry, but only because she wanted to be alone and theys weren't letting her."

According to Jarvis, the name of the huge snow creature is *Marshmallow*. Tony's pretty sure that hadn't been mentioned in the movie. Loki giggles and asks if he swims in hot chocolate.

"Didn't you sort of make Sleipnir and Fenrir, like how she made Olaf?" Hopefully, Loki doesn't freak out at the question.

Loki just shrugs as he starts arranging all of his figurines on his dresser. "I almost never saw them before, but I like seeing them! I wish they'd come out now." He pouts when nothing happens, and adds in a rather sulky voice "I wanna pet Fennnnnniiiiiiiiirrrrr! Fenrir, why won't you come out? You gots 'ta come out! Please? Pretty please?" He's apparently switched to talking to the wolf now.

"Fenrir was the wolf in the theater, right?" Pepper asks, and Loki nods. Tony sort of wonders why Fenrir had appeared in the theatre. He's guessing it's because there were wolves in the movie, just like how the horses prancing around the walls of Loki's room (or field, as Loki called it) seemed to trigger Sleipnir's release. But there had been wolves in *Beauty and the Beast*.

Loki actually seems to be trying to bring Fenrir out again, since his brow is furrowed in concentration. A small illusion of Fenrir appears, but it's closer to a hologram than the lifelike
illusions Loki apparently made on accident. Loki scowls slightly at the small, unmoving illusion and swipes a hand through it. He sits there sulking for a bit.

"Sleipnir was right in here yesterday." Loki says to Pepper. At least, Tony thinks the god's talking to Pepper. "He's a horse, just like Maximus." Loki holds up his Maximus plush. "Xcept he has twice the legs. He's got eight, like a spider." Loki giggles. "Hey, how come Natasha doesn't have eight legs, if she's a spider?"

"She's not a spider. She just has a spider alias." Bruce explains, and Loki asks if that means she can't turn into one. Bruce chuckles slightly and says that she can't do that.

"Fenrir attacked people, right? To try to keep you safe?" Tony asks suddenly, remembering the story Loki had told about Fenrir biting Fandral.

"How did you know that?"

"Remember, you were telling me a story." Tony explains, and Loki nods as he plops down on the rug and tugs at Tony's hand, as if wanting him to sit down, too. Tony lowers himself to the ground and the four of them are sitting in a sort of circle. Loki has Simba on his lap and the Elsa toys in his hands, as well as the Rapunzel and Genie figurines. "What is this, story time?"

Loki laughs. "Yeah! Story time!" He bounces excitedly, before turning his gaze away. His eyes get glassier, even more unfocused.

"Once there was a girl named Elsa. She could make ice and snow, but her parents didn't like it. She had Anna, but she got hit and then she didn't have Anna anymore for a really long time. And she hated her magic. But then she ran away and she let it go, an' she made her Olaf and her Marshmallow."

There's a bit of a pause, and when Loki speaks again, it doesn't seem like he's talking to them at all, and the story changes. "There once was a little monster boy from a far off realm."

Tony already suspects that the little boy is Loki himself. Loki goes on. "He used to live with other monsters, but then the not-monsters took him. But they still said the boy was a monster, 'cause he really had blue skin underneath. They hated him and hurt him and he hated it. He was sad. Nobody wanted to be his friend, so he made his own, but they were real. To him, but everyone else said they were fake. His friends were all monsters like him, and they liked the boy no matter what. Even when he did magic."

By this point, Tony doesn't think Loki's talking to them, and is instead just talking while they're in the room. But Loki's definitely referring to himself and his imaginary friends. Are they imaginary? Two of them showed up recently, looking rather real. Then again, the other-Loki's look real.

"The horse was really fun and liked to play games. And he sang when the boy was scared. The snake hugged the boy and tried to get him to be sneaky to avoid trouble, but sometimes it got him in trouble instead..." Loki strokes Simba absentmindedly, his mind now clearly worlds away.

"The wolf got mad when people hurt the monster boy. He was really pr'tective, you know, and didn't like people hurting his other monsters. An' the girl's a dead monster, and she tried to talk to the boy to make him feel better and say it's not his fault. But it was, because he was a monster. But she said they shouldn't hurt her fellow monsters, and she really wanted to toy with the not-monsters when they died."

Tony wants to ask what the heck that last part meant, but manages to restrain himself, sensing that
this is important. "The not-monsters didn't like the monster boy talking to his monster friends, and eventually his monster friends said they had'ta go 'way so he'd be safes. So they didn't talk to him anymore, once he became a monster man."

Loki is silent for a bit, but everyone else remains silent to hear if there's more. Tony wonders if maybe Loki feels more comfortable making this story anonymous, even though it's pretty obvious it's about him. But, seemingly randomly, the story switches to specifically referencing people.

"The monster hated it there, but eventually he was sent to Midgard. And he met Tony 'n Bruce 'n Hulk-y 'n Jarvis 'n Pepper 'n Simba. Tony let Loki live in his tower and bought him gifts and told him he was his friend! And they told him that he wasn't a bad monster, just likes Hel did, an' they said his magic was good and he didn't have to be scared, 'cause they didn't beat him like everyone else. And on Midgard, he wasn't thought of as a monster."

"And he was happy." Loki says, smiling. "Done!" Loki nods decisively, and seems to sort of return to reality. It's silent for a bit.

"So the story has a happy ending?" Tony grins.

"Hey Snoopy, do you like your powers?" Tony asks suddenly, and Loki turns to look at him like he's crazy.

It's a serious question, though. Loki certainly wasn't born scared of his powers, it was obviously conditioned into him during his stay in Asgard. Perhaps, like Elsa, Loki had liked his magic when he was young?

"I mean, was there ever a time before Asgard started... letting you know they don't like that stuff? I mean, if you take negative reactions out of the equations, does doing magic feel, I don't know, good or something?" Okay, while this is mostly for Loki, part of Tony is just plain curious. He's been waiting forever to figure out this magic stuff.

Loki frowns thoughtfully, cocking his head to the side. "Doing it feels like..." Loki's body makes a little spasm, as if receiving an electric shock. "But better, sorta, 'xcept sometimes not." Tony's not sure how to interpret that, but Loki's not forthcoming with anything else, although it's not for Tony's lack of trying. He'll have to ask again later.

"You know, your powers could be considered super powers." Tony somewhat reluctantly stops asking Loki questions about his magic. "I mean, the force fields, the healing... Even the ice. You could say Elsa sort of had super powers, right?"

"Super powers? Like the Avengers?" Loki asks, staring at him with eyes as round as dinner plates.

"Technically, most of us don't really have special powers- although my awesomeness really should be considered an official superpower." Tony starts, and Pepper cuts him off with an exasperated "Tony."

"Yes, like an Avenger." She turns to Tony and asks "Have you ever shown him The Incredibles?"

Surprisingly, Tony hasn't even thought of that movie, but if he recalls correctly, some of the characters have powers similar to Loki's own. Actually, there might be real people who have powers like Loki's. Tony's going to have to hack into S.H.I.E.L.D sometime soon and see if they have anything.

Jarvis winds up giving Loki a brief rundown on some of the characters, particularly Frozone and Violet. Loki's first question is whether Tony knows them personally.
"Uh, no." Tony answers with a lot more hesitance than normal. Telling Loki that they're made up would sort of ruin the point he's trying to make by bringing them up, because it wouldn't be a stretch at all for Loki to claim that the point he's trying to make is made up, too.

"Are they from the screen realm? Which part? The drawing realm? Or the sorta-different-looking one?" Loki asks these questions in rapid succession, and Tony's briefly lost. Tony thinks the second one means computer animated movies whereas the first is for the cartoon drawing ones. Loki still doesn't seem to get that movies aren't real, but Tony thinks that's actually a good thing right now. Being convinced Elsa, Esmeralda and Rapunzel are real people probably helped a ton.

"Yeah. They're from the sorta-different-looking realm, like Elsa." Tony answers. "There's a super hero who makes ice, just like you, and a girl who makes force fields and turns invisible and stuff." He really needs to show Loki that movie sometime.

"They said heroes don't use magic." Loki mumbles. "And Frost Giants can't be heroes..."

"Yeah, well, both his parents secretly use magic, so that's a total lie."

"But why did they lie?" Loki asks in a hurt, confused voice.

"I don't know. Because they're assholes?" Tony says, and Loki giggles slightly, to Tony's surprise. "Besides, there are heroes with ice powers. We just told you about one, and Elsa counts as a hero, right. She's good overall, anyways." Okay, Tony probably wouldn't have said that last part if he wasn't trying to convince Loki.

"So there are two good Frost Giants?" Loki murmurs, as if such an idea is almost unfathomable. "Wow."

"Are you counting yourself in that?" Tony arches an eyebrow.

"Me?" Loki asks in awe.

"Yes, you. Seriously, I haven't seen you do a single bad thing with your powers the whole time you've been here." Okay, technically, Loki accidentally broke a couple vases, but Tony doesn't mention those. He's not even sure if Loki's aware of them, since both times he'd already been in the middle of a panic attack.

"I'm good like Elsa and FRO-zone!" Loki grins. Tony grins too, because he hadn't expected to hear half this stuff, and it's major progress. First of all, they're talking more openly about his powers, and secondly, Loki actually seems to be getting that Asgard was wrong.

Tony doesn't really notice until now that the snow that Loki made hasn't really melted, so there are a couple white flakes on his green rug.

"Jarvis?"

"Yes, Mr. Loki?"

"What's winter? Anna said that word."

"I take it they don't have winter in Asgard." Bruce raises an eyebrow, surprised.

"No...? Maybe? I dunno what it is. Is it another word for snow? There's no snow in Asgard."

Jarvis proceeds to give a brief rundown on seasons, particularly about how it snows during the
winter. Loki frowns. "But I thought snow and ice were just in Jotunheim... and that Beast's castle was there."

"What?"

"There was snow in Beast's castle." Loki explains, picking up the Belle and Beast figurines and singing a snatch of a song. "You know perhaps there's something there that wasn't there before."

"Snow is normal." Tony shrugs. "And we have machines that make ice. Haven't you looked in the freezer? You can do it a heck of a lot easier, and in less time."

"It's normal?" Loki seems shocked. He tries to pick up a snowflake, to no avail, and accidentally shoots some snow out of his hand. "Wait, does Jarvis make ice?"

"I do not, Mr. Loki, which means your powers are a step above mine." Jarvis sounds somewhat amused. Loki looks as surprised as someone who just saw a purple unicorn.

"Wow." Loki mutters.

"Elsa made stars. Snow stars." He murmurs. This statement is accompanied by another flourish, and snowflakes shoot out of Loki's hand towards the ceiling, near the holographic stars. "Stars!" Loki laughs, flicking his fingers.

"This is amazing!" Loki shrieks in a purposely high voice as he dances around with his arms spread wide. Tony realizes he's acting out Young Anna, but the fact he's using this scene of them having fun with magic is a big plus.

Loki takes one of the broken boxes from their shopping spree today and morphs it into a slide, which he sends his Elsa and Anna dolls down, like in the scene of them playing as children, only his dolls look like adults. He giggles as they hit the ramp and soar from the desk to the bed.

Watching Loki laughing instead of freaking out is awesome, although Tony can't help but notice he's mostly doing stuff he's already fairly comfortable with, anyways. He changes the Elsa doll back to the coronation outfit. He studies his doll, yanking off the tiny blue gloves and letting them fall to the floor. "There. Now she can make ice." He nods decisively.

Suddenly snickering slightly, Loki abandons his scene and plucks the tiara off the doll's head, putting it on Bruce's like he'd done with the costume tiara at the Disney Store. "It's for Hulk-y." Loki grins expectantly, as if hoping Bruce will Hulk-out right there to accept it.

No such thing happens, and Loki's face falls slightly.

"Hey, if you manage to get Hulk to wear a tiara," Tony whispers to Loki "And Jarvis sees it, I'll..." He doesn't know how he'll reward Loki for that, but Hulk in a tiara is a sight he really wants to see, and Loki's probably the only person who'd manage to achieve getting him to wear one.

He's still not sure what to offer. Money's sort of out of the question, mostly because Loki doesn't seem to have any use for it. He just bought Loki a boat-load of toys, too. "I don't know what I'll do," Tony concludes lamely. "But I'll make it worth your while."

Loki snickers behind his hands, and Tony wonders if his very newly revealed pranking side approves of this idea.

Loki plucks the doll tiara and makes it grow before placing it on Pepper. Pepper smiles slightly and tells Loki it's beautiful. She hands it back to Loki after a bit, when Loki asks for it. He's heading at
Tony with a mischievous smirk on his face. "Now you wear it."

Tony backs up. "No, no. I'm not going to wear a tiara. That thing would look horrible on me. Those really aren't my colors, you know. So yeah... no. Thanks but no thanks. Sorry." He says, completely unapologetically.

Bruce and Pepper are failing miserably at hiding their grins. "Come on, Tony, I had to," Bruce's smile grows wider, and Tony glares at him while backing up more.

Loki doesn't say anything as the tiara suddenly morphs into some bizarre red and gold crown. Loki looks surprised, but grins and says to Tony, as if appeasing a small child. "There. It's like your suit colors!" Really, the only similarity is the color, and it still looks ridiculous.

So quickly that Tony barely even sees it, Loki's arm lunges forwards and places the tiara on his head.

"I must say, that look suits you, sir." Jarvis says, sounding amused. Tony glares at the ceiling to let the AI know of his displeasure, before looking in the mirror. Yep. He looks utterly ridiculous-even more absurd than Bruce did in a tiara.

"The next time I see Hulk, I want to see him in a sparkly tiara." Tony mutters under his breath as Loki tries to balance the Mufasa and Zazu figures on the ridiculous crown. That might make up for this.

Loki doesn't answer. Instead, he starts fiddling with his Elsa doll and singing.

"It's funny how some distance
makes everything seem small
And the fears that once controlled me
can't get to me at all.
It's time to see what I can do
to test the limits and break through
No right, no wrong, no rules for me
I'm free!"

Chapter End Notes

I know Elsa's not actually a Jotun, but Loki's pretty much decided she is. And, hey, it helps him, so...
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Loki has yet another nightmare, and Tony's starting to get some ideas.

Later, he teleports accidentally, and even Jarvis loses track of him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Loki shrieks, delighted, as he soars through the air. He's flying like how Peter Pan flies, without anything- not a suit like Tony's, or wings or even Pixie Dust, just his body as it's always been. Tony won't have to hold him in the Hulk suit anymore, because he can fly on his own! He loves it! This is so much better than teleporting, because it's a lot more fun, even if it's not instantaneous.*

*Loki spins in midair, laughing as Tony flies next to him in one of the Man of Iron suits. They start to race, neck and neck, until Loki's distracted by the figures below him. Still laughing with joy at the sheer freedom only flying provides, he soars down to where he races Sleipnir, Fenrir and Simba (who looks like he did on the screen), while Hel and Jormungand watch.*

*Then, Loki flies up towards the stars, screaming with joy from the thrill of it. He's trying to go up to the horse constellation, and it's just out of his reach. He reaches a hand up, trying to touch the stars, but it doesn't work. Nobody can touch the stars, because they're billions of miles away, even if they look so close...*

*He laughs as he plays his game, grasping for the stars that look just out of his reach.*

*But then, suddenly, everything changes and he's no longer flying.*

*He's in the tower's theater, but it's playing Frozen. But they'd watched that in a different theater. Tony, Bruce and Pepper aren't here. Loki looks around, getting more anxious. Where are they? They're supposed to be here, right? He'd just been racing Tony not long ago.*

*He hears a sword being drawn, and he turns to look at the screen, where Hans is standing over Elsa with a sword in his hand. Loki really doesn't like Hans.*

*But then, Hans turns to look right at him, which hadn't happened before and it's really scary, because Hans surely knows he's just like Elsa. Loki can tell just by the way Hans is looking at him. It's like Hans is looking into his soul.*

*Of course it has to get even worse. Hans steps out of the screen, still with the sword. Loki notices he's taller than Hans, but Hans doesn't seem to care.*

*Loki backs away from the man but collides with one of the seats and falls into it as Hans continues his approach. Now Hans is looking down at him, and Hans seems to be growing. Or is it him shrinking? Maybe it's just because Hans is looking down on him? ”I know what you are, Jotun.” Hans says, which is really the last thing Loki wants to hear, though he was expecting it.*

*This is even worse than when that Other-Loki that came out when he first saw Shego. Especially*
because Hans has that sharp, very lethal sword that's somehow glinting even in the dark theater.

"Stay away." Loki says fearfully, putting his hands out to try to block himself.

Hans, however, merely sneers, probably thinking him quite pathetic. "Don't even think about using those ice powers of yours."

Hans continues at him with the sword, and raises it above his head. Without even thinking about it, Loki's hands erupt with green energy and Hans is sent flying backwards. It's not ice, but it's still magic and that was always punished just as harshly in Asgard. He has to get away!

Loki turns to make a run for it, not caring that running is cowardly. He only half-notices that there's another Loki-illusion as he turns around. However, Hans is standing there when he turns around.

Loki blinks. He has no idea how Hans is now in front of him, when he'd been flying back the other way. Can Hans teleport? It's not like it matters, though. What matters is that Hans is there and he's dangerous.

"You think I'll be fooled by those tricks?" Hans demands, and the sword comes down towards Loki. The magic blast hadn't even done anything against Hans, really.

Without thinking, Loki throws up his hands and accidentally shoots a icicle at Hans, but Hans knocks it out of the way with the sword and sneers "Monster!"

The word echoes viciously all around him, as if a thousand people are shouting it out. Loki squeezes his eyes shut. No!

Loki knows Hans hates his and Elsa's powers, but it just happened. He knows he's in trouble now. Really big trouble, for all the magic he just did.

"You're just like Queen Elsa." Hans sneers it at him like it's an insult, but Loki likes Elsa.

"You were wrong 'bout Elsa!" Loki shoots back before he can stop himself. "She didn't kill Anna and you lied and you're bad!"

Loki glares at Hans. Hans tried to kill both Anna and Elsa, and that's not okay, and now he's coming after him, which is the most important part. He hates Hans!

"Why...?" Loki asks staring up at Hans.

"Why am I doing this?" Hans smiles coldly. "Because you're just like Queen Elsa, and seeing as I failed to get rid of her..."

"Besides," Hans continues. "I still need a throne, don't I?" His grin grows positively wicked. "I hear you're a prince, and even though I don't want to rule over a bunch of monsters, Jotunheim will have to do for now. Perhaps I'll move onto Midgard later."

Loki screams out Tony's name- or tries to, but it's more of a gasp because of the pain in his chest. Surely Tony will come save him, right? Tony won't let Hans do this. Hans didn't get away with what he did to Anna and Elsa, and he won't get away with this now. But looking up at him, it seems an awful lot like he's going to get away scot-free. Hans is too strong, just like Odin or Thor or anyone else, really.

Suddenly, there's an enraged roar and Hulk and Tony are here. Hulk's roar drowns out whatever
Tony's saying. Tony's in a Man of Iron suit, just like when they were flying earlier. Loki practically sobs in relief because Hulk and Tony will surely be able to beat up Hans. Hulk lets out another angry roar, and Loki smiles because Hulk's angry at Hans, not him. Because Hans is the bad guy, worse than being like him or Elsa. So Hulk's mad at Hans for being mean to him, right?

There's no way Hans can hurt him now, not when his Tony and his Hulk are here. His voice is weak from the recent beating and Hans' knee pressing down on him makes it hard to talk, but Loki calls out to them. Despite the pain, he smiles slightly at the sight of his best friend and one of his other best friends.

Hulk's massive green fist connects with Hans' stomach, and Hans goes flying across the room. Hulk lets out a victorious roar.

However, to Loki's horror, Hulk's victorious roar turns into one of pain, and he falls forwards with the silver hilt of a knife sticking out of his back, the blade obviously buried inside.

Gaston steps out from the shadows behind where Hulk had been standing. He gloats about what he just did, nudging Hulk's body with his foot.

"HULK!" Loki screams at the top of his lungs. Hulk isn't moving. Loki tries to get up but stars dance before his eyes and pain erupts from his midsection, thanks to his recent beating.

Gaston can't get away with hurting his friend! Loki refuses to consider that Hulk's dead. At first Beast seemed dead when Gaston stabbed him but then he wasn't, and maybe the same thing happened to Hulk. Hulk can't be dead and Bruce can't be dead either! They just can't be!

Surely Rapunzel could heal Hulk. She healed Eugene even when he was dead, and Hulk isn't dead, Loki tells himself firmly.

Rapunzel's not here, but Loki realizes that he could heal Hulk. He's got healing powers, just like Rapunzel. He can heal Hulk! If he could just get free, Loki might be able to use his hair like Rapunzel does. Loki grits his teeth and tries to scoot towards Hulk, who he can only sort of see through the stars dancing in front of his eyes. They're not good stars, either.

Loki manages to get to his feet but is tackled to the ground. Hans is back, apparently having recovered from Hulk's punch. Loki struggles, but Hans has him pinned down again with a boot on his chest.

Tony flies into the air and holds out his hands like he's going to shoot the stars at Gaston and Hans, but another figure jumps in the air, with green energy around their hands. Loki can't tell if it's that Other-Loki or Shego, but Tony's fighting them.

It looks like he's losing. Loki can't tear his eyes away. How can Tony lose?! Loki watches in horror.

His attention is diverted as two other lifeless bodies are thrown on top of the equally lifeless Hulk-Natasha and Clint. Dr. Drakken strolls out from the shadows, presumably having tossed the bodies away. Maybe he'd mistaken them for Kim and Ron. Drakken just copies Hans, planting a boot on Loki's chest and looming over him with a scarily gleeful expression on his face.

Loki can't even see the fight going on between Shego (or is it the other Loki?) and Tony anymore, but he hears a pained sound somewhere between a grunt and a moan, and he can tell it's Tony making it even though he's never heard that noise from Tony before. The pained noises continue, getting louder.
Loki thinks that's the worst sound in the world, hearing his best friend being hurt. They're hurting Tony and they hurt Hulk, too!

Loki gnashes his teeth, since his hands are tied up, kicking and screaming, but Dr. Drakken and Hans continue to hold him down and start to hit him again.

Loki can't hear Tony making any sound now, and he doesn't want to think about what that could mean.

A low, rumbling growl echoes through the room, followed by a loud bark. Fenrir launches himself at Dr. Drakken, sinking his teeth into Drakken's arm. Drakken yells out, and Loki smiles weakly.

However, Fenrir is knocked away again by a blast of magic from Shego. He gets up snarling but lets out a whimper and collapses to the floor.

Loki screams with fury. A rage like he's never felt fills his chest. They killed Hulk and hurt Tony and Fenrir! They're going to pay for hurting his friends! Without thinking, Loki lashes out, snarling, trying to hit Hans with anything.

Loki hasn't lashed out in ages, he's not sure when the last time was. He ends up shooting another icicle at Hans while trying to hit him with a hand at the same time.

Hans evades this attempt easily and wrestles him down to the ground. Loki claws and snarls and slaps, but Hans pins him down and starts beating him, until Loki's gasping in pain on the floor. He huddles into a tiny ball as Hans kicks him mercilessly.

Sometime later, though Loki's not sure if it's a minute or an hour, the blows cease.

Suddenly flipped on his stomach, Loki's arms are yanked behind his back and cold metal cuffs snap around his wrists. Loki lies helplessly on the floor, pulling on his restraints without any luck. He's pretty sure his rib is broken, but he can feel it healing, although that hurts a ton too. Right now, even breathing hurts.

"Don't try that again." Hans says in a scarily soft voice.

Why had he tried something so stupid?! He knows what happens when he lashes out, when he fights back, and it never ends well for him.

Hans and Drakken smirk cruelly down at him.

And then, Hans' sword comes down towards Loki's head.

"Sir? Please wake up."

Tony groans and rolls over. "Not now, Jarvis." He moans over the AI, while Jarvis says something about a theater. He'd probably agreed to fund the construction of a theater or something, but he really doesn't care at all. Why the hell does he need to hear about it right now- or ever?

"Sir, I'm afraid I must insist you get up."

"You'd better have a good reason for this, or I'm demoting you to a toaster." Tony grumbles, glancing at the clock. Three in the morning. Wonderful.

"Then I'll burn your toast." Jarvis replies snarkily, before going back to business. "Mr. Loki appears to have had another nightmare." Jarvis explains. Tony frowns. Somewhat apologetically, Jarvis
adds "I tried to console him myself, but he does not even seem to hear me."

"Ok. I'm on it." Tony sighs and rubs his eyes. He's actually been trying to catch up on all the sleep he's missed. He never slept spectacularly before Loki landed on his roof, either because he'd get wrapped up in some project and forget about such trivial things as sleep, food and other things necessary for survival, or he'd have nightmares of his own to worry about. His nightmares aren't nearly as bad as they were right after Afghanistan or the Battle of New York, but he's pretty sure he's got it worse than most people in terms of nightmares. Then again, most people don't go through what he's gone through.

This past month (plus a bit), Tony's been sleeping even less because of Loki's nightmares. Although it's not that much less each night than it had been before Loki's arrival, it adds up. Really, it would be better for both of them if they could sort those out.

He thought that maybe, after the progress they seemed to have made during the evening, Loki might not have a nightmare tonight. It's a lot later than Loki usually has nightmares, too.

Tony groggily gets up and heads towards the hallway. Stubbing his toe on the doorframe certainly wakes him up, though it has the side effect of making him swear loudly.

He heads towards Loki's room, but Jarvis interrupts. "Sir, Mr. Loki is actually in the theater a few floors down."

Well, that's unexpected. "Why is he in the theater?" Tony asks.

"I am not sure, sir, but it appears he teleported there in his sleep."

"I am not sure, sir, but it appears he teleported there in his sleep."

Okay, then. That's new. Well, not the teleporting. Loki's done that a few times, though Tony's sadly never been able to get a great readout on whatever the energy is. Teleporting in his sleep, however, is new. Tony heads towards the elevator and takes it down a couple floors.

Tony stops and stares for the briefest of moments when he enters the tower's movie theater. The lights are on, so it's easy to see. He gazes at the three identical Loki's in front of him, not even sure which is the real deal. Two of the Loki's are facing him while the third faces away, towards the blank screen. Of the two facing him, only one currently has open eyes, but those eyes have the glassy green gaze Tony's used to seeing. They all have messy, long black hair, and Iron Man pajamas. This is the first time Loki's made another Loki completely identical to himself, and Tony's pretty sure this is the first time there's been more than one illusion at a time.

They're also all muttering, rocking, flapping and jumping. Their eyes constantly dart around anxiously. Tony can't make out what any of them are saying. None of the Loki's even have Simba, which is a strange sight in of itself, and it could have been an easy way to identify the real Loki.

That's not all, though. There are two other figures as well. One is a certain eight-legged horse laying on the ground, singing Loki's song, although it's mostly drowned out by the Loki's muttering. And then there's the wolf that's pacing back and forth, growling. Tony ignores Sleipnir and Fenrir for now and tries to figure out which Loki is the real one.

Tony calls Loki's name, but none of them react. Tony slowly approaches the closest Loki, laying a hand on his shoulder. That Loki disappears, as does the second one he tries. Obviously, the remaining one is the real deal. Loki is now curled up by Sleipnir.

As he gets closer, Tony notices that there was one difference between the three Loki's- the Jormungand necklace. The two illusion-Loki's didn't have it on, but Loki does. Tony finds himself
wondering if Loki had slept with it on, because that would be weird. Loki now has green magic around his hands and is currently trying to hug himself. Tony stares as the necklace grows to the size of a large python.

Loki’s eyes are completely unfocused yet still scared as he rocks back and forth, now muttering something about stop it. He doesn't look up when Tony goes from crouching to kneeling next to him.

Tony gently puts a hand on Loki's shoulder, but Loki uncharacteristically screams bloody murder. Tony isn't expecting it when Loki shoves him away, so he's caught completely off guard. Stumbling, he falls back on his ass.

He notices that he's sitting in Sleipnir- the eight-legged horse isn't tangible, so Tony's butt is currently where Sleipnir's heart should be. Oddly enough, Sleipnir doesn't disappear like all of Loki's other illusions have, including when Sleipnir showed up before.

"Loki? It's me, it's Tony. You're safe." Tony says, moving so that he's no longer sitting in Sleipnir. Fenrir lets out a low chuffing sound.

Loki blinks and stares at him, as if only noticing him for the first time. "Tony?"

"The one and only." Tony smirks. Loki sighs in relief.

"Are you hurt? Do I have'ta sing?" Loki asks, tilting his head to the side and looking Tony over.

"No, no, I'm perfectly fine." Tony assures him. Loki stares at him for a bit. His brow furrows in confusion as he looks from Tony to Fenrir and back again, but he's clearly thrilled to see them all the same.

Then abruptly, the worry spikes and he asks "Where's Hulk-y?! Where's Bruce?!" The way he's asking this is close to panic and he glances around as if expecting someone to jump out at him.

"Dr. Banner is currently asleep in his bedroom, Mr. Loki." Jarvis speaks up. That's right, someone's still sleeping here, Tony thinks. Wow, he's really sleep deprived if he just made that connection. Really, sleeping is what both he and Loki should be doing right now, but of course they aren't.

Loki seems to be able to run on not a whole lot of sleep and still have tons of energy. Way more than Tony has, which is so not fair. That seems like a really nice perk of being Aesir or Jotun. Tony's had his fair share of nights without a lot of sleep, but they take their toll on him no matter how much caffeine he drinks.

Tony briefly wishes he could trade with Loki, but Loki is way worse off than he is, especially in terms of their pasts.

Loki seems very unconvinced about Bruce being fine, and Tony has to wonder why he's so anxious about Bruce's whereabouts in the first place. He doesn't think Bruce is going to hurt him or something... does he?

"But the knife..." Loki exclaims loudly, eyes wide and wild.

"What knife?" Is Loki describing his dream? This couldn't have actually happened, Jarvis would have alerted him.

"A big, sharp shiny one." Loki says with his eyes squeezed shut.
From the corner of his eye, Tony sees the flash of light reflecting off metal. He looks over and sees a knife lying on the floor near the huge canvas that movies are projected on.

Whoa, okay. How did he not notice that here before? It has a silver hilt with a red stone in the middle, and it's really closer to a dagger than a knife.

"Loki, why is there a- Where did you even get this?" Tony goes to pick up the dagger, but his hand passes through it and it disappears. What?

Was that an illusion? It had to be, since it was too realistic to be a hologram. What else could it have been, anyways? Was that the knife in Loki's nightmare? Loki lets out an inarticulate screech, and Tony has a feeling he'd noticed the knife.

"Where's Bruce?" Loki asks again, sounding even more panicked. Tony repeats what Jarvis had said about Bruce sleeping, but Loki still seems unconvinced and very anxious about Bruce's whereabouts.

Hoping Bruce won't be annoyed, Tony tells Jarvis to wake Bruce up and tell him that Loki's asking about him. Bruce probably won't Hulk-out over being woken up abruptly in the middle of the night. At least, Tony sincerely hopes so.

When he turns back to Loki, who's staring at the spot the knife had just occupied with terror, he sees yet another new sight, leaving him to wonder why everything's crazy right now. Loki's currently-huge Jormungand necklace is wrapped around Loki's torso, even around his arms, leaving just his hands sticking out the front. His hands are flapping and flicking their fingers.

"Uh, what is this?" Tony asks, gesturing at the snake that's practically squeezing Loki in it's coils. At least it's a fake snake instead of a real one, but still, it looks like it's preparing to eat him. "Let's get this off. Why did this even happen?" Tony mumbles more or less to himself, moving towards the huge fake snake.

While unwrapping the snake looks pretty simple, Tony finds that it's actually quite difficult as it keeps wrapping itself around Loki again as soon as he tries to unravel it.

"The knife wasn't real." Tony says, trying to reassure Loki since he'd seemed worried about that, and Fenrir barks.

Tony continues to yank at the snake, but stops when he notices that Sleipnir is staring at him. This is kind of awkward

"Don't." The horse says simply. Slightly taken aback that Sleipnir actually spoke to him (Sleipnir's only ever sung Loki's song before now) Tony pauses.

"Don't what?"

Then, Tony hears Loki's voice say, barely above a whisper. "Pull. Don't pull the snake, please? Don't pull my Jormungand." Tony hesitantly removes his hands from the fake Jormungand that has Loki all trussed up. Sleipnir turns back to Loki and nuzzles the god, starting to sing that horse song again. Tony's pretty sure Loki doesn't feel anything when Sleipnir does that, since touching Sleipnir just feels like touching air, but Loki grins when Sleipnir does it anyways.

"You like that around you?" Tony asks, raising an eyebrow. Frankly, it looks like it's restraining him. He would've thought that sort of thing would set Loki off.

"Safe." Loki murmurs.
"Is this a Jormungand hug?" Tony asks, his tired brain finally putting the pieces together. Loki's mentioned on a couple different occasions that his snake friend hugged him. Loki nods, murmuring that it's better than before.

"Come on, let's go back to the main floor." Tony says, trying to pull Loki to his feet. Since Loki's hands are basically pinned in front of his body, he has to get up without using his arms. Loki manages this surprisingly well.

Tony leads Loki to the elevator, muttering "This is ridiculous. I feel like I'm escorting a prisoner or something." Loki jerks away from him with wide eyes, and Tony hastily says "Which you're not. You're not a prisoner."

Loki relaxes again, and Tony is somewhat surprised when Sleipnir and Fenrir follow them into the elevator.

When they arrive back at the penthouse, they're greeted by a very rumpled looking Bruce. His hair's messy with bedhead and the white t-shirt and navy blue shorts he's wearing as pajamas are all wrinkled. Tony realizes that those shorts are the super-stretchy shorts for if he Hulks out. Then again, he seems to wear a pair of those all the time now.

Bruce looks somewhat shocked about the snake that's essentially tying Loki up as well as their two animal companions.

Loki looks even more relieved to see Bruce, getting up and trying to hug him, a feat made impossible because his arms are pinned. Loki blinks and looks down at the former-necklace that's wrapped around most of his torso. The snake shifts so it's wrapped around his waist instead, freeing his arms.

Loki hugs Bruce, who looks confused as the god starts singing Rapunzel's healing song. A soft green light emanates from Loki's hands.

"Loki, I'm fine."

"You wouldn't get up." Loki mumbles down to Bruce, since he's a lot taller than him. Loki actually rests his chin on Bruce's head. "Gaston stabbed you in the back likes he did with Beast!"

So this was just an ordinary nightmare, instead of the PTSD flashback kind.

"Gaston?" Tony asks. Loki nods, glancing around fearfully as if expecting the character to appear at any moment. "Didn't he die?"

"But he stabbed Hulk with a knife, so he can't be dead, 'cause he dids it!" Loki exclaims, practically yelling and clearly panicked. "B'sides, Beast and Eugene were dead but they came back to life!"

"Loki, Gaston's not real. He's just--" Tony's cut off when Bruce sends him a look telling him to stop. Realizing how he'd almost slipped up Tony shuts up. If he explains how Gaston's not real, Loki would probably work out that none of the other characters are real, either. For now, Loki thinking the movies are actually real is a good thing because he's been taking in the messages in them and connecting himself to characters, using them to slowly start to believe everything Tony's told him about Asgard being wrong. He actually seemed to be doing a lot better earlier tonight. Well, technically, that was yesterday since it's three a.m.

"Gaston's not here." Tony amends.

"His knife is!" Loki shrieks, already running to his bedroom, Sleipnir and Fenrir right at his heels.
On their way to Loki's room, Tony tells Bruce about the illusion-knife, and his theory about it being the one from Loki's dream. That would mean Loki can make illusions based off of dreams and memories, but then again, maybe that's what that child Other-Loki was? Tony feels like he should test this new hypothesis, but not now. Judging by what Loki just said, though, that seems to be a pretty good theory.

When Tony enters Loki's room, the god is of course hugging Simba. He seems quite relieved to have the toy back. Sleipnir's singing Loki's song again, and Fenrir's lying on the floor.

Loki's not exactly calm by any sense of the word, but he is significantly calmer than he'd been in the theater or the living room. It's probably because of Sleipnir and Fenrir, as well as the Jormungand necklace wrapped around Loki's waist. But maybe it's also partly because of the stars on the ceiling that cast a low light in the room, the horses prancing across the walls and the soft rug.

Tony gives Loki a reassuring squeeze, reminding him that Bruce and Hulk are here and perfectly fine, and that Gaston is not here and never has been.

"Is this your happy place, Loki?" Bruce asks.

Loki's gaze flicks up towards the holographic stars, and then back at Bruce questioningly, but he's smiling slightly. Bruce, with a small grin of his own, says, "I should have guessed. Sometimes when I'm stressed, I like to close my eyes and imagine I'm somewhere peaceful. I think this room makes you calmer, doesn't it?"

Loki cocks his head to the side, but nods. "Safe. Like our field, Sleipnir." He grins at Sleipnir, who nods enthusiastically, and looks around him. "My room's my field now."

"Glad you like it." Tony says, although he sort of wants to get back to this dream topic.

Figuring he should reassure Loki a bit more, Tony says "None of that stuff with the knife happened, you know that, right? I know it seemed real, but it was just a dream, and the knife wasn't real either."

"Wasn't a flashback." Loki says, sounding glad about that. "Besides, you're here my Fenrir is okay too." Loki tells Bruce, looking much less anxious now.

"Exactly. Here I am, clearly alive." Bruce says, giving Loki a reassuring smile. Loki smiles back slightly.

"I can attest that Gaston is not anywhere in the tower, Mr. Loki." Jarvis pipes up. "Nor was he ever in here, unless you count a small plastic figurine." Loki relaxes slightly and glances at the figurines on his desk.

"What 'bouts Hans and Drakken and Shego?"

"None of them were ever in the tower, either, Mr. Loki." Jarvis replies smoothly. "If they were, they would need to get through me, which is no easy feat." In another situation, Tony might have found Loki dreaming about all those fictional characters funny. However, even though Loki seems to get that the nightmare isn't real, he still seems pretty traumatized by it.

"Do you want to tell us what happened?" Bruce asks gently. "Sometimes talking about it helps." Tony and Bruce wait for Loki to respond. Loki tries to start playing with Tony's hand, curling Tony's fingers until Tony yanks his hand away, because that's a little too weird. Loki instead fiddles with Maximus' tail, while hugging Simba close. He picks up the Hans figurine and stares at
it. Loki's silent for almost a minute, and Tony's about to ask again when Loki starts.

"Hans came out of a screen with a sword, and he was gonna cut me, kill me! Like he tried'ta do to Elsa." Loki starts breathing quickly, and Bruce urges him to slow his breathing down. Loki only sort of manages to do so, and his body is still clearly tense now as he recounts what happens. Sleipnir nickers, clearly trying to reassure Loki.

The rubbery, yet realistic Jormungand suddenly looks a lot more realistic, just like Sleipnir and Fenrir. It starts to wrap itself around Loki's torso again, only it seems to be tangible, unlike the other two. Maybe that's because it's an illusion projected on something real (it had once been a hose), whereas Sleipnir and Fenrir just are illusions in thin air? Tony wonders if Loki's capable of conjuring solid objects without having to transform them from something else.

Tony puts an arm around Loki's shoulder and feels Loki relax a bit. Loki looks at Tony when he continues. "An' I don't wanna die, so I tried'ta gets away, but he was still there! And he got mad when I ax'dentally made ice." Loki's shaking now.

The god starts hitting himself with the Hans figurine, on his forehead, his stomach, his chest. Fenrir howls mournfully.

"Whoah, Snoopy, what do you think you're doing?! Don't hit yourself!" Tony goes to grab Loki's wrists to keep him from hurting himself as Loki lays on the rug and continues to batter himself with the small plastic toy.

"He beat me and then you and Hulk-y came, but Gaston stabbed him, and you couldn't help me!" As Loki says this, he rams the Gaston figurine into the Hulk toy's back, making it fall over on its face, clearly showing what happened. Tony sees a tiny silver dagger in the Hulk toy's back, with the tiniest dot of red in the hilt.

Bruce hastily averts his gaze and leaves the room, while Tony looks on with fascination. Maybe Loki can recreate things with illusions.. "Where's Bruce going? What if Gaston gets him?!" Loki asks.

"I think Dr. Banner just needs some time to himself." Jarvis explains. "Remember, Gaston is not in the tower, Mr. Loki."

"Wait, you don't think we could beat up Hans and Gaston?! We would totally kick their asses." Tony protests."You're talking about two people who stopped a freaking alien invasion and have taken out countless killer robots, and you don't think we could handle two ordinary men lacking any impressive weapons and abilities?" Frankly, Tony thinks, that's almost insulting. Besides, he thought Loki believed the Avengers (particularly him) to be unstoppable. Why would they be bested by the likes of Hans and Gaston?

"Alien invasion?" Loki asks. Why is that the part he focuses on?

"Yeah. The Chitauri. Huge army that tried to take over humanity and rule us all. They're what started the Avengers."

Recognition flares in Loki's eyes, and Tony figures that all of Asgard, even Loki, probably heard Thor talk about that. "Oh. Like with the weasels." Loki says, as if it makes perfect sense.

"Weasels?" Tony questions with a raised brow.

"Yeah. The old guy ruled all the weasels in Weasel-Town, even though he wasn't even a weasel. That's really not fair, you know, 'cause what if the weasels don't like a short old guy taking over?
He's not even nice!" Loki ends this little speech in a kneeling position instead of his previous sitting one.

"...Are you talking about the Duke in Frozen?" He asks, connecting the dots eventually. Loki nods.

"Yeah! He said they were wesels, not weasels! He didn't even get 'em right!" It takes a second for Tony to grasp Loki's logic. People kept mispronouncing the Duke's kingdom of Weselton as Weasel Town, and Loki's apparently convinced that weasels are actually in the equation somewhere. Tony smirks slightly at this as Loki goes on. "He shouldn't be their ruler." Loki scowls at the injustice of it. "They should just bite him, 'cause they've got really sharp teeth."

"That's sort of what we did to the Chitauri." Tony says.

"You bit them?!" Loki laughs, chomping on air with his teeth.

By this time, Bruce has reappeared with tea and hot chocolate. He even has Mrs. Potts and Chip on the tray for Loki. Bruce grabs a mug of tea and starts to sip it, clearly a lot calmer. There's nothing like drinking a nice hot beverage to soothe one's nerves, Tony thinks, watching Loki sip hot chocolate out of Chip, looking a lot calmer. Well, for Tony, there's alcohol, but that's clearly not everyone's cup of tea.

To be honest, Tony's not sure what Bruce thinks about the whole nightmare Loki described, what with the Hulk getting hunted like that. That had happened in real life, too. Does Bruce ever have nightmares about it?

Realizing that the whole conversation's been derailed, and wondering if that's what Loki had been going for, Tony tries to get it back on track. "Okay, well the point is that Hans and Gaston couldn't beat us." Tony says.

"But no one's quick as Gaston!" Loki says. "No one hits like Gaston!" In a quiet voice, he says "You can't beat him if he's the best. He's like Thor!"

"We didn't let Thor hurt you, right?" Bruce asks, and Loki nods. "So, we wouldn't let Gaston hurt you either. Thor's much stronger than Gaston."

"Hans d'feated Elsa's big snow Marshmallow Hulk." Loki adds, shaking his head wildly.

"But we'd totally own Hans. Okay, I know your dream had a crappy ending. Worse than a B-rated action movie." Tony says flippantly, but he knows what it's like to have dreams where everyone you care about dies and you can't do anything to stop them. "But that's not how it should have ended at all."

Loki just stares at him blankly. Tony's not entirely sure what makes him decide to do what he does next- maybe it's inspired by Loki's story time earlier tonight and watching him play with toys countless times. Anyways, Tony decides to take a leaf out of Loki's book, reaches for the toys on the floor in front of Loki. Tony holds the Gaston figurine- which is at most four inches tall, so about half the height of the Avengers action figures- in one hand and Toy Stark in his other hand.
"Gaston just has a knife, right, or a dagger or something. At most, he has a gun like in the movie. Well, I have a freaking Iron Man suit, so this is what would have happened." He makes Toy Stark fly into the air and pretends to have the toy swoop down and knock Gaston down before blasting him with invisible repulsors. "See? I'm too awesome. I mean, guns and swords don't even do anything against my armor. Bullets just bounce off." Tony looks at Loki pointedly, hoping this will console him.

Of course, without his armor, Tony would be screwed against a gun, but he's not going to go into that. He doesn't like thinking about it anyways. Who does, really?

"But what 'bout when you're not in you armor?" Loki asks worriedly, and Tony's surprised Loki catches what was left unsaid. So much for not going into that. "Then you're hurt, right? And you're a mortal too!" Loki wrings his hands together, worry all over his face.

"Yeah, well, then I try to avoid swords and guns." Tony says, sounding much more carefree than he actually feels about the topic.

"Don't die." Loki tells him sternly.

"I'm still alive and kicking after everything, and I'm not planning on kicking the bucket anytime soon."

"But what if you get hurt?" Loki asks him urgently.

"Well... then I get patched up. I've got my own special healer now, right?" Tony grins at Loki.

"...Me?" Loki asks in a hushed voice. Tony confirms that yes, that meant Loki. Loki seems awed for some reason, and a small grin forms on his lips.

"Tony's healer." Loki says softly, clearly liking the sound of it.

"So, their weapons wouldn't do anything against me, and if they did, you could probably patch me up. I mean, you fixed a broken leg, so you've got to be able to heal other things, right?"

"Buts you're gonna die soon 'cause you're a mortal! You need an apple!" Loki shrieks, bouncing up and down.

"Hey, I'm not planning on dying anytime soon." Tony says. "I've cheated death a ton of times."

"You're not mad at him, are you?" Loki asks, looking to the side. Tony has a feeling Loki's not talking to him anymore. He pauses as if someone's responding, and then says "Don't let him die, 'kay, Hel?" Oh. Of course. Another one of his friends- a young girl, if Tony remembers correctly.

Perhaps seeing the confused look on Tony's face, Loki says "She works with dead people in Helheim."

"I can look out for myself." Tony declares, slightly weirded out by the idea of some random girl deciding if he dies. Not that he believes it, it's just a weird idea. "Are we going to get to meet Hel?" Frankly, considering Sleipnir and Jormungand are visible, it's odd that Hel isn't.

"Oh, I don't think you'd like seeing her right now." Loki says with a strange smile on his lips. "She takes some getting used to, you know."

"Where did your friends come from?" Tony asks, because it really is a strange cast of characters.
"My dreams." Loki says after a bit. "They were nice in my dreams, and I asked 'em to be with me when I was awake, too, 'xcept I couldn't see 'em then much. Everyone said they weren't real but they are!' Loki exclaims, flapping his hands. "They're real like Hobbes is to Calvin!"

They seem more real than that, but maybe that's just because of Loki's magic illusions.

Loki's looked calmer after asking Hel to keep Tony alive, but he casts an anxious glance at Bruce. "Cans you make sure my Bruce doesn't die, too?"

"Hey, they couldn't do anything against Hulk either." Tony says. "Trust me, stabbing Hulk would just piss him off, and nobody in their right mind wants to piss off Hulk."

Bruce looks pretty uncomfortable at this last part, but admits that Hulk is basically indestructible and that Gaston certainly wouldn't be able to do anything to him. As emphasis, Tony makes Gaston stab the Hulk toy. Loki seems to hate seeing that. But then Tony makes Hulk toy get up from where it had fallen and punch the Gaston figurine before stomping on it. Bruce doesn't seem to particularly like seeing this. Loki, however, smiles slightly, seeming relieved to see this version instead of what he'd seen in his dream.

"You weren't fighting Hans and Gaston, though." Loki stares at Tony, smile gone as if it had never been there at all as he's back to his worried look.

"I wasn't?"

"No," Loki says simply, and Tony asks who he was fighting, even though the question was implied. "You were fighting... Shego." Loki flaps his hands, bouncing up and down as he chants "It was Shego, it was Shego, it was Shego! Wasn't me! Nope nope nope! SHE-GO!" Loki seems to be trying to convince himself of this, and considering that whole Loki illusion incident after Loki was first exposed to Kim Possible, Tony can't really blame him. Loki had mistook Shego for himself, and if he'd seen that Other-Loki attack Tony in his dream, that would probably freak him out.

"I wouldn't believe it if it was you." Bruce says. "You're not really the type of person to do that."

"She did bad green magic and was winning!" Loki exclaims anxiously. "I think. You were fighting her."

"Hey, the magic isn't bad, remember? She just does bad things with it." Tony corrects, and Loki doesn't argue that point, instead going on about what happened.

"Dr. Drakken threw Clint and Tasha on top of Hulk. They were really really hurt! Dead, maybe. Hulk-y wasn't getting up, 'n neither were the others. And you wouldn't stop screaming!"

Tony puts an arm around the god and pulls him close, telling him that it's okay, that he's okay, that neither of them are actually hurt, and that Clint and Natasha are fine too. Okay, he can't guarantee about Clint and Natasha, but he seriously doubts anything's happened to them. He would have heard if two of his teammates were in critical condition or something.

"That's not realistic, either." Tony says. "Clint and Natasha wouldn't lose to Dr. Drakken. I mean, he's not even as good as a Doom-bot." He hunts around for the Clint and Natasha action figures, as well as toys to use as the two villains. Loki doesn't have any that actually look like them.

As he grabs the Clint and Natasha figures from Loki's desk, Tony spots something that makes him grin and pick that up, instead.

It's a Loki action figure that goes perfectly with the improved Avengers action figures. Tony
glances between Loki and the toy. It's wearing miniature versions of the Iron Man pajamas and that starry long coat Loki made with his magic. Loki obviously made this with his magic, too. The action figure is almost eerily realistic, just like Toy Stark and the other Avenger toys, except for Thor.

"This is awesome, Loki." Tony says, once again truly impressed by what Loki's magic can produce. He holds it up for Bruce to see, and Bruce seconds the well-deserved praise. "When did you build it?" Tony's rather surprised that he hasn't seen this before.

Loki doesn't answer, but Jarvis does. "Mr. Loki made it after you left the room earlier tonight, out of what used to be a can opener." Tony briefly remembers Loki clutching a can opener the first day and pranking him with the same one just a couple days ago. He smiles slightly at the fact Loki would use that to make a toy of himself.

Loki nods slightly when Jarvis speaks. "B'fore I went to sleeps." He mumbles, confirming Jarvis' words.

Sleipnir says happily "It looks just like you."

Loki laughs. "It's a mini me!" Turning to Tony and Bruce, he asks "You like it?"

"Isn't that what we just said? It looks awesome."

Loki grasps at the charms hanging from the enlarged Jormungand necklace that's still wrapped tightly around his waist. The necklace- though it's closer to a belt now- looks as real as Sleipnir and Fenrir. Loki scoots up next to Tony and tries to hold the charms next to the Loki toy. Jormungand actually raises his head to put the charms near the toy Loki. The charms are smaller, proportionately, but Loki laughs and says "It's us!"

Sleipnir trots around in circles excitedly and Fenrir barks.

Loki lets go of the charms and picks up Simba. "You're kinda big for him." Loki says, and his gaze turns to the desk with all the figurines. With a huge grin, Loki picks up the young Simba figurine from The Lion King set and holds it up next to the Loki action figure. He laughs delightedly and says "There's his Simba, and I've gots my Simba, so he has Simba too. And we both have our Avengers."

Tony hands the action figure to Loki. Loki makes the Hans figurine slowly approach the toy of himself. "I know what you are." Loki says, presumably as Hans. Loki has the Loki toy tell Hans to stay away, and suddenly throws the Hans toy backwards.

"What was that?" Bruce asks.

"I hit Hans with wind. And ice." Loki mutters.

"Hey, that's good!" Tony says, wondering why this hadn't come up before. "You defended yourself. Nothing wrong with that. Actually, it's strongly encouraged."

"Hans said it was bad. And he was there when I turned around, even though he went flying the other way!" Loki re-enacts it again when he says this, and for a brief moment.

"But he was wrong. Don't listen to Hans. He lied to Anna and Elsa." Bruce points out.

Loki frowns. "He wanted to rule a kingdom, so he hurt Elsa and Anna tryin'ta do it! That's bad! I
wouldn't do that! And I wouldn't make weasels be wesels." Loki shakes his head firmly.

"Of course you wouldn't." Tony says. Somehow, despite all the abuse he's suffered, Loki's turned out to be a very kind person. Someone kind enough to care about the well-being of imagined weasels.

Loki could have turned out completely the opposite, though. Actually, it's almost surprising he didn't turn out differently. That one Loki illusion that Loki mistook for Shego, though, sort of seemed like the villainous type that would probably do something like try to take over the world. Tony's been thinking a lot about that other-Loki that showed up after *Kim Possible*. Although Loki mistook it for Shego, it seemed different than the character. Maybe that's what Loki would have ended up like had he been raised differently, although the way he had been raised is already bad enough.

"Seriously, Loki, you could totally beat Hans."

Loki looks very skeptical and lets out a snort. "Weakling."

"Loki, you're not weak."

Loki looks very dubious. Okay, maybe Loki's physically weaker than other Asgardians, but he's a lot stronger than ordinary humans. Cap and Hulk might be a bit stronger, and Tony could probably hold his own against Loki as long as he had his suits, but that's about it. Not that Tony can ever see this situation happening. So with just physical strength, he seems to have almost all of Earth's population trumped, just like Thor does, and then Loki has magic as well. Loki's magic also seems quite powerful, and

"I mean, you stopped the Incredible Hulk with a force field, for crying out loud! Do you know how hard Hulk is to stop?!" Tony asks incredulously, before immediately wondering whether bringing that up was a good idea or not.

Bruce looks like he'd rather be somewhere else, as he fiddles awkwardly with the Hulk action figure. "Trust me, that is not weak. You are not weak. You're strong."

Tony's not sure if Loki's going to freak out at the force field reference. Loki looks like he'd forgotten all about that. He stares into space absentmindedly makes the Anna doll repeatedly punch the much smaller Hans figurine in the face, basically just bashing them together. He ends up switching to using the Anna figurine, which, being part of the same set, is closer in size to Hans than the doll.

"Elsa stopped an arrow with ice." Loki says quietly.

"Exactly. She was keeping herself from being killed. She could have easily beat Hans. All he had was a sword."

"But he almost killed her! He woulda, too if Anna hadn't stopped him! I tried'ta help you, but he was too strong!" Loki almost sounds like he's apologizing. "It didn't work and Hans was even madder!" Loki says, slapping his own thigh so hard that a loud smack sounds through the room. Tony winces because that sounded painful, but Loki doesn't even blink.

"Fenrir tried to get Hans to stop, but he got hit too."

Fenrir lets out a whimper that sounds very apologetic, and he growls at the Hans and Gaston figures, trying to bite them, although his teeth presumably pass through them. However, since Tony can't see through the wolf, it looks like he's eating them.
"I tried to get to Hulk-y, but I couldn't." Loki says, sounding very distraught.

Fenrir, still trying to chew on the figurines, gives Loki a pointed look, as if to say look what I'm doing.

"Aaaugh!" Tony says for Hans. "We're getting eaten by a giant wolf!" Loki giggles and Fenrir barks what sounds like an affirmative before going back to trying to chew them. Loki cheers him on. "Loki doesn't have to worry about us anymore."

Loki laughs again but then seems struck by an idea.

"I'm free!" Loki shouts, holding the Loki toy and bringing it over to the Hulk toy. "Now Rapunzel and I can heal Hulk-y!" He grabs the Rapunzel figurine and sings Rapunzel's healing song. The dagger sticking out of Hulk's back disappears. Tony grins at how Loki's making a better ending.

Tony hunts through Loki's figurines for characters to use as Dr. Drakken and Shego, and decides on Jafar and Mother Gothel respectively.

Loki sips his hot chocolate and looks confused as Tony makes Toy Stark and Mother Gothel spar in the air, especially when Tony makes the Toy Stark overwhelm Mother Gothel.

When Tony explains that Mother Gothel is Shego, Loki seems to accidentally make the toy look like Shego. He doesn't seem particularly thrilled, but he doesn't totally freak out, either. He's seemed to have gotten over the fear of changing his toys or clothes.

Even though it's three in the morning, they end up re-enacting Loki's dream a bunch of times with Loki's toys, only with a better ending where the Avengers are not defeated at all. Loki seems to quite like making Iron Man and Hulk stomp on Hans and Gaston, and he even gets Elsa and Simba into it. Tony takes the Elsa part as a good sign.

They continue to think of new endings for the nightmare to make it less scary. Oftentimes, they veer away from what Loki's revealed about the nightmare to make up these new endings. Some of them are completely ridiculous, like Gaston suddenly deciding that he needs to comb his chest hair, but they make Loki laugh, and, more importantly, get his mind off of what he'd imagined in his nightmare, off watching his friends be hurt.

Tony's not going to admit this to anyone but himself, but this isn't half bad, sitting on the floor with Loki, playing with toys. It seems to help him forget, for a bit, about seeing his friends dead. Loki seems to think it's hysterical when Tony makes Jafar "trip" off the bed/imaginary-cliff and fall to the floor before getting run over by Maximus (although Jafar's cast as Dr. Drakken, that figurine didn't change appearances like how Mother Gothel morphed into Shego).

Making Loki laugh, especially when he'd been scared not long ago, makes this worthwhile.

While they have some ridiculous endings, which Tony feels might be influenced by his sleep-deprived brain, they also frequently play out a version where Tony and Hulk save Loki, which seems to make Loki feel a lot better.

Loki also makes a version where Beast prevents Gaston from stabbing Hulk in the first place.

One other instance of magic which Tony finds very interesting is, at one point when Loki's trying to control three toys at once, one of them moves on its own. Not in a living way like in Toy Story, but as if it's a puppet controlled by an invisible string. It's one of the figurines, so all it does is hop around, but it's still kind of cool. Tony wonders if that's the extent of that power or not. Considering Loki's illusions, couldn't he make toys look like they were actually alive?
Loki just watches the toy do this, and Tony can't tell what he's thinking, whether he thinks it's good or bad.

Loki goes back to re-enacting the nightmare.

"Snoopy, if someone's trying to hurt you, it's not bad if you keep them from doing so." Tony makes the Hans toy (they don't have any of the guards) approach Elsa, and Loki makes Elsa blast Hans with magic. There's a tiny flurry of snow when this happens, courtesy of Loki. Tony makes Hans fly backwards and moan his defeat.

"The snow was a nice touch." Bruce comments from where he's drinking tea. Loki has a mug of hot chocolate on the nightstand, but it's forgotten.

Surprisingly, Loki doesn't freak out about it, although he does mumble that it was Elsa. Of course it was him, but he doesn't seem to like saying so.

"Elsa made the snow Hulk guy. Marshmallow." Loki says, glancing at Bruce. When Tony asks Loki if he could do that, Loki just shrugs. "I like Marshmallow. And Olaf. He's funny!" Loki picks up his small Olaf plush with a smile. "I wish I could do that."

Making a huge snow monster wouldn't be a good idea. Still, Tony's surprised but pleased that Loki expressed a desire to do some type of magic. "Loki, you basically have." He gestures to Sleipnir and Fenrir. Loki smiles slightly but doesn't answer.

"If someone tries to hurt you, you should do what Fenrir does and fight back."

"They don't like that!" Loki protests.

"Well, the guards didn't like Elsa defending herself, but she did it anyways. Just as she should have." Tony tells Loki, who stares at him.

"How about when the guards were chasing Esmeralda?" Bruce catches on to what Tony's doing. "It was pretty awesome how she outwitted them, right?"

"She used magic to get away!" Loki says, understanding kindling in his eyes. "She tereported. No, teleported and she made them hit each other." Loki giggles and wriggles his body slightly, and Tony remembers he'd liked that scene a lot. "And Aladdin! They couldn't catch him."

"Exactly. You could do that too. Did you ever do that?" Tony can actually imagine Loki doing that. Loki tenses and starts rocking back and forth quickly.

Tony pulls him close and mutters soft nothings to try to get him to calm down.

"You can beat them." Tony tells him once he seems relatively calm again.

"Really?" Loki still sounds very skeptical.

"Really." Tony confirms. "Just like-" His eyes land on a drawing on the wall, and he grins. "Just like Boo beat Randall. Remember?"

"I'm Boo, 'cause they see a monster." Loki says. He seemed to like that analogy before.

"Exactly!"

Loki laughs and goes to his desk, where he finds the figurines of Boo, Randall, and Sulley. He starts to re-enact the scene where Randall has Sulley almost falling to his doom, while Boo looks
on, terrified of Randall. But then, Boo beats Randall up with a baseball bat. Loki recreates this by setting Boo on Randall and using a finger as the baseball bat that Boo hit Randall with. Each time his finger hits Randall, Randall changes patterns, just like in the movie.

"Great job." Tony says, grinning at him. "Boo seems a lot weaker than Randall at first glance, but she beat him." Loki cocks his head to the side.

"How would you feel about learning self defense?" Tony asks the god. He's been thinking about Loki sticking up for himself ever since noticing Loki's distinct lack of doing just that. "That way, if someone does try to hurt you again, you'll be able to keep them from doing so." Loki stops midway through making both the Loki toy and Boo defeat Randall together.

"NO!" Loki screams, taking Tony by surprise.

"Why not?"

"Odin says it's forbidden." Loki says after a bit, as if that settles the matter. He's looking at Tony like he just suggested they go kill everyone.

"Yeah, well, Odin can suck it. His rules don't apply here." Tony says, before wincing internally. He really hopes Odin doesn't decide to decimate his tower for that. He can't deny that Odin could probably do just that, being a viking alien/god king. "He did magic too, remember? He was probably scared about how powerful you are."

"But he's the Allfather." Loki's silent for a bit, and then he says in a choked voice. "I never wanted to be there..." Then he starts to cry silently.

"I know..." Tony murmurs as he once again pulls the god into a one armed hug, rubbing circles on Loki's shaking shoulder. Loki's body shakes with silent sobs as he drops Elsa and hugs Simba, burying his head in his knees.

For about three minutes, they just sit there while Loki cries. Both Tony and Bruce speak in soft, reassuring voices.

"I hate it. Hate getting hurt." Loki says, once the tears have subsided. He wipes at his eyes.

"Well, we're going to do everything we can to make sure you don't get hurt again." Tony says. Loki smiles broadly at that and throws his arms around Tony. Clearly, he likes hearing that a lot, being reassured that he has people who care about him and will look out for him.

"Still, it wouldn't hurt if you could protect yourself." Tony adds.

"But it does, it hurts, always hurts more! I always lost!" Loki mumbles, looking like he's going to start crying again. Tony has a sickening feeling about where this was going, as Loki continues as if a barge was let out.

"Running didn't help much. Not even like Esmeralda." Loki whispers. "They always caught me...too fast." He fiddles with his fingers, chewing his lip and rocking back and forth, clearly anxious. Tony realizes that Loki's actually answering his question from a bit earlier. "Sometimes I thought I got away but they always caught me later. 'Cause I was always there!" Loki flaps his hands anxiously. "I gots in worse trouble later, even way later when the found me. They always got me 'ventually and it always hurt more then..."

Tony's not even sure what to say to that, but it seems Loki doesn't want to talk about it anymore. And it's clear they're not going to be able to convince him of that soon.
"Do you ever have good dreams?" Bruce asks curiously, fiddling with the Hulk toy, while Loki instructs him to make it hug the Loki action figure.

By now, Jormungand is back to just a snake necklace. Sleipnir and Fenrir are still visible, but they're not doing much of anything.

"I was flying with Tony before, and racing Sleipnir n' Fenrir and Tony." Loki says with a small smile on his face. Loki moves Toy Stark and the Loki toy as if they're flying.

"That sounds nice."

"It was. And my other friends were there, and I flew up in the stars." Loki flops over to gaze up at the holographic stars above him, reaching up like he's trying to grasp them.

Loki having control over his nightmare seems to help a lot, since he's not thinking about Hans and Gaston murdering his friends anymore. Tony starts to wonder if that could help with some of Loki's traumatic memories. It wouldn't be quite the same thing, obviously, since those aren't re-imagining a fictional dream, but isn't this sort of what they'd do anyways? Getting Loki to think about the memories in a less-threatening way and giving him control over them, so he might be able to conquer them? However, Loki hasn't revealed much about his traumatic memories- at least, not by talking about them. Perhaps, roleplay could help him.

Tony thinks about some of the illusions Loki's made. Maybe it could almost be like him reliving a traumatic experience through illusions. If they could get it to be like he's re-living them but in control...

Tony seriously thinks this could help, even if it is a bit... childish. But Loki played with toys before, so it's not anything new. Still, this actually seems therapeutic. He'll have to bring it up the next time Gwyneth comes.

Though there's no way he's going to try this with his own nightmares.

Clint, Steve and Natasha ride the elevator up Stark Tower. Tony had called them around noon, saying something about a training session and being overdue for some team bonding. Surprisingly, they're all free now. No missions or anything, obviously.

Since Halloween, Clint's been on the Helicarrier, on call for S.H.I.E.L.D. It's been slightly annoying. Not getting to spend as much time with his family as he'd like (there's not enough time in the world for that) is one of the worst drawbacks of being an agent and Avenger.

Anyways, he's in Stark Tower for some Avengers team building. Clint's looking forward to training, since the archery range in the tower is awesome, even better than what S.H.I.E.L.D has to offer. Although he likes the team bonding over scotch (okay that's really mostly him and Tony) even more.

They wind up going to Tony's penthouse first. Sure, Clint's been up here before for parties and such, but it's not exactly a normal occurrence, since they usually use the Avengers common area. Tony, Bruce and Loki are all there.

Just like the last time he and Natasha had been over here, music blares through the speakers and Loki laughs, delighted. "Oh yeah, hey yeah. I'm your basic average girl. And I'm here to save the world. You can't stop me 'cause I'm Kim Poss-i-ble..."

Clint doesn't really know much about that show, but he recognizes the theme song from one time
Cooper and Lila had been watching reruns of it online. That's about all he knows, other than Lila telling Natasha she looks a lot like Kim and telling him he's a bit like Ron—only way cooler, obviously. Okay, he added that last part.

Somebody's humming along to the song, and of course it's Loki. The living room floor is covered with toys, not unlike Clint and Laura's own living room. From the looks of it, they mostly appear to be Disney toys, the only exceptions being the Avengers action figures. The Simba that Loki carried around everywhere the past two times Clint visited is among them, dressed in an Iron Man suit.

"Stark, I told you what I'd do if you play that song, right?" Natasha asks, annoyed. Tony holds up his hands.

Before he can say anything, Loki looks at Steve (with his usual glazed eyes) and says "I drew you."

"You drew me?" Steve asks, though he doesn't seem too perturbed by Loki's odd conversation starter.

"Yeah." Loki hunts around a stack of papers, frowning. Clint catches glimpses of several drawings of Disney characters in the stack. "It's not here." Loki mutters.

Loki darts off down a hallway and returns about a minute later with several sheets of paper. He grins and holds up a drawing of Captain America that could easily be mistaken as a child's rendering.

"It's great." Steve grins, and Loki beams. "I take it you like drawing? I'm rather fond of it, too." Loki nods. This strikes Clint as odd, because Loki had seemed a lot more nervous around the super-soldier the last time they'd both been here. Had Steve been here since then?

"Do you have a naked mole rat?" Clint realizes that question is meant for him, since Loki's glassy gaze is now directed at him.

"Uh, what?"

"A naked mole rat. They're called *Heterocephalus glaber.*" Loki says the words stiltedly as he stares at the ceiling as if reading the words off of it, before his gaze swings down towards Clint again. "They live underground in... Africa? I think? I forget." Clint finds it a little odd that Loki can rattle off a scientific name like that—albeit with some difficulty, but hey, that's better than he could do—but then be unsure of if they live in Africa or not.

Then again, Loki's a little odd, Clint thinks, taking in Loki's appearance. Loki's wearing that bizarre long coat that looks like a night sky, and he now has a necklace that looks like a snake, with three charms hanging out of the mouth.

Okay, maybe Loki's more than a little odd. But it's not a bad odd, as far as Clint's concerned. Loki actually reminds him of his kids, in some ways, only with a grown man's body. But at the same time, even if he was in a kid's body, Clint doesn't think Loki could pass as a normal kid.

Loki continues talking. "Well, 'xcept for Rufus, 'cause he lives in Ron's pocket. So do you have one? 'Cause I'm not going to lie, that would be stupendous!" Loki laughs, and Clint's pretty sure he's heard that line somewhere, but he can't put a finger on it. "You look like Ron, so maybe you have a pet like him, too?" Loki asks in a rather hopeful voice.

"Nope sorry. No naked mole rats. Or whatever the hell the other thing you called them was."
There's no way Clint can pronounce that scientific name. Clint guesses this is some sort of reference to the TV show. He refrains from saying anything more about pets, just in case he slips and mentions Lucky the dog on accident. Although that's not very likely. He's kept his family a secret from basically everyone he works with except Fury and Nat. Aside from Nat, none of the other Avengers even know.

"Oh." Loki looks highly disappointed in him as he picks up the Hawkeye action figure. His gaze shifts to something unseen and he asks "You don't smell one, huh?"

Is Loki still talking to him? Clint doubts it, though he's not sure who the god would be talking to otherwise. Loki continues talking to thin air. "Yeah, that's what I thought. Just grass and wood and metal and leather, huh? No Rufus." What on Earth is Loki talking about?

"Well, maybe this Clint can have one." Loki says as he holds the Hawkeye action figure. Clint wonders if Loki thinks that's supposed to make him jealous.

"Wow, he looks a lot better." Clint gestures to the action figure of himself, which actually looks slightly eerie with how realistic it is. It's definitely different than the action figure Loki had shown him at great length last time Clint had been here. It even appears to have removable clothes now, though Clint honestly doesn't want to know how realistic the toy is under the outfit, nor does he want to think about Loki undressing a miniature plastic version of himself.

The action figures of Natasha and Steve look much better too. Natasha points this out.

"Tony says I made 'em better." Loki says softly, with a tiny hint of something almost like pride in his voice. "I drew you too. Look!" He hands a sheet to Clint. Clint glances at it, simply seeing a drawing of him and Natasha in crayon and magic marker. Natasha looks at it over Clint's shoulder. For some inexplicable reason, Loki is snickering. Clint shoots him a questioning look.

"You fell for it!" Loki says between snickers. "It's not you! It's Kim and Ron!"

Well, okay then.

"My Tony says you've never fought Dr. Drakken or Shego either, but that you'd win if you did." Loki nods earnestly, and Clint snorts at the fact Loki just referred to Tony as his.

Loki seems slightly calmer than he had last time. It's not a huge change, or even particularly noticeable, but it's there. Loki mentioning that he did something to the action figures- probably with those powers Tony had told them about- is also a new development, and it seems like an improvement.

"I have me, too." Loki says proudly, holding up a toy version of himself that fits right in with the Avengers figures. It's wearing what appear to be Iron Man pajamas and the same starry long coat that Loki's wearing now.

"Did you make that?" Natasha asks him. Loki grins at her and nods slightly, but then casts a slightly worried look at them, as if fearing their reactions.

"It's very nice." Natasha says sincerely.

Loki turns to his paper and starts to draw something. Steve sits next to him, grabbing a sheet of paper and starting to sketch. Loki stops drawing and stares as Steve draws circles and ovals lightly with a pencil, so they'll be easily erased later.
Clint notices that Tony keeps giving Natasha calculating looks.

Last time, Natasha had started out slightly suspicious of Loki (given their jobs as agents of S.H.I.E.L.D, Clint can't exactly blame her). Clint could tell she was never actually going to whisk Loki off to the Helicarrier, despite what Tony seemed to think. However, Clint hadn't been sure about whether or not she was going to tell Fury about Loki or not. She hasn't, though, and Clint doesn't detect any hints of suspicion from Natasha right now. She apparently realizes Loki's not a threat.

Tony's clearly thinking along similar lines, because he pulls them aside and asks "You haven't told Fury, have you?" The unspoken about Loki after Fury is clear.

"No, Fury doesn't know." Clint answers. Although he tries to hide it, and does a rather good job, Clint's pretty sure Tony's relieved.

To be honest, Clint doesn't think Fury needs to know about Loki. He's clearly not a threat- he actually seems a lot more likely to be harmed than harm others. Although, that one time Natasha had threatened to eviscerate Tony, he'd seemed surprisingly formidable.

Okay, Clint knows that Fury would love to know about Loki's powers, but he hasn't told the Director yet. Neither have Natasha or Steve, and Tony certainly hasn't. To be honest, Clint doesn't know how far S.H.I.E.L.D would go when experimenting on Loki's powers.

"So, I take it Thor's not here." Clint says, looking around the room and noticing a missing teammate. It doesn't escape his notice that Loki visibly tenses at Thor's name.

"No, he's not. He was on Halloween, though. I thought you promised to show up, but I couldn't get in contact with you. How come you weren't here?"

"I had other plans." Clint says dismissively. In other words, he was taking his kids out trick-or-treating, although not at Stark Tower. "So... what happened with Thor?"

"Hulk-y hit him!" Loki exclaims, grinning at Bruce, and looking up from Steve's drawing, which turns out to be a sketch of Simba. "And Tony did too!"

"Tony and Hulk tried to give him a hands-on lesson about how Asgard's treatment of Loki was wrong." Steve elaborates in a disapproving tone, although he continues to draw.

"Really?" Natasha asks without any emotion in her voice. "Don't you think hitting him is giving the wrong message, if you hit him for hitting others?"

"That's what I said." Steve says, erasing a stray mark.

"They said I shouldn'ta gotten hit back there, 'cause I don'ts deserve it, nope nope nope." Loki informs them, and Tony grins at him.

"You bet." Tony tells him. Loki grins back and looks back down at Steve's drawing.

Tony and Steve give a brief summary of what happened when Thor showed up. Loki summed it up pretty well, actually.

"We need to have a serious talk with Thor the next time we see him, and make sure that he knows why it was wrong." Bruce says, and nobody offers any objections.

"If he still thinks it was perfectly fine," Tony mutters darkly. "I'm not going to be playing nice this
time, either." Clint's with him on that. The way Loki was apparently treated was despicable. Frankly, Clint's rather annoyed that he missed the first time, but he's glad he was with his kids instead.

Steve presents Loki with a finished drawing of Simba. Loki gawks at it, and Clint has to admit, it looks pretty good. Almost like it came from the movie.

"Can you draw Elsa?" Loki asks excitedly.

Steve says that he doesn't know who Elsa is. "She's a good one. Not like Dr. Drakken."

"Okay... what does she look like?" Steve asks. Loki hunts through the toys on the floor and pulls out a doll that Clint recognizes as Elsa, from the Frozen trailers that Lila's been so excited about. The movie's not even out yet! Why does Loki have a doll from it? He sees there's another princess-looking doll in the midst of toys, with two red braids, and he realizes that's another character from the movie, and there's a small plush snowman too.

"What's with the princesses?" Clint stares slightly, because that seems a lot more suited to small girls like Lila rather than grown men like Loki.

"...Queen." Loki corrects. "Elsa's a queen! They never thought someone like us should be ruler, but she's a good one!"

"A good what?" Clint asks, wondering if Loki's seen the movie somehow.

"Frost Giant." Natasha mutters to Clint. Clint gives her a questioning look. Loki's staring at them, having apparently heard that.

"You figured that out?" Tony asks, surprised.

"Tony says they're not bad! Elsa's good, and Tony and Bruce say so too!" Loki exclaims before anyone else can respond, hiding behind Tony slightly.

Loki slowly heads over to look at what Steve's drawing.

About ten minutes later, Tony suits up in an Iron Man suit and they go down to the training area, a huge room full of every sort of exercise equipment imaginable, as well as an archery range, a boxing ring, and more. The team spreads out, doing their own things while Loki sits down near the shooting range, where both Clint and Tony are, with a huge book, a drawstring bag, and Simba.

"Hey, Loki. Wanna see me hit that target over there?" Clint asks, nocking an arrow in his bow and drawing back. He nods towards the moving target way on the other side of the huge room.

Loki looks from him to the target, his expression clearly wondering if Clint's being serious or not.

Smirking, Clint releases the arrow and of course hits the target smack in the center. Loki looks astounded, and Clint grins. It's always nice to have a fan.

Of course, Tony has to try and best him by shooting repulsor blasts, which Loki seems to think are stars. However, they keep having to stop and shepherd Loki away from the firing range. Eventually, Loki seems distracted by the exercise bikes, trying to figure out what they are at first and then fiddling around on them.

Clint climbs up to the rafters- which could also pass as catwalks- in the training room for his next shot. The rafters here are identical to the ones at S.H.I.E.L.D, so much so that Clint wouldn't be
sure if he was in the tower's rafters or the Helicarrier's without looking down at what's below him. All the Avengers have seen his quirk of going in the rafters or the air ducts. Tony makes fun of him for it, yet at the same time Clint knows it's not a coincidence that the rafters here are so similar to S.H.I.E.L.D's. Tony's never done anything close to admitting this, of course, but Clint has a feeling Tony did it for his sake.

As he readies his arrow and aims, a voice less than a foot behind him says "I've never been up here before."

Whirling around, Clint's halfway through targeting his shadow before he realizes who it is. Fortunately, he realizes it's Loki before he releases the arrow. Otherwise, Loki would have had an arrow embedded in his forehead.

How the hell had Loki gotten up here so fast, Clint wonders, and why hadn't he heard Loki come up? He's an agent, he should be ashamed of being snuck up on like that. Frankly, it's pretty embarrassing. Then again, his kids have sometimes managed to catch him by surprise.

Loki is understandably shocked about suddenly staring at the razor-sharp tip of an arrow only inches from his face. He lets out an earsplitting scream and flinches backwards.

Clint's gaze shifts to the freaking huge snake draped over Loki's shoulders as Loki scurries over to the edge of the rafter and leaps over the gap to another one in a way that reminds Clint of a bat, with the way that bizarre coat flutters around him.

Suddenly both Loki and the snake are just... gone. Clint blinks, looking around and seeing no sign of either of them.

Glancing down at his bow, Clint realizes that his arrow is covered in ice.

"Hey, Legolas, what's going on?" Tony asks, flying up in his suit.

"Loki vanished." Clint replies. "Into thin air."

"Oh. Well, he does that sometimes. Just-" Tony starts, and Clint's not sure if Tony's joking or if Tony thinks he's joking about the vanishing.

Jarvis interrupts with "Sir, I regret to inform you that Mr. Loki is nowhere in the tower."

Loki slams into something and it hurts. He frowns in confusion, because he's been rammed into stuff before, and it normally doesn't hurt like this. His whole body feels drained, as if he's a berry someone squeezed hard enough for all the juice to leak out and leave a sort of squishy skin. It makes him feel exhausted, as if he just ran for days straight.

He blearily opens his eyes and realizes he's still in the rafters, which jogs his memory to what happened before this sudden exhaustion and emptiness in his body appeared.

He remembers that Clint had been aiming a razor-sharp arrow right at his head, just seconds ago.

That had obviously more terrifying than a fist coming at his face, which usually meant several more cruel blows to follow. Fortunately, he hasn't really had much experience with arrows pointed at his head. Loki doesn't even know why Clint had almost shot him. All he'd done was follow Clint up. Even if he hadn't had an arrow, Clint would have looked very dangerous with the look he'd had on his face. The arrow just made it a hundred times worse.
Loki suddenly realizes that Clint must be in the rafters still, too. Is Clint still trying to shoot him? Loki likes Clint, which makes the idea of Clint trying to hurt him even more awful.

Loki sits up, and it makes his head swim slightly. He waits for it to pass, loosely hugging Simba and Olaf. He has to make sure that Clint won't shoot him.

He pulls himself to his feet using the railing. Looking around, he sees no sign of Clint. Maybe he doesn't need to worry about an arrow going through his brain anymore.

Then, he looks down and realizes that this is not the room he'd been in before, although it looks exactly the same from the rafters. It has some machines that are quite similar to the things in that room in Tony's tower. The people below him are definitely *not* the Avengers, though, and the room has a different layout. Where is he?

Some of the people are looking up at him and Loki backs away, not liking all those eyes on him and liking it even less when they start asking him who he is.

A hand grabs his shoulder, and a voice says "Identify yourself." The grip is rough, like in Asgard. Loki panics and jerks away, but he still feels so drained, and he stumbles slightly, falling to the cold metal grate.

Someone grabs him again and then there are more hands grabbing him. Something sharp pokes against him which makes Loki freak out even more. He's lost in memories of other times this happened, and for a bit he actually thinks he's back in Asgard again, and the hands are the guards grabbing him to punish him for something...

Something is pressed to Loki's face and Loki drifts off into a sort of foggy state of half-consciousness.

Fury looks at the video feed showing the stowaway. The stowaway is currently slumped in a circular glass cell elsewhere on the Helicarrier, a cell which had originally been built for the Hulk. They hadn't been sure where to keep the man or how much security he'd need. Considering he'd made it on the Helicarrier, they'd decided on something high-security.

Fury has to say, he's rather intrigued. The man appeared out of nowhere- teleported, like Doctor Doom does. He's certainly going to be asking the man about that, as well as why he's on the Helicarrier.

They'd managed to sedate the man with gas. They'd originally tried to use a syringe, but hadn't been able to pierce his skin to do so and it actually broke the needle. Apparently, the man is disproportionately heavy for his lean body and needed to be supported by five agents once sedated.

They'd sedated the man for multiple reasons. For one thing, it stopped his panic attack, but it was also a quick measure to try to make sure he didn't escape by teleporting. He hadn't put up a fight, but they'd needed to make sure he wouldn't try to give them the slip when they weren't looking.

They have no clue who this man is, since he doesn't match anyone on S.H.I.E.L.D's files, but he can't have good intentions for sneaking onto the Helicarrier. Fury's not going to take any chances, and it will help to make sure he's nice and docile.

It's not just the man himself that's interesting. The man has probably the strangest stash of items and clothing. Fury can't see why a villain would have the items the man had, but he can't see why anyone would have those items. There's a stuffed lion with the Iron Man suit, a small plush
snowman, a large fake snake that has a trace of energy around it, with small charms that include some sort of mutant horse, and a coat that would blend in perfectly with a night sky. The lion is now in S.H.I.E.L.D's labs, because of the Iron Man suit, with what looks like a real, albeit very watered-down, arc reactor.

Tony Stark had absolutely refused to share his suits with anyone, so how exactly this man has one-with an arc reactor, no less- even if it is for a toy is a mystery.

On the screen, Fury watches as the man stirs slightly. Clearly, the sedation is wearing off.

He already knows that the coming talk is going to be very interesting.

Chapter End Notes

There is a reason that Loki teleported to the Helicarrier. The rafters in the training room in the Helicarrier look pretty similar to the one in the tower. He was trying to get to another rafter and away from Clint, so his magic decided to put him on a similar rafter far away from Clint.

Kind of a jerk move on his magic's part, putting him here.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

More of Loki-teleported-onto-the-Helicarrier Incident

Loki's in a fog. But there's no actual fog in front of him, he doesn't think, it's more like there's fog in his head. It's not visible, but it's there, sort of like how Fenrir and the others weren't really visible, until recently. Maybe they're making this fog? It would probably be Hel or Jormungand if it was one of them, but they've never done anything like this before, so why would they now?

"Stop it," He mumbles, but Hel says they're not doing it. Loki frowns, confused. Hel wouldn't lie to him, so it has to be something else, but he doesn't know what. The fog is dulling his head. Part of him is telling him he should be worried, but something else is telling him to relax. He tries to lift an arm to part the fog, but his limbs feel heavy and useless when they don't respond. He stares ahead, not even really noticing what's in front of him. He feels remarkably relaxed just sitting there, not moving. He vaguely thinks that's somewhat strange, because normally sitting still makes him worry about someone jumping him, and it's just so hard to keep his body still anyways.

Slowly, the fog seems to fade as he's set down against a wall. Some time later- he's not sure if it's a minute or an hour- it's mostly gone. Loki looks at his surroundings.

Loki knows he's never been here before as he glances around at his surroundings, unsure as to how long he'd been out of it. Where is 'here', anyways? There's glass all around him, a circle of clear material has a couple columns built into the glass walls. It kind of reminds him of those mostly-flat glass cylinders that Bruce had in his lab, called petri dishes. All of Bruce's petri dishes had been rather small, and he didn't even know they could be this big. Unless he shrunk? But that doesn't make any sense. Loki never had any desire to be in a petri dish, but here he is.

There's a bridge leading out, but it's on the other side of the glass, and while everything inside this petri dish is bright, everything outside is sort of dark and gray. There are also a couple holographic screens.

Loki realizes that he doesn't have Simba, or Olaf for that matter. If he had to choose one to get back, he'd choose Simba but he'd really like to have them both. Why are they even gone? He looks down and sees that he's still wearing the same clothes. Why are they still here but not Simba and Olaf? He'd had them when he jumped in the rafters...

Did he teleport here? Well, no, he doesn't think he teleported here exactly, but he's pretty sure he teleported to the rafters. Really, how else would he have ended up in a completely different room in the blink of an eye? He hates teleporting even more now that it landed him in that scary place.

Okay, so he's almost positive that he teleported to the rafters, but he doesn't know how he got in this glass thing. Is it in the same building as the other room he'd teleported in? He can't be in Stark Tower, still, can he? He doesn't feel the huge arc reactor, but he never really feels that in the penthouse, either. But Stark Tower isn't scary like this.

Loki turns his attention back to the glass around him. Considering it's all around him, it's probably supposed to keep him in, like a cage. That's what it feels like, anyways. He feels trapped. This
thought makes him very nervous, because he doesn't want to be in a cage! Why is he in a cage?!
Who put him in here?

If someone put him in a petri dish, they can't be too nice, right? Loki has a bad feeling that the
people here fall into that category. What if the people here find out he's a Frost Giant with magic to
boot? What if they're not like Tony, but like Asgard. They can't know about it, and they can't know
who he is!

Where is he? Is he even on Midgard? He has so many questions but so few answers.

Loki suddenly realizes the implications of the fact his cage is made of glass.

Loki smirks. Whoever made a cage out of glass must be really dumb, because everyone knows that
glass breaks, sometimes even if you just punch it. Loki doesn't know why they're trying to keep
him here and he doesn't like it, but he's not planning on staying here. Nobody's here to punish him
if he tries to escape.

He needs to get back to the tower, back to his home. And first, he needs to get out of here.

Home is such a nice word, he thinks absentmindedly.

He runs his fingertips over the glass, walking around the perimeter of the circle. He briefly wishes
he had something like a chair to throw through the glass, but he doesn't. He stops briefly, fingering
the glass before bringing a fist back to smash into it.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you. Now, you mind telling me why you came here?" A voice says
behind him. Loki whirls around at the voice, even though it takes a bit longer for him to understand
what it's saying. At first, the words just sound like jumbled sounds, until the All-Tongue sorts them
out.

There's a really scary man with an eyepatch like Odin's, only it's over his left eye instead of his
right. Still, Loki hates being reminded of the Allfather. This man, unlike Odin, is bald, has dark
skin and a long coat that isn't nearly as awesome as Loki's own, since this man's doesn't have stars
on it.

Still, this man gives off the same sort of feeling that Odin did- cold, menacing and scary. The man
has a cold impassive gaze fixed on him.

Does this man know Odin?! What if this man decides to send him back to Odin and Asgard?! Loki
doesn't think he could bear Asgard again, now that he knows what it's like to be liked and not be
beaten at least every other day. Now that he has a home.

Loki doesn't like this man at all, and he screams at the top of his lungs.

"You mind telling me why you came here?" Nick Fury asks the man, who looked like he was
about to try to break out of the containment unit. As if he could- it was designed for the Hulk.

The manwhirls around with an uncomprehending look. Upon seeing Fury, he promptly screams.
Yes, he actually screams. It's a rather shrill scream, as if he's getting tortured by something out of a
nightmare.

"Not too happy to see me, I see." Fury says dryly. This man clearly didn't want to end up in his
clutches, probably knowing it would be bad, regardless of the reason he came onto the Helicarrier
in the first place. This man probably knows exactly who he is, Fury thinks. After all, if one was
going to break into a top secret base, they'd probably do their research beforehand.

So clearly this man isn't too happy to get caught, but still- screaming? What kind of response is that?

The man looks like he's going into a panic attack as the scream continues to roll off the walls. Green energy starts forming around the man's hands but it fizzes out. That's another interesting thing about the man. Fury really wants to figure that out, along with the teleporting.

The man's somehow still screaming, and Fury's surprised that he hasn't seemed to run out of breath yet. "Sedate him again." Fury mutters into his comm, and gas starts entering the chamber the man is in. Like he had before, the man slumps against the wall, bleary eyed. He's still conscious, though, and his eyes continue to track Fury's movement, wide and terrified. They'd given him the same dosage, but already it seems to affect him slightly less.

"I'll ask again- What are you doing in the Helicarrier?"

"Hel...?" The man mumbles, sounding rather out of it. Fury notes that he has a British accent. "You can't carry her." His eyes become even more glazed than they already were and he asks "Dids they carry you? No, I didn't think so, just... just me."

The man's eyes focus somewhat more Fury, still slightly glazed but clearly terrified. He starts rocking back and forth, hugging his knees to his chest and flapping his hands. "I don't like it here, Hel. Don't like this man, nope nope nope. Too much like him."

"You could be right about this place being Hell," Fury states coldly, "If you don't give us what we want."

The man just stares at him- well, not at his face, but at his hands- fearfully, as if he's expecting them to lash out or produce a weapon. Not that that's an unreasonable assumption on here, especially when one is the prisoner. Besides, Fury literally just threatened him.

Still, aside from, well, getting here, this man hasn't done anything worrying yet, although he could be trying to lure them into a sense of false security.

When Fury asks another question, the man just screams again, squeezing his eyes shut. It seems like Fury's mere presence is its own brand of torture for the man, who seems to be having another panic attack, curled into a quivering ball on the floor.

Okay, maybe the man's not in any state for questioning right now. And he's quite possibly insane, which is never a good trait for an enemy.

"Tell Agent Coulson to get in here." Fury mutters. As much as Fury would like to have this talk himself, they're not going to get anything out of the man if he keeps having panic attacks. Not even torture could really do anything about that, though the man hasn't exactly done anything to merit that yet. Agent Romanoff is currently out, and while she would have been Fury's first choice- she can seduce a lot of men into talking, as long as they're straight- Coulson will do fine.

Once Phil Coulson enters, Fury stalks out of the room.

"Jarvis, what did you just say?" Tony asks, really hoping he'd misheard and that Jarvis hadn't just said what Tony thinks he just said.

"Mr. Loki is nowhere in the tower, sir." Jarvis repeats. Tony groans. This is freaking fantastic. In
hindsight, he really should have expected that something like this would happen sometime. Heck, it sort of had happened, with Loki getting lost in the city. Only, that was normal and this isn't, since Loki apparently just teleported out of the tower.

"Any trace of him at all, Jarvis?"

"Unfortunately not, sir. He is not wearing the watch with the tracking device." Tony slaps his forehead (well, his mask's forehead) when he realizes that if Loki were wearing that tracking watch, this would be a piece of cake. His frustration in himself only grows when he realizes that, he should have had Loki wear that all the time once he'd discovered Loki could teleport. Twenty-twenty hindsight again.

Okay, so even if Loki was wearing the tracking watch, it might not be a cakewalk if they had to fly to the other side of the world (it would take a while, certainly), but they'd skip the worst step that they're currently stuck on- actually finding him.

"What's going on?" Steve asks, coming over from the other side of the room with the rest of the team, clearly sensing something's up.

"Loki's gone." Tony says shortly, before rounding on Clint. "What happened, exactly?"

"He startled me and then freaked out when I automatically aimed my bow at him. I think I sort of scared the shit out of him." Clint says guiltily.

"Well, of course he freaked out. Most people don't like having bows in their faces, Katniss! And then you go aiming at someone who doesn't even seem to know there's a such thing as a friendly punch on the arm, much less an unintentional arrow in the face?!" Tony exclaims. He notices that Clint's arrow is covered in ice, and he whistles slightly.

"Whoa, did Loki do that?" Of course he did. Who else would it have been. Tony glances at Bruce. Loki freezing the arrow is just like what Elsa did when confronted with a crossbow. He wonders if Loki would have done that before seeing Frozen, or if freezing it was instinctive. Either way, it's good to see that Loki defended himself.

"I wasn't going to shoot him!" Clint protests, and both Bruce and Steve try to diffuse the tension.

To be totally honest, Tony can't blame Clint for automatically reaching for his bow, given his job as an Avenger and agent, although he's sort of annoyed at Clint because if he hadn't done that, Loki would still be here. Clint slumps slightly and says "Ugh. I really screwed everything up, didn't I?"

"It wasn't your fault." Steve says with a hand on Clint's shoulder, ever the supportive one. "What happened once you instinctively pointed your bow at him?"

"He jumped and just disappeared. Can he teleport?"

"Yeah. He seems to have no control over it, though, and it's only happened a couple times. Freaks him out every time, not that I can blame him... I mean, popping up somewhere else without meaning to has got to be pretty scary..." Bruce murmurs. Tony wonders if Loki's freaking out right now. He's almost positive Loki is.

"So any idea where he is?" Steve asks. Tony turns to glare at him.

"If I had the slightest idea, I'd be headed over there now." He points out, not in the mood for stupid questions. "Jarvis, start looking through any security camera you can find from buildings around here and see if you spot any sign of him."
"I was already doing so, sir, but have not had much luck." Jarvis sighs.

"Do you have any suspicions of his whereabouts? Where has he teleported before?" Natasha asks, crossing her arms.

"The first time, it was to the other end of my lab. Then he teleported in his sleep to the tower's movie theater not long ago, and there was one time that he teleported across his bedroom." Tony pauses. "It's always when he's airborne, and I think it happens when he thinks he's flying... or when he's actually flying."

"He's flown?" Steve asks, which really isn't the important part of this conversation at all.

"Sort of. I took him for a ride when I was in one of my suits. That was the first time he teleported." Tony says offhandedly. "Hey, it was in my lab, which is probably why he teleported to the other end of it."

"So, his room, your lab, the theater." Natasha lists, and Bruce seems to catch on. "Any significance with those places, specifically?"

"Presumably he just didn't teleport that far. I mean, most of the time it wasn't even out of the room." Tony muses. "And he really loves his room."

This isn't like when he'd lost Loki in the city. That time, he'd had an idea of where Loki could have been. Then again, he hadn't even known Loki could do magic back then, let alone teleport. Not knowing really made things easier, because Loki could be anywhere on Earth. Or maybe he's not even on Earth anymore. What if he'd teleported back to Asgard?

But then again, Loki's never teleported far from where he started out. Most of the time, he never even teleported out of the room he was in, let alone teleporting out of the tower. Tony's somewhat surprised that he had this time. Maybe he's not very far away, Tony thinks. Or hopes.

Tony groans when he realizes that Loki has absolutely no way to contact them, nor is there any way for them to get in touch with him. Of course Loki hadn't had a Stark Phone- he almost never uses the thing. Perhaps Tony should start making him carry it around constantly. Maybe he can strap it to Simba or something. Tony's noticed that Simba's gone too.

"Jarvis, any luck with finding security footage of him?" Tony asks somewhat impatiently.

"Not yet sir." Jarvis sounds exasperated. "I assure you I'll let you know immediately when I find something."

Tony pulls up a holographic screen, fingers flying over the accompanying holographic keyboard. He starts checking for any trace of Loki on any of the tower's scanners. They usually pick up his magic energy, but he's not sure if the scanners would be able to detect them from a distance.

"Maybe he went to an actual field with horses?" Bruce suggests. "Or maybe Central Park? Sometimes they have horses there. Sure the stars aren't out right now, but still..." Tony could totally see Loki winding up somewhere with horses.

"Jarvis, start looking at satellite feeds nearby of anyplace with horses." Tony sighs, annoyed with this whole process.

Yeah, he really needs to make sure that in the future there's always a way to track Loki down and get in touch with him. In fact, maybe he'll take the tracking watch and Stark Phone with him so he
can attach them right after finding the missing god.

He heads to Loki's room, since the Stark Phone he'd given Loki is in there instead of the lab. He'd shown Loki how to use some apps, but it mostly just sits unused on the god's desk. Loki obviously prefers the holographic screens that float in the air instead of a holographic phone. Right now, it's actually buried under his figurines.

Tony snags the Stark Phone before going down to the lab and grabbing the watch. He's definitely going to start making Loki carry them around in the future, because losing Loki is frankly sort of annoying.

Phil Coulson waits for the man to calm down. A small amount of sedative gas had floated into the chamber not long ago, and it seems to be taking effect. Phil glances at the man's feet, which were oddly bare even when the man first showed up. Sometimes they take a prisoner's shoes to try to keep them from escaping, but he made that entirely unnecessary. Perhaps he'd teleported from his home- he probably wouldn't go out without shoes.

The man had been screaming when Director Fury was in the room, but that's stopped, thankfully. Despite just being sedated yet again, the man was apparently still tense, as he visibly relaxed once Director Fury left, though he hadn't stopped screaming until almost half a minute later. Somehow, it seems this man is partially fighting off the sedation. He doesn't seem even close to relaxed, but he seems a lot more relaxed than when Fury was present.

"What are you?" The man suddenly asks, glazed eyes sort of focused on Phil.

Does he mean *Who are you?* Or is he pretending to not know this ship is full of S.H.I.E.L.D agents?

"I'm supposed to be asking the questions, but I think you already know who I am. Agent Phil Coulson of S.H.I.E.L.D." Phil says, figuring this man probably did his research before breaking onto the Helicarrier anyways, so telling him this can't hurt.

"Son of Coul." The man says it like he's asking for confirmation. The phrasing reminds Phil of Thor. "You made the scary man go 'ways." The man looks at him almost thankfully.

Okay, wow. This man is basically setting himself up to fall for the Friend or Foe interrogation method. One would think that someone who'd managed to sneak onto the Helicarrier would know about such techniques. It's pretty obvious that acting friendly is really just trying to gain someone's trust until they reveal information, so the fact that the man seems to have fallen for it is somewhat shocking. Director Fury had, somewhat unintentionally- until he'd threatened the man, that is- been the Foe. But the prisoner had apparently already regarded the Director as a major Foe before the threat, so much so that he'd screamed bloody murder.

Well, Phil can play up the Friend part. Sometimes that gets them to spill the beans. Although, to be honest, Phil thinks that Fury had started out a little harsh anyways. It's not like he beat people up like when Thor first came to Earth.

"Yes, I made him go away." Phil agrees, even though he hadn't. Still, if it helps... "Sorry about all this." Phil gestures to the cell. "It's a necessary precaution."

"Pre-cau-shun." The man echoes, sounding out the word and repeating it a few more times. "That means... like, tryin'ta make sure something doesn't happen, right?" He frowns slightly and cocks his head to the side. "What's gonna happen? Are you gonna hit me?"
"I won't hit yu." Phil says, purposely not adding that he can't guarantee about not getting hit by anybody else on the Helicarrier. If Director Fury decides this man needs a bit more persuasion during his interrogation... well, hitting might be the least of this man's problems. Still, the man looks very relieved to hear that he won't be hit.

"Are you hungry?" Phil asks, both to get on this man's good side and because he has no clue if this guy ate recently. "I can have someone bring something for you to eat, if you'd like." The man doesn't answer, but Phil decides to do so anyways.

"Where are we?" The man asks, looking around. "Not the tower...?"

"I think you know where we are. You're the one who came here, after all. So why did you come onto the Helicarrier?" Phil waits for an answer, but the man just stares at him blankly.

"Where's Simba?" The man asks suddenly. "And Olaf? Hey, can I get outta here now? I have to go home."

"Simba and Olaf? You mean the toys you had?" Phil asks, having recognized the lion. He ignores the last question- the answer is obvious. What prisoner just blatantly asks to be let out like that? If that tactic worked, people would probably never be imprisoned in the first place.

"Your toys are indisposed." Phil says. Currently, both toys are in the labs, being experimented on. Well, the Iron Man (or should it be called Iron Lion?) suit is being experimented on. As far as Phil knows, the toys are just sitting there. Not that Phil's going to tell him that, obviously. The scientists are thinking that perhaps the toys have some hidden information in them. Well, certainly Simba has the Iron Man suit and possibly something else, but the snowman- Olaf, apparently- seemed like just a regular stuffed toy. Maybe it was to throw people off? But why is he asking about the toys instead of the suit- surely that's the important part.

There's definitely something different about the fake snake he had, though. There are faint traces of some sort of weird energy around it, apparently.

"I want them." The man says almost petulantly. "You can't take my Simba, you can't! Or Olaf." Oddly enough, he doesn't mention the snake.

"I think you'll find we already did." Fury's voice comes over the loudspeaker this time, and the man flinches slightly.

Then, the man starts to look rather annoyed. "You can't take them! That's stealing, and stealing is wrong! W-R-O-N-G! Not R-O-N Ron. Wrong! Like, even Flynn was wrong for stealing, but he made up for it later and Aladdin had'ta steal. But you guys can't take my Simba and Olaf, 'cause they were gifts and you can't steal people's gifts!" The man's voice has risen to a shout by the end of this and his hands seem to have a mind of their own, flapping with flicking fingers.

"We'll give you the snowman but that means you have to answer some of our questions." Phil suggests. The snowman at least seems normal and probably doesn't have any secrets. The man nods hesitantly. Phil speaks in his comm, saying to bring the toy snowman up with the meal.

"Why are you coddling him?" Fury asks over the intercom. He's watching the proceedings from the control room, after it was revealed that this man is terrified of him. Phil can't tell if he's actually asking or if he's playing up the Foe role.

The man's eyes flick to the speakers placed intermittently throughout the room, and he mumbles something that sounds a lot like "Like a mean Jarvis."
"I'm just treating him humanely, Boss." Phil responds, trying to up his Friend status so the prisoner will potentially spill his secrets.

"Can I have Simba too?" The man asks in a quiet voice. Phil hesitates.

"I'll think about it, but if you cooperate, maybe." Phil answers, though he's sort of lying. The Simba toy could have more than just the suit and is clearly more important than Olaf the snowman. There has to be some reason for the man to want it, and there's no way they would want to just hand it back like that. Still, all is fair in interrogation, so getting him to think he'd get it back isn't overstepping the bounds.

"What's your name? Who are you?" Phil asks as he waits for the agent to arrive with the promised food and toy. Who can just teleport into the Helicarrier like he had?

"I'm Flynn Rider." The man says after a bit, with a small smirk that gives Phil the feeling that's not his real name. Sure enough, when he looks it up, it's the name of a Disney character. Sure, this man could have the same name, but it's not likely.

"Really?" Phil raises a brow. The man had mentioned a Flynn before, and he probably hadn't been talking about himself in third person. Phil wouldn't be surprised if this man didn't want them to know his real name, though.

"Eugene. My real name is Eugene Fitzherbert." The man says in a different voice, as if he's mimicking someone. "Someone might as well know."

Phil's starting to seriously doubt that this man is any kind of trained person sent to infiltrate S.H.I.E.L.D. If he is, he has horrible technique. He's literally stealing the identity of a Disney character, because according to the internet, Eugene Fitzherbert uses the alias of Flynn Rider in the Disney movie Tangled. The likelihood of this man actually having that name and going by the same alias is rather slim. Still, he did manage to infiltrate the Helicarrier.

"Why don't you tell me your real name?" Phil says sternly. "Remember, if you cooperate, you're more likely to get Simba."

"Loki." The man mutters. Phil's not sure if he's telling the truth or not, but he supposes they'll have to go with that. "And I'm not a monster." That last part is sort of weird, and Phil decides to focus on the first part.

"Just Loki? No last name?"

"Just Loki." Loki answers.

Phil asks how to spell it, and the man replies "L-O-K-I. That's how Bruce says it's spelled in Midgar... No, En-glish? He saids it's called English." Phil raises an eyebrow at this answer and quickly searches S.H.I.E.L.D's files but finds nothing.

An agent comes with the snowman toy and the Loki's gaze immediately fixes hungrily on it, not even glancing at the meal that comes with it. It's like he's getting a Happy Meal, only less happy and with a toy he already owned. "Olaf." Loki states upon seeing the snowman.

With a gun pointed at the man, the agent quickly opens the door to the cell, throws the plush snowman and the Meal Ready to Eat (MRE) inside, and shuts it again. Loki had been staring at the door with a curious glance- it's really just one of the glass panels sliding up, and perhaps he hadn't even known there was a way out. He scurries over to the plush toy and picks it up, not like someone picking up something with valuable hidden information, but like a child picking up a toy.
they like. Loki hugs the small snowman to his chest, furthering that image.

Loki continues to hug Olaf, and the toy's stick-like arms shift ever so slightly as if the toy's hugging him back. He sits there, ignoring the box containing the MRE. Perhaps he hasn't realized that's the food, although even civilians should be able to recognize that for what it is. Phi's starting to think this man's slightly touched in the head.

"Why did you teleport here? How did you teleport here?" Director Fury asks over the intercom, somewhat harshly, because that's the main reason he's considered hostile right now. His refusal to cooperate right now isn't gaining him any favors either.

"Magic." Loki answers before immediately clamping a hand over his mouth with wide eyes.

"Magic?" Phil asks skeptically.

"No! I didn't say magic, nope nope nope!" The man says again in a frantic tone of voice, shaking his head wildly. "I think your ears are broken. No magic. Just jumping... jumping to the other rafter. Away from him."

"Away from who?" Phil asks, gesturing at the MRE package and telling Loki that he can eat what's inside it. Loki doesn't even seem to know how to open it, so Phil has to walk him through that, wondering vaguely how Loki doesn't know this, when he even makes a comment about "all food here being inside not-food, even chocolate." Phil wonders where here is.

Loki takes a very hesitant taste of the chili in the MRE and immediately spits it out, where it splatters on the glass. He refuses to touch anything else in the box, probably believing it to be inedible, but that's his problem. His request for waffles is not granted- they don't even have them for starters, but prisoners normally don't get waffles anyways.

"Can you take me to Tony Stark's tower?" He asks hopefully.

Why on Earth would they take him there? There's no way he lives there. He probably just wants to break in or something. Still, Phil tries not to show his suspicions and answers "Maybe later."

"Is that where you got the Iron Man suit?" Phil asks again. Had Loki broken into Stark's lab, too? But why would Stark have a suit for a toy Simba? Actually, Phil wouldn't put it past Stark. He does weird things sometimes. To try to get Loki on his side, Phil adds "It's a very nice suit. Perhaps it should be called the Iron Lion."

Loki laughs and singsongs Iron Lion for a bit. "I made it." Loki eventually answers with more than a bit of pride.

"Very impressive." Phil says, not even really faking. Loki actually smiles slightly at him.

"I made it and my Tony made the arc reactor. An' he made me a suit for Halloween, he dids!"

The only person who's been gifted with a suit is James Rhodes for War Machine, so Phil seriously doubts that Tony Stark gave this man a suit.

"Did he now?"

"Yeah. Tony's my best friend ever! Even better than Simba." Loki says. "An' he doesn't even hate my friends like they all did, just 'cause you can't touch 'em." Phil wonders if Loki knows how that sounds.
Loki pauses thoughtfully. "You better let me go or you'll be sorry, Eyepatch Man." Loki says this like it's a fact instead of a threat, crossing his arms and glaring at the camera in the corner, apparently knowing that Fury's watching through it.

"Oh, I will?" Fury asks over the intercom in a rather unimpressed tone, clearly not believing that Loki has any sorts of alliance with Tony Stark or any other Avenger. Sure, Loki had snuck onto the Helicarrier, but considering Loki's the one in a cage and can be sedated at any moment, he's about as threatening as a puppy. The fact that he hasn't teleported away yet probably means that's not an issue, unless he's messing with them.

"Yeah, 'cause my Tony will beat you up. He's Man of Iron, and he says that even Hans and Gaston couldn't beat him, nope nope nope! They couldn't beat him! Or my Hulk-y and my Bruce. They could beat you up too, 'cause they beat up Thor."

Why does this man think Tony Stark would support him when he most likely stole an arc reactor? If Loki knew anything about Tony, he'd know that stealing the billionaire's designs is a big mistake that would make Tony hate him. Of course, that's sort of what they're doing now, but they're going to keep that a secret as they run tests on them. Once Stark asks where the armor is (and he surely will, seeing as it was almost certainly his originally- S.H.I.E.L.D will return them, pretending they'd only just gotten their hands on the armor.

If they actually did get on Stark's bad side, well, that might not end well for them. But that's not going to happen. This man is the one who stole Stark's tech.

"So have you met the other Avengers?" Phil asks, still not sure whether to believe Loki or not.

"Yeah." Loki says. "But Clint was gonna shoot me and now I'm here, but I gotta go back to my tower! Well, it's Tony's but it's my home, an' he said it is. So you gots 'ta take me back there!"

Perhaps this is all some weird form of manipulation, but the man really needs to rethink his strategy. Really- telling the organization that the Avengers work for that the Avengers are going to beat them up? That's plain stupid. Especially since Phil himself was the Avengers' official handler, and Besides, why would Clint try to shoot this man if he wasn't up to something?

"I'm sorry, but we can't do that."

"I don't wanna be here." Loki says as if that would make a difference. Of course he wouldn't want to be stuck in a cell, but that's what he gets.

"Well then you shouldn't have come here." Director Fury comments over the loudspeaker. "Why are you here? What's your motive? You're in league with Dr Doom, aren't you?" Fury demands. Realistically, the man's not likely to just tell them, but they do have ways of getting this stuff out.

"I DON'T wanna be here!" Loki says again, smacking the floor of the containment unit with his hand. "I wanna go HOME!" Obviously, that's not going to happen right now.

"Where is your home?" Phil tries a different question. Maybe Loki will reveal where he came from.

"I WANNA GO HOME!" Loki shrieks suddenly, smashing his fist into the glass near the chili splatter, and Phil's somewhat surprised at this reaction. "LET ME OUT! LET ME OUT!" He takes a deep breath and his scream somehow becomes even louder. "Tony! TOOOGG-NNYYY!

Is he screaming for Tony Stark or some other Tony? He has mentioned Tony Stark, but Tony's the only one living in Stark Tower.
Yet more sedative gas enters the cell, and Loki calms down somewhat, although they need a lot more of it to sedate him now.

"Okay, so if you know the Avengers, than surely they'd recognize you if they saw you." Phil says.

They decide to call in Thor first, rather than Romanoff or Barton. Stark's obviously not an option right now since they're secretly experimenting on his tech. Besides, Loki seems to be up Thor's alley. Apparently the thunderer's on Earth right now, and even agrees to stop by once Fury contacts him. With the speed of Mjolnir, he shouldn't be long.

Thor knows more about teleporting than they do. Loki could easily be an Asgardian anyways, with his durability that won't even let him get pricked by a needle, his way of saying "Man of Iron" and "Son of Coul", and those powers. Besides, Thor would be able to confirm or deny what Loki's saying. If Thor says this man is lying (which he probably is), then things certainly won't be looking up for Loki.

"So if you're not a threat, than surely Thor could vouch for you. You're from Asgard anyways, aren't you."

"No! Not Thor! Please, I'll be good! Don't send me back, please!" Loki practically begs when he hears that Thor's coming, though he doesn't dispute the Asgard fact. Him saying that he'll be good really doesn't give much credit to the idea of him being innocent in the first place. Perhaps he's an escaped criminal who doesn't want to be brought back to Asgard to face justice.

"I won't do it anymore." The man pleads. Whatever 'it' is- probably some crime he's being punished for in the first place. Loki doesn't answer when questioned about it.

Loki's aversion to Thor seems to make Fury all the more convinced that Thor should be here, and so the interrogation is put on hold, and obviously his pleas are ignored.

Phil leaves the room to talk to Fury while they wait for Thor.

Loki's close to panicking, when Son of Coul leaves the room. Son of Coul had actually been pretty nice. Loki actually liked him, even if his food was awful.

Why had they been asking him all those questions? It was like talking to Dr. C, only with weirder questions and they didn't listen to his answers. And he's stuck in a petri dish without Simba or Tony. These people don't seem to get that he doesn't want to be here and they don't seem to believe him about Tony.

He doesn't know why they're keeping him here, but it's obvious now that they are. He just wants to go back to the tower, back to his home. His real home. Not in dumb old Asgard where everyone hates him. Everyone but Son of Coul hates him here, too, it seems, but this place doesn't look like Asgard at all.

He can't believe Thor's going to be here and he hates the idea so much. This is already bad enough, and now Thor's going to make it worse, and Tony's not here to keep Thor from hurting him. What if they send him back to Asgard?! Loki doesn't think he can do Asgard again, now that he knows what it's like to actually live somewhere safe with friends.

Ultimately, it's his "fake" friends that manage to calm him down. They're not visible, and Jormungand's hugs aren't nearly as good now that he doesn't have a tangible body like when he uses the necklace (The closest thing right now is Loki hugging himself, which used to be the closest Jormungand ever got to hugging him). Sleipnir sings their special song and Loki tries to
pretend that Tony's voice is singing it too. He really likes it when Tony sings his song, because he has a feeling that Tony doesn't do that often, or for many other people.

Once he's calm, they remind him that Tony's going to come for him. Tony found him in the city, after all, so Tony's going to find him now too, and then he'll beat up the Eyepatch Man.

Then, Jormungand asks why they need to wait for Tony to come, when they could get out themselves. Jormungand once again recommends that he should punch through the glass, despite the Scary Eyepatch Man saying not to.

Loki frowns. That idea would be ridiculously stupid in Asgard, for all the trouble he'd get into. Not that he'd ever really been locked up like this. But this isn't Asgard, and he really needs to get back to Stark Tower anyways, and now there's even more of a reason to go back so he can avoid going to Asgard again.

But Eyepatch Man is watching through the metal eyes, like Jarvis does, right? Loki's worked out that Jarvis sadly isn't here, but Eyepatch Man probably is watching. Disobeying him probably isn't a good idea.

Tony would probably say escaping is good, anyways, Loki thinks. He wonders what Tony would do in this situation. But Tony wouldn't even be in a situation like this, would he?

No, wait... Loki remembers Tony mentioning a cave he was stuck in, and how he'd escaped from that. Tony said something about blowing stuff up with his Man of Iron suit. But Loki doesn't have a suit. What would Tony do if he didn't have his Man of Iron suit? Then he'd... he'd... okay, so Loki has no clue what he'd do.

Still, Tony would definitely think escaping is a good idea, and if Tony and Jormungand both say it's not bad, then it's not bad. Besides, Simba wouldn't just stay here, either. He'd run, like he had from the Hyenas and Scar as a kid, or he'd fight back like he had as an adult.

Simba wouldn't want him to stay here, and neither would Tony, regardless of what the people here want. Decision made, Loki stands up.

Punching through the glass doesn't work, sadly, but he knows there's a door now. It's indistinguishable from the other glass panels, but he'd seen it slide up to make an opening. He feels around the edges with his fingers, but it certainly doesn't feel any different than the other panels. He tries to find some sort of ridge to pull up on, but there's nothing. Loki sits back, annoyed, and thinks.

Before he can do anything more, four men enter the larger room that his cell is in. They're not like Son of Coul or the scary Odin-like Eyepatch Man. Loki's not even sure if these new men are real, or if they're even men, but they're clearly guards of some sort. Loki hates guards. They have shiny black helmets that cover all of their faces and black clothes that sort of look like soft armor, which is really dumb. Why would anyone wear soft armor? It's supposed to be hard so it can protect people. Then again, they'd made this glass that he can't punch through, so maybe they know what they're doing with soft armor.

Loki knows automatically that the guards are coming for him, because there's nobody else in here. They're still far away, and are now just standing there watching him (he thinks- he can't see their eyes). At least they're not hurting him.

What he wants more than anything is to be back in the tower. But he's stuck here.
Or maybe he's not. He'd teleported into the rafters, maybe he can teleport back to Stark Tower? Just like how Esmeralda teleported away from the guards, and Tony's said there's nothing wrong with that.

Loki's not sure how he teleported here in the first place though, and he's never teleported anywhere on purpose before so he has no idea how to do it.

He tries to think about what he's done when teleporting before. He got here by jumping in the rafters.

Maybe he needs to think about jumping back to the rafters, like how he'd jumped to the rafters here? He imagines the room he'd been in before he wound up in the other rafters. Tony's there, along with Bruce, Steve, and Natasha. Clint's not there, but that means he won't get shot so that's good. Loki's really sad that Clint's apparently not his friend anymore. Loki leaps to the other end of the cell.

He opens his eyes to see he's just in the other end of the cell. Figures- maybe he'd have to be back in the rafters in the first place for that to work. Loki slumps back, disappointed.

Hel recommends going to his happy place instead, saying she'll go with him. Bruce had said to go to his happy place when he was scared, too, so it's clearly good advice.

He closes his eyes and imagines being in Stark Tower. He can see his bedroom so clearly in his mind's eye, with his stars and his horses and his drawings and his toys.

He keeps imagining being in his room in Stark Tower, being safe as he tells Tony all about the scary petri dish cage he was in but how he got out. How he got out, away from the guards so now they can't see him, because he's safe in the tower. His head fills with this fantasy of being safe again. He can see his bedroom so clearly in his mind and he leaps again.

"Where did he go?" A voice asks. Loki frowns and opens his eyes, seeing he's still in the cell. The guards are approaching and Loki shrinks back against the wall. His magic feels a lot weaker than normal. It had slowly started to replenish after suddenly feeling weaker when he teleported and landed in the rafters, but now it suddenly feels even more drained, even though he hadn't done anything. He hadn't used magic, because he hadn't teleported this time. Usually, he'd be glad about this, but he really wants to teleport back to Tony.

Loki sees the green energy around his hands and he blanches. No! He was trying to get them to not know about his magic, although his treacherous mouth had betrayed him once, as it often does, during his talk with Son of Coul.

The guards continue to approach his cell, for some reason saying things like "the prisoner has escaped." What prisoner? Him? But he didn't escape, although he really wishes he did.

Suddenly, there are also two of the illusions of himself, one of which is wearing the Hulk t-shirt, even though Loki's not wearing it. He goes to swipe them out, but then pauses. The guards are looking at the illusions and not him. Actually, they haven't looked at him at all.

Loki smiles somewhat, although the illusions feel like they're draining his power.

Sadly, it isn't long before the fizzle out and disappear, and the guards' attention returns to him.

Jarvis has been working diligently to try and find Mr. Loki. Roughly an hour and a half has passed since he first went missing without a trace. Obviously, he teleported out, and Jarvis has to agree
with Sir that they really should make sure that they always have some way to track and communicate with Mr. Loki in the future.

For the past hour and a half, he’s been going through security camera footage anywhere they have cameras nearby, which is mostly in nearby stores and traffic cameras. His facial recognition software has been going on overdrive trying to spot the god. So far, he's had no luck.

Sir is getting very impatient. He'd actually flown around the streets surrounding the tower looking for Mr. Loki, but had returned with no further leads. Jarvis had been in the helmet then, obviously, and had seen no sign of him either. Nor had any of the pedestrians been able to find him, like last time.

Aside from that little trip, Sir and the other Avengers have been helping with looking over live satellite feeds of Central Park, having the idea that perhaps Mr. Loki teleported to the horses. Jarvis has noticed that Agent Barton appears to feel rather guilty about scaring Mr. Loki. As he should, obviously, Jarvis thinks, somewhat annoyed, although he remains perfectly polite to the Agent.

Around half an hour ago, Sir had started hacking into S.H.I.E.L.D’s server to see if they had anything, since S.H.I.E.L.D usually finds out about strange occurrences like teleportation. Surprisingly, they hadn't seemed to notice anything when Mr. Loki first landed on the tower, but Jarvis supposes that's just as well. The Helicarrier had not been above New York City that day, apparently.

Captain Rogers had been very disapproving of their hacking once he’d figured out what they were up to. Not that this stopped Sir at all, of course. In fact, Jarvis can tell that Sir enjoys it all the more due to the super-soldier's disapproval.

Hacking into S.H.I.E.L.D isn't nearly as easy as Sir makes it out to be. Sir acts like it's child's play, and while it's doable for them (even if most people aside from Sir wouldn't stand a chance) it takes a while, and Jarvis has to run all sorts of programs to cover their tracks. They haven't even made it into the deeper, more secure information yet, and haven't seen any sign of Mr. Loki being there.

Naturally, the stuff they're looking for—information regarding if S.H.I.E.L.D knows anything about Loki—is a lot harder to hack into than, say, the lunch menus.

Suddenly, there's an energy surge that Jarvis has come to associate with Mr. Loki's powers, and two figures appear.

One looks just like Mr. Loki, only Jarvis' scanners don't detect an actual person there. Apparently, it's one of Mr. Loki's illusions of himself.

"Hey, glad to have you back, Snoopy." Sir says, grinning and clearly not realizing that this is not the real Mr. Loki.

"You had us worried." Dr. Banner adds.

Jarvis is forced to be the bearer of bad news when he tells them that this is merely an illusion.

The other figure is a girl, appearing to be at the very beginning of adolescence. She looks like something out of what humans deem as horror movies. One side of the girl's body resembles a skeleton-like zombie sort of creature.

"What the Hell is that thing?" Agent Barton asks, staring at the girl.
"...Hel, right?" Sir guesses, and Agent Barton turns to look at Sir like he's crazy. Dr. Banner says they'll explain later, not taking his eyes off of the two figures.

The girl doesn't react. Neither does the other-Loki. Instead, the other-Loki simply opens his mouth and talks.

"Tony! I'm safes, right? Not in the petri dish anymore." The Loki illusion says, not actually looking at any of them. Sir goes to respond, but the illusion keeps talking. "Are they gonna get me again? I don't want them to, 'cause it was really, really scary, 'specially the Odin-like man."

"No, still there." The Loki illusion says, as if suddenly noticing something. For a second, they catch a glimpse of Loki's dejected, terrified face. Abruptly, the illusions disappear as suddenly as they had come.

There's a beat of silence and Agent Coulson asks "Seriously, what the hell was with that girl?"

"I think that was Hel. She's one of Loki's sort-of-imaginary friends." Dr. Banner explains.

"Sort of imaginary?"

"Well, she looked real, right?" Sir says with a raised eyebrow. Nobody offers any objections to that. "I'm not entirely sure what she is, but I think she at least started out as an imaginary friend, along with the others."

"Clearly Loki's not too happy, wherever he is. I wonder if he actually is trapped somewhere."

"But that wasn't the real Loki. What makes you think that informations accurate?" Captain Rogers questions. Sir sighs and says he doesn't know.

After all, there had been that illusion after Mr. Loki was fist exposed to Kim Possible that hadn't been like Mr. Loki at all.

By this point, Jarvis has finally managed to break into the S.H.I.E.L.D's camera feeds. Well, some of them, like unimportant hallways. The more important things like the bridge have more security to get past, but at least they're somewhere.

"Wait, there's Thor." Sir says, scanning the images Jarvis has brought in front of him, as the thunderer walks down a hallway. "Wonder what he's doing there..."

Sir's fingers fly over the keyboard as he and Jarvis start trying to break into the more encrypted camera feeds. It only takes a couple minutes this time.

They find him, at last.

Jarvis spots it first, before he even pulls up the holographic display. In a large, cylindrical glass cell, there are two Mr. Loki's.

Sir's eyes widen when he sees this and he says "Shit! He's with S.H.I.E.L.D after all! Damn! Why the hell is he in a cage?!"

"That's the cell they built for the Other Guy." Bruce says in a tight voice. "That seems a little over the top."

Sir nods in agreement and then says "Wait a minute- that's what he meant by the petri dish. And the Odin-like man... that has to be Fury."
They watch as the two Mr. Loki's- both apparently illusions- fizzle and die out and a third Mr. Loki- perhaps the real one- appears. He looks exhausted and terrified but actually bares his teeth at the guards stationed outside his cell. At the same time, he's pressing his back into the wall furthest from them, like a cornered animal.

Sir's hands are balled into fists. Without another word, he strides over to the balcony and fires up his thrusters, shooting into the sky. Jarvis knows immediately where he's headed.

Back in the tower, the other Avengers look at each other. "Good thing we have a quinjet." Agent Barton mutters. As the four of them head towards the roof, they discuss how Mr. Loki could have ended up on the Helicarrier. Clearly, S.H.I.E.L.D found him somehow, but how? Where?

Around six minutes later, Sir reaches the Helicarrier. He boards and tells Jarvis to have a go at their systems in a tone that clearly means to mess with them.

Jarvis is all too pleased to comply.

Fury watches on the screen as the man jumps around, from one edge of the circular cell to another. He sends some agents down to stop him and even releases more sedative gas, but the man keeps jumping.

He'd seemed to be having another panic attack earlier, and had started singing something about a silver stallion under his breath.

They still don't know much about this man, who may or may not be named Loki. Is this man some kind of mutant like the X-Men, or is he an alien or Asgardian? Fury's guessing he's an Asgardian, but he seems slightly different from them, too. He teleported like Doom, and now it's clear he can make ice. A couple agents report that his body temperature has dropped slightly.

This man has demonstrated a lot of interesting abilities, and Fury's determined to find out their secrets. Understanding the teleportation could help them defeat Doctor Doom, and harnessing the other powers could come in handy in the future. There had been some energy spikes when he'd been left alone after the interrogation.

Coulson's interrogation with the man hadn't revealed Loki's motive, but he's probably an Asgardian. It also strengthened Fury's hunch that the man is insane. He doesn't seem like any sort of trained professional, but he could be working alone. They still don't know why he came here, but he surprisingly hasn't teleported away yet.

Thor's actually on his way to the Helicarrier now and should arrive soon thanks to the speed of Mjolnir. Fury watches through the camera feed as the guards approach the containment unit.

Fury and Coulson watch as the prisoner closes his eyes, muttering something before leaping to the other edge.

Thor arrives while this is happening. Not long later, the tall blonde walks onto the bridge in his usual armor and red cape, Mjolnir hanging loosely from his right hand. He approaches Fury and Coulson. "I believe you wanted to have words with me, Director?"

"We've got a stowaway who might be like you." Fury deadpans, turning to the alien/god. "We're going to run some tests on him but wanted to know if you have any experience with him first. He obviously recognizes your name."

"Show him to me."
Fury pulls up the screen again, only to see that the camera feed shows an empty cell. Thor looks confused and says "Don't jest with me."

One of the guards in the room informs him that the man is gone, in case they hadn't noticed. Fury swears, since the man obviously gave them the slip and teleported away. So much for experimenting on his abilities.

However, not long after, two other-Loki's appear. Fury and Coulson exchange puzzled glances. This man just keeps demonstrating more and more interesting abilities. Had he cloned himself? Is there a whole army of him? Is he a twin? There's no way of knowing which one is accurate at the moment.

Thor, however, clearly recognizes the man. "He is still in there." He informs them, before asking "Why have you imprisoned this man? Is it because of what he just did?"

Neither of the other-Loki's are doing anything, but the guards train their guns on the two men, even though there's glass separating them. Around half a minute later, the other-Loki's fade and the original returns.

According to one of the technicians looking over the readings in the cell, he'd never been gone and the two Other-Loki's weren't actually real people. If he was never gone, had he turned invisible? Thor backs up this theory and explains that it's magic. He's clearly not a huge fan of it.

Fury's ordered the scientists to perform some tests on the man. The guards, after cuffing the man, stand watch as the scientists enter the cell with various equipment. The man tries to press himself further into the wall.

The prisoner looks tired, like he had when he'd first arrived, but he bares his teeth at the metal instruments like a dog. Before now, the man's seemed surprisingly complacent, so seeing him like this isn't exactly surprising, but slightly unexpected, especially since he's pressing himself into the wall at the same time. It's mostly flight with a tiny bit of fight in it.

"He teleported onto the Helicarrier." Fury says. "He can't have a good motive for that."

"So is he an Asgardian?" Coulson asks. Thor pauses.

"He is not of Asgard, but he grew up there." The thunderer looks at the screen as he speaks. "What are they doing?" He's clearly indicating the scientists, who have started scanning the man with various instruments. The man looks absolutely terrified.

"Running some tests." Fury clips out.

Thor frowns slightly as he watches.

"This man poses no threat to you or your realm. There is no reason to lock him up like that."

"I think him managing to make it on here is reason enough." Fury says.

"Does Tony Stark know about this?" Thor questions. "He would not be too happy to find out you have locked up this man."

Fury frowns. Does Stark actually know this man? He'd thought the man was lying, but now Thor is referencing it, too.

Suddenly, the screen cuts out and turns red, along with every other screen on the bridge.
The lights flicker out. Fury is already on his comm, telling agents to figure out what's happening. Half a minute later, they report that none other than Iron Man has just arrived.

The lights turn on again, but the screens remain useless. A British voice sounds through the loudspeakers.

"Indeed, Mr. Stark is not happy at all, and neither am I." Fury realizes that the voice belongs to Stark's AI creation. "In fact, Mr. Stark has requested that I spread this around."

Every screen on the bridge, and presumably everywhere else on the Helicarrier, blinks again and then shows a photoshopped image of Fury himself in a hot pink bikini. Fury feels a vein twitch in his temple. Stark is being even more obnoxious than usual, and apparently they'd just gotten hacked by his AI.

Things are not going as planned.

Loki's still mostly out of energy. In fact, he feels completely drained, and he sits slumped against the wall of his cell. That gas certainly hadn't helped. Every time it comes, the fog starts creeping up again.

Once the Other-Loki's had disappeared and the guards had focused on him again, Loki had tried to get as far away from them as possible. He'd let his frustration at not being able to get away by growling at the guards- they were intimidating anyways- and then had waited in fearful anticipation at the punishment that was surely to come. But no blows had fallen on him. They'd cuffed him, though, which was perhaps worse and enough to send him into another panic attack. Then the gas had come. The fog that makes him feel sleepy and stupid is back, but it's not as bad as it was the first time. Actually, the fog is already fading a little.

One of the guards had barked at him not to do that again, and Loki's not even sure which thing they were referring to.

Loki shrinks against the wall with his hands behind his back, trying desperately not to notice all the people surrounding him and the scary metal things in his face. He feels like Boo in the Scream Extractor.

Fenrir had been snapping at the metal things, but the people hadn't even noticed him. Loki had snapped too, with only his teeth to defend himself. He can't even bring up his arms to block them.

Loki arms are locked behind his back and Olaf has tumbled out of his grip. Loki really wishes he had Simba right now. And Tony. He manages to choke out Tony's name. Tony's going to come for him, right? Like when he was lost in the city.

Loki hates the cuffs behind his back, and he starts thinking about how Elsa had frozen her cuffs off. As he's thinking this, he feels a chill behind him, and the white-coat-people tell him to stop while they start prodding his hands with the metal things.

What had he been thinking, trying to escape with magic teleportation? That never ended well for him. As soon as Loki thinks this, Jormungand tells him that it wasn't bad, reminding him that Tony would say it wasn't bad, either.

Loki realizes with horror that maybe Thor is going to punish him for doing magic and trying to escape. After all, they said Thor was coming here. Loki curls into a tight ball and squeezes his eyes shut, wishing once again that he was back in the tower with Tony and Jarvis and Bruce.
Dimly, he hears Jarvis speaking. It has to be just his imagination. Loki shakes his head angrily, not wanting his head to tease him like that. Jarvis continues talking, and it's too cruel, for his imagination to mock him like that. He opens his eyes and sees he's still in the cell, surrounded by people with metal things that beep as the move over him. Loki quickly closes his eyes again, instinctively curling his legs up. He's still in this stupid petri dish, and Jarvis isn't here.

Jarvis is still speaking, saying something about not harming something. Or maybe he misheard that, because it sounds sort of muffled.

Loki starts to get even angrier because it makes him hope that Jarvis would really be here, but it's all in his head, isn't it? He's also angry at his magic- why did it have to bring him hear but not bring him back to the tower?! Loki angrily smashes the back of his head into the wall.

His head is pinned back against the wall by a gloved hand so he can't move it. Loki kicks out but his legs are quickly pinned down too.

No, no, no, no, no. It's just like Asgard.

He hears voices talking loudly in the background but doesn't pay attention.

The hands holding down his legs and head are suddenly gone, an angry voice saying something that sounds like bass-turds. Loki frowns in confusion. That voice sounds like Tony...

He opens his eyes and sees Tony, as Man of Iron, walking through the door of the glass petri dish cell. Loki goes to rub his eyes to see if he's real, but his arms are still locked behind his back.

"Tony?" He'd been waiting for Tony for who knows how long, and now he's finally here. He was right, Tony had found him, just like how he had in the city.

"Tony! Tony!" Loki grins, because now the guards and white-coat-people aren't touching him anymore. Now that Tony's here, Thor can't hurt him and the scary Eyepatch Man can't hurt him either.

Tony's here, just like how Sulley came to get Boo out of the Scream Extractor. Loki accidentally shouts out "Kitty!" like Boo had, because he's thinking about that scene.

Tony tells the people in white coats with the metal things to get out in a tone that leaves no argument.

"I think it's time to get you out of here, don't you." Tony says, crouching down next to him.

Loki nods and smiles slightly, leaning up against the suit's arc reactor. Tony's here, and Tony's going to keep him safe, because he's his best friend.

"What the hell did they do to you?" Tony mutters, and Loki wonders why he's talking about Hel. Tony somehow gets the handcuffs off him and looks at them. "Hey, I see you started pulling an Elsa again. Good job." He holds them up, and Loki sees they're covered in ice. So that's what the cold had been.

The white-coat people had told him to stop that, obviously not liking it, but Tony says it's good, and why would he believe stupid people with scary sticks over Tony?

"What was with the Kitty?" Tony asks with a small smirk as he hands Olaf to him.

"You were like Sulley."
Tony pauses for a bit and says "Huh, I guess that was a bit like Monsters Inc."

"We need'ta get Simba." Loki mutters sleepily. "They took him."

Tony sounds annoyed and says something about a suit, but Loki’s already given into the exhaustion that’s been plaguing him, his arms now wrapped around his best friend. The last thing he’s aware of is Tony putting a vaguely familiar leather band around his wrist and sliding something into his pocket, saying something about not getting lost again.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Loki learns the meaning of Ohana, courtesy of another blue alien.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony's not sure if Loki's asleep or not, but he wouldn't be surprised if he was. The god looked exhausted, a far cry from his usual self with seemingly endless energy and enthusiasm. He had been kneeling next to Tony but is now slumped in an awkward-looking position. The way Loki's long legs are currently folded under him reminds Tony of a deer lying down, like Bambi or something, and the innocence on his face matches it.

Loki's arms are still wrapped around him, but his grip has loosened, which probably means he's asleep. At least, Tony hopes he's just asleep, instead of knocked out cold somehow. Olaf has tumbled from Loki's grasp, and Tony wonders how he still has that toy if they took Simba away. Then again, Olaf doesn't have an Iron Man suit.

The fact that S.H.I.E.L.D confiscated the Iron Man suit that Simba had on infuriates Tony. There's a reason he didn't want them to get their hands on his suits. They'd probably try to build their own army of them or something. Not that Simba's suit has any weapons or anything, but it does have a miniaturized arc reactor.

Tony carefully fastens the tracking watch on Loki's wrist, hoping Loki won't be reminded of the handcuffs he'd just removed. Still, he wants to get the watch on as soon as possible, in case Loki teleports accidentally again. He slips the Stark Phone into Loki's pocket, clipping it there should it fall. Jarvis is also on Loki's Stark Phone and would be able to operate it if needed. In his HUD, Tony now has two screens showing him the location of both the watch and the phone.

He picks up Olaf and, unsure of what to do with the toy since it's just a little too big for Loki's pockets- winds up slipping Olaf in the neck hole of Loki's t-shirt so the snowman's snuggled under the god's chin. Loki smiles slightly, though Tony's not sure if it's because of that or something in his dream, which at least seems to be pleasant for once.

Seeing Loki in handcuffs in the first place was somewhat shocking, and it makes Tony want to shoot something with his repulsors. He settles with blowing up the cuffs that were around Loki's wrists with a repulsor blast. Loki had actually started freezing the cuffs, from the looks of it. Like when he'd frozen the arrow, Tony wonders if he got that from Elsa or if he would have done so before seeing Frozen.

"Have you found him?" Clint's voice asks through the comm right by Tony's ear, and Tony is not startled- just a little surprised, since he wasn't expecting any team chatter like they have on missions.

"Yeah, I got him out of that cell. Where are you guys?"

"In a quinjet, headed to the Helicarrier." Natasha replies, and Tony can't say he's surprised about
them coming along, at least. He just hopes they'll be on his side instead of Fury's, he thinks as he carries Loki out of the cell.

Suddenly, loud footsteps enter the room and Tony turns around to see Thor. He still looks out of place on the Helicarrier, in his armor and billowing red cape (how is it even billowing with no wind?) Mjolnir is currently hanging loosely from his right hand.

"What are you doing here?" Tony snaps at him. Hopefully he's not here to start a fight or something, although in some ways Tony would enjoy that. But Loki's completely vulnerable now that he's unconscious.

"I was unsure of if he was still in the cage." Thor replies.

Tony snorts. "As if you'd care, Point Break. I bet you liked seeing him locked up like that, huh? I bet you loved the terrified expression on his face."

"Actually, I did not." Thor says, shifting slightly.

"Really?" Tony quirks an eyebrow and gives him a disbelieving smile, wondering where this is coming from. From what Loki's said, Thor was a complete jerk to him, and undoubtedly enjoyed his suffering.

"In fact, I came here with the intention of letting him out." Thor replies. "I do not jest, Friend Stark. There was no reason for Director Fury to have him restrained like that."

"Says the person who thinks he's a total monster." Tony's voice hasn't risen at all, but he can tell it's taken on a chilly quality. "So, if you were going to let him out, why'd you wait until I already let him out?"

"I have not been here for long." Thor counters. Tony rolls his eyes.

"Yeah, and I've been here for even less time, but I'm the one who let him out." Tony finishes with a satisfied smirk, knowing he won.

Still, at least Thor isn't a total jerk right now. Then again, he seemed like a decent guy before Tony learned what he did to Loki. It's annoying, because Tony can't just write him off as a total asshat. Sure, he's done some terrible things, but as the Merchant of Death, Tony can't really talk.

"Hey, Jarvis? Take Fury off this screen, will you?" Tony taps one of the holographic screens near the cell Loki had been in. A moment later, the screen shows a bunch of controls. Tony taps a command and the floor below the cell opens up. Another tap and the cell simply drops out of the Helicarrier altogether. Tony closes the trapdoor with a satisfied smirk on his face, knowing that even this Hulk-proof cell will break from the fall.

"Alright, J. Put the masterpiece back up." The image of Fury in a bikini is back, making Tony's smirk grow.

"Stark, stop messing with our systems. I want you to take this goddamn picture off all the screens immediately." Fury calls out loudly from somewhere down the hall, sounding really pissed despite not even having entered the room yet.

Tony ignores him. Messing with their systems is fun, and hacking them has provided some very useful information- the most recent example being showing them where Loki was. Or, about a year ago, telling Tony and the other Avengers that Phil Coulson was not actually dead, like they all believed. The blatant deceit hadn't gone over well with any of them.
"Just what the hell do you think you're doing?" Fury demands as he walks in the room, followed by Phil Coulson. Obviously they've noticed the missing cell and the freed prisoner.

"Funny, I was going to ask you the same question." Tony says, glaring at the Director of S.H.I.E.L.D.

"You can't just let a prisoner out." Fury stares at him with his one remaining eye, but Tony stares right back, not backing down. "And why the hell did you drop that cell? Do you know how much that thing cost?!"

"It was about time you got rid of it." Tony counters, not feeling sorry in the slightest. Loki doesn't need to be locked up in there. Neither does Bruce, and the cell was built for him- or, rather, for the Hulk.

"You can't do that!" Fury fumes, and Tony rolls his eyes.

"I think you might need to rethink that, Nicky boy, because I just did." Tony grins broadly at Fury, who's sending him a murderous glare, before getting serious. "Besides, he shouldn't have been a prisoner. Why the hell was he locked up?!"

"I already informed you this man is of no harm, director." Thor states, to Tony's great surprise. Had Thor actually vouched for Loki?

"He managed to get onto the Helicarrier." Fury says as if that settles everything.

"He got on here?" Tony asks.

"He seemed to just teleport on here and thus successfully infiltrated our base." Fury says. Tony frowns thoughtfully. He'd sort of assumed S.H.I.E.L.D had picked Loki up somewhere for some reason. He hadn't considered that Loki actually teleported onto the Helicarrier. Why in the world would he have teleported there? Fury goes on. "That's not exactly harmless."

"It is if he didn't do anything worrying once he got here- which I highly doubt he did." Tony glares at the director. "We'll get back to that, but first things first, I believe you took some things of his."

He switches to speaking to Jarvis "Hey Jarv, any idea where Simba and the suit are? Loki said something about them being taken."

"I am aware that Mr. Loki said that." Jarvis replies dryly in Tony's earpiece inside his helmet. "Now, I believe they are in the labs, sir, along with Mr. Loki's Jormungand accessory. They can't even really call that a necklace anymore, because half the time it wraps itself around the god's waist like a belt.

"He also said something about Agent Barton shooting an arrow at him, and he clearly dislikes Thor. Those indicated that he could be a potential enemy, after he teleported onto the Helicarrier. Those don't point to good intentions. This man could be anything- a mutant, alien, enemy. I can't be sure if he's up to anything."

Seriously?! This guy's a professional spy, he's supposed to be able to read people really well, and yet he didn't realize that Loki's not an enemy?! Furthermore, didn't anyone realize that there's something a little bit off about him?! Tony's not exactly great with people, and he noticed within minutes of meeting the god, yet the thought never seemed to occur to Fury?

"Well, he's not an enemy. The only reason Clint tried to shoot at him is because he was startled, and just automatically aimed his bow."
"Who is this man?" Fury asks, though it sounds like he's demanding an immediate answer. He glances at the unconscious Loki, who Tony has deposited in a chair near one of the holographic screens outside the cell. These screens also show the photoshopped photo of Fury in a bikini, and the real Fury glares at them for a bit.

"Why do you need to know?"

"Stark, don't push me." Fury grinds out.

"You don't need to worry about him." Tony says, and Fury clearly doesn't believe him at all. Phil Coulson, however, looks like he agrees.

"I don't think he was a trained professional sent to infiltrate us." Phil speaks up for the first time.

"Yeah, because he wasn't. I'd bet my tower he had no clue where he was."

"He did seem a little... off." Coulson says, mostly to Fury. "I mean, in addition to the teleportation and other odd powers." At least someone here has some sense.

"He could have easily been faking, for all we knew. Besides, we couldn't just let him go without knowing who he was first." Fury says impassively, though he sounds like he's starting to second-guess the faking part.

"If he was faking, he'd deserve every Oscar ever." Tony mutters.

"I don't think he was faking, Boss, especially when he had that panic attack." Coulson says.

"He had a panic attack?" Tony asks slowly, not liking where this was going at all. Of course, he'd guessed that Loki would be having some sort of panic attack every time he landed, but he's not sure what S.H.I.E.L.D would have done to him. They do have psychologists that are supposed to help with anxiety or other things that might affect agents.

Fury nods in confirmation. "He seemed to go into a panic attack, so we had to sedate him."

"What the hell! You freaking drugged him?! What is wrong with you?! If someone's having a panic attack, that doesn't mean you just drug them into a stupor." Tony exclaims, imagining what it would be like if he'd been drugged during one of his own panic attacks. Okay, so that technically would work, but it still doesn't seem right.

Perhaps Loki isn't simply asleep, then. Tony can't believe the stupidity of this. Well, actually he can, but he wishes people weren't this stupid. Loki, as an alien, could react very differently to whatever drugs and sedatives they administered. Admittedly, they probably hadn't known that, but still, some people don't react well to certain drugs. Right now, Loki's breathing seems abnormally slow. "Those drugs better not have done anything serious to him or you're going to deeply regret it." Tony flips down his visor to look more intimidating. "How much did you drug him?"

Fury remains silent.

"If you do not answer Mr. Stark's question, Director Fury." Jarvis says rather cheerfully. "I would be quite happy to rip some rather important information from your systems, including what you are not telling us."

It turns out that the amount of sedatives Loki's gotten over the past hour or so, through multiple doses of gas, is enough to knock out ten horses, but at least it had been a normal sedative instead of some weird drug S.H.I.E.L.D mixed up or something.
Holy crap. No wonder Loki’s asleep with that dosage. It would have killed an ordinary human, most likely.

Fury wouldn't have done that to an ordinary human. Would he? But he probably hadn't known Loki is an alien. Perhaps they'd just dosed him until he calmed down?

Tony is so tempted to clock Fury in the jaw with the full power of his Iron Man armor. He almost goes to do just that but manages to stop himself. If he did that, he'd have an entire Helicarrier-worth of agents out for his skin, including quite possibly Natasha and Clint. Doing that is sort of stupid, especially when he has to worry about protecting Loki, who is currently totally helpless due to his unconsciousness.

"These... sedatives." Thor interrupts, half to himself and half to them. "I believe I was subjected to them during my banishment to Midgard, when I was in the building with the healers." He frowns slightly. "I did not particularly enjoy that."

"Did you do anything before they sedated you, or were you just pointlessly subjected to it for no reason?" Tony asks as he pointedly glares at Fury.

"I told the Midgardian Healers not to touch the Son of Odin, and then tried to escape rather violently." Thor admits, before turning to Director Fury. "You said this man tried to escape. Did he become violent? Because that does not seem like him."

"Of course not." Tony scoffs. "Everyone in your Castle on a Cloud tried to beat the fight out of him." There's still some fight left, but it's buried most of the time, it seems. Tony actually manages to stare down Thor, who looks like a kicked puppy. "It doesn't matter that he tried to escape- he would have been well within his rights to do so, since you had no reason to lock him up in the first place." Tony doesn't even care that his voice is rising.

"We had an unknown human- who turned out to be an alien- in our hands, who had just teleported into our base. For all we knew, he could have been with Dr. Doom, or he could have been behind the Chitauri attack." Fury says.

If this were another situation, Tony would have snickered at that idea. Really, Loki behind that huge attack on New York? Or in league with Doom? Why would anyone even think for a second that those could be possibilities? That would be like someone thinking Fury is going start skipping around throwing flower petals around the Helicarrier. He vaguely wonders if he should get Jarvis to have the screens show something like that sometime.

"Seriously? Not everyone is an enemy, you know. Here's a tip. If you find an alien- or anyone of uncertain origins- that doesn't mean you should just start experimenting on them. I mean, unless you have some weird sort of fetish for that 'E.T. phone home' scene, I can't see why that would be your first reaction." Tony says. Heck, that wasn't even his first reaction when Loki landed on his roof and started healing before his eyes, and never let it be said that Tony doesn't want to know how everything works. "Did he really seem like the enemy type to you? Did he fight back at all or give you any reason to handcuff him?"

"You still haven't answered my question, Stark. Who is he? He said his name is Loki, after trying to trick us into believing he was named Flynn Rider and Eugene something-or-other."

Tony smirks slightly at that, which does not help Fury's mood any. Though he has to wonder why Loki picked Eugene, when he sort of designated him as "Tony's" character. Not that wondering that is important right now.
"Well, he didn't lie about the Loki part." Tony admits eventually. After all, Thor's right here and Fury could just ask him.

"What about him not having a last name?"

"What are you doing, stalking him? Besides, he wouldn't show up on your databases anyways, since he's not from Earth. Or has your little intelligence agency not figured that out yet?"

"He has a last name. Laufeyson." Thor inputs. "But Tony Stark is right, Director- you Midgardians would not have heard of him, as he is from another realm."

"He grew up in Asgard, being treated like crap by basically everyone." Tony says with a pointed glare at Thor, who actually looks sort of ashamed. As he should, although Tony's slightly surprised. Still, Loki had mentioned that Thor hadn't hit him since being banished to Midgard, so perhaps he wasn't a total jerk to him recently.

"So he's an alien with a sob story." Fury states unsympathetically. "How did he end up here on Earth, exactly?"

Tony really hates these never ending questions. "How is that any of your business, exactly?"

"I can make it my business. Why didn't you tell me when you encountered an alien species?"

"Because there was no reason to tell you! It's not like he was going on some crazy power-seeking quest or something. He's literally the least threatening person I know."

"Still, I want to know how an alien ended up with you."

"He landed on my roof a little over a month ago." Tony's not in the mood for this questioning, but Fury could easily figure that information out anyways so there's not exactly a point in hiding it. "The point is, you didn't know anything about him, and your first instinct was to lock him up and experiment on him?" And people think he's an asshole. He's at least been putting off trying to figure out Loki's powers until Loki's not terrified of them. He had thought that they might be getting to the point where Loki would let him test some of them and ask him to do certain things, and now Director Cyclops and his band of minions had to go ruin that by potentially making yet another potentially traumatic event for Loki.

In his comm, Tony hears Clint say they've arrived. Tony not-so-subtly tells them to try to find Simba, the armor, and the Jormungand necklace. Surprisingly, they agree.

Fury protests about them taking stuff, to which Tony replies "Oh, you mean like how you took that stuff from him in the first place? By the way, here's a question for you- what are you doing with the Iron Man suit?" He stalks forward a couple steps. "I thought it was clear I didn't want you getting your hands on my suits."

"He had a suit." Fury throws a glance at Loki.

"Yeah, for a stuffed animal. How is that threatening, exactly? Never pictured you as one to be scared of stuffed animals, Fury."

"He said he has a suit, too." Coulson inputs.

If it was someone else, Tony would have been surprised to hear that information like that had been revealed, but he's not entirely surprised that Loki had brought it up.
"Yeah, and that was a Halloween costume. It doesn't have any weapons or anything, and it can't even fly."

"His suit here had a miniaturized arc reactor."

"And how do you know it's real? Have you been messing with it?" Tony intensifies his glare, and then says "Jarvis, delete any information they've gotten from Simba's suit, and Loki himself in general."

"Stark-" Fury has a vein pulsing near his temple. In the comm, Tony hears Natasha say that they found Loki's possessions.

"Look, if you're going to say that I can't do that, I think I can. Jarvis is in your systems and has restricted your access-" Tony indicates the screens, which are still just showing a hot pink bikini clad Fury, and are thus totally useless. "Now, if you're going to say I shouldn't do that, well, you shouldn't have gotten that information in the first place."

Steve, Natasha and Clint enter the room. Bruce is evidently still in the tower, apparently not trusting himself to be in this situation. Which is a shame, really, because Tony honestly wouldn't object to Hulk smashing up some of S.H.I.E.L.D's equipment.

Clint's carrying Simba, in the now-rarely-seen natural form without armor. Said armor is in pieces in Steve's arm, since they don't have the briefcase to reassemble it. Natasha has the Jormungand 'necklace', although right now it's in its larger, belt-like form.

Natasha and Clint both deposit the toys (or sort-of accessories, in the fake Jormungand's case) in Loki's arms. Still apparently asleep, he snuggles up with Simba while the Jormungand wraps itself around him in what's a hug, according to Loki, although Tony still thinks it looks like it's trying to squeeze the life out of him. Everyone but Tony stares at the sight. Fury looks far too intrigued for Tony's liking.

Tony's only ever seen Loki do that when he's awake, though. But then again, he's made illusions of himself in his sleep and done some other magic, so it's not exactly surprising that this can happen in his sleep.

"Agent Barton, Agent Romanoff, Captain Rogers." Fury stares at the three of them. "What the hell do you think you're doing? Did I give you permission to return those objects?"

"Don't let Loki hear you calling Simba an object." Tony mutters under his breath.

"With all due respect, sir, I don't think you should have taken these in the first place, and you shouldn't have locked this man up." Steve says. "He really isn't a threat or an enemy, and locking innocent people up isn't really humane." Oftentimes, Steve's strict moral compass gets on Tony's nerves- like when Steve points out the many supposed flaws in Tony's lifestyle- but right now he's really grateful for it. Steve normally takes Fury's side on things, seeing as Fury's higher up on the chain of command, but not if Fury does something Steve deems is immoral. Like experimenting on an innocent person (or alien).

"Locking him up is like locking up some random person you find on the street." Clint adds.

"He's not some normal person. He has some very interesting abilities, and I'd like to know what they are." Fury states.

"Yeah, well, too bad." Tony says, crossing his arms. "Besides, Thor has some abilities, too, but I don't see you experimenting on him."
"This man has something extra." Fury says, crossing his arms.

"Yeah, he does, but you're not going to find out what they are, because it's none of your business."

"They could be dangerous."

"But we've said they're not! Sheesh, you're worse than Natasha." Tony quickly holds his hands up when Natasha just crosses her arms and glares at him. "No offense, Natasha." She seems annoyed enough for him not to call her Tasha, and Tony isn't stupid enough to even think about calling her Kim Possible right now.

Tony turns back to Fury. "Yeah, he's got powers, and sure, they could be used for bad purposes, just like guns can be used by evil people. But he hasn't been doing anything nefarious with them. In fact, we've had to convince him that using them at all doesn't make him a freak." Tony glares at Thor, who looks reasonably chagrined.

Really, what part of this makes any sense? A strange man lands on their ship, so they decide to freaking drug him with sedatives and run tests on him?! What part of that follows the basic concept of human rights? Well, technically, Loki's not a human, but they still apply in principle.

"What do his powers do, exactly? So far, I've seen him teleport like Doom, and I've seen him apparently turn invisible and make clones of himself. And he just brought that freaking snake thing to life. How is that not dangerous, Stark?"

"Maybe because it's not doing anything dangerous. That's actually a hug, believe it or not." Okay, Tony knows that sounds crazy and everyone probably thinks he's not being serious, but he is.

"Doesn't look like a hug to me." Fury mutters. "Looks like it's restraining him. How do we know that he doesn't have a whole army of snakes that he's going to use to attack us?"

"He has no army." Thor pipes up, and Tony's once again surprised at his input actually helping their cause.

"Hey, Hammer Time, you know who that is?" Tony asks, gesturing at Jormungand. "Jormungand. You know, someone you beat Loki up for talking to, for supposedly 'not being real'. Well, look at him now." Admittedly, Tony's pretty sure this is just an illusion, but Thor doesn't need to know that.

Thor's expression is simply one of shock, as if he's not believing his eyes.

Fury remains impassive. "Is that all he can do?" Fury asks. Tony's not sure he wants to answer that, because that would just make Fury more interested in Loki. He sincerely hopes Thor doesn't answer, but by the way he's still gawking at Jormungand, he's not sure that's too much of an issue.

"I'm not even sure what he's capable of, but I am sure that he's not going to be going on a malicious rampage, ever really, so you don't have to worry about him. And by the way, they're not living clones- they're illusions. And why do you care if he can turn invisible? We're in an invisible ship."

"I still want to know about these abilities of his." Fury deadpans.

"Yeah, well, too bad. You're not going to be experimenting on him. Loki's not a freaking lab rat. Now listen. You're never going to get your hands on him again, and if you ever somehow manage to, trust me, you're going to be very sorry. Same goes for you, Point Break."

Tony claps a hand on Thor's shoulder before rounding on Fury again, giving him a not very
friendly grin. *Oh, you're curious, Mr. Jack Sparrow-wannabe? I've been curious about his powers too, but I haven't been going around sticking instruments in his face and not even telling him what the hell I'm doing or why I'm doing it, like you had your little agents do. For all he knew, they could have been weapons.*

Fury looks like he partly disagrees and he'd really be quite glad to get his hands on Loki again. To be honest, Tony can totally understand the desire for information, for understanding these powers. Grasping the teleporting could help them defeat Dr. Doom.

The key difference is, he's not going to yank the answers out at Loki's expense, although Fury seems quite content to. Then again, that's why Tony had wanted to keep Loki a secret in the first place.

It's a really good thing Loki hadn't landed here in the first place. Otherwise, he might have just spent the rest of his life as a secret test subject or something. The thought makes Tony's stomach churn. He'd probably never even get to see the light of day if he was locked up in the mostly window-less Helicarrier.

Tony guesses they have Heimdall to thank for that, since according to Thor, he was the one that dropped Loki off. Perhaps he knew S.H.I.E.L.D would be a bad place for Loki. Tony thinks that it might be a bad place for anyone to be experimented on, actually.

Loki had said that Heimdall had gotten him out of Jotunheim once when Thor and his friends brought him there.

Tony pauses thoughtfully. "You're hard to convince, Director Cyclops. How about this. You know that R&D lab I so generously offered to pay for? What would you do if I changed my mind? Or, better yet, what if I decided to cut out all my funding?" Tony smirks, because he knows Fury's not going to give up Stark Industries funding. Without it, a lot of the S.H.I.E.L.D's operations would go under, and Fury clearly knows it.

Fury looks like he's about to have an aneurysm.

"Well, if you don't want anything like that to happen, stay away from him."

"Why are you so concerned with this man?" Fury asks.

"You really need to ask yourself that question. Now, I have better things to do with my time than this, and I'm sure you do, too. I think you were scheduled for sulking in a corner right now, so I suggest you get to it. I don't want to hold you back, after all."

"You still need to get that off the screens." Fury glares at the photoshopped image of himself.

Tony sighs and rolls his eyes. "Fine. Jarvis, you know what to do." He can't hide a smirk at what's coming.

The image of Fury in a bikini is replaced by a version of the Nyan Cat video with Fury's head superimposed over the rainbow-farting cat's.

Clint lets out a couple of loud coughs that are obviously trying to cover laughter, while Steve looks both confused at to what's on the screen and very disapproving about his commanding officer being made fun of.

"I would say it's been fun chatting, but it really hasn't." Tony grins.
"Stark, get this video off the screens now."

"Fine. Jarvis, get the video off the screens." The image of Nyan-Fury disappears, but the music continues. When Fury tells him to shut that off, Tony smirks. "Sorry. It's on loop for twelve hours, and there's no way to shut it off. Don't bother trying, you're not going to get anywhere, unless you want to blow up every speaker in the place.

Not wanting to hang around any longer, Tony scoops up the still unconscious Loki and says. "All right, Point Break, you're getting off the hook this time, but we're still going to continue our conversation from Halloween sometime."

Clint approaches the thunderer and says, surprisingly nonchalantly "You know, I'm sort of tempted to put an arrow through you. Actually, make that a bunch of arrows. Stick you up like a thunder god pincushion, you know?"

Thor frowns, looking like a kicked puppy that's not sure as to why it's being kicked.

"What you did could get you locked up for a lifetime here. Extreme domestic abuse, from what I've heard. Hell, it's practically torture. I'm not a huge fan of it, you know." Clint crosses his arms and glares at the taller man. "There's no excuse for it, so don't even bother."

Right now, all the Avengers are giving Thor hard looks, since none of them are fans of people who inflict pain for fun.

It dawns on Tony that Thor could actually provide a very important answer right now. "Hey, Hammer Time, are these drugs going to hurt Loki?"

Thor looks at him like he's an idiot. "Your Midgardian drugs are not strong enough to harm an Aesir or Jotun, even one as weak as Loki."

"Loki's not weak." Tony glares at him. "That's another thing we're gonna have to talk about. Right, well, I guess you can look forward to that." Tony says over his shoulder.

Addressing Fury and Coulson, he says "Now, even if you do mind, I'm going to be borrowing a quinjet."

After all, he can't carry Loki and all his stuff just flying in his suit.

Bruce had opted not to go along with the rest of the Avengers to the Helicarrier. Yes, he cares about what happens to Loki, of course he does. Loki's his friend, and one of the few people who doesn't treat him like a monster because of the Other Guy. Heck, Loki doesn't treat the Other Guy like a monster.

The thing is, the Other Guy's never been too fond of the Helicarrier in the first place, and even seeing that glass cell made specifically for him put the Other Guy on edge, even though they'd only seen it on a screen. Actually being there in person probably would have been a lot worse, especially with all the emotions revolving around whatever they've done to Loki. Bruce is trying not to think about that too much, but it's really hard.

His mind keeps coming up with images of Loki being hurt in increasingly awful ways, some of which Bruce wouldn't exactly put past S.H.I.E.L.D. In the video feed from when Tony was hacking into S.H.I.E.L.D (which, in retrospect, had been a great idea, considering that's where Loki was, as unlikely as it seemed), there had been two Loki's. At least one of them had obviously been an illusion, and both had looked rather scared.
Bruce can perfectly understand why Loki would be scared. However he'd wound up at S.H.I.E.L.D, he probably had no idea why he was locked in a glass prison. Or, an even worse thought, maybe he's had experience with being locked up for no reason in Asgard.

Bruce forces himself to take deep breaths and go to his happy place, trying to prevent the Other Guy from coming out.

Jarvis informs him that Tony has found Loki. Loki's condition apparently isn't certain, but he doesn't seem to be too worse for the wear.

A little bit later, Jarvis announces that there had been a delivery a while ago, and apologizes for forgetting to announce it earlier. Bruce tells him it's fine, since they had much more pressing things to worry about than the mere arrival of a package. Dum-E brings it from the elevator to one of the many coffee tables in the living room.

Some time later, while Bruce is meditating, he hears something land on the huge balcony outside the penthouse. He realizes it's a quinjet, but to his surprise, Tony steps out of it, carrying Loki, who appears to be unconscious.

"God, I need a drink." Tony remarks once he comes through the glass door. However, instead of heading to the bar, he heads towards Loki's room. Bruce follows him, watching Tony lay the unconscious Loki on his bed. Loki's hugging Simba, who has a rip in his back, and the god's head is using Maximus as a pillow.

"What happened to him?" Bruce asks in a whisper, not entirely sure if this is risking the Other Guy coming out or not.

"They sedated him." Tony says just as quietly. "Multiple times, with what seems to be some pretty strong stuff. But he looks like he's doing all right to me." Sure enough, Loki's breathing appears normal, though when Bruce finds a pulse, he's not sure if it's normal for a Jotun or not.

"So... how hard was it to get him out?"

Tony rolls his eyes. "Please, I'm Iron Man. The hardest part was getting Fury to shut up about Loki, actually. But I made it clear that if he touches Loki again, he's going to pay. Same for Thor."

"How was Thor?" Bruce has a feeling Thor probably made things worse.

Tony pauses slightly, and says "Thor was actually sort of weird. He sort of stood up for Loki. Well, at least he told Fury that Loki's not dangerous."

"That's good." Bruce says, somewhat surprised. But Thor had told the truth, since Loki really doesn't seem dangerous, although he is quite powerful.

"Yeah..." Tony says somewhat distractedly. "I figured now would be a bad time to talk to him, since I have no clue when Loki will wake up." With a slight smirk, Tony adds "Knowing Loki, he'll probably wake up way before what should be humanely possible."

"He's not human, remember?" Bruce says with a smile of his own.

"Thor said that our 'Midgardian drugs' aren't strong enough to harm an alien, even one 'as weak as Loki.'" Tony sighs. "So, he's sort of getting there, but he's not perfect."

Bruce doesn't answer, but really, Thor's grown up among prejudice against Frost Giants. It doesn't make it right, but Bruce can't really blame him for going along with it.
Tony notices the box on the coffee table and opens it. He pulls out a smaller, purple box and holds it up for Bruce to see. It's a figurine set for The Hunchback of Notre Dame, which they hadn't been able to find during their excursion to the Disney Store.

"Oh yeah. I broke the Hulk cage in the Helicarrier." Tony says casually.

"You what?"

"That big glass cell they had Loki in? There's a trapdoor under it, and I dropped it out. After I got Loki out, of course." Tony gives Bruce an intent look. "You don't deserve to be in a cage, Bruce, and neither does Hulk. That's why I'm not making Hulk's room here seem like a cage."

Tony's shown Bruce the plans for Hulk's room here, and it's currently under construction. It's actually quite large and very nice, even if it is made to keep Hulk in it.

"Thanks." Bruce says quietly. Really, it means a lot. Tony's not what the media often paints him to be. He's not an uncaring jerk.

"No problemo." Tony says nonchalantly, getting up and stretching. "Right, well, I'm going to hack into S.H.I.E.L.D and watch the full surveillance." Tony says, strolling towards the bar. He hunts through the various bottles, grabs something, nods approvingly, and pours himself a glass. He drains part of it with a satisfied sigh.

"Jarvis, alert me when Loki wakes up, will you?"

If a disembodied voice can give the impression of rolling its eyes, Jarvis' does. "You don't need to tell me to do everything, sir."

Tony replies with some sort of quip that Bruce only half listens to as the billionaire engineer pulls up a holographic screen and starts tapping away.

Loki wakes up to the feeling of something soft beneath him and a very familiar lion in his arms. He grins, immediately recognizing Simba even without seeing him, just by the way the lion feels. He can also tell that Simba's not wearing his Man of Iron suit by the fuzziness when he runs a hand over Simba's back.

The soft feeling beneath him, he realizes, is a bed. He opens his eyes, where he sees stars. He works out that they're the holographic stars in his bedroom. He's not in the petri dish cage anymore. He's home.

His grin grows even wider.

Loki fiddles absentmindedly with Simba's ears. He's not sure when he'd gotten Simba back, but he doesn't remember anything since right after Tony came into the room his cell was in. Simba's not in his Man of Iron suit, and Loki really hopes that's not gone forever.

He realizes Simba has a rip in his back and he frowns, not liking it. He squeezes Simba's ear, but Simba doesn't sing or dance like he normally does. "Why won't you talk?" Loki mutters, but Simba doesn't respond like he normally does. Dejectedly, he hugs Simba to his chest.

"Simba can be fixed, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says. "I'm sure Mr. Stark will be able to make him talk again. He did make me, after all." Jarvis adds dryly. Loki grins. Simba might be okay!

Jarvis continues talking. "I think there's something you can do about the rip in Simba's back, Mr.
Loki's eyes go wide. He'd fixed Tony with his magic, so maybe he can fix Simba's rip. Fixing things is good, right? He hugs Simba close and starts to sing "Flower gleam and glow, let your power shine..."

When he finishes the song, he looks down at Simba and sees the rip is gone. He hugs his lion tightly, grinning. Curiously, he squeezes Simba's ear, but Simba still doesn't do anything.

He sees Olaf sitting on his dresser next to Elsa and Anna. Smiling, he goes over and grabs Elsa, whispering "I did what you did, you know, with the cuffs. And my Tony said it was good, even though the white-coat-people said not to do that, but I think my Tony's right and they're wrong." He nods, hugging the doll to his chest with Simba and grabbing Toy Stark and the Hulk toy. He looks at the Clint one for a bit, sad that Clint tried to shoot him.

"By the way, I'm quite glad to see you awake again, Mr. Loki." Jarvis' smooth voice flows through the room again, and Loki grins.

"Thanks Jarvis." He cocks his head to the side as he remembers. "Were you in the petri dish? 'Cause I thoughts I heard you but then I thought it was fake, like pretend or a dream, I dunno, but then Tony was there." Loki frowns slightly. That hadn't come out quite right.

He's been trying to speak in English without All-Tongue, thinking maybe if he can read and write it like Bruce and Jarvis have been teaching him, he can speak it too. Bruce or Tony hadn't even suggested it, he'd come up with it all on his own, because he quite likes the idea of being able to really speak to his favorite people instead of just using All-Tongue and speaking the language he spoke in Asgard. Besides, he likes it here a lot more than Asgard, so why should he still speak Asgard's language? Tony said he's never going back there.

The downside of all this is that it often makes his mouth sound even stupider than it had before, which if he believes Fandral, is hard to do. But Loki has a strong feeling that Tony would say that Fandral's the stupid one if he heard him say that. It's a weird thought but a nice one.

"I was in fact there, Mr. Loki, as I was in Mr. Stark's suit as always and I transferred myself to their ship temporarily." Jarvis replies. "I trust you know that Mr. Stark and myself are quite mad about how you were treated on the Helicarrier."

Loki doesn't want to think about that. He didn't like being held down, didn't like the metal things.

No! He's thinking about it. Loki tries to focus on the room around him, looking at the stars and the horses prancing across the walls. It's his happy place, as Bruce says.

"Mr. Stark and Dr. Banner are in the lab. I hope you don't mind that I have informed them that you are awake, and they're on their way in." He doesn't mind that Bruce and Tony are coming, not in the slightest.

"See? I told you he'd be up really early." Loki hears Tony's voice say almost triumphantly as footsteps approach his door. There's a knocking, and Bruce pokes his head in.

"I heard you're up." He says. Tony pushes past him and strolls into the room. Bruce walks in after and sits at Loki's desk chair.

"Hey, Bambi." Tony says, lounging against the wall and swirling some sort of alcoholic drink in his hand. His voice isn't slurred, though, and he's got a box in his other hand.
"What...?"

"You can have multiple nicknames, you know, to keep things interesting so I don't just call you Snoopy all the time." Tony raises an eyebrow.

"I like Snoopy." Loki says.

"I think you'd like Bambi, too." Tony says. Loki just stares at him, still not knowing what a Bambi is. Tony seems to get that, because he adds "Bambi's a cartoon deer from a Disney movie. I don't really remember what happens, but we can watch it sometime if you want." Tony pauses and asks "Do you guys have deer in Asgard?"

Loki nods. Of course they have deer! They even ate it in Asgard, sometimes. He never really liked it much as a food. But he would like to watch the movie Tony's talking about.

"You know, Rudolph could work too." Tony says, grinning for some reason. Loki frowns. Rude Olf? Is he really rude enough to warrant being called that? And what's an olf? Tony goes on explaining, saying something about a reindeer with a red nose and how "All of the other reindeer used to laugh and call him names, they never let poor Rudolph join in any reindeer games."

Tony seems to decide that those are both good nicknames, because at the end of all that, he calls him Rudolph.

Loki wonders what kind of games Reindeer play. Sven had liked trying to get Olaf's nose- maybe it's that? Or maybe they play like Simba and Nala. He glances at Simba again. He's still not sure when he'd gotten Simba back...

As if reading his thoughts, Tony says "Clint got Simba back for you while I was dealing with some other people."

"Clint did?" Loki's not sure if Tony's still trying to be funny. "Is he still gonna shoot me?"

"No, no he won't. He didn't even mean to aim his bow at you. He was just startled, that's all. He feels pretty bad about it." Bruce says. "He still likes you, by the way. He's not annoyed about you freezing his arrow."

Loki chews slightly on his lip. "I froze it? Like Elsa?" Elsa hadn't been bad when she'd frozen the Duke's guards' arrows. But Clint's a hero here on Midgard, so what if it's different?

"Yeah. And there's nothing wrong with that." Tony assures him, which means he clearly doesn't think this is different from Elsa doing it. "You were keeping him from shooting you. Not that he was actually going to shoot you." Loki frowns, not seeing any sense in that until Tony goes on. "He was just startled, and his automatic reaction is to grab his bow. He wasn't trying to hurt you, and he didn't mean to scare you."

"So's he still my friend?" Loki had hated the idea of Clint not being his friend anymore, since he likes Clint.

"I'd say so." Bruce says. "Even if people fight sometimes, they can still be friends, you know."

Loki knows that. He thinks. After all, Tony and Hulk fought, and they're friends, and sometimes Pepper gets annoyed at Tony but they're still friends, too.

"Anyways, this arrived earlier today." Tony hands the box out to him, and Loki looks at it curiously. He reads the word hunchback and when he turns it over, he grins. It's toys from The Hunchback of Notre Dame, little figurines just like Quasimodo had. He sees Quasimodo himself,
as well as Esmeralda, Phoebus, and even Quasimodo's gargoyle friends, Victor, Hugo and Laverne, and Esmeralda's goat.

He opens the box and takes them out, fiddling with Quasimodo and Esmeralda.

"Where's Simba's suit?" Loki asks, because Simba doesn't have it on right now.

"Don't worry. We got that, too, and your Jormungand necklace-belt thing. Which I supposed you noticed." Tony glances pointedly at the Jormungand necklace, which is now actually a necklace and is around Loki's neck. Loki laughs. Of course he noticed! It's around his neck!

"Simba's not talking, Tony." Loki says mournfully. "But I fixed him, just likes I fixed you leg. Look, no rip." He grins and holds Simba up, and Tony grins back.

"But he still won't talks or dance, nope nope nope." Loki sighs.

"Let me have a look at him." Bruce says. Loki hands Simba to Bruce and he opens the velcro on Simba's stomach (they don't have velcro in Asgard, but Tony had explained what it was. Loki's sandals use velcro, too).

Bruce winds up sending Tony to fetch a tool called a "screw driver" which he twists in Simba. "All right, I have a diagnosis." Bruce says with a small smile, as if he's not being entirely serious as he pulls out a small cover to the box inside Simba. "He needs new batteries. I think they might've been removed. Wow, he takes C batteries? Hey, Tony, do you have any batteries?"

Loki has no clue what they're talking about, but Tony's rambling. "I don't know. I mean, most stuff is powered by the arc reactor, but some things still use batteries. Like, some of the video game controllers and stuff. Hey, Jarvis, do we have any C batteries?"

"In the junk drawer by the refrigerator, sir."

"How would I find anything without you, Jarvis?"

"You wouldn't, sir." Jarvis replies dryly. Loki giggles.

Tony comes back with some weird cylinder things and starts explaining how they power things, using all sorts of weird words like cathode and electrode. Loki's not sure he really gets it, but it's fascinating, that little cylinders can give things energy.

Once those are in, Loki squeezes Simba's ear, and Simba asks "We'll always be pals, right?"

"Right?" Loki grins.

"You know," Tony says with a raised brow. "If you want, I could fix Simba up with some Artificial Intelligence, so he says more stuff." Loki shrugs.

"Well, now that we've fixed Simba- How are you feeling?" Bruce asks. "Are you hurt anywhere?"

"No rips anywhere. Not like Simba hads."

"That's good, although I bet those would've been gone by now anyways." Loki likes that Bruce actually cares whether or not he's okay. Tony cares about that, too. It's really nice having friends, he thinks.

"I'm glad you like us as friends." Bruce smiles at him slightly, and Loki realizes he'd spoken aloud again. But despite having said so many things unintentionally, Tony and Bruce never make fun of
him for it.

"So how do you feel?"

Loki cocks his head to the side. "Hungry. Their food was really gross." As if to prove the point, Loki hears his stomach growl.

"I'm not sure MRE's can count as food." Tony mutters. "Nice, spitting the chili on the glass, by the way." Loki giggles.

"We should probably get some dinner." Bruce agrees. "Any suggestions?"

"Waffles!" Loki answers immediately.

"That's not really a dinner-" Bruce starts, but Tony cuts him off.

"No. We're having waffles, as a sort of 'glad to have you back' meal." Tony says decisively, and Bruce suddenly looks like he knows some sort of secret. Loki doesn't think too much on it- instead, he simply cheers and gets out of bed, and they head towards the kitchen.

Sometimes Loki and Bruce make waffles "from scratch" as Bruce says, but there's also a box in the so-called freezer of waffles that just need to be heated. Loki doesn't mind the fact that they're really cold when they come out of the freezer, but they're really hard and sort of impossible to eat.

Loki fiddles absentmindedly with the band on his arm. It's only then that he really looks at the thing. He'd worn it when going out to meet Dr. Carlisle, but hadn't paid too much attention to what was on it. There's a weird circular thing on the band with little numbers.

"Tony, what's this?" Loki asks, holding up his wrist after putting waffles in the toaster (when they make them from scratch, they use a thing called a waffle maker. Loki thinks that's more fun).

"That? A tracking unit. It tells me where you are at any given time. I want you to start wearing it all the time, so if you disappear with your powers that would put ninjas to shame, I'll be able to find you. That's also why your phone is in your pocket, by the way. You should probably start carrying that around, too."

"But you found me and I didn't have it." Loki says, confused- not that he objects to the idea of Tony finding him. No way.

"Yeah, well this will tell me exactly where you are, so I won't have to go looking first. It'll probably save a hell of a lot of time."

"Oh. But what's this?" Loki taps the circular thing with the numbers and the weird, moving, tiny stick-like things. There are three, and one of them's moving a lot faster than the others.

"It's a watch."

"What's it watching?"

Bruce chuckles lightly at that and says "No, it's called a watch. A wristwatch. It's sort of a miniature clock you wear on your wrist."

Loki's not sure what Bruce is talking about, but he'd gotten what Tony had said. He obviously likes the idea of never getting lost again. This time had been even worse than when he'd gotten lost in the city, and that had been bad enough.
"Loki, look. I know it might be too early to talk about what happened, but you need to know that it wasn't your fault and you didn't deserve to be locked up like that." Tony says, looking at him intently. "I don't want you getting any wrong ideas."

Tony puts a hand on Loki's shoulder and says "I'm going to do everything I can to make sure they never get you again. You're safe." Loki grins, wrapping his arms around Tony, and Tony returns the gesture.

Those words make Loki relax a lot.

"Do you want to talk about it? We're here, if you want to talk." Bruce says quietly.

Loki just wants to forget it ever happened, so he shakes his head no. He wants to forget about the Eyepatch Man and the petri dish cell.

"All right, but we're always here if you want to talk to us." Bruce says gently. "You could talk to Dr. Carlisle, too. Hey, Tony, when's Loki's next session with her?"

"Why are you asking me?" Tony asks with a smirk.

Bruce smirks and says "I don't know. Hey Jarvis, when's Loki's next session with Dr. Carlisle?"

"It was going to be tomorrow, but seeing as you're leaving for Malibu early in the morning, I'm afraid it's not possible to actually meet her in person. However, I've arranged to have it done via a video chat around three p.m."

"Great." Tony says. "Am I going to be in a stupid meeting then?"

"You will not, sir. Miss Potts and I made sure to leave your schedule open for that time."

The toaster dings and the waffles pop up. Loki grins, grabs them and then goes to the box that's cold on the inside- the fridge, according to Tony, although half of it is the freezer and apparently different- to get maple syrup, which might be the best part of waffles. Although Loki likes the design with all the squares, too. He heads to the table, where Simba, Quasimodo and Esmeralda are, and drenches his waffles in maple syrup.

"Oh, yeah." Tony says after he sits down with his own plate of waffles. "I think we met Hel. Sort of. She didn't really do anything, but she was there with... another version of you."

Loki cocks his head to the side and peers at Tony. "What?"

"When we were looking for you, you sort of showed up. You even told us about the petri dish cell, and I think Hel was there with you. She's the girl that looks like a corpse on one side, right?"

There's a bit of a pause and he says "I just talked about it, didn't I?" Bruce nods.

Loki nods and fiddles with his fingers. "Uh huh. That's her ands sometimes I call her Hela, but I like Hel more and she doesn't care. You know she works with dead people, right? She says you're not gonna die anytime soon, 'cause you gots to stay here with me 'cause you're my best friend."

"Hey, remember I'm not going anywhere. Now, when you say she works with dead people, what does that mean exactly?"

"She rules Helheim. I read 'bout that in a book and she tells me more. It's where you go when you die, but some people go to Valhalla, I think. I dunno. But she decides what happens to people in Helheim, and she saids that I wouldn't be hurt there even though I'm a Jotun." Maybe he shouldn't
have said all that, but he'd been rambling. Still, Tony doesn't laugh or anything.

"I thought you guys were immortal?" Tony asks. Loki's not sure what to say to that, so he doesn't say anything.

"Never mind. So yeah, I guess we met Hel."

"You didn't thinks she's scary? I did, at first." Loki admits.

"No. Please, she wasn't even attacking me or anything." Loki giggles, because Hel wouldn't attack Tony!

Loki asks Hel in his head "You were here?"

"Yeah, we were going to teleport, remember?" Hel replies in his head. Loki nods. He does remember.

"Yeah, buts it didn't work, nope nope nope." Loki pouts, before pausing. He sees Tony looking at him, and Loki realizes he'd said that aloud.

"What didn't work?"

Loki pauses. He's pretty sure that Tony won't think teleporting away is bad. He glances at his Quasimodo and Esmeralda figurines, which he brought to the table with him. "Esmeralda was good for teleporting away from the guards, right?"

"Yeah, there was no reason to let herself get caught." Tony nods as he takes a bite of his own waffle. "Why, did you try to teleport?"

Loki blinks but nods. Maybe that hadn't been as sneaky as he'd hoped.

Tony grins. "Good for you."

"It didn't work." Loki pouts, but then he starts to wonder. If Tony saw him and Hel, something must've happened. And when he tried to teleport, he felt really drained without a reason. Maybe he'd sent Hel and one of the Loki-illusions here instead? Tony said they were illusions.

Tony is apparently thinking along exactly the same lines, because he says basically what Loki just thought.

"You know, the other-Loki told us where you were. Pretty handy, don't you think? It's a heck of a lot cooler than video chats. It's like going there, only not." Tony says, before asking "Did you hear what we said?"

Loki shakes his head, wishing he had heard. Then he would have known Tony was coming for him. He never doubted that Tony was looking for him, but he'd had no idea how long it would take.

He could have known Tony was on his way when the white coat people came in.

"Um, I'm not sure if you want to hear this, but I think you turned invisible, too."

Loki perks up, actually liking that. He'd always liked the idea of people not being able to see him. It would have been really nice in Asgard, and there had been some times where it seemed that people really hadn't seen him. But Loki has no clue whether he's invisible because he can always see himself.
Still, he had noticed that the guards had looked at the Loki illusions instead of him in the petri dish cell. Maybe he really had been invisible.

"That's good, right?"

"It's freaking awesome. You don't even need a cloak like Harry Potter."

Loki's not sure what Tony's talking about, but it's clear he supports the idea of invisibility, even if Asgard wouldn't. But Tony says Asgard is wrong about that stuff. Loki smiles slightly and takes a huge bite of waffle, loving the taste of maple syrup.

After dinner, they wind up watching two movies: *Bambi* and *Wall-E*, which is apparently Dum-E's favorite movie. It's about a robot who collects trash (there's a *lot* of trash there), but he meets a female robot that he really likes and follows her into space. Loki fiddles with Dum-E's claw as he watches Wall-E the robot travel among the stars.

Tony sips some coffee as he works his way through S.H.I.E.L.D's secure data in the comfort of his private jet. His jet does in fact have a full internet connection- Tony can never be too far away from technology, after all. He doesn't even need to worry about his devices screwing with his jet's systems, thanks to his own technological awesomeness when it came to designing Stark Phones and Stark Pads.

Okay, so he hadn't clocked Fury in the jaw like he'd been tempted too, but going through S.H.I.E.L.D's classified data is perhaps even better. Knowledge is power, after all, and for an intelligence agency like S.H.I.E.L.D, having their secrets discovered is a pretty crucial blow.

Tony had always made it a point to hack into them anyways, sometimes when he's just bored, but right now he's going all out. Letting Jarvis into S.H.I.E.L.D's computers yesterday in order to freeze all the screens also came with the handy side effect of getting a ton of classified data.

So here he is, on his jet, cracking open Fury's secrets.

The reason he's on the jet is because they're on their way to Malibu for that conference Tony hadn't been able to get out of, which he's still dreading. The reason Pepper isn't with them right now is because she's already in Malibu.

Tony had decided to take Loki with him, although he could have theoretically left Loki with Bruce in the tower. Of course, now he's going to end up leaving Loki with Bruce in the mansion while he goes to stupid meetings, but Loki will still be able to see him in the mornings and evenings. Convincing Bruce to come along with them hadn't been that hard. Tony suspects that Bruce will like being able to go out of the Malibu mansion to a nice, lush yard instead of ever-busy and loud NYC. Bruce really doesn't seem like a city person, and Tony has a hunch Loki isn't big on cities either.

Bruce seems rather uncomfortable around all this luxury, despite living at the tower recently. He seems especially uneasy around the stewardesses, as if he's not used to being waited on like that. Well, he probably isn't, but still.

A five and a half hour flight really doesn't seem like Loki's thing, Tony discovered fairly quickly. He'd also discovered that Loki hadn't known what a plane was, at first thinking it was some huge metal bird that was going to eat them. When Tony explained that it was going to fly, Loki had looked at him like he was crazy. Of course, once it had taken off, Loki had clearly believed him and seemed to think it was the greatest thing ever. This is sort of his first flight, as neither the
Helicarrier nor the Quinjet, in which he'd been unconscious, really count.

They're about two hours into the flight, so not even halfway. For a bit, Loki had seemed content to stretch himself across two leather, sofa-like seats and read *Peanuts* strips, but had soon grown restless and started running up and down the length of the plane. Tony's jet is fairly big for a jet, but there's still not much space to run around.

Once Tony managed to get Loki to stay more or less in one place, the god had proceeded to scatter the floor with toys, books and art materials like he so often does in the tower. However, this posed a large tripping hazard for the flight attendants, so Bruce had tried to get him to condense it to a table in front of one of the seats.

Movies are really their lifeline right now. Tony made sure to have a bunch of Disney movies for Loki to try to keep him grounded during the flight. Tony thinks that *The Incredibles* should wait for a team movie night (with Loki, of course, even though he's technically not part of the team). He's told Loki about how Violet and Frozone have powers like his- for Violet, it's turning invisible and making force fields, and for Frozone it's obviously the ice powers.

He half wonders if he should invite Thor to the movie night when they watch it, provided Loki doesn't freak out. But just like seeing examples of his powers being used for good things helps Loki, it might help Thor see past some of his prejudice if he saw (admittedly fictional) superheroes using Loki's powers.

Then again, he has to wonder if Thor's view of magic has changed since learning both his parents can do it. Thor clearly respects his father- perhaps more than a bit too much, considering Odin's vastly different treatment of Thor and Loki. Loki doesn't even get the short end of the stick; he gets hit with it instead. Thor had tried to deny that Odin's magic is anything like Loki's, but he can't really believe that.

Tony takes another sip of his coffee, only to realize it's definitely *not* coffee. It's hot chocolate.

He raises a brow at Loki, who's smirking at him. Tony has to give Loki credit- he hadn't even noticed the god switching their mugs. It's kind of nice to see this prankster side of Loki.

"Well, you got me. I didn't notice you switch these." Tony says, and Loki's smirk turns to a real grin. "But the joke's on you pal." Tony adds with a smirk of his own. "You don't even like coffee, whereas I'm perfectly content to drink your hot chocolate." He raises the mug with a smirk and Loki stares at him with an expression of utmost horror.

"No!" He protests, hastily pushing Tony's mug of coffee so it's back in front of him. Tony chuckles and says "Hey, I'm just messing with you." Loki looks very relieved as Tony pushes the mug of hot chocolate back across the table.

Loki had finished watching a DreamWorks movie called *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron* not long ago. It was about horses and Loki had clearly loved it, because, well... horses. He had asked about the DreamWorks logo in the beginning, clearly used to seeing the Disney logo, and Tony hadn't been sure how to explain movie companies without going into long explanations as to what movies are, so he'd skipped it. Which might be a good thing, because that would have then lead to Loki figuring out that movies aren't real and perhaps questioning everything they've been trying to correct about what he was told in Asgard.

Surprisingly, Loki hadn't really freaked out during that movie, but he hadn't during *The Lion King* or *Bambi* (or at least there hadn't been any triggers, although Loki certainly didn't like the fire in the beginning of *Bambi* or watching Scar kill Mufasa).
While Loki had been watching that, Tony had found a lot of blueprints for weapons in case there's another alien attack, like with the Chitauri. Some of the weapons are, quite disturbingly, weapons of mass destruction, enough to level entire cities. And Tony know his weapons, having manufactured them before taking up the Iron Man shtick.

He frowns, not sure what to make of this. What if there is another alien attack? The Chitauri don't seem to be coming back (or maybe they're biding their time) but if those aliens exist, there have to be others. Well, he knows there are others. There are the Asgardians and the Jotuns, for starters, and there could be a ton more...

It would be really nice if the Earth just had a sort of shield around it to prevent invasions in the first place...

"Hot towel for you, Mr. Stark?" One of the flight attendants asks. Tony accepts one with a distracted thanks and only a brief glance at her (despite the fact she's very hot) as he continues to go through the files.

"How about you sir?" She turns to Loki, who's busy watching Lilo & Stitch. Tony's told him it has a happy ending, but so far it's mostly freaked him out. The beginning scene of Jumba's trial, during which Stitch was trapped in a glass dome clearly brought back memories of the glass cell Loki had been in just yesterday. The fact that Stitch (or Experiment 626) was referred to as a monster certainly hadn't helped things. Tony and Bruce had both been quick to tell Loki that they weren't calling 626 a monster because of his blue skin.

Tony had been ready to shut that movie off and put in The Lion King, which he knows Loki would like, but shockingly, Loki had objected. He seems to really want to watch Stitch find a family, so perhaps telling him the ending was a good idea. Still, Tony can't help but notice that Loki scooted closer to him during the scene with the glass dome, as if wanting to make sure he wouldn't pop up in S.H.I.E.L.D's glass cell again.

"Sir?" The stewardess asks when Loki still doesn't answer as he rocks back and forth, staring at the screen.

"Hey, Snoopy, she's talking to you."

"Why'd she call me that?" Loki asks. "Jarvis called me that too when I first talked'ta him, remember?"

"Yeah, I remember. And you asked him to call you Loki." Tony says before gesturing to the flight attendant, who's clearly masking her confusion behind an air of professionalism.

"Sir?" She asks yet again, offering the hot towel to Loki.

"I don't like hot things." Loki says, despite the fact he's drinking hot chocolate. Though Tony supposes, as a Jotun, Loki fares far better with cold than heat. Perhaps that doesn't apply quite as much to food. "You look like Sif." Loki says out of the blue. "But you're nicer." He grins at her.

The stewardess nods, looking somewhat uncomfortable but also somewhat charmed in by Loki's smile. "He's adorable." She whispers to Tony, who rolls his eyes. Loki's a grown man, not a five-year-old child, despite how he usually acts.

She turns and offers another hot towel to Bruce, who accepts one quietly, and then leaves them to themselves. Tony returns to going through classified information.

Tony has always made it a point of hacking into the secret agency. He never trusted them in the
first place, and that lack of trust was furthered once he'd figured out that they'd faked Coulson's death.

He flips through various files, some of which contains stuff he already knows. He's already hunted out and deleted any information they'd gotten about Loki or Simba's Iron Man suit, since they had no right to that information in the first place. Loki should have never ended up with them.

Tony glances up at Loki, who's watching Lilo punch a red-haired girl with glasses. Loki's rocking back and forth but doesn't seem to be that upset.

Tony comes across something very interesting, its allure only growing as he goes through the information. It's about a whole secret society.

"Hey, Bruce, have you heard about these... X-Men people?"

"What?" Bruce asks, looking up from his book.

"They have all these files on some school for mutants run by a guy named-" He skims around for the name he'd read not long ago. "Charles Xavier."

"Never heard of them." Bruce murmurs.

"Neither have I, but this actually looks really interesting." Tony turns to go back to the information, but Loki suddenly lets out a very loud cry of "No!"

Tony glances at the screen and sees basically the Disney version of Nick Fury- a bald black man in dark clothes, but with sunglasses instead of an eyepatch. He even gives off the same mysterious secret-agent-like vibe.

Tony pauses the movie and says "That's not Fury."

"But he's angry." Loki says, hugging Simba and Maximus tighter. Tony puts a hand on his shoulder.

Tony laughs. "No, Fury is the name of the man with the eyepatch from yesterday. This isn't Fury, even though he looks like him. Just like how Shego wasn't you, and Kim and Ron weren't Natasha and Clint, remember?"

Loki nods slightly, looking a little less anxious. "The Eyepatch Man was really scary." Loki hasn't talked much about what he'd gone through in the Helicarrier yesterday, though Tony had watched the footage. Maybe Loki will talk to Dr. Carlisle about it.

"Director Fury?" Tony asks, almost certain who the Eyepatch Man is. "Yeah, he kind of lives up to his name."

"He's like Odin." Loki says, his voice almost a whisper.

"Well, this isn't Fury, and Fury and Odin aren't going to hurt you again, if I can do anything about it." To be fair (although the thought makes Tony rather uneasy) Tony's not entirely sure if he could do anything against Odin, but Odin probably won't be trying to get Loki back, given that it sounds like he never particularly liked him. Well, that's a bit of an understatement, considering he sewed Loki's lips shut for lying.

If they'd seen this movie before Loki's little trip to the Helicarrier yesterday, Tony doubts this would have been an issue at all, but now...
"Do you want me to shut this off?" Tony asks. Surprisingly, Loki's not actually freaking out, even if he seems pretty anxious, and he seems to want to keep watching. Then again, they'd made it through *Frozen* even with all the triggers in it.

After the man, Cobra Bubbles, talks to Nani and Lilo about Nani's fitness to act as Lilo's parent, he leaves. Nani chases Lilo and they start to fight. Loki, already riled up from the majority of the stuff before this point in the movie, is rocking back and forth and singing under his breath. "If you find the field where the horses roam, and you need a place to call your home..."

The fight ends with Lilo going to her room and both Lilo and Nani screaming into pillows.

Not long after, Loki tugs on Tony's sleeve. "What is it, Rudolph?" Onscreen, Nani and Lilo are sitting on Lilo's bed, talking about something. Tony hasn't really been paying attention, but it sounded like they were fighting earlier, after Cobra Bubbles the social worker came. Perhaps Loki wants it shut off now?

"Like us." Loki announces as he continues to point at the screen. "Remember?"

Tony has no idea what he's talking about. "We're like... Lilo and Nani?" He asks, confused.

"Nani bringed pizza." Loki says as if it makes perfect sense. "They fought and Lilo's in her room, and Nani bringed pizza."

"Okay...?"

Loki sighs and says, as if explaining to a particularly young child. "Pizza stops fights. Nani saids that a rabbit would be better than Lilo, and you asked when I'd get it through my thick skull that this isn't Asgard."

Tony would have laughed at the pizza line- actually, he'd started to- until he'd discovered the real reason Loki brought this up. Loki's talking about the incident the evening after his first therapy session, where Tony had snapped at him under the table and Loki had run to his room, terrified.

"Um, yeah, I guess it is kind of like that. But it's not because of the pizza." Tony bites back a smirk at that, thinking it probably wouldn't help. "They're just not mad at each other anymore. People can get mad at each other occasionally, you know, but that doesn't mean you stop liking them."

Loki nods. "Like you did."

Tony doesn't exactly like the look Bruce is giving him right now, but luckily the conversation is dropped when Loki turns back to the movie. Lilo confesses that she hit Myrtle Edmonds, and Nani asks her why.

"People treat me different." Lilo answers glumly, and Loki looks very sympathetic.

"They just don't know what to say." Nani answers. Their conversation is soon interrupted by a falling star.

Loki seems to really like the idea of falling stars, for obvious reasons, though he seems somewhat confused about the idea of Lilo wishing on one.

Lilo wishes for a friend, and Loki looks very sympathetic, like he had when the girls in Lilo's hula class teased her. Tony wonders how many times Loki had made the same wish, and he wonders if that's what made Loki's imaginary friends.
The ‘falling star’ is actually Stitch's spaceship. He's run over by a truck and taken to a pet shelter, where Lilo and Nani wind up going. Lilo picks out Stitch, much to Nani the clerk's horror. Frankly, the fact that people think Stitch is a dog is sort of hilarious.

Stitch basically only sticks with Lilo to avoid Jumba, his creator who's been sent to capture him, and Pleakley, the skinny alien who was sent with him. At one point, Lilo sees Myrtle and the other girls, and she announces they're her friends even though they bully her. She proudly shows them Stitch, but Myrtle says that Stitch is the ugliest thing she's ever seen, and the other girls chorus "Yeeaaaaah" really obnoxiously.

Loki laughs in delight when Stitch knocks Mertle off her tricycle and steals it.

When Lilo brings Stitch home, he immediately starts destroying things. Loki actually seems to find some of Stitch's antics funny, like turning on the blender without the lid on so liquid sloshes everywhere. Nani, fed up, starts to drag Stitch out of the house.

"He was an orphan and we adopted him! What about Ohana?" Lilo shouts.

Nani protests that Stitch hasn't been there that long, and Lilo says "Neither have I! Dad said 'ohana' means family." Nani pauses. "Family means nobody gets left behind." The sisters say together.

Tony glances at Loki, who is staring at the screen so intently that he seems unaware of anything around him.

"Or?" Lilo prompts.

"Or forgotten." Nani sighs, but lets Stitch stay. Lilo takes him upstairs, where Stitch proceeds to wreck most of her room, although Lilo tells him to never touch the photo of her dead parents.

Lilo asks Stitch why he doesn't try to make something instead, which kind of reminds Tony of how they've been convincing Loki to do good things with his magic. Not that he's done bad things with it while he's been here, but Loki believes a lot of the things he's done to be bad.

Stitch winds up making a replica of San Fransisco but ends up destroying it all the same.

Later that night, he wakes Lilo up and curiously looks at the book of *The Ugly Duckling*. "That's the ugly duckling," Lilo explains while pointing to a page in a book, where a baby duckling is shouting *I'm Lost!* "See, he's sad because he's all alone, and nobody wants him."

Tony notices that Loki's gone uncharacteristically still again. Lilo continues talking, point to a page where the Ugly Duckling is surrounded by other ducks. "But on this page, his family hears him crying and they find him. Then the Ugly Duckling is happy, because he knows where he belongs."

Stitch takes the book thoughtfully, and heads off to his own bed that's a pineapple crate.

Throughout the movie, which Tony has wound up watching with Loki, it keeps striking Tony how similar Stitch's story is to Loki's own. Both are blue aliens who landed on Earth from not-ideal conditions and wound up with another sort of outcast. They hit it off initially and slowly build a real friendship that eventually becomes familial.

Tony wonders if Loki's making the same connections. He also thinks about how Lilo's life is somewhat similar to Loki’s, in that she was bullied by her peers and wished for a friend more than anything.

They watch as Stitch makes Nani lose her job at the restaurant. Cobra Bubbles comes and tells
Nani to get a new one. Once Stitch throws a book at him, he declares that Stitch needs to be a model citizen. One of Cobra's sunglasses lenses pops off, so that it kinda looks like Fury's eyepatch.

Loki, however, seems to be focusing on the fact that Stitch threw a book at him.

While Nani tries to get a job, Lilo tries to teach Stitch to be a model citizen, using Elvis Presley as a role model. Lilo and Stitch wind up inadvertently ruining all of Nani's chances, the last being on a beach.

David, who has a crush on Nani, takes them out surfing, which Loki seems to find fascinating as he bounces along to the beat of the *Hawaiian Roller Coaster Ride* song.

However, Jumba and Pleakley try to capture Stitch, which leads to Lilo going under the water. Unfortunately, Cobra Bubbles sees the whole thing, and says that Lilo's going to be taken away to foster care the next day.

That night, Stitch leaves with the Ugly Duckling book. He opens it up in the forest and shouts "Lost!", clearly waiting for his family to come.

The next morning, he hears a rustling in the bushes, but instead of his family, it's Jumba. Jumba notices the book and asks what Stitch is doing.

Stitch says he's waiting for his family.

"Ah." Jumba replies. "You don't have one. I made you."

"Maybe... I could..." Stitch says slowly, hopefully.

"You are built to destroy. You can never belong." Jumba tells him.

Without warning, Loki's screaming at the top of his lungs and hurling the closest things- his markers and pencils- across the plane at the screen. Tony's thankful it's a holographic screen, because the pencils actually imbed themselves in the wall behind the screen.

Tony wraps his arms around Loki's arms, both to try and calm him down and to get him to stop throwing things across the plane. Loki jerks away from him but stops throwing stuff.

"Loki, Jumba is so wrong about that. Stitch does have somewhere he belongs, just like you do. You belong with us." Tony says. Loki stares at him and slowly seems to relax.

"Really?" Loki asks.

"Of course. Nothing's going to change the fact that you belong with us." Tony says. Well, unless Loki goes on a homicidal rampage or something, but that really doesn't seem likely.

"Who does Stitch have?" Loki demands loudly, wringing his hands.

"Lilo." Tony answers. "Stitch has a happy ending, just like Quasimodo, Elsa and Esmeralda. You'll see." He puts a hand on Loki's shoulder and Loki doesn't flinch away anymore.

"And Genie?" Loki asks. "Genie got free."

"Yeah, and Genie." Tony had actually forgotten about him.

Loki turns back to the screen. He seems to find the fight between Stitch and Jumba at Lilo's house
somewhat funny, like when Stitch hits Jumba with a blue Volkswagon Bug.

Lilo's house winds up blowing up, and Cobra Bubbles comes for Lilo. Lilo sneaks out of his car and runs into Stitch, who hands her a burnt photo of her family. She's understandably very annoyed at him, and tells him he ruined everything.

Suddenly, they're captured in a net by Captain Gantu, who was sent to capture Stitch after Jumba and Pleakley's repeated failures. He loads them up in a glass container on his spaceship, which Loki doesn't seem to like much.

Stitch wriggles out, only to be confronted by Nani and finally captured by Jumba, who locks him in handcuffs and slams him rather violently against a tree.

Nani winds up confronting Jumba and Pleakley about Lilo's whereabouts, and they eventually agree to help rescue Lilo, freeing Stitch.

This leads to, in Tony's opinion, a rather unexciting spaceship battle around the mountains. It's certainly a lot less exciting than what he does.

At one point, Lilo calls out to Stitch from the glass capsule she's stuck in "Don't leave me, okay?"

"Okay." Stitch says before hijacking a truck.

Stitch ends up rescuing Lilo, who exclaims "You came back!"

"Nobody gets left behind." Stitch replies, and Tony notices Loki staring at him. Maybe he's thinking about Tony getting him yesterday.

When they arrive back on the beach, however, aliens are there to capture Stitch. Loki looks really worried, rocking back and forth again and wringing his hands together.

At first, it seems like Stitch is going to be taken away, and he asks if he can say goodbye, after correcting the Grand Councilwoman about his name being Stitch, not Experiment 626. As Lilo hugs the handcuffed Stitch, the Grand Councilwoman asks "Who are you?"

"This is my family." Stitch explains. "I found it all on my own. It's little, and broken, but still good. Yeah, still good."

Then, Cobra asks Lilo whether she bought Stitch. She runs up to the Grand Councilwoman and shows her the adoption form, saying that if she takes Stitch, she's stealing. The Grand Councilwoman decides that Stitch can stay on Earth with Lilo and frees him from the handcuffs. She then asks Cobra Bubbles why he looks familiar, and he says he was in the CIA previously. Tony smirks. This guy really is like a Disney Fury, being a secret agent and all that.

The credits show photos of Stitch with his new family, which sort of includes Jumba and Pleakley.

"Stitch isn't a monster anymore." Loki says in an awed voice. "Like Quasimodo. Like, Stitch was a monster, but he's not now, an' he's good."

"Yeah. He didn't have to be a monster, so he decided not to be." Tony says, glancing briefly at Bruce. "Anyone can change, you know."

"Jumba changed too." Loki mutters. He'd seemed confused about that at first.

"Well, if Stitch can change, so can he." Tony shrugs. "Stitch changed, and he has a family now."
Loki laughs, wriggling around like a puppy. "And Lilo loves him even though he's blue and he wrecked stuff." Loki says. "And he loves her even though Myrtle says she's weird."

"You bet. Stitch found where he belongs."

"In Asgard, sometimes..." Loki starts to say, fiddling with his fingers.

"Sometimes...?" Tony prompts when Loki doesn't say anything for a bit.

"Am I 'llowed to tell you?" Loki asks.

"Of course. You're not going to get in trouble." Well, unless it turns out he murdered someone, but Tony really doesn't think that's what Loki's going to say. He's not even sure why he keeps thinking that.

"Promise you won't laugh at me, 'kay?" Loki says, looking at him intently. Tony and Bruce both nod, and Tony really hopes that whatever Loki's going to say isn't funny in some way or he might accidentally break that promise. But they'll cross that bridge when they get there.

"Sometimes... we pretended we was a family." Loki says.

"Who did?" Bruce asks quietly, as if he didn't like where this was going.

"Me an' Sleipnir an' Fenrir and Jormungand and Hel. We was a monster family." Loki says quietly, staring out the window instead of at them. He traces a finger over the glass to some pattern seen only by him, and he hugs Simba with his other arm. "Is that okay?"

"Of course it's okay. And you guys aren't monsters, Loki." Tony can't think of how anyone could possibly find something to laugh at this. In the fact that Loki felt he needed to make up his own family because nobody around him would accept him as theirs. Not even Odin, the man who decided to take Loki in in the first place.

"So did you guys adopt each other as siblings?" Tony asks, trying to alleviate some of the sombre mood. But seriously- they're all different species, except for perhaps Hel and Loki, who are at least both human-ish. The rest of them are animals.

Loki shrugs, but then says "Sometimes, we pretended I was the father." He seems to find the expression on Tony's face funny, since he giggles.

"You were the father?!" Tony asks somewhat incredulously.

"Yeah, 'cause I was around first and, like, I mades 'em in my head, I think? So that kinda makes me their father, like how Jumba made Stitch and Elsa mades Olaf 'n Marshmallow the snow Hulk, right?"

Tony still can't help but notice that there have been an increase in what he's guessing are All-Tongue glitches, with removed syllables and random S's added to words. Not even that, but he's made some grammatical errors that he hadn't made before, like saying *bringed* instead of *brought*, or that *we was* thing he'd said. Why would Loki be going backwards? Maybe the drugs had affected his speech? Tony tries to think of when these glitches had increased but is unable to think of an exact time.

"I suppose so. More like a creator, but I guess you could be a father figure." Tony says, because while it's a bit of a stretch, he supposes he could kind of be considered Jarvis and Dum-E's father. Almost as if reading his thoughts, Loki says "Jarvis says you made him and Dum-E."
'Xcept once-" Loki flicks his fingers against the window. "Once, I hads a dream where I was in my field with my horses, and I turned into a horse!" He claps his hands, delighted, and says "I loved it! I wish I coulda been a horse there when I was awake, too."

Tony wonders how this is related to pretending they were a family, until it hits him. "I see, so you were a horse like Sleipnir."

Loki nods happily. He starts snickering and can barely get a word out. "A-and" Loki now has his knuckles stuffed in his mouth.

"And...?" Tony prompts once the god's snickering has subsided, only for it to start back up again.

"And I hads another dream where-" Another bout of snickering. "my Sleipnir came outta me."

"Sleipnir came out of you?" Tony knows that his own expression is a mirror of Bruce's- a look of total confusion. Loki seems to find their faces hysterical, as he starts cackling and wriggling around in his seat, until he's gasping for breath.

Eventually, he calms down somewhat, but still seems to have trouble getting the words out between his snickers and giggles.

"Yeah! That's how L-Lady Frigga said babies are made, you know. You gets real fat for a while, and then a baby comes out, 'xcept it's not like pooping, nope nope nope! 'Cause babies aren't poop." Loki says this entirely seriously, it seems, as if there was actually someone challenging that.

"You know that only works for women, right?" Tony says, trying his hardest not to laugh, though he can feel a smile already forming on his lips that refuses to be forced down. "And how does a horse come out a human? I mean, unless you have some other abilities we don't know about..."

"I was a horse then." Loki replies as though Tony's being dumb, although he'd only mentioned being a horse in the first dream. "A mare." Loki stresses, before adding that a mare's a girl horse, in case Tony didn't know. He actually didn't, not that he'll admit that.

"Why were you a mare?" Wow. Okay. Loki's mind certainly is... interesting. Well, he'd always known that, but still... There's no way Loki can just switch genders. Or species. "I'm not even sure I want to know." He mutters.

Loki answers anyways. "I dunno. 'Cause it was a dream?" Loki shrugs, and Tony supposes he's reading too much into this. After all, who doesn't have weird dreams? Never let it be said that Loki's dreams are boring. "But Sleipnir sometimes called me Mummy when we pretended, 'cause of thats."

"Okay, so you pretended you were a family?" Tony prompts, wondering if this is going somewhere or just a story in it's own right. He also wonders if Loki had just made up the whole mare part right now to mess with them, as he'd seemed to love the results. Considering that Loki's revealed a mischievous side recently, Tony actually wouldn't put it past him.

"Yeah, but then they had'ta go 'ways, and family's not supposed to leave. That's what Lilo says. 'Nobody gets left behind. Or forgotten'... I didn't forget them."

Tony isn't sure what to say to this, and Bruce looks like he's about to say something, but Loki beats them both to it.

"You know what?"
"What?"

"I think I gots another family now, so it's not just my monster family anymore. And nobody can say it's not reals, nope nope nope."

Tony spares a glance with Bruce, wondering if this is going where he thinks it's going. "Who's in this family?"

"My Tony..." Loki mutters almost wistfully, leaning up against Tony. Tony puts an arm around him without really thinking about it, the habit so automatic after calming Loki down over the weeks. Tony's about to ask whether it's just him when Loki goes on.

"My Tony 'n Jarvis 'n Bruce 'n Hulk-y 'n Pepper 'n Dum-E 'n Simba... It's my family, my Ohana, and nobody gets left behind or forgotten, ever! Not even when Thor comes not when they're in petri dish cells. Ands they don't see a freaky worthless monster, nope nope nope!"

Loki’s fiddling with Toy Stark and the Loki action figure. Suddenly, they change colors and Tony shares a glance with Bruce when he realizes the Loki one is blue.

Then he notices that Toy Stark is covered in the same design that's on Lilo's dress- white leaves on a red background.

"Of course we don't see a monster." Tony says. "You're not a monster, remember?"

"Like Boo and Stitch and Elsa and Quasimodo aren't monsters?" Loki asks, looking at him with wide eyes. He waves his Quasimodo figurine in Tony's face.

"Just like that." Tony smiles.

"My family's never gonna leave me behind, right? 'Cause you didn't leave me in the city ands you didn't leave me in the glass either."

"Never." Tony says. "We're never going to leave you."

Loki smiles even more. "And you're never gonna forget 'bouts me, right?"

"Trust me, there's no way I'm ever forgetting about you."

Loki stares intently at him, clearly working out whether to believe this or not. Then, he sticks out his pinky. Grinning, Tony interlocks their pinkies and says "Pinky promise."

Loki grins. "Pinky promise." He echoes, before Tony interlocks their other pinkies, claiming it's a double pinky promise, which makes Loki collapse into a giggling fit. For a bit, nobody says anything.

"You know what else?" Loki asks.

"What?"

"I thinks... I think I love my family." Loki flaps his hand wildly and laughs as he singsongs the words my family like it's they're the greatest words in the world.

Smiling slightly, Bruce asks "What do you love most about your family?"

"That my very own Tony's in it, 'cause he's my best friend and he's the nicest person ever! And he doesn't let anyone hurt me."
"Bambi, you're making me blush." Tony says teasingly as he smiles slightly and pulls Loki closer. To be honest, he actually sort of likes this idea. Sad as it may sound to outsiders, Jarvis and Dum-E really are Tony's family, and he already considers some of the Avengers to be sort of like family. Mostly Bruce and Clint. Loki, to be honest, had already sort of felt like family (maybe it's because they've been living together), but he's not sure Loki knows that.

Quietly, so quietly he doesn't even think Bruce hears, Tony whispers "And I've got my own Loki in mine."

Chapter End Notes

Lilo & Stitch is my favorite movie of all time. Also, remember that scene way back in chapter 16 where Tony brings pizza to Loki's room after making him freak out? That was a reference to the scene in Lilo & Stitch after Nani and Lilo's fight.
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Tony decides to bring Loki and Bruce along to Stark Industries, and Loki stumbles across the kids in the daycare.

Bruce can't hide a smile as he watches Loki declare that they're family. He vaguely hears Tony whisper something affirmative, which Tony probably didn't want him to hear, and Bruce's smile grows a little more. Loki snuggles up with his head near Tony's arc reactor. The genius inventor glances at Bruce and rolls his eyes almost fondly.

"Say it again?" Loki asks Tony, almost sounding worried that he misheard the man. "We're family, right? Ohana?"

"I think we just established that. Yes, we're family. Okay, legally, we're technically- No I'm not even going to go there. We're family." Tony says, which confirms Bruce's theory about him whispering to Loki minutes ago about how they're family now.

Loki suddenly stops hugging Tony with one arm and slaps his own cheek very forcefully. Tony reaches out to grab his wrist. "Hey, don't hit yourself." A look of realization crosses the billionaire's face, and he adds "Trust me, this isn't a dream. And you don't have to smack yourself to tell that you're awake. You can give yourself a light pinch or poke or something. No need to beat yourself up." Tony demonstrates by pinching his own arm.

"Again?" Loki grins up at Tony hopefully.

"Don't hit yourself this time." Tony says, grabbing Loki's wrist again. Loki nods hesitantly. "We're family." Tony says, and Loki squeals and flicks his fingers. He buries his head into Tony's shoulder, half giggling, half crying.

"Uh, Bambi, you've been hugging me for almost a minute." Tony says, before mumbling "It kind of rocketed past the awkward line over fifty seconds ago. And Bruce, wipe that grin off your face." Bruce only sort of tries to remove the grin from his face while Tony glares at him, partially seriously.

Then, it's Bruce's turn. The hug Loki gives him isn't as awkwardly long, but when it ends, Loki just sits there to gaze at him contemplatively.

Loki blurts out randomly. "What happened to yours?"

Bruce isn't sure what Loki's talking about at first.

"My what?"

"Family." Loki stares at him intently.

"My... family?" Bruce asks unsurely. Both his parents are actually dead, and he knows both of Tony's parents are, too.
Loki nods. "Hulk-y's too."

"They're... not here." Bruce says eventually. He half expects Loki to take that literally as in *right here in this very plane*, and say something along the lines how obvious that is.

"It was rainy, and they went for a drive." Loki says, and Bruce realizes that Lilo had said the same thing, although she'd said it before asking Stitch what happened to his family. Bruce has to wonder if Loki's just quoting the character, or if he actually understood the unspoken words about them being dead.

Loki continues quoting Lilo. "I hear you cry at night. Do you dream about them?"

Bruce actually does have nightmares, but they're less about his family and more about Hulking out and killing everyone. Besides, he doubts Loki actually knows about them, or Tony for that matter. He's had a couple since moving into the tower, but thankfully Jarvis has kept his secret.

Loki seems to be staring into Bruce, as if he's talking directly to the Other Guy. "I know that's why you wreck things, and push me." Bruce knows he's quoting Lilo here, but it's oddly relevant. Hulk, like Stitch, had wrecked things and so far, the only time he'd assaulted Loki had just been a simple push. But the Other Guy's just an angry monster, right?

"You can be part of ours. Wanna be?" Loki asks Bruce, or maybe he's asking the Other Guy. Loki had listed off both of them when listing people he considers to be members of his family, but Bruce is still somewhat surprised Loki's inviting them into his little family. The Other Guy has pushed Loki and attacked Tony, too. But he's also hugged Loki and contentedly watched *Beauty and the Beast* with the god. Not to mention, he does seem quite protective of Loki, as evidenced by confronting Thor, although that had been in a rather violent, monstrous way.

Bruce notices that the Other Guy seems less angry. Actually, he almost seems happy, and not the kind of happy as when he gets to smash things. Bruce has noticed that the Other Guy seems to calm down in his mind whenever Loki's hugging either Bruce or the Other Guy, almost like he actually likes Loki's hugs. This is a really welcome change, since the Other Guy isn't too crazy about planes.

The Other Guy seems to really like the idea of family. Which is somewhat surprising, but then again he really seems to like Loki.

"Yeah, we do like our family." Bruce says with a small smile.

"My family's the bestest." Loki grins and claps his hands, moving back to sit next to Tony.

"I noticed you've been speaking differently." Tony blurts out randomly, completely tactless. "Um, is there a reason for that?"

Bruce has noticed that recently, too. He'd noticed the weird Ss added to words even before yesterday, but had chalked it up to All-Tongue glitches. This, though, seems to be something else, something that worryingly sounds more serious. Loki's making grammar mistakes he hadn't made before, and Bruce has noticed it a couple times here on the plane.

Whatever it is, that can't be good. What if the sedatives S.H.I.E.L.D gave Loki yesterday caused this? Bruce doesn't know how Loki's body or brain would react to those sedatives, since his body has to be a bit different. He's an alien, after all. Still, Thor had assured him that those drugs wouldn't have any permanent negative effects on Loki, and for another, some of it had been happening before yesterday.
"Hard. Harder nows." Loki says, looking down and biting his lip slightly. Bruce tries to think of some other reason for speaking to suddenly be harder. Stroke? Bruce sort of doubts people like Loki can get strokes.

"Speaking's harder now?" Tony asks, concerned.

Loki shakes his head. "Can say more than there." Tony looks about as confused as Bruce feels, because it certainly seems like he's able to express himself less than he could before, so how does this work?

"I thought you just said speaking is harder?" Tony asks, and Loki nods. What? Why does he keep contradicting himself?

Bruce asks him how it's harder, and he and Tony wait. For a bit, it doesn't even seem like Loki's going to answer, but then he does. "They gets out bad. Wrong. They gets out wrong. Comes out wrong."

"What comes out wrong?"

"Not same heres" Loki waves a hand in the general direction around him, looking very frustrated. "As heres." He points to his own head, frowning. "Stupid!" He suddenly screeches, slapping his palm against his right temple.

Tony reflexively grabs his wrist and says again "Loki, don't hit yourself. And you're not stupid." He sounds like he means it, too (although, to be honest, Bruce is pretty sure that anyone who Tony thinks is stupid has been told so by Tony).

"All wrong. Like more glitches." Loki frowns. "Well... right in here," He points to his forehead. "But wrong heres." He adds, pointing to his mouth.

Tony has his phone out now and mentions Broca's Aphasia, or Expressive Aphasia. Apparently he's already researching the problem. Bruce remembers reading about this in one of his college psych classes. Basically, it makes it hard for someone to speak or write, but it doesn't really explain why Loki only seems to be showing signs of it now. Bruce isn't going to just jump to the conclusion that Loki has it, and at least it seems like Tony isn't going to either.

It's a pity they're not still in the tower where they have all sorts of things like MRI's, F-MRI's and other brain scanning equipment on the various medical floors. Then again, considering that Jarvis' sensors apparently pick up on some weird sort of energy around Loki (undoubtedly his magic), Bruce starts to doubt that those machines would even work on him. Of course, this hypothetical scenario all depends on if they could do the whole scan without Loki freaking out about being in said machine, which isn't certain, especially after the incident at the Helicarrier yesterday.

"Are the words stuck in your head?" Tony asks while reading something on his phone. Bruce can see through the holographic screen of the Stark Phone, which currently shows a bunch of text, though he can't read what the text says from over here.

"It's lower now." Loki says, seemingly irrelevantly. "Use it lesser now. Harder without All... Talk? Speak? All-Speak!"

"Wait, you're not using All-Tongue?" Bruce asks, caught by surprise.

"Can't gets it to go 'way totally, 'specially not in my ears. But I use it lessers now in my mouth and it's reallly... really hard, it is. Using it the leastest now, but it's still kinda there? Not listening to it 'xcept for getting words, but it's all wrong from my mouth." Loki groans, sounding very frustrated.
as he rocks back and forth, flapping one of his hands and fiddling with the tuft on the end of Simba's tail.

Tony blinks. "Wait, so why are you speaking without All-Tongue? I think it would be awesome, having a handy super-translator in my head."

Loki frowns. "'Cause... I'm reading it and write it too?" He frowns. "Easy then, 'cause it's slow and I can think 'bout it mores. Ands I don't wanna... talk Asgard's stinky... langauge. Don't want it to sound like there in my head!" After a bit, he adds. "I cheated, 'cause I used All-Tongue for that. And this. Didn't know the words. All-Tongue's lots easier, but still not perfect, nope nope nope, 'cause it glitches."

Tony's eyebrows rise in surprise, and Bruce is sure his own are doing the same. He hadn't known Loki was trying to not use All-Tongue in the first place. "How long have you been doing this?"

Loki shrugs. "Most right now. Somes before. Can't gets it all off, but mosts now."

Bruce, once Loki mentioned trying not to use All-Tongue, has relaxed considerably. At least this doesn't hint towards anything serious. Still, he's shocked at how well Loki's doing, considering he's trying to speak a language he's heard for less than forty-five days, and also considering that his language is a little strange even with All-Tongue. Then again, Loki had said he can't totally shut it off, and Bruce isn't sure how much translation is going on in the background. Loki had said something about getting words with it.

Still, Bruce is impressed, particularly at Loki's drive to speak a different language when he has a simple solution at his fingertips that probably requires minimal or even no effort.

"Hey, you're doing a good job." Tony says, putting a hand on Loki's shoulder.

"You really are." Bruce smiles softly. "You're doing well with reading and writing, too." Loki gives him a million-dollar smile, showing a fair number of teeth. It's not empty praise either. Loki has seriously impressed him with the rate he's been reading and writing, presumably without All-Tongue. Sure, it's not perfect, but it's a lot farther than Bruce feels most people would have gotten after only being exposed to it for about a month and a half. And Bruce hadn't even started teaching Loki to write in English right away.

"I'm not sure if you want corrections or not," Tony says. "But it's least and less, not leastest and lesser. Still, great job, though."

"Oh." Loki says simply. "It's harder to have off. Too long.

"What? All-Tongue?"

Loki nods and sighs. "Hard to get it not there, hard to speak with it not there. It's all back now, you know. It was gone for too long, and it wanted to come back." He sighs. "Gonna just use it now, 'kay?" Both of them assure him that's fine.

"If you want," Bruce offers, "I could teach you to speak in English, like how I've been helping you with reading and writing without translating."

"Yes please! Thank you!" Loki grins, clearly loving the idea.

The rest of the plane ride, Loki doodles on paper, looking very restless as he shifts around in his seat. He draws Stitch- he'd obviously loved the blue alien- and then spends considerable time on another drawing of a small crowd.
Bruce and Tony both look at that one when he's done. Loki's in the center, holding Simba. Tony's right next to him, but closer to the right side of the paper than the left. To the right of Tony is Bruce himself, and behind him is Hulk (Loki drew them as two separate people). To the right of Hulk are Pepper and Dum-E, and at the very end is a blue sphere that is supposed to be the holographic representation of Jarvis, even though Loki's only seen the AI's "body" a couple times.

On the left side are what Bruce is pretty sure are Hel, Fenrir, Sleipnir and Jormungand, judging from previous drawings and the Jormungand accessory with little charms of the other three. For some reason, Elsa is also featured in the drawing.

"So what's this a drawing of?" Tony asks, quirking an eyebrow at Loki.

"My families. Both of 'em. Here's my Midgard family, Ohana like Stitch." Loki points to the right side of the page, where Bruce and Tony are. "And here's my Monster family." Loki points to Sleipnir, Fenrir, Hel and Jormungand and Elsa.

"Elsa's part of your family?" Bruce asks, somewhat confused.

Loki shrugs. "Maybe. We're... we're both Jotuns, and she's a princess, and Laufey's the king of Jotunheim." Loki says in a quiet voice. He clearly still doesn't like talking about Jotunheim, and Bruce is surprised he actually is.

"But the King and Queen in Frozen weren't Jotuns, were they?" Tony asks. "And they're the reason Elsa's a princess."

Bruce is pretty sure they weren't Jotuns- it's somewhat debatable if Elsa even is, although it does help Loki a lot- but Loki apparently considers himself and her to be related. He fiddles with his Elsa doll and says "Maybe she's my sister. I'd like that."

Bruce isn't entirely sure what to say.

Eventually, the plane lands. Loki seems eager to get off, and actually undoes his seatbelt before he's supposed to.

Loki seems somewhat reluctant to put on sandals, and seems ready to kick them off until he, for some reason, crouches down to brush a hand against the asphalt, which is being heated up by the sun. He yanks his hand back, at first letting out a yelp and then practically hissing like a cat, and sucks on his palm for a bit. When he pulls his hand away from his mouth, Bruce swears he sees some frost on Loki's palm. When he gets a closer look, he sees there's also an ice cube poking out of Loki's mouth, but Loki hadn't been drinking anything with ice before.

Loki is perfectly content to keep his sandals on after that, clearly not liking the idea of walking on hot asphalt. Then again, Bruce would be somewhat impressed with anyone who chose to walk across this long stretch of hot ground. He certainly has no desire to put his skin up against it, and as a Jotun born for a very cold climate, that's got to be even worse.

Loki prances around, singing some song from that movie about horses he'd watched on the plane. He sings to the beat of his footsteps, hugging Simba with one arm and galloping Maximus through the air with the other.

"Under the starry sky, Where eagles have flown

This place is paradise. It's the place I call home

And everything I want, Is everything that's here
And when we're all together. There's nothing to fear.

Waiting for them by a car are Pepper Potts and a man in a suit, who Tony introduces as Happy Hogan. Tony seems slightly surprised but pleased to see Happy here.

Apparently, they're running late to some important board meeting, so they're rather quickly loaded into the back of the car, while Happy takes their luggage into the trunk. Loki seems very disappointed about being strapped to a seat again.

"So who are your friends?" Happy asks Tony, and Bruce sees the driver glance back at him and Loki in the mirror.

"Bruce Banner." Bruce introduces himself, not exactly surprised he wasn't recognized. After all, Bruce himself isn't even as well known as the Other Guy, who people know from the Battle of New York and subsequent battles. Well, Bruce is still known, but not as much as, say, Tony.

Happy claims he already knew that, which means he was mostly asking about Loki. The god pipes up on the subject of Bruce, cheerfully saying "He turns into Hulk-y, and Hulk-y turns into him... like, like a circle." He makes a circular motion with his hand and says "Bruce, Hulk-y, Bruce, Hulk-y."

"It's the ciicircle of Bruuuuuuce!" Loki suddenly sings the melody to Circle of Life, looking like he's trying not to laugh as he thrusts his Bruce Banner action figure in the air like Rafiki holding Simba. "When he be-comes Huuuuulk!" As Loki sings this next part, he changes the Bruce toy into the Hulk one, and he looks rather pleased with himself before he's unable to contain his own laughter.

Bruce actually finds himself smiling at that.

Loki's too busy laughing to introduce himself at the moment, so Tony mentions his name. Once he stops laughing, Loki exclaims "Tony and Bruce are my family now." He nods happily and turns to Pepper. "I drew you in my family too."

"Did you now?" Pepper asks, smiling, and Loki pulls his picture out of his drawstring bag to show her, pointing out each individual member. He then shows her his drawing of Stitch and goes into a lengthy description of the little blue alien while hugging Simba.

Loki looks slightly nervous as he asks Pepper "Do you... do you wanna be part of my family? My Midgard Ohana?"

Pepper smiles slightly and says "Well, I'm in your drawing, right?"

Loki grins at her, clapping his hands.

Pepper glances at her watch and says "Happy, we really are running late. I guess you should drop Tony and I off at Stark Industries and drop Bruce and Loki off at Tony's house, after."

"Nah, I want to give them the full tour of my house personally." Tony says and looks at Bruce and Loki. "You two are coming with us."

Bruce looks down at his clothing, which is rumpled as usual, and then at Loki. Neither of them are exactly passable as employees (especially Loki), and he just raises his eyebrows questioningly.

"Really?" Pepper asks just as skeptically as Bruce feels. "Tony, what are they going to do all day? And don't say you're bringing them to the meeting."
"What? You think I would subject them to hours of tortuous boredom?" Tony asks, smirking, before becoming slightly more serious. "There are spare labs there. They can just hang out in one of them and do whatever. I mean, basically all our time is spent in various labs in the tower, anyways, so it's not like it's a big change. Heck, I can get them their own lab, probably. What do you say, guys?" He grins at them.

Bruce sighs, knowing they're not going to be able to talk Tony out of this ridiculous idea, and he glances at Loki. Loki just stares at Tony and asks "I'm gonna get to stay with you?"

"You're going to get to see where I work." Tony answers. "But you're going to be with Bruce for the day."

"You sure people won't care that we're not dressed up?" Bruce asks skeptically, resigning himself to the fact he's going to be spending the day at Stark Industries. He sincerely hopes he won't have an incident with the Other Guy.

Tony sighs and says "What part of a private lab don't you understand?" At least privacy greatly reduces the risk of Hulking out. Bruce is grateful for the fact they'll get a private lab. Loki, however, is glancing between Tony's suit and his own clothes.

"You want us to wear those?" He asks. Tony doesn't actually confirm it, but Loki's clothes begin to morph into a nice-fitting suit that looks nearly identical to Tony's. It would actually look spiffy, although the effect is sort of ruined by the Jormungand accessory - currently in its unanimated necklace form - his starry long coat, which was unaffected by the magical clothing-transormation, and the fact he's wearing sandals with a suit. However, his hair actually appears more tamed than usual.

Loki looks down at his clothes in surprise, his mouth forming a little 'o' shape. "Well, don't you look snazzy?" Tony says with a slight smirk, and Bruce bets that Tony's hoping Loki won't freak out. To their relief, he doesn't, instead grinning and saying "They're just like your... you said it's a suit, right?"

"You look just like Tony in that suit." Pepper says, smiling, clearly choosing to ignore the coat, snake and lack of shoes. Loki grins even wider, obviously liking being like Tony.

The billionaire can't seem to resist adding "I wear it better, though. And I'm way hotter." That seems to fly over Loki's head, or maybe he just doesn't care at all.

"Good job staying calm." Bruce says, smiling, glad that Loki hadn't freaked out about his magic.

Loki seems to glow a little at the praise. "Elsa changed clothes too. And Toy Stark and Hulk-y change a lot!"

Loki looks between them again as he tries to wriggle out of his long coat, clearly noticing that Tony's not wearing one. Now, he doesn't stick out quite as much - that coat is certainly an eye catcher. Now, the only abnormalities are the snake, Simba, and sandals coupled with a business suit.

Loki actually undoes his seatbelt to take off his coat, and seems very annoyed about strapping himself back in. Admittedly, he'd probably survive a car crash even if they got in one, thanks to his super durability, and they're not likely to get in a crash anyways, but still...

They pull up to Stark Industries, and Loki seems very eager about getting out of the car and as far away from his seatbelt as possible.
Loki's bored out of his mind. This room that Tony had left him and Bruce in is sort of like Tony's and Bruce's labs, only without as much space to move around and without all the clutter like Tony's lab. Bruce is doing... something. Loki has no clue what it is, but Bruce seems very absorbed in it. Loki sighs, really wanting to stretch his legs. He'd kicked off his sandals a while ago and, while they're not bad, he really prefers being barefoot.

Still, despite the boredom, all in all, today's turned out to be great. Tony had said they're family, and Pepper said she'd be part of his family, too. It had almost seemed too good to be true and Loki had thought perhaps he was dreaming, like when finding out they still liked him after Thor came.

After all, Loki had thought it was weird enough that Tony thought of him as a friend, wondering who would want to consider themselves friends with a Frost Giant. But Tony doesn't seem to care about that at all. Loki has been thinking recently, Tony's a really great friend, and they've been living together almost like a family. Of course, he'd lived with Odin for centuries and centuries and Odin never felt like family, but Odin's really mean whereas Tony's really nice.

Besides it turns out that Frost Giants and weird blue creatures like Stitch can be family with people totally different than them. Anna doesn't care about how Elsa's a Jotun, and Anna and Elsa are family, but Anna's not a Jotun. Stitch and Lilo are a family, too, and they're nothing alike. And he and Tony and Bruce and Hulk are a family, too.

He should have been nervous about talking about families like he had a little bit ago- both his monster family and his new family with his Tony- but he wasn't. He's said so many things here that wouldn't have gone over well at all in Asgard and Tony's never made him feel like an idiot for them.

He'd told them about how Sleipnir and the others were his pretend family and they hadn't laughed, and then he'd even said he thought of them as family, hardly daring to hope that they'd ever feel the same way about him. Especially since he kind of threw pencils into the wall while watching that movie with Stitch and Lilo. He'd pulled his pencils out of the wall, feeling rather bad about it. He'd been worried that Tony would be mad at him, but at least he didn't have to worry about being beaten anymore, since Tony's promised not to hit him. Tony had seemed slightly annoyed, yet at the same time, seemed shocked and almost impressed.

But Tony even agreed they were family! Loki grins, and after a bit, idly sings one of the songs from *Spirit* to himself.

"Here I am, so young and strong,

Right here in the place, where I belong."

Loki knows where he belongs- with his family. His grin grows even wider, and he doesn't even think he could possibly stop grinning as he flicks his fingers happily.

For a while, Loki entertains himself with going over these recent events as he sits on a table and swings his long legs idly. He's fiddling with the box-like thing that had been clipped to his pocket. He'd unclipped it and is bouncing it up and down with the elastic cord it's attached to, which is really fun. Tony had said he can talk to people in that box, and that it's called a phone, and that Jarvis can talk through it, too. Right now, though, he's too busy thinking to talk to Jarvis.

He still really wants to stretch his legs.

He asks Bruce if he can run around, and Bruce glances at him, saying not to leave the hallway right outside the lab. Loki nods as he grabs Simba and heads out the door.
Loki gallops down the hall and back in his bare feet, wondering if this is what it's like to be a horse. They always run so fast, and Loki thinks that would be really fun to be one. He imagines Sleipnir trotting beside him, and he can actually see his horse friend, now. He grins and starts to race Sleipnir, who's a lot faster than him, being a horse and having eight legs. Loki ups his pace and tries to catch up to the gray form in front of him, and Sleipnir says that there's no way Loki can win. Loki sprints even more, but Sleipnir still beats him.

Loki doesn't mind too much, though. He always loses to Sleipnir, unless Sleipnir lets him win, although Loki can tell when he's doing that, so that never feels like much of a victory. Sleipnir prances around happily as he says he wins.

He suddenly realizes that he's nowhere near where he started out, having gone through some turns and a bunch of other hallways in the effort to keep his race with Sleipnir going. Sleipnir has no clue where they are, either.

Great. Bruce had said he wasn't supposed to leave that hallway. He's probably going to be mad when he finds out.

He bites his lip and asks "Jarvis?" There's no response, and Loki frowns. Jarvis had even been there eventually when he'd been in that glass thing yesterday, and he's supposed to be in that phone thing...

It's only then that he realizes he'd left the phone back in the lab, having never put it back in his pocket like Tony's said he's supposed to. Tony's probably going to be mad about him not listening, just like Bruce is going to be mad about him leaving that hallway. Loki hates the thought of making both Tony and Bruce mad.

He glances around and spots one of those metal doors that means an elevator, like in the tower. He remembers that there had been elevator doors by the lab Bruce had been in, and Loki's noticed that elevators travel between elevator doors. So maybe he can get back that way?

Loki presses one of the buttons outside the elevator, which he knows by now open the doors, although this elevator's taking its sweet time. Eventually, it shows up, and there's nobody else in there. Loki looks at the rows and rows of buttons, wondering which one to press. Tony had said he'd been some floors down, right? So he should go down, but Loki has no clue which floor he's on. So he figures he should just press one of the buttons near the bottom.

He's pretty sure that the lab is somewhere to his right, so he figures he should push one of the buttons on the right-most column of buttons. However, the elevator lurches downwards, so he's definitely not going the right way. He hugs Simba as his mind imagines all sorts of horrible things that could be awaiting him when the doors open again. Maybe it'll be like that room with the rafters, which led to him being in that petri dish cage...

When the doors open, though, it's actually quite colorful and not at all threatening. Loki sees a bunch of really tall shelves with bag-like things in them, and a lot of the bags have pictures or patterns on them. There's even one that looks like Steve's shield. Wondering what these things are doing here, Loki takes that bag off the hook its hanging on and curiously looks at it. The straps definitely aren't strings, like his drawstring bag, and it doesn't close by pulling on the straps. There are these tiny plastic things he has to pull along little tracks that look like teeth. The thing he pulls locks the teeth together when he pulls it one way.

It's almost like sewing a mouth shut...

Loki closes his eyes and hastily shoves the bag back where it had been, hugging Simba tightly and
rocking back and forth. *No, can't think of that can't think of that... The silver stallion gallops away, His herd follows him and they start to neigh...*

"*Their hoofs beat to the stars and moon above*

*Just follow them to find the one you love."

Loki and Sleipnir sing the song together and it helps him calm down somewhat.

There's suddenly a scream from somewhere, and he jumps, badly startled, and his heart races again.

Part of him tells him to go away, to turn back to the elevator, but part of him wants to find out what the scream was. Other screams follow it, but they don't sound like scared screams. They sound... young.

He goes down the hallway to where there's an open door. He stares at the room, which is full of children running around and screaming. Loki cautiously enters, looking around as he clutches Simba tightly. Does Tony know this place is here?

He enters the room and immediately there are children crowding around his legs, looking up at him and shouting a million questions. Loki stares down at them, unsure how to react. All the children he's known haven't been too nice to him, but that was mostly Thor and his friends when they were children.

They don't seem very scary, except for one, who whacks his leg with a doll. Loki edges away from that one. Well, even that one isn't actually *scary*, per se, not like the Warriors Three, just mean. Loki's a lot taller than these kids, though. They're only toddlers, and none of them even come up to his waist, so they probably can't hurt him. It's not like getting hit with that doll hurt. Loki has a feeling it hurt the doll a lot more than it hurt him.

"Who are you?" At least four different children shout, and the question is also asked by an adult, a lot closer to Loki's size than the kids but still shorter.

Loki doesn't answer, hoping they don't know he's a Jotun, because maybe they're not like Tony and they hate those sorts of things.

"I'm Tony." A little boy announces.

"No you're not." Loki, wondering if this child's trying to jest. This kid is a lot shorter than Tony, and he has bright red hair instead of dark hair. Plus he doesn't even have a beard, or an arc reactor, and there's the obvious part about him being a kid...

"Yes." The kid says again, even though he's clearly not.

"No." Loki shoots back with a snicker. He's not fooled at all.

"Yes!"

"No!" Loki's pretty sure he wouldn't even need All-Tongue for this.

"Uh huh!"

"Nuh uh!"

"Yes! It's my name!"
"You took Tony's name." Loki frowns at him, wondering how Tony will feel finding out this kid stole his name. He'd probably be annoyed at this kid. "You can't be Tony. So there." Loki concludes decisively, smirking slightly. That had been an easy argument to win. He looks away from the child, glancing around the room without the kids. He spots a shelf with plastic horses on it, and he grins heading over.

With Simba tucked under one arm, Loki grabs one that's sort of a yellowish color like Spirit. He sits down with Simba in his lap and starts to prance the horse around the shelf, singing one of the songs from the movie with Spirit.

"Here I am. This is me

I come into this world so wild and free."

Suddenly, a little girl with straight blonde hair crawls into Loki's lap next to Simba and grabs part of his Jormungand necklace. Loki blinks and looks down at her, uncertain of what to do. This has never happened before.

The little girl is wearing a blue shirt. It's almost the shade of his Jotun skin, actually. He wonders why she'd want to wear something Jotun colored, because it's sort of like pretending to have Jotun skin, in a way. On the shirt is some sort of blue... creature, with a round head, a large toothless mouth, and two eyes on top of said head. The eyes are basically white circles with smaller black circles in them.

Loki's still not too big on blue, but it can't be all bad. After all, the sky is blue, and the night sky is sometimes just a really dark blue, and Tony's arc reactor is sort of blue. Besides, Stitch, Sulley and Genie are all blue, and Elsa wears blue and they're not bad.

"Is your snake real?" The girl asks him, still looking at Jormungand. "My mommy says snakes are gwoss, but she says mouses are too and they're cute. Like Mickey."

"Snakes aren't gross." Loki frowns, before answering the girl's question. "He moves and sometimes he hugs me, but sometimes he's not this snake, nope nope nope. Sometimes he's like Fenrir." Fenrir's never tangible, along with Sleipnir and Hel, although Loki really wishes they were. Fenrir would be really nice to curl up with, Loki thinks.

The girl, still in Loki's lap, grabs one of the other toy horses, trotting it up Loki's arm and then across Simba. She squeals out Simba's name and then asks "Why's he Iwon Man?"

Loki laughs and hugs Simba. "He's like my Tony. I made the suit 'n my Tony made the Arc Reactor. My Tony, he's my family now." Loki nods happily.

"I have a little brudder. William." The girl says. "He's two. I'm Claire and I'm four now." She holds up two fingers when talking about her brother and then adds two more when proudly stating her own age. She looks like she'd be at least a century old by now, Loki thinks, until he remembers that Tony said he's only forty-three. Loki frowns, remembering that humans die quickly. He doesn't like that.

Claire keeps talking, presumably about her brother. "He frowed up in the bafroom. He's in the sick kid room."

Loki isn't entirely sure what she's talking about, and he points to the blue creature on the girl's shirt and asks "What's that?"

"Cookie Monster." Claire says, smiling toothily. "He likes cookies! I love cookies sooo muuch!"
She dances around on her tiny feet a little and hugs her body, as if giving the picture on her shirt a hug.

Loki’s not sure what cookies are, but that’s not the important part. "He's blue." Loki observes, frowning slightly. She’d said he’s a monster, but she seems to like him. "Is he a good monster, likes Stitch? Stitch’s a good blue monster, and he doesn’t even have’ta be a monster. Like Quasi’s no monster, and Elsa too."

"Cookie Monster's funny." The girl practically shouts "Gwover's blue too. Blue's my favowite color."

"Really?" Loki doesn't know why anyone would like blue most. "Would you wanna be blue?" He asks, although it's a stupid question. Of course the answer's going to be no. He's not even sure why he asked.

"Yeah!" Claire exclaims excitedly, and Loki blinks in surprise before smiling. This girl's nicer than Sif was as a child.

The girl, fiddles with the charms hanging from the Jormungand necklace's mouth. She looks at the Hel one and says "That's a girl."

"She's Hel." Loki explains.

The girl wrinkles her nose and says "You said a bad word." Loki frowns, sad that she doesn't like his friends.

Claire runs off to an area with what looks like a mini wooden fridge, stove and cabinets, judging from the fact there's a sign that reads Play Kitchen. Loki watches the girl rummage through things before seeming to find what she's looking for. She brings it back to him and shoves it towards his mouth. It's a brown disc-like thing with small, darker brown chunks in it.

"Eat the cookie, Cookie Monster!" She says, and Loki figures she's pretending he's the thing on her shirt. At least the monster on her shirt is a good monster, like Sulley. Loki frowns and takes a curious bite, only to immediately spit it out. It's horrible!

"You like this?" Loki asks in disgust, while Claire starts to laugh.

"You don't really eat it! It's just pr'tend!" She seems to find it hysterical that he had eaten it, though.

"Claire, what are you doing? You shouldn't talk to strangers." A lady asks before looking at Loki and asking "Who are you?"

Loki doesn't like the tone he has, and he decides to mess with her a little. "Stitch." He answers, and he's pretty sure he has a straight face.

"Stitch?" The lady asks skeptically. Loki grins and curls his hands into claws, like Stitch's, and grinning with a lot of teeth showing. "That's not a real name-"

She sounds just like the woman at the pet store that Lilo got Stitch from, so Loki finishes the line for her. "...In Iceland. But here it's a good name. Stitch it is."

The lady looks at him for a bit and plasters on a smile. "Stitch, then. How did you come here? Are you lost?" Loki is sort of lost, but this lady's talking to him like he's an idiot. Loki doesn't like that, much.
"Tony said Bruce and I can come here." Okay, that's a lie, because Tony only said something about coming "to work." He said nothing about this room with children, but Loki likes it in here. Claire is really fun, and they have toy horses!

"Who's Bruce? And who's Tony?" She asks.

"Tony Stark. He's Man of Iron. And Bruce is Hulk-y. They're A-vengers." Loki nods. He's worked out that Tony's pretty famous here on Midgard, and he apparently works somewhere in this building, too (Is it an Avengers building? But then why would Bruce coming here be new?) So this woman has to know Tony at least, right?

The lady's eyes light up in recognition, and she says "Oh. Tony Stark! Of course." She doesn't sound like she believes it as she pulls a device off her belt and says something into it, but Loki's not listening.

He wonders if she'll fall for the fake food trick Claire had tricked him with. He holds out the nasty plastic thing (what had Claire called it? A coo-tie?) to the lady and tells her to eat it. The lady smiles and pretends to take a bite, and Loki's somewhat disappointed that she didn't actually bite it like he did. Maybe Claire tricked her with that, too. Loki wonders if Tony would fall for this trick, but decides he probably wouldn't. Tony's too smart for that.

Claire has grabbed his hand with her own tiny one and his tugging on his hand to lead him over to a table with water, like a mini bathtub. There's a sign by it that has a picture of the exact same table, and Loki reads the words "Water Play."

Loki can't even stand up fully when Claire's holding onto his hands, so he follows along on his knees, hugging Simba and all the plastic horses.

Claire reaches for the horses and dunkes them in the water. She reaches for Simba, too, but Loki pulls him away. "Simba can't get wet." He says, which is true. Jarvis has told him that Simba might stop talking if he gets wet, and Loki really doesn't like that. Loki never really got that, since Simba swam in the movie, but he doesn't want Simba to stop talking.

Loki continues holding Simba, hugging him tightly. It's a good thing, too, because little boy with glasses and a girl with green eyes run up and try to just take him. Loki hugs Simba tightly to his chest with one arm. The last time someone took Simba, which was only yesterday, they hadn't given him back for a while.

The little boy and girl continue to yank at Simba, and a different adult, a man, pulls them away and tells them they need to wait their turn. Both of them are screaming and crying by this point, and the man asks Loki who he is. Loki's getting really tired of all these questions, and he again says his name is Stitch, trying not to laugh as he does so.

"Is that one of our toys?" The man asks. "I can kind of imagine Mr. Stark making something like that."

Loki grins. "He dids! Well, I made the suit, but my Tony made the Arc Reactor, and, and he gots me Simba as a gift!"

"You know Tony Stark?" The man asks. Why does nobody seem to believe that? This man also speaks into one of those things he pulled off his belt, saying something about an "odd man" Loki frowns. Is this man talking about him?

Claire's been tugging on Loki's hand this whole time, and he turns back to her.
With Simba hugged tightly to his chest with one arm, Loki prances the horses through the water with Claire.

Something whirs past Loki, and he sees it's a miniature version of those car things that he hates. Only, it's driving by itself. Loki glances at the horses, wishing they could run by themselves. He starts imagining it, and suddenly, they start to. For a second, he thinks it's still his imagination, but he realizes it's not and both Loki and Claire scream in delight.

Becoming friends with Claire was almost as easy as becoming Hel or Pepper's friend. Loki wishes that making friends had been this easy in Asgard.

"You have green hands." Yet another kid suddenly says behind Loki. Loki glances at his hands and sees green magic around them, and then glances at the running plastic horses. Had he done that? That's... really neat, actually.

One of the horses puts its mouth under the water and starts to drink, but Claire claims that animals drink with their tongues. Loki knows that's wrong.

"Um..." Loki tries to think of how to say what he wants to. He's trying to speak in English instead of just speaking his usual language and letting it come out as English thanks to Allspeak. He can't really "shut off" All-Tongue, and it helps with trying to find the right words in English, but he's trying not to use it when he actually speaks. It's pretty confusing even in his head, and he's pretty sure it all comes out wrong when he doesn't use All-Tongue. Sometimes All-Tongue seems to take over, although even that's not perfect. Stuff often sounds better in his head than when it comes out of his mouth.

"Spirit... he drinked water really weird." Loki's pretty certain that hadn't come out right at all. "Like, horses, they don'ts..." He frowns and bites his lip. "They don't haves their mouth above the water and use their tongues, nope nope nope. Not like a dog." Loki shakes his head and flicks his own tongue out to demonstrate, before deciding against it. That water looks gross to drink. "They put their mouth a bit under the water, likes that." He points to the horse on the water table.

Claire doesn't seem to be listening, though, as they both watch the horses prance around. Soon there's a crowd of other kids gathered around, excitedly watching the horses run and reaching out to try to catch them. It's kind of nice, actually, having all these people really excited about something he did with his magic. Actually, Loki really likes what had happened this time, kind of like when he made Toy Stark look better.

Loki vaguely wonders if he can make Simba move sometime. Though maybe he should wait until there aren't as many grabby kids around, he thinks, looking at the small hands grasping for the horses.

Suddenly, from another part of the room, he hears a loud but high pitched cry of "HULK SMASH!" A little boy wearing big, green fake Hulk hands and a Hulk mask runs up to a tower of blocks another boy is building and punches it to the ground. The little boy who was building it bursts into tears.

Loki frowns at the Hulk boy and says "You know, you wreck everything you touch. Why don't you try making something for a change." He's going to have to remember to ask the real Hulk that when he sees him again. Loki hopes that's soon, as he scoots over to the area with the blocks (keeping a careful hold of Simba) and grabs some.

"We're gonna make the best tower ever!" He exclaims to the boy who's crying. Loki's really good at building towers. When he'd first met Bruce, they'd build a tower for that game where he had to
pull blocks out without having it fall over. It never had fallen over, actually.

Loki starts to stack some of the blocks as he hums his and Sleipnir's song, since it always calms him down. He doesn't want everyone to know the words, though. Just his family. The crying boy snifflies, wipes his nose, and grabs a block, putting it on the top of the stack. Loki looks at the boy dressed as Hulk and says "Hulk, help too!"

The boy has to take off his huge Hulk hands to even grab them, but he does. Other children crowd around and start placing blocks (Claire stands right next to Loki) while some of them go off to build their own tower.

The tower falls down when there are only eight blocks in it, but they restart, and Loki's determined to have it stay up.

Bruce is pretty sure Loki should be back by now. After all, he'd heard him running up and down the hall a couple times, and he'd said he wouldn't go far. It's been almost fifteen minutes since he left, but Bruce had been absorbed in his work. He should have been more attentive. Bruce abandons his work for a bit to poke his head out in the hallway.

There's no sign of Loki. Frowning, Bruce walks down the hall for a bit, calling Loki's name, but there's still no response.

Great. Had Loki left? Teleported accidentally? Had he gotten kidnapped or stopped by security? Bruce forces himself to take deep, calming breaths as he heads back towards the lab, although it's a little hard when he keeps thinking about how he failed, although if Loki teleported, there's no way he could have prevented it. This shouldn't be too bad, he tells himself. Hopefully it'll be nothing like yesterday, although Loki does seem to go missing a lot. After yesterday, they've started to have Loki carry around his own Stark Phone. Bruce dials Loki's number, which he'd put on speed dial yesterday, only to realize as he walks in the lab that Loki's phone is in there.

Wonderful. That sort of defeats the whole purpose. Bruce forces himself to take more deep breaths as he scans the lab, realizing that Loki left his drawstring bag with all his toys (except Simba) here.

Then he remembers that Loki has that tracking watch, and he grins. Unfortunately, he doesn't have an actual way to track him, so instead he dials Tony's number.

Pepper is at first rather annoyed when Jarvis announces from Tony's phone that he has a call until he mentions Dr. Banner's name. Tony simply answers it as he leans back in his chair, not even bothering to take it somewhere private. "You lost him? What did he do, te-" A quick glance at the board members, and he pauses before amending whatever he was going to say. "Did he pull his disappearing act again? Hopefully this won't turn out like yesterday.

Pepper frowns. Something happened to Loki, it seems, both now and something yesterday. Apparently, yesterday's thing was pretty bad. "Yeah, of course I'm going to look for him. I've got the software. What do you mean he doesn't have his phone?" Tony sighs and mutters. "Snoopy, you'd better be wearing that watch I gave you." He hangs up, not even glancing at the other board members, and starts doing something on his phone when Jarvis announces that he has another call, from the director of the daycare.

Frowning, Tony asks the AI "Why the hell is the daycare calling me?"

He answers that call and he says "What? Yeah, I know him. He's with me, and he's perfectly
harmless. He's not going to eat any of your kids or anyth-

Pepper simply snatches the phone from him, listens as they describe a strange man who had wandered into the daycare and started playing with the children, and says "Of course we'll come down."

Tony stands up to leave, presumably to check on Loki, but Pepper says "I'll go." She can totally picture Tony trying to ditch the rest of this meeting, and she'd rather that not happen. Plus he doesn't even know the people who run the daycare. She wonders how in the world he ended up there.

"Yeah, and pick up his phone beforehand. It's in the lab Bruce is in." Tony scowls at her but sits down when she glares at him. Hopefully he won't derail the entire meeting while she's gone.

She leaves and heads down towards the lab where Bruce is to pick up Loki's phone and reassure Bruce that Loki's perfectly fine and still in the building. Once that's done, she heads towards the daycare center. Stark Industries has a daycare for all its employees' kids, though in the mornings its mostly just babies and toddlers, kids too young to go to school. From around three to five, the school-age children of employees start arriving. There's even a separate daycare/clinic for sick children. It's actually more efficient to have a daycare here, as it takes less time for employees to drop off and pick up their kids.

When she gets to the daycare, she's greeted by the director, Abigail. They watch as Loki, surrounded by a crowd of small children, is building a block tower far above their heads. Right now, it's around Loki's chin level, and Loki is pretty tall, even for men. He's certainly over six feet.

The kids seem amazed with the tower's height, and are holding up blocks for him to add to it, clambering to have the block they're holding picked next. Frankly, Pepper's surprised the thing's still standing, especially since there are some large flat blocks at the top that stick out from the rest of the tower, like a deck. Loki grabs a block from a little boy and puts that on top of the large flat blocks.

There's one little girl in a Cookie Monster shirt who keeps tugging at Loki's pants and seems closer to him than the other children, though a lot of them seem to love him.

"At first we were a little worried about him." The director of the daycare, Abigail, says. "You know, a strange man showing up somewhere with a bunch of children..." She trails off and says "We were wrong about that, definitely."

"Yes, you were." Pepper agrees. They watch Loki for a bit more. Honestly, he sort of does seem like an overgrown child, but he's surprisingly good with children. Apparently, he'd- perhaps unintentionally- solved a crisis with a boy in a Hulk costume knocking down a block tower.

"He says his name is Stitch." Abigail ventures. "I don't think that's really-

"It's not." Pepper assures her. "He's named Loki." Abigail mutters something about that being just as strange.

"He's special, isn't he?" Abigail asks with the slightest emphasis on the word *special*. She doesn't say it in a patronizing way like some people would, but Pepper just shakes her head.

"I'm not sure. He's just Loki, and he's great to be around." His enthusiasm is really nice, considering most of the time she's around corporate bigheads. Pepper smiles and snaps a picture of Loki with her phone.
Abigail says that somehow, some plastic horses that weren't supposed to move started running, but she doesn't pin it on Loki. Pepper decides to remain quiet on that subject.

The children around Loki hop up and down excitedly as they hand him more and more blocks to stack on the tower, and half the time, Loki's hopping up and down too. A tow-headed girl, probably three at the most, accidentally bumps into the tower's base, but it somehow remains standing, even though it should be impossible. Then again, Pepper had caught the slightest flash of green around Loki's hands.

There's a small group of children building a smaller tower next to them, although that group gleefully kicks their own tower down, looking at the huge tower with awe and grabbing blocks to add to it. Some of the children are building a base around the tower.

Some of the children have noticed Pepper by now, but Loki's apparently absorbed enough in the block tower not to notice.

She walks over to Loki and he notices her now, grinning and exclaiming "Pepper! Look, I builded home!"

"Built." Pepper corrects. Bruce had briefly filled her in on Loki's new habit of trying to speak without All-Tongue, which is apparently the translator in his head. She looks at Loki's tower again and sees that it actually does sort of look like Stark Tower, at least with the large balcony protruding near the top, around most of the tower. "It's a lovely tower."

Loki flaps his hands, delighted, and several children scream that they helped.

"It's Iwon Man's tower." The little tow-headed girl who'd almost knocked it over says.

The kids and Loki start discussing the Avengers. Loki says that Tony's his favorite (obviously) and a little boy declares he likes Hawkeye most. Another little boy, wearing a Hulk mask, apparently likes Hulk the best, and the little girl in the Cookie Monster shirt, the girl who seems to really like Loki, declares that she likes Captain America because he's a hero. There are several children who voice their agreement about which one's their favorite when someone mentions them.

"I've met them." Loki says simply, grinning. "And I live with Tony and Bruce and Hulk-y and Tony and Hulk-y gives really good hugs!"

"I like Thor!" A girl exclaims and Loki freezes, happy expression gone in an instant.

"I don't like Thor, nope nope nope! He's mean!"

"But he hits the bad guys with his hammer."

"Tony says I'm nots a bad guy!" Loki shrieks, darting away to a corner of the room, clutching Simba tightly while rocking back and forth and singing something about a field and horses rather loudly, as if he's close to panicking. Slowly, though, his voice quiets down as Pepper approaches him and goes to lay a hand on his shoulder. He flinches away but soon recognizes her and lets her hug him.

"You're not bad." She assures him.

"Likes Stitch 'n Genie 'n Quasi 'n Elsa 'n Esmeralda, right?" He asks, and Pepper tells him that's exactly right. Loki smiles slightly.
Loki, eyes lowered guiltily, says "I forgots my phone, and Bruce said not to leave the hall but I was racing Sleipnir..." Looking at her, he asks "Are you mad?"

"Not really." She says. "I know you didn't mean to. Just try to keep your phone in the future." She hands him his phone, and he clips it back to his pocket, bouncing it slightly on the elastic cord.

"Where's Tony?" Loki asks.

"He's in a meeting."

"Who's he meeting?" Loki asks, and Pepper smiles slightly at that question.

"Some business people."

"Biz-ness?"

Pepper's unsure of how to explain it, but Loki's already glancing back at the tower he'd built and clearly wanting to continue with it.

Suddenly grinning, Loki stoops down and picks something up. He holds out a toy cookie to her and says "Eat." Pepper stares at it. It looks like it has a chunk missing, as if someone actually took a bite out of it. Or maybe it had been made to look like that, but wouldn't the manufacturers have put an edge along the bitten part instead of leaving it open to show it's hollow?

Pepper obliges and pretends to take a bite, to appease Loki. Loki, however, looks disappointed, and mumbles something about her being too smart for that, whatever that is.

Everything seems fine again, and Pepper's vaguely wondering if maybe Loki can stay here until they leave- the children seem to love him. Pepper trades glances with the daycare staff, since it's really their decision if he stays.

However, a little boy dressed up as Thor approaches them with a toy version of Mjolnir and hits Loki in the leg with it.

Loki completely loses it, grabbing the hammer and flinging it across the room, where it actually goes through the wall. Yeah, there's no way they're letting him stay after that. And wow, it seriously went through a wall?

Loki seems all too content to leave, though, and practically pulls Pepper out the door.

Tony's mentally checked out of this board meeting. Really he hadn't been totally engaged before finding out Loki was missing, and then immediately finding out his location.

He's been thinking about how the heck Loki ended up at the daycare facility and what he's been doing there. He's probably re-enacting Disney scenes with a bunch of hyperactive children or something. That actually seems rather suited for him.

Pepper still hasn't returned, and Tony idly messes around on his phone. Unfortunately, he can't really do anything productive like hack into S.H.I.E.L.D again or even read about those X-Men people he's itching to learn more about, since he's in a room with a bunch of other people who shouldn't know about that stuff. The one disadvantage of having a holographic phone is it's hard to hide what you're doing on it.

He receives a text from Pepper (who apparently knows he's on his phone). First, there's a picture of
Loki building what looks to be Stark Tower made out of blocks, surrounded by half a dozen children. He smiles slightly, and receives another text about fifteen minutes later, saying that Loki's back with Bruce in the lab, saying rather vaguely that Loki freaked out.

Pepper returns about , and she trades a look with him, saying she'll talk to him later. Bruce should have the situation under control. While Tony was originally annoyed at Bruce for 'losing' Loki, he's realized he can't really blame him. After all, he's lost Loki too, and Loki disappearing isn't anyone's fault. Tony's not sure if Loki teleported this time or not, since nobody had seen him in the hallway.

Finally, after a couple more tedious hours, around one-thirty, the meeting is over.

"So what happened with Loki?" Tony asks as they walk to the lab Bruce and Loki are in. "By the way, that picture was awesome."

"A little boy in a Thor costume hit him with Mjolnir." Pepper sighs.

"Yeah, that'd do it. How long did it take to calm him down?"

"About five minutes, and that was after calming him down when a little kid said Thor hit bad guys with his hammer. That first time, I just had to remind him that he's not bad, though."

Well, that's good news, Tony supposes. Tony wonders if Loki had asked her to compare him to Disney characters.


When they enter the lab, Loki rushes up to hug Tony. "You okay?" Tony asks him.

"Yeah! I made horses run!" Loki announces.

"What?" Tony knows he's missing something here, and Pepper fills him in, saying a daycare worker said that some plastic horses had started running on their own. Tony grins at Loki and tells him he did a good job, glad to see Loki happy about something he did with his magic. Pepper also claims that Loki had gone by the name of Stitch, and Tony thinks it's a good sign that he'd chosen a blue character to pretend to be.

Loki gazes at Simba, and the toy suddenly moves its head. Admittedly, it's not much- Simba does that anyways when talking- but it's something. Tony wonders if that's all Loki can do at the moment or if he's hanging back on purpose.

Tony, Bruce and Loki head towards the parking lot, where Happy is waiting for them with a limo. Tony's pretty sure that driving him around isn't part of Happy's job description as Head of Security, but Happy's apparently making an exception for them.

"Tony, a kid stole your name." Loki suddenly says. "He said he was Tony, but he wasn't you."

"How dare he!" Tony says, and he sees Bruce hiding a smile.

Loki seems to think he's serious and claims proudly "I wasn't fooled! I know you're Tony."

Tony bursts out laughing. When he regains his breath, he says "I'm not the only Tony. And Tony isn't even my real name, it's Anthony. Tony's just a shortened version."

"Anthony?" Loki wrinkles his nose and looks very confused and asks "No, Tony's better. Lots
better. Why do people have your name?"

"Because, well, a lot of people have the same first name. Bruce isn't the only Bruce, either." Loki looks shocked. Tony wonders if there are other people named Thor and Loki up in Asgard, but he kind of doubts it.

For the rest of the ride, Loki chatters on about a little girl named Claire and something about a good, blue "Cootie Monster", whatever that is.

As much as being chauffeured is convenient, Tony really would've liked to drive one of his sports cars at ridiculous speeds, especially since driving in New York traffic just plain sucks, but he'd been dropped off in the limo and thus didn't have a car to take home.

They exit the limo when it pulls up by the fountain in front of the mansion. Loki immediately starts dashing around, going up to different trees and sometimes running a hand across their trunks and sometimes hugging them. Eventually, he scrambles up one tree with Simba. Most of the trees in the huge yard aren't great climbing trees, since the vast majority are palm trees or trees without many branches, making them sort of hard to climb.

The tree Loki's in is one of the exceptions to that, with several thick branches that (somewhat surprisingly) support Loki's weight. Actually, considering that Tony needs an Iron Man suit to lift Loki up at all, he's slightly shocked that the branches are supporting him, especially since Loki's near the end of one, where it's getting thinner and is more likely to break.

Bruce is apparently enjoying the quiet and outdoor air, which is almost eerie when one is used to going outside in NYC, with its numerous sounds and smells all competing for attention.

Loki grins at Tony from his spot in the tree. "Being high's al-most good as being b'low things." Loki says matter-of-factly.

Tony bursts out laughing. Loki probably has no idea what being high means, and it's pretty obvious he meant high up, like in a tree, but still, that wording is hilarious. Loki looks somewhat confused as to why Tony's laughing, but he grins as if he likes making him laugh.

Once his laughter has died down, Tony says "You might want to move closer to the trunk. I mean, that branch looks like it could break at any time."

Now that he thinks about this, the physics just don't work. That branch really should break. Tony bets it would break if he climbed on the end of it like that.

"Oh, no, won't break." Loki says with an odd grin, and Tony wonders if he's back to trying not to use All-Tongue. His speech had seemed normal (at least for him) in the car. "Wanna know why? I gaves them a hug, I did, so she likes me now." He leans down and wraps his arms around the branch, which still doesn't break with the weight even more towards the end of it. But then again, Loki's made stuff float and once- so long ago, it seems, despite not even being two months since Loki arrived- he made a Jenga tower not fall down when it obviously should have. And that tower he was building in the picture looked really unstable...

"She likes me." Loki says again with a soft smile, and Tony frowns, having no idea what Loki's talking about.

"Who's she?"

Loki just gestures towards the tree, and Tony can't help laughing again. "The tree?" Loki doesn't reply verbally, but he nods as grabs Simba and climbs even higher, as if he's been climbing trees
for years. Then again, he had mentioned climbing trees a lot after climbing the Hulkbuster suit. Loki even uses his bare toes to attempt to grip things, although they're not too useful, it seems. Still, Loki does really well with only one arm, as the other hand's holding Simba- maybe he's used to carrying things and climbing? Maybe Loki's got some ape genes in him, Tony thinks, jokingly.

Tony realizes that Bruce is watching the events with a slight smile.

"Hey, Loki, do you want to come down for a while? I've got to give you the grand tour of mi casa, after all."

"Comes out later?" Loki asks hesitantly. Yeah, he's definitely trying not to use All-Tongue, although he either switches between using and and not a lot or sometimes he does pretty well and sometimes he doesn't. Bruce gently corrects Loki.

Tony shrugs and says "Of course you can come out later. The trees aren't going anywhere." Loki nods and proceeds to simply jump down from the rather high height, sticking the landing surprisingly well. At least, he doesn't break his legs, although he'd probably be able to fix them if he did.

Shockingly, the tree's branches briefly go down with Loki, as if reaching down for him, like the tree's hoping he'll stay. Tony scoffs. That's ridiculous. It's just the wind or something, he tries to tell himself, but that sounds flimsy in his head even as he's thinking it, seeing as he neither feels nor hears a breeze of any sort.

"Don't knows her name yet, but she's she." Loki says, and Tony wonders why Loki's personifying a tree.

The weather's a lot warmer in Malibu than in New York at this time of year, although Loki actually seems to prefer the colder weather. Which makes sense, considering his species is apparently from an ice planet that's probably a lot like Hoth in The Empire Strikes Back.

"All right, so who's ready for the complete tour of my humble abode?" Tony asks with his eyes flung wide. Okay, so it's only one of several abodes, and none of them are humble in any sense of the word, but oh well. Who cares? "Now come on, you two." He gestures and heads towards the mansion.

Looking at the house, Loki comments that it looks a lot different from the tower and doesn't sport a huge letter A on it. Indeed, the mansion does look different, mostly because it's a heck of a lot shorter (which also gives it the impression of being wider, even though the tower covers more square footage of the ground than the mansion does).

The mansion hosts three floors, plus Tony's lower-level garage/workshop. The house has an awesome ocean view, since it's built on- and partially in- a cliff, and like the tower, features many floor-to-ceiling windows.

They enter the front door, dragging luggage behind them, and Jarvis greets them. "Good afternoon Sir, Mr. Loki, Dr. Banner." Loki's face lights up like a Christmas tree and he happily calls out the AI's name.

"Jarvis is here!" Loki exclaims pointlessly, since it's pretty obvious. He frowns thoughtfully and asks "Do you lives here?"

"Yeah. It's one of my many houses."

"Not even Odin hads lots n' lots'o castles." Loki says, sounding awed. "But you're way better than
"You don't need to tell us that this living room." Bruce says mildly, looking around as they walk into the very spacious room with floor to ceiling windows that show off a brilliant ocean view. Sofas, chairs and coffee tables are scattered throughout it, and there's a huge television screen that covers all of one wall. Really, it's not too different from the tower, except for the fact it has an ocean view instead of a city skyline view.

"Bruce, Bruce, Bruce." Tony sighs, throwing aside parts of his suit jacket, shirt and dress pants so just the rock band t-shirt and jeans that were underneath them remain. "You should know that it's not the living room, it's a living room. Kind of a big difference, since I have like four here."

Upon seeing the ocean view from one of the living room windows and looking down at the cliff and small beach below them, Loki remarks "That's a lotta lotta water. Like a really big sea. Hey, do you haves a pirate ship?" When Tony corrects him and says it's an ocean, not a sea, and answers that no, he does not have a pirate ship, Loki asks him if he has "a wood water board." It takes a bit for Tony to work out that he's asking about a surfboard, like he'd just seen in *Lilo & Stitch*. Loki had seemed to find the whole idea of surfing ridiculously exciting when he'd watched Lilo, Stitch, Nani and David do it.

Tony leads them through the many living rooms, multiple kitchens (one on each floor), some of the entertainment and recreation rooms, even the gym with its boxing arena. He shows them the various guest rooms and lets them deposit their stuff in the ones they choose. None of the guest rooms are near the Master Bedroom, which Tony uses, but Bruce winds up choosing a room next to the one Loki chooses.

The other thing Loki seems to love about this house (apart from the outdoor parts) is that there's a waterfall by the stairs. He runs a hand under the falling stream of water, laughing as it sprays outwards, laughing even more when he angles his hand so it hits Tony. Tony mock pouts at him as he pushes his now-wet bangs off his forehead, while Loki laughs uproariously and Bruce tries to cover up his chuckles as coughs.

Too bad Dum-E's still in the tower, or Tony could set him on them with a fire extinguisher in retaliation. Actually, Tony's not sure if Dum-E would douse Loki or not, since the robot really, really likes Loki and vise versa.

Jarvis pipes up to inform them that the video appointment with Dr. Carlisle is in a couple minutes.

Tony groans. He'd forgotten about that, and was hoping to do some more research on the X-Men, but Loki probably wants him there for his therapy session. Loki's making that quite clear by firmly gripping his both his and Bruce's sleeves.

Tony sighs and plops down on the couch. He's still sort of annoyed about the last session.
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Not all therapists work for everyone.

Tony, Bruce and Loki have some fun around the Malibu house. The Science Bros meet Loki's imaginary friends all at once, and Loki reveals yet another power of his.

Also, there's a movie night with Hulk.

Chapter Notes

This is where the chapters start getting even longer, except for chapter 37.

A holographic screen shimmers to life in front of one of the largest sofas in the main-floor living room. (Tony's decided it's safer to use holographic screens, especially after the incident of Loki throwing pencils at the screen on the jet this morning). The screen shows Dr. Gwyneth Carlisle, and Tony ushers Loki over to the couch.

Loki seemingly reluctantly sits down, though he raises himself to the backrest and puts Simba down on the actual seat, near his feet. He's still wearing the suit he made with his magic, although he has the starry long coat on now, too. For a bit, he hangs upside down over the back of the sofa but then sits up again and flips through a random book he'd grabbed from one of the bookshelves, something Tony has on electrical circuits. Tony, who has joined him on the backrest- because why the heck not?- sort of doubts Loki understands any of the drawings of circuits, but he seems to like looking at them. Tony wonders if he should try explaining it later- Loki had looked fascinated when they put new batteries in Simba yesterday.

"Why do we always seem to have these sessions in a new place?" Dr. Carlisle asks, eyeing the ocean-view background behind the sofa and obviously realizing that Tony's not in New York.

"So you don't stalk us," Tony mutters under his breath, and Bruce sends him a really? look. It seems that comment hadn't transmitted to the therapist, or perhaps she's is choosing not to comment. To be honest, Dr. Carlisle had really pissed Tony off last session, especially when she'd pried into his life. Actually, she'd annoyed him enough for him now to think of her, impersonally, as just Dr. Carlisle instead of Gwenyth. Also, so far, Tony's pretty sure he's made more progress on his own than Dr. Carlisle has. Admittedly, he's spent a lot more time with Loki, but still, these sessions haven't seemed to do anything.

"'We're at Tony's house, not the tower. One of Tony's houses, 'cause he gots lots of 'em." Loki pipes up in a tone that's says she really ought to know that. He doesn't look up from the book as he says this.

Tony's not entirely sure he wanted that information shared, but last time he definitely hadn't wanted the fact he has nightmares shared, and Loki had innocently let that slip.
"Tony, look! a city!" Loki says, pointing to a picture of a circuit board on a different page of the book. "Like, a map or something." He studies the diagram carefully, trailing one of his long fingers along the line.

"Yeah, that does sorta look like a city, doesn't it, Rudolph?" Tony says, glancing at the page. "That's not a map, though I could see how you'd think that. It's actually called a circuit board, and it-" He's about to launch into an explanation about the finer aspects of circuitry when Dr. Carlisle clears her throat a bit more pointedly than needed. Tony scowls at her.

"Do you think you'll be able to talk to me without Tony and..." Dr. Carlisle pauses to glance in Bruce's direction and ask "Who are you?"

"He's Bruce, and he's my Hulk-y too." Loki says before Bruce can reply himself.

Dr. Carlisle doesn't say anything, but for a bit she looks like she expects Bruce to Hulk-out at any moment and is clearly wondering if the somewhat rumpled scientist should be present. Bruce clearly guesses what she's thinking about his big, green alter-ego making an appearance, and he actually starts to get up to leave, but Loki grabs his sleeve and pulls him back onto the sofa, making it quite clear that Bruce is staying. Heck, he's probably hoping Hulk will come out.

Tony glares at the woman on the screen. She almost seems like one of those people who's prejudiced against Hulk, even though he helped save the whole world's collective ass a year and a half ago, with the whole Chitauri attack, and has helped on other Avengers missions since then. Plus, she doesn't seem to think much of Tony himself, either, probably believing a lot of the crap the media says about him.

"Okay, then, do you think you can talk without Tony and Bruce?" Dr. Carlisle asks.

This kind of irks Tony. Loki clearly hadn't been ready last time, so why would this time be any different? Besides, if Loki wants them here, they're allowed to be here, end of story. Loki clearly does want them here, so that's not the issue. Perhaps Dr. Carlisle thinks Loki might reveal more without Tony there. Heck, that's probably what happens with most patients, but Tony thinks the opposite might actually be true with Loki. Loki's revealed more to him and Bruce than he has to Dr. Carlisle (Tony's pretty sure he basically knows almost all of Loki's secrets by now- Jotun, magic, and so on). To be fair, Loki had let the fact he has magic slip during the last session, which had resulted in the god panicking.

"No! Tony stays. And Bruce." Loki says firmly, making it sound like it's a fact and there's absolutely no chance of it changing, and grabbing onto both Tony and Bruce's arms, as if to ensure that they stay there with him. Loki glares at the screen slightly (this is the first time he's looked at it today), obviously not too happy with that suggestion. When he speaks again, he sounds like he's only half addressing what he's saying to Dr. Carlisle. "Tony and Bruce- they're family now. Same for Jarvis 'n Dum-E n' Hulk-y n' Pepper- she said so, she did. An' Tony too!"

Abruptly, the god's eyes widen and he asks "Jarvis, do you wanna be in my family?"

"I would be delighted to, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says fondly, giving the verbal equivalent of a smile.

Loki claps his hands happily and bounces up and down slightly on the sofa, which thankfully doesn't break under his weight. He glances fleetingly at the image of Dr. Carlisle on the screen, but then announces very decisively to the room. "They stay now, 'cause nobody gets left behind or forgotten. They're my family, my ohana." He singsongs this last sentence.

To be honest, Tony's glad Loki objected, in some ways. If he and Bruce had been sent away, Loki
could panic again sometime (after all, these therapy sessions probably bring up some difficult topics). Additionally, while it might be a huge breach of privacy, Tony might have ended up spying on the session through Jarvis' cameras anyways. If he didn't, he'd wonder if Loki had brought up something he should know about, on the off chance that would actually happen. Tony's not sure if he knows all of Loki's secrets, but it seems he knows a lot of them.

"So what's happened since I last talked to you eleven days ago?" Dr. Carlisle asks. Wow- it's only been eleven days? Tony's a little surprised. Considering everything that's happened during those eleven days, it feels like a lot longer. Tony pauses, thinking. Thor arriving on Halloween had been after the last therapy session, and even Halloween feels like a while back, despite it really only being nine days ago.

Tony wonders what it's like to live a boring life. He snorts slightly, knowing he'll never know the answer to that. Loki giggles slightly, perhaps thinking the snort was funny.

"So what happened? Something funny?" Dr. Carlisle asks. Bruce looks at both Loki and Tony, clearly wondering what in the past eleven days has been funny.

Tony glances at Loki. Really, he should be the one to talk to her, and Tony should just sort of sit in the background. Trading a look with Bruce, Tony sees that his Science Bro is thinking the same, so both of them wait for the god to answer.

When Loki doesn't say anything for a bit, Dr. Carlisle says "I remember you mentioning you were going to be Iron Man for Halloween."

Loki nods, looking at Tony instead of the screen. Tony notices he seems rather nervous right now, and is starting to wonder if that could be related to talking to Dr. Carlisle. Or maybe that's just him trying to find more reasons to dislike Dr. Carlisle. "I was Man of Iron for Halloween, I was!" Loki says, clapping his hands. "And my Tony was my Hulk-y, and my Bruce was Cap'n... Mer-i-ca?" Loki glances at Tony questioningly, clearly wondering if he'd said that right. Tony gives him a thumbs up and whispers Captain America. Loki nods, and says. "But then..."

Loki gets up, flapping his hands, and paces, no longer in the range of what Dr. Carlisle can see. "Then Thor came, but Tony beat him up in his big Hulk suit and Hulk-y beat him up too, and they said he's wrong 'bout me!"

Dr. Carlisle asks Tony and Bruce with raised eyebrows, her expression clearly asking Really? You beat him up? Out loud, she says "Is it because of how he treated Loki? Because I'm not sure beating him up is the best solution."

Tony glares at her. "Butt out of that. It's none of your business." As he glares at her, he notices Loki doing the same, and wonders if Loki's actually annoyed about it or if the god's just imitating him.

"What did they say he was wrong about?" Dr. Carlisle asks Loki after a bit. Loki looks away from the screen. Even though he's answering her questions, it almost feels like he's talking to Tony or Bruce instead of her.

"Said they weren't faking 'bout liking me, and Thor didn't change that, nope nope nope."

"Did you think they were faking liking you before?"

Loki gives Dr. Carlisle an odd look and says in a voice that makes it clear he thinks that's a stupid question. "Just after first talkin'ta you."

Dr. Carlisle looks really confused, and for a couple seconds, Tony is too, until he remembers the
incident during dinner after the first session, which Loki had actually brought up earlier today when watching _Lilo & Stitch_, where Tony had snapped at Loki under the table.

"Did I somehow give you the impression that Tony didn't really like you?" Dr. Carlisle asks. "If I did, that certainly wasn't what I wanted."

"No, it's just that we had a little misunderstanding after that session." Tony eventually says after Loki doesn't answer.

"Tony said he's never gonna hit me like they did." Loki adds.

"I would hope he wouldn't." Dr. Carlisle says. "Were there any other times you thought they didn't like you?"

Loki doesn't answer for a bit, although it seems more like he's debating whether he should actually answer or not than if he should. Eventually, he nods, although Dr. Carlisle can't see him.

"Thor told 'em I'm a freak... And I thought they thought so then 'cause nobody disagrees with Thor. But they did and said I'm not, even when they saw me." Tony's pretty sure that by _saw me_, Loki means that they saw his Jotun skin.

"Hell yeah you're not." Tony goes over and squeezes Loki's shoulder and Loki leans up against him for a bit.

Tony's noticed that some of Loki's more recent speech patterns, like having S's added to words and having some grammatical errors from trying to speak without All-Tongue actually aren't occurring now. Either he's getting better or he's using All-Tongue, and Tony sort of guesses it's the All-Tongue. Given his recent habits of speaking without All-Tongue, Tony's surprised he's using it now. Perhaps Loki doesn't feel comfortable enough around Dr. Carlisle to try to go without All-Tongue, or maybe Tony's reading too much into it. After all, Loki had said that going without All-Tongue is hard and that it 'wants' to come back.

"Hel says I'm not, too." Loki whispers with a grin. Tony can hear it but Dr. Carlisle obviously doesn't hear, and Tony wonders if that's why it was whispered. So far, Loki's seemed to be half ignoring the therapist, which makes Tony wonder if these sessions are really best for Loki or not. What if there's someone better? Dr. Carlisle might be good with other people, but Tony's not sure if she is with Loki. Really, if Loki's ignoring her, that's not going to get them anywhere. Tony glances at Bruce, but Bruce is looking the other way and Tony can't exactly tell what he's thinking.

"It must have been nice to hear that." Dr. Carlisle says. Loki nods happily, but he's still looking at Tony.

"And they said I'm still their friend, 'xcept now we're family." Loki adds before he screams excitedly and flicks his fingers wildly. "We're family, we're family, we're family!" He singsongs. Abruptly, he throws his arms around Tony and then Bruce, who at first looks uncomfortable but then relaxes in the embrace.

"I remember you talking about family during our first session," Dr. Carlisle starts to say. Loki seems to tense a bit and glances at the screen.

"Nuh uh. Didn't have one b'fore."

"I remember you saying that, but you still talked about what a family should be." Dr. Carlisle explains. "What makes Tony and Bruce different from everyone in Asgard?" At least the question isn't asked in an accusatory way, although it still kind of irks Tony. He's loads better than all those
asses up in Ass-Guard were. He smirks slightly at the wordplay in his head.

Loki frowns at her and turns back to Tony and Bruce, putting an arm around each of their shoulders. "They're nicer and they like me no matter what. Like how Anna loves Elsa and Lilo loves Stitch, even when Stitch wrecks things or... Elsa made it winter."

Dr. Carlisle seems to think for a bit, and it's silent. "I take it you wanted a family?" There's a small smile on her lips.

Loki nods slightly and says "Before I just had my Sleipnir and the others. But they're good too."

"I remember you mentioning Sleipnir." Dr. Carlisle says. "You said he was your horse, but you couldn't ride him and he sung to you."

Loki absentmindedly starts singing his and Sleipnir's song.

"Was Sleipnir imaginary?" Dr. Carlisle asks.

Loki glares at her. "Sleipnir's real. Just 'cause you can't see him much doesn't mean he's not there!"

After seeing Loki turn invisible in the glass cell, Tony supposes there's some truth to that statement. Admittedly, he's still not sure whether Sleipnir is an illusion or not, but he does seem rather helpful. "They're all real and they're my monster family and Hel tried'ta help me get out yesterday!"

Loki clamps his hand over his mouth as if he hadn't wanted to say that. He had glossed over the whole Thor thing, and Tony wonders if he's going to skip the Helicarrier incident, despite inadvertently bring it up. Tony sort of hopes he doesn't, because they should probably talk about that sometime.

"Get out of where? What happened yesterday?" Dr. Carlisle asks, and Tony's not sure if the god's going to answer. Loki hadn't seemed too eager to do so yesterday, and Tony's starting to wonder if maybe he'll be even less eager with his therapist, seeing as he doesn't know her as well.

Loki looks somewhat unsure as he fiddles with his fingers, but he eventually speaks.

"Cap'n Hook trapped Tinker Bell in a wood n' glass box." Loki says, and Tony realizes he's talking about the scene in Peter Pan where Tink was stuck in a lantern. That had sort of been what happened to him, after all, only his captors hadn't been giant like humans are to Tink.

"So he did. That wasn't very nice, was it?" Bruce asks. Dr. Carlisle looks like she's going to say something, but she doesn't get the chance.

Loki shakes his head vehemently. "No! Hook's really mean but Smee's not 'xactly mean, and Hook tricked Tink, he did! She was stuck in there, even though she tried'ta get out, and she couldn't fly 'way, nope nope nope. And Hook asked her all sorts of weird questions like where Peter was, an' names, and how Simba had a Man of Iron suit."

Loki quickly shuts his mouth after he says that, eyes wide.

"Something tells me we're not really talking about Hook and Tink..." Tony says, and annoyingly, Dr. Carlisle says it at the same time. After all, Hook certainly hadn't asked anything about an Iron Man suit.

Loki shakes his head, more slowly this time. His head is right by Tony's arc reactor now. Tony's still not sure why he likes it so much. "Stitch was in glass too, twice, and Lilo was the second time,
but Stitch e'scaped and got her out too."

"Were you... trapped like Tinker Bell and Stitch?" Dr Carlisle asks, probably not knowing the extent of the similarities, in that Loki was actually trapped behind glass.

"Don't wanna talk 'bout it." Loki mumbles. During this exchange, he rooted through his drawstring bag full of action figures and figurines until he found the small Tinker Bell figurine that came with the Peter Pan set they got. He fiddles with the toy, making it fly through the air before dropping it in Bruce's empty water glass.

He moves the figurine around as if she can't get out. However, all of this is happening out of Dr. Carlisle's view. He makes the fairy repeatedly bump into the edge of the glass.

"How have the dreams been going?" Dr. Carlisle asks, apparently sensing she's not going to get much out of Loki about the previous topic. "Have you still been having nightmares?" Tony can't help but remember that Loki told Dr. Carlisle that he has nightmares, too, and while he knows this isn't the case, his brain is making it seem like she's asking him, not Loki. He really hates the fact that she knows that.

"You're gonna make Tony stiff again." Loki says, glaring through the back of the holographic screen. Tony sputters for a second, as Dr. Carlisle gives him a sharp look. Sure, Tony knows how that can be interpreted and he definitely has a reputation as a playboy, but Dr. Carlisle is definitely not Tony's type, and even if she was, he doesn't like her after both this session and last session.

"You brought it up last time and Tony got all stiff 'cause he doesn't like talking 'bout it." Loki adds, still glaring slightly at Dr. Carlisle.

"Tense." Bruce says gently. "I think you mean tense, right?"

Loki cocks his head to the side and then tenses his body. "Like this." He says as he demonstrates. Bruce confirms that the word for that is tense. Dr. Carlisle still casts a somewhat distrusting look at them again, especially Tony, as if she really thinks he's lusting over her or something. Tony rolls his eyes. Please.

"Have you been telling yourself that you're not bad?" Dr. Carlisle asks Loki, who's back in the area of the room that she can see.

"Tony tells me that." Loki says, not exactly answering her question. "He makes me feel better when I wake up scared." He glares at Dr. Carlisle almost accusingly. "You said you're gonna make the nightmares go away, but you haven't."

"These things take time." Dr. Carlisle starts, but Loki cuts her off.

"Tony helps me more than you do!" Loki shrieks. It almost seems like he's trying to defend Tony from her disapproval. "We beat up Hans, and he hugs me and helps and you don't! You just ask questions and glare at Tony when he talks!" Loki suddenly gets up and storms away, leaving Tony and Bruce in the living room, looking at the screen with Dr. Carlisle on it.

The screen switches off after a bit. It's pretty sure this appointment is now over.

Loki doesn't think he's slept at all this night. To be honest, he doesn't really want to. After all, he'd recently teleported to the theater in his sleep, and even more recently teleported to the Other Rafters, which led to him being in the glass petri dish cell and seeing the Eyepatch Man, who Tony claims is named Fury.
Loki really doesn't want to teleport in his sleep again, because what if he ends up somewhere worse? Sure Tony would come for him eventually, but what if something even worse happened while he was waiting. Besides, his dreams all stink anyways. Well, sometimes he has nice ones before his nightmares, but the nightmares are always there.

He has his Tony to calm him down now, though, and to hug him like his friends can't. Tony's his family now, but it's not just pretend like he'd pretended Sleipnir and the others were his family. Or maybe that was as real as Tony being family, because you don't actually have to be related, it seems.

He starts thinking back to his session with Dr. C today. He hadn't been looking forward to it at all, because he'd wound up having a flashback the last time, and he'd been worriedly waiting for her to bring something up that would make him have another.

Shockingly, she didn't, but he'd tried to avoid anything that would make him. When the whole thing that happened yesterday had been brought up, he'd tried to think of Tinker Bell and Stitch instead of himself.

He really hadn't liked how she keeps asking to talk to him alone, because he really likes having Tony with him. Tony helps him calm down, and so does Bruce, although not nearly as well as Tony.

He hadn't really meant to snap at Dr. C like he had this afternoon, but she doesn't seem to like Tony or Bruce much, and Loki doesn't like people who think bad things about his family. She always seems mildly annoyed at Tony, and she'd looked at Bruce like he was a monster.

Also, she had said a while ago that maybe she could help the nightmares go away, but she hasn't helped at all. Tony's helped more than her.

Tony had talked to him later, saying that if he doesn't like Dr. C, they can always try to find someone else. That had been hours ago, though.

It's a lot darker here at night than it is in the tower, Loki notices as he ambles past the huge floor-to-ceiling window in his bedroom. In the tower, there are always a million lights from the city outside even when it's dark out, but here, there's not a whole lot of light, not even moonlight. He doesn't even have Simba's arc reactor to light things up, since Tony has Simba's Iron Man suit. Loki has Toy Stark, though, but while his arc reactor glows, it doesn't light a whole lot up.

Loki can see some stars, though, and he grins, looking at them. He's not sure which stars they are, though- seeing as there are only a few, there's not much to compare them with, so it's really hard to tell which they are.

For a while, he watches the stars and talks to Hel, Fenrir, Sleipnir and Jormungand, although Fenrir never talks back. In some ways, it's just like the nights before he met Tony.

The really awesome part about tonight is he actually sees his friends. Most of the time, they're sort of invisible, although Sleipnir had been visible when they were racing.

He thinks back to when he'd made the toy horses run, and how he'd wondered if he could make Simba do the same. He glances at his beloved lion. It would be really awesome if Simba could move by himself, and more than just turning his head and moving his tail like he does now. Most of the time he just stands there like those toy horses, but they had moved.

He imagines Simba moving, but nothing happens. He glances at his hands but sees there's no green
tendrils or misty magic around them. In some ways, he's almost disappointed, which is completely
crazy.

"Why didn't it work?" He asks Simba, who doesn't answer, and Jormungand and the others, who
claim they don't know. Loki sighs. He tries again but only gets Simba's tail to move side-to-side
like it always does when he squeezes the lion's ear.

He idly starts humming *Let It Go* to himself, since he really likes it. He really likes Elsa, too, he
thinks as he rummages through his bag and pulls her out. She's a Jotun, just like him, and she did
some awesome stuff with snow and ice.

"I'm never going back, the past is in the past." He sings.

After a bit, he says in his best Pumbaa voice "It's times like this my buddy Timon here says: You
got to put your behind in your past."

That's the whole point of this therapy stuff, right? To make the memories of Asgard and flashbacks
and nightmares go away? Loki wishes it were as easy as just sticking his butt out behind him, but
as Timon says, it's 'you got to put your past behind you.'

Elsa did that. She decided to just let her magic go. She almost made snow look like stars. Loki
wishes he could do that. He doesn't have the holographic stars in this room, and he really misses
them.

Well, he probably could do it. After all, he has Jotun powers, too. Tony's said they're not bad, that
Elsa did both good and bad things with them. Loki knows that when Elsa made all those fun things
in the beginning for her an Anna to play with, she was doing something good with them. He stares
at his Elsa doll for a bit, vaguely wondering what an ice slide her size would look like. He grabs
her but doesn't try to make one. Instead, he focuses on how she'd made snow stars.

Loki lays back on his bed and stares at the ceiling, flapping his hands above his horizontal head, so
he's looking up at them. He feels his body grow a tad colder, but his blue Jotun skin isn't showing.
Although Stitch and Genie are blue, so blue skin can't be all bad, can it? Tony seemed to like that
weird blue guy in that floating tank, in that Avatar movie where people actually looked real, in the
way people here do, instead of like drawings or somehow different like Elsa, Rapunzel and Boo.
Not to mention, Claire said she wanted to be blue, and she wore blue too.

Thrusting his hands towards the ceiling, Loki manages to shoot some snowflakes upwards. He
laughs and flicks his fingers, because they sort of do look like stars, like the ones back in his room
in the tower. He tries to imagine constellations in them, but they're already falling down, landing
on his nose.

After a bit, he does it again.

In Asgard, doing this sort of thing would not have ended well. This isn't Asgard, Jormungand
reminds him, but Loki still hates thinking about what would have happened there. He hates all the
memories, and he slowly lowers his hands as he remembers the pain that was inflicted after he'd
made ice and snow on accident there.

Bruce had said that the King and Queen of Arendelle would have been monsters for hurting Elsa
for using ice magic, though. Loki wonders if his Elsa doll can make snow, or if he can make it look
like she's making snow, but he doesn't make any move to try.

At some point, he decides not to just lay there anymore and gets up to roam around the house.
He remembers, after one of his nightmares, being too scared to walk through the vast openness, but right now he's too anxious to stay still, and everything is just calm and quiet instead of scary, like after a nightmare.

In some ways, this isn't nearly as fun as some of his nighttime wanderings in Asgard had been, which is a weird and crazy thought. Midgard not being as fun as Asgard?! Loki laughs slightly at that. Midgard is a lot better than Asgard in basically every way. He doesn't have to worry about running into anybody when walking around Tony's house, like he'd had to when wandering around the palace. He supposes he could run into Tony or Bruce, but that wouldn't be a bad thing. The thing that makes this slightly less fun is that, on Loki's nighttime wanderings in Asgard, he'd been able to go to the stables and the field to see the horses. Sleipnir's great- he even talks!- but Loki can't pet him or feed him apples and carrots like he could with the horses in Asgard.

Loki wanders around some more with his friends, stopping to watch the small waterfall by the staircase. He really likes that.

For a while, he just hears the sound of running water until he sits down on the basement steps. Then, he hears a somewhat quiet but pounding beat. It sounds like that awful stuff Tony listens to, which he claims is rock music. Loki just thinks it sounds like people yelling. He likes the songs in movies a lot more.

None of his friends have any idea what's down there.

Curious, Loki heads down the steps. Fenrir stalks in front of him like a bodyguard. Loki appreciates the gesture, but Tony's house wouldn't hurt him, right? He's got Jarvis looking out for him, after all, as well as Tony, of course. Loki hasn't been to this part of the house before, and the thumping beat grows slightly louder the further he descends down the steps. He sees light coming up from whatever's down on the lower floor.

When he gets to the basement, his eyes grow wide. "Oh, wow."

"Bruce, I'm telling you this Professor X guy is the answer!" Tony exclaims. He's in his lab with Bruce, and it's rather late at night- technically it's morning already.

"Tony, you don't even know him." Bruce sighs.

"Yeah, but I mean he runs a school for mutants with strange powers. He'd probably be awesome with Loki, I mean, a lot better than Dr. Carlisle, and..."

"And you don't know if he'd even want to talk to Loki in the first place." Bruce asks, giving Tony a level look. "What were you thinking of doing anyways? Hiring him as a therapist?"

Well, yeah, that's exactly what Tony's thinking. The man seems a heck of a lot more suited for all the magic-y aspects of Loki than Dr. Carlisle, since she's just an ordinary psychologist.

These X-Men are fascinating. Charles Xavier, a.k.a Professor X, is apparently a telepath, with some sort of mental powers, although Tony hasn't found too much about what exactly those powers actually are yet. He'll probably have to hack some more to get those files. Still, he has to wonder what those mind powers are. Mind reading? That would be more than a little creepy, and Tony certainly wouldn't want this guy reading his mind. Still, that sort of thing would be pretty dang useful for a therapist.

He sort of wonders whether Charles Xavier/Professor X and these other X-Men know that S.H.I.E.L.D has information on them. He certainly wouldn't be surprised if it turns out they don't
know about it. Tony had also found information on himself and fellow teammates, including ways
to deal with them if they went rogue, though he'd already known they were on threat watch.
Although, the things they had planned to counteract his Iron Man armor wouldn't have even
worked. Idiots.

This whole idea of this telepathic man helping Loki just started out as a passing thought but had
lodged itself firmly into Tony's brain and his mind won't let it go.

As he thinks the words *let it go*, the song from Frozen starts playing in his head, and Tony groans.
That gets stuck in there way too easily, especially with Loki singing it *all the time.*

Tony sees Bruce smirking at him and realizes he's humming out loud. Tony glares at him and stops
humming, muttering "Shut up."

"I didn't say anything." Bruce replies, still smirking. Tony sighs and turns back to the files about
X-Men.

They don't have too many files on people other than Charles Xavier, although there's apparently a
whole society of mutants. There are some files on a guy named Logan (no last name listed), who
goes as Wolverine. He apparently has regenerative abilities that allow him to heal far more than an
average human, which sounds a lot like a certain someone living with Tony. S.H.I.E.L.D clearly
hasn't roped this Wolverine guy into healing agents or anything of the sort, though.

He really needs to meet these people, out of sheer curiosity, and it could help Loki a lot too.

Bruce is looking at Tony almost as if he's a telepath reading Tony's thoughts. Or maybe it's just
obvious what he'd be thinking in this situation.

"Let me guess. You're going to figure out some way to find these people, even if they don't want to
be found?" Bruce asks mildly.

"Well, yeah, wouldn't you?" At Bruce's look, Tony sighs. "No. I guess you'd leave them alone like
a considerate person. Anyways, we need Charles Xavier. From what it sounds like, he's perfect- he
works with troubled people with all sorts of powers. I'm no therapist, and Loki needs someone
besides just us. But I think it's kind of safe to say that Dr. Carlisle's not exactly working out." Some
people would probably say that Tony's narcissism made him dislike Dr. Carlisle since she didn't
like him, and that's the reason he's thinking they should sever ties with her. But that's not it, really.
Okay, he doesn't like her, true, but Loki doesn't seem to like her much either. Some of that might be
based on Tony's attitude towards her and her attitude towards him, but Tony's pretty sure that
having a therapist you don't like isn't going to help much.

"Tony, you don't even know if Professor X would be willing to work with Loki. Besides, do you
even have a way to contact him?"

Okay, so Bruce has some valid points. It would pretty annoying if this Charles guy didn't want to
talk to Loki, although Tony could probably pay him handsomely for it. And he really doesn't have
any contact info for this guy yet.

"Well, I guess I'm gonna have to hack some more until I find his number or email or something,
and then hopefully he'll agree to talk with Loki." Tony says. Bruce sighs, probably thinking that's
far-fetched. He leaves around seven minutes later, muttering something about trying to get some
sleep.

A half an hour or so later, Tony's alone in his workshop blasting rock music. Jarvis, at first, had
thought it was funny to put on the *Iron Man* song by Black Sabbath, even though that joke got old really quickly years ago. Or, rather, it's old when Jarvis makes it, Tony thinks, but it's still hilarious when he himself does it.

Right now, it's currently around 1:30 in the morning and Tony's running on coffee, mostly. There's alcohol in his system, too, because well, he's Tony Stark, but he hasn't drunk enough to make him stumble or make his vision blur.

Tony knows that Pepper will probably kill him tomorrow for not sleeping before an important meeting, but what else is new? Besides, he's reading up on these X-Men people. Or, rather, he's now having Jarvis read stuff to him while he tinkers on Simba's Iron Man suit.

There have been a couple times where Loki has been without his phone but has still had Simba- take his little elope to the daycare at Stark Industries earlier today (well, yesterday, if one wants to get technical) and even the little journey to the Helicarrier, although they'd taken Simba from him there.

Still, Tony's decided, instead of trying to get Loki to carry a phone around, why not just work it into Simba's armor? Sure, he could just strap the Stark Phone Loki owns now to Simba's back or something, but that would be lame. So instead, he's equipping Simba's armor with Jarvis, which isn't too different from a Stark Phone, really. Besides, Tony's real Iron Man suits have Jarvis in them, and even Loki's costume suit does, so this is sort of like a little nod to that. He's also placing a tracker in Simba's suit as well.

"Sir, you have a visitor." Jarvis suddenly announces with a somewhat amused tone. Tony looks up and sees Loki staring at him through the glass wall between the stairwell and his workshop. He's in his Iron Man pajamas. Since Tony's currently tinkering on the armor, Simba's currently naked, like he'd been when they recovered the lion from the Helicarrier.

Loki frowns as opening the door turns out to be a failure since the door is locked. Loki gets a somewhat panicked look on his face, and it suddenly dawns on Tony that Loki had been stuck behind glass only yesterday. It's clear Loki's thinking about that too, judging from the look on his face.

Without even asking, Jarvis cranks down the music and unlocks the door while Tony motions for the god to come in. Loki runs up without a word to hug Tony, practically crashing into Tony's lap so that the rolling chair Tony's sitting in rolls backwards with both of them in it. Loki's a fair number of inches taller than Tony, so Tony has to crane his head upwards to see Loki's face. Tony doesn't particularly enjoy being shorter, but he's gotten used to hugging and receiving hugs from Loki. Still, Loki sitting in Tony's lap is new. Tony's had people sit in his lap before- usually women, and it was always for an *entirely* different reason than seeking comfort, like Loki obviously is doing now. The god clearly enjoys this sort of physical contact and comfort, as opposed to the abuse he suffered in Asgard.

"Sorry if, um, not being able to get through at first brought up some memories." Tony says somewhat awkwardly, not sure how to phrase it without Loki freaking out. "Um, can you please get off my lap now? I'm starting to lose feeling in my legs, because you're really heavy." Tony vaguely wonders if he should have said that, but his mouth just went off without him. Loki either doesn't care or doesn't notice, though.

Loki gets up but grabs onto Tony's hand, pacing back and forth so that Tony has to either pace with
him or get dragged along. Tony supposes this is preferable to the disproportionately-heavy god cutting off a circulation in his legs, but right now, pins and needles are going through his legs due to that.

"Are we gonna be able to get outs now?" Loki asks in a worried voice, eyeing the glass wall with intense distrust. "Didn't lets me in b'fore for a bit, 'till now."

"Yeah, we're going to be able to get out. That wasn't the glass, that was the lock. Generally I keep my lab private, so you're one of the exclusive few who are allowed to enter in here." Tony notices that Loki still doesn't look entirely consoled, and figures Loki might not trust locks either, especially not ones he can't even see, like electronic locks. "Even if the lock failed for some reason- which isn't going to happen since it's my tech- that glass door's not the only way out of here. And if worst came to worst, I could always blast through it with a repulsor, or fly through the ceiling or something. But that's not going to happen." After all, he has that tunnel that he uses to exit the mansion in his suits (or the many cars down here).

Loki finally looks convinced that they're not going to be trapped in here, and he looks around at the lab, scowling slightly at the cars. He really doesn't seem to like them. Or, rather, he's come to associate them with seat belts after only riding in cars a handful of times.

"So, Bambi, did you have a bad dream?" Tony asks, because that's not an unlikely assumption in the slightest. That's most likely why Loki came down here in the first place, where he then sort of freaked out about the glass wall with the temporarily locked door. "If you want, I can kick the villain's butt again, like I did with Hans."

Loki just pinches himself, as if he's testing whether he's awake or not. Tony's glad he hadn't slapped himself in the cheek like he'd done before, apparently remembering what Tony told him on the plane about how beating himself up wasn't necessary. Loki finishes this off by saying "No dreams."

"Oh. Well, that's good I guess." Tony says automatically, knowing how rough nightmares are, and then asks "Wait, so you weren't sleeping all this time?" He takes a swig of coffee.

Loki shakes his head. Tony raises a brow and smirks. "Insomnia's got you too, huh?" He can certainly sympathize with that, and with the nightmares.

"In...som..." Loki tries to sound out the word and Tony really should have thought of that.

"It means you can't sleep."

"Oh." Loki nods. "Yeah, that. Can't sleep, nope nope nope."

"Why not?" Tony asks curiously. Loki's never seemed to have this issue before. Well, he almost never goes to sleep after a nightmare, but that's different than not sleeping in the first place.

"Don't wanna," Loki says. Really, at the rate Loki has nightmares, Tony's surprised he never seems to protest the idea of sleeping before now, especially since he seems to be able to function perfectly well with only three or four hours of sleep a night on average. Heck, if Tony's going to be honest with himself, he's avoiding sleep, and bad dreams, too. Maybe Loki suddenly doing this as well has something to do with Dr. Carlisle bringing up the fact that he's still having nightmares?

Before Tony can think too much on that thought, which might be a bit of a stretch, Loki says, rather randomly "Go 'way agains."

"You want me to go away?" Tony asks, confused. Loki normally loves being with him. Also,
there's no way Loki's kicking Tony out of his own lab.

"Noo!" Loki groans, exasperated. "Me! I don't wanna go's way again."

"You don't have to go away. You can stay in here as long as you don't screw anything up." Tony says, and as soon as the words leave his mouth and he sees Loki's frustrated expression, it clicks. Loki's talking about going away when he's sleeping. Just a couple nights ago, Loki had that nightmare where he wound up teleporting to the theater. Perhaps he's worried he'll teleport somewhere in his sleep again, and it's not like he wound up somewhere fun the last time he'd teleported. No, he'd wound up in the Helicarrier, and then got locked in a glass cage and interrogated. Looking over the footage, Tony's realized that Loki actually teleported to the rafters in the Helicarrier's training room, which are identical to the ones in his tower's training room. Tony seriously doubts that's a coincidence.

"Oh. I get it." Tony says. "You don't want to wake up somewhere weird, right?" Loki nods.

"Hey, you're wearing your watch, right?" Tony asks, and Loki holds up his arm to show the watch fastened around it. Tony had been debating about strapping it to Simba instead- after all, Simba helpfully goes everywhere with Loki, even the Helicarrier. But now that he's upgrading Simba's armor, he can just put a tracking device straight in that. "Good." Tony grins at him, and reminds him "Y'know, if you do end up somewhere else, that'll tell me exactly where you are." Loki smiles slightly at that.

"When's Simba gonna gets be the Iron Lion again?" Loki asks, and Tony smirks.

"Iron Lion?"

"That's what Son of Coul said." Loki nods before looking like he hadn't wanted to say that. Tony figures that Son of Coul means Phil Coulson. It seems Loki had picked that up from Thor, although maybe that's just the way everyone in Asgard would say it. Still, he's a little surprised that Loki said Iron Lion instead of Lion of Iron, like he does with Man of Iron. Wow, that thought had too many iron's, even in his head.

"Definitely by tomorrow evening." Tony says, looking down at the armor he's been working on. Loki grins.

"What did you think of Coulson?" Tony asks curiously, because in the footage he'd watched, the agent hadn't seemed too mean to Loki at least. He's hoping bringing this up won't be a problem, but then again, Loki was the one to bring Coulson up.

"Better than the Furious Eyepatch Man." Loki says.

"Yeah, he's a lot nicer than Fury." Tony agrees. "Not that that's hard, really."

"You know them...?" Loki asks, and tilts his head to the side, eyes unfocused as he thinks about something. "I heard Thor saids once that Son of Coul was gone, dead, but he didn't look dead. Maybe that was a..." Loki seems at a loss for words and simply switches to something else. "Ands Thor said something 'bout a d'rect'r who's furious and has a..." Perhaps being unable to think of the word, Loki simply covers his left eye with his hand.

"Eyepatch." Tony supplies the word he's looking for.

"Eye...patch? Yeah, that. I thinks so?" Loki frowns and then nearly whispers "Odin gots one too, but on the other eye."
"Um... yeah, Point Break might've mentioned them." Tony says, unsure of how to tell Loki that he sort of works for Fury, even if he doesn't totally let Fury boss him around.

"Ands they acted like they knewed you." Loki adds, and Tony decides not to correct his grammar right now, because that's really the least important thing he could do. Still, part of him is tempted to delay this. How will Loki react to knowing that Tony's worked with the people on the Helicarrier? Tony then reminds himself that Loki's known basically the whole time that Tony works with Thor as an Avenger, yet that hasn't ruined anything yet, not even in the beginning when Tony first met the god.

"Um, yeah. I know them. I work with them, but that doesn't mean I'm not angry at them for what they did to you. I'm furious at Fury- pun intended- for deciding to lock you up like that. You didn't deserve that, got that?" Tony gives him a steady look, and while Loki nods, Tony's not sure if he actually means that or if he's just nodding to appease him. "You didn't deserve it. Just like how you didn't deserve any of the shit you went through in Asgard." Tony tells Loki, hoping that's the right thing to say. "By the way, I think Thor, Odin, and all their fellow Space Vikings are dicks for treating you like they did. They really put the ass in Ass-guard." Tony purposely mispronounces Asgard, and Loki snickers slightly.

"And Fandral 'n Hogunn 'n Volstagg?" Loki asks. "They hitted me even after Thor didn't." He's definitely trying to go without his handy dandy translator, which only makes it all the more obvious that he'd used it when Dr. Carlisle was calling.

"Glad to hear Thor stopped hitting you eventually." Tony mutters, knowing Loki's mentioned this before. "When did he stop?"

"After his corono-ration and Midgard." Loki says, and Tony briefly decides to tell him that hit is the past tense, not hitted, and that it's coronation. Loki accepts the corrections far easier than Tony himself would have, which most people would probably say is a good thing.

Tony suddenly remembers something he'd put on one of the workbenches in here. He grabs it and shows the thin, flat thing to Loki. "It's a circuit board, like in the book you were looking at." He explains, pointing at the tiny lines. "You see these things here? They're capacitors, and they store energy." He winds up giving a basic explanation of how the individual parts work and how the circuit board works as a whole. Loki seems fascinated.

"I made a circuit board when I was four, by the way." Tony finds himself saying. Okay, maybe that comes off as a bragging, but he is known for being a narcissist.

Loki just gives him a sad look, and Tony wonders if he's thinking about how their lifespans are so different. Tony's going to remember to ask Thor about that when he sees the Thunderer again. Loki had mentioned Idun's apples, too.

For a couple minutes, Loki just watches Tony work on Simba's armor. To break the silence, Tony explains what he's doing, not entirely sure whether or not Loki's listening, since a lot of his attention is focused on the actual suit.

"I made snow stars earlier." Loki says quietly. "Like Elsa. 'Cause I don't gots my stars here like in my room in the tower. Is that good?"

Tony shrugs. "It probably looked pretty cool, didn't it."

"Snow's cold." Loki says as if it's the most obvious thing in the world. "But the cold never bothered me anyway." Tony laughs and explains that cool can mean awesome or neat, too, not just
cold as in physically cold. Loki nods and falls silent for a bit, watching Tony work on the armor some more.

"I saw your snow stars, Mr. Loki, and may I say they looked very nice." Jarvis says, and Loki grins even more. They fall into silence some more.

"Was I right?" Loki asks suddenly, wringing his hands together and hugging Simba tightly.

"Were you right about what?" Tony asks, feeling very confused. Loki's given him basically nothing to go with, there. Are they still talking about Loki making "snow stars" as he calls them?

"Whens... I was in petri dish cell, I thought that... that you'd says to es-cape." Loki nods, and Tony's surprised he brought this up again. But it's probably a good thing, he thinks, as Loki continues. "You know, 'stead of just sitting theres. And I tried'ta punch through the glass but it wouldn't break, nope nope nope! Which was real weirds 'cause it was glass! It's supposed to be real easy to break! So then Hel saids I should try to te-le-port outta there, and I tried but it didn't work!"

In some ways, it sort of did. Loki had sent illusions to Tony, which is at least something. Admittedly, it's not what Loki had been going for, though. Loki continues to ramble. "Couldn't get outs, just like Tinker Bell 'n Stitch 'n Lilo. Xcept Stitch got out of the glass the second time ands then he got Lilo out, but I couldn't 'n neither could Tink, 'til Peter letted her out, and Stitch had to gets Lilo!"

Tony blinks as he processes this long rambling, which is starting to make his head hurt. "So you tried to get out?" He asks. Loki just gives him a slightly annoyed look that clearly says Yeah. Weren't you listening?

"You're right." Tony says. "I would have told you to escape. Although normally captors don't like that very much." He smirks slightly, but it's a humorless smirk.

"They put in... air that mades me feel slow annnd... tired." Loki slows down his voice as if to emphasize what he's saying, although from the recording Tony watched, Loki hadn't spoken that slowly when sedated.

"Yeah, I know, and they shouldn't have done that." Tony mutters darkly.

"What if I go's back?" Loki asks fearfully.

As much as Tony wants to promise that's not going to happen, he can't, really. Wouldn't it be worse to promise it, when there's a small chance of it happening if Loki teleports again? Then it would be like breaking that promise, even if it wasn't his fault.

"You're not gonna let 'em hurts me, right?" Loki asks before Tony's figured out what he's supposed to say twisting his hands together.

"If they try to hurt you again, they're going to be very sorry. I'll make sure of it." At least Tony can promise that.

"I hated it when they held me down, and they had metal things and they were really scary! Buts it didn't hurt like in Ass-guard." Loki snickers as he copies Tony's mispronunciation.

"I'm glad to hear you weren't hurt." Tony replies. Really, he is. "And I can get that it was scary. Trust me, I'd hate being held down too. But those metal instruments were just measuring tools. They weren't going to zap you or anything." Loki looks somewhat relieved.
"You gots me out." Loki says, and he now has Toy Stark and the Loki action figure in his hands. Toy Stark still has the pattern of Lilo's dress on him, though, and the Loki toy is still blue like Stitch, or indeed Loki himself, although it's a different shade of blue than Loki's natural skin.

Loki, looking at the Loki toy, mumbles "He kinda looks like me." Well, obviously he does- Loki's Avengers toys and figure of himself look like miniature versions of the real people, thanks to Loki's magic, but Tony almost feels like Loki's actually referring to the blue skin.

"I'm curious, can you change them at will? Say, if you wanted to make Toy Stark's armor green, could you do that?" Tony asks. At least Loki never freaks out about changing his toys anymore. Tony makes sure that all the scanners in the room are on, both Jarvis' scanners and the various other ones he has stationed throughout.

Loki cocks his head to the side and says irrelevantly "Making Simba move ‘s harder. Can't get him to do much." Then, he stares at Toy Stark until it looks like he's almost going to go cross-eyed, and Tony fights the urge to laugh.

Eventually, Loki starts muttering stuff about being green and after a bit, Toy Stark's armor changes from red with white leaves, like Lilo's dress, to green with gold accents. Loki smiles slightl. Tony, encouraged, challenges him to make Toy Stark similar to Loki's night-sky long coat. That, somehow, takes less time and soon Toy Stark looks like he'd blend in if held up to a starry sky. The glowing dot of the fake arc reactor even adds the the effect.

After getting Loki to change Toy Stark to his Tony form instead of Iron Man, Tony suggests that Loki turn him blue, like a Jotun, he adds. Loki gives Tony a very strange look for actually requesting to have the toy version of himself look like Loki's true form, and Tony shrugs. "I dunno. I'm kind of curious to see what I'd look like on your planet. Or as one of those Avatar people, because they're really close enough."

Loki's staring at him and says "Claire saids she wanted to be's blue ike Cootie Monster." Tony has no clue what a cootie monster is.

"Or Stitch." Tony remarks, smirking when Loki's face lights up at the mention of the alien. Yep, it's been less than a day since Loki saw the movie, and he seems totally obsessed.

Eventually, Loki does manage to turn Toy Stark blue, and Tony looks over the toy. Really, it looks pretty dang good. He tells Loki so in basically the same words, and the god gives him a shocked but pleased smile.

"Oh, yeah, Jarvis found something you're gonna love." Tony says, before telling Jarvis to bring up the video. Said video starts playing, looking a lot like the beginning of The Lion King, with Circle of Life playing. Loki laughs and hugs currently-naked Simba tightly, singing along to the song.

However, instead of Rafiki holding a baby Simba above the cliff, he holds up Stitch. Loki lets out a surprised cross between a shriek and a laugh, flicking his fingers.

"Hey, that's not Simba." Timon says, standing on Pumbaa's back. Loki seems slightly confused, since Timon and Pumbaa hadn't been in that part of The Lion King, but then again, neither had Stitch. Rafiki drops Stitch, and the blue alien clears his throat as he stands on the rock above all the animals, where he proceeds to roar at all the animals gathered below. Loki is laughing uncontrollably by now and jumping up and down almost maniacally.

There are other Lilo & Stitch parody trailers where he sabotages other Disney films. One shows Aladdin and Jasmine riding the magic carpet and singing A Whole New World, only for Stitch to
fly up in his stolen red police cruiser and steal Jasmine away. There's one where Stitch loosens the chandelier in the ballroom while Belle and the Beast dance, and even one where he's surfing and wipes out Ariel with a huge wave. Loki seems somewhat confused by that last one, as they haven't watched *The Little Mermaid* yet. They had watched *The Jungle Book* last night.

"By the way, Mr. Loki, there are several sequels to *Lilo & Stitch*, as well as a television series." Jarvis pipes up. Loki cocks his head to the side in confusion. Tony explains that a TV series is like Kim Possible in that it has short episodes that are around twenty or thirty minutes, instead of an hour and a half like a lot of the movies they've watched.

Loki looks very excited, but then says thoughtfully. "I thinks Bruce needs some green movies."

"Green movies? Like, environmentally friendly? I'm pretty sure Bruce is all for that stuff already, and I don't even know what movies that would include. Like, nature documentaries or something?"

Loki shrugs, looking somewhat confused. "Stitch is blue, so maybe Bruce needs green like Hulk-y."

"Oh, you mean literally green." Tony says. It's actually not a bad idea, although it probably won't work for Bruce as much as it seems to work for Loki. Still, it can't hurt to try.

Loki stays in the lab the rest of the night with Tony. For part of the time, he watches some episodes of the Lilo & Stitch series Jarvis had mentioned. Apparently, Stitch has 625 cousins, which is a lot larger than Loki's own monster family is. Lilo and Stitch work to get them before Gantu and find the one true place where each one belongs. Loki likes that idea a lot. Just like Stitch himself, Stitch's cousins start out bad but become good, while still using their powers. It's like Tony said, they use their powers for good and bad things.

There's a purple experiment named Richter, who makes earthquakes, and his one true place is a shop where he shakes drinks called "Quake Shakes" for people.

Tony nods off sometime around early morning, simply falling asleep with the side of his face pressed into the workbench. There are several empty mugs around him that smell like coffee, as well as a couple glasses with what appears to be some alcoholic drink in them.

Loki knows Tony always drinks that coffee stuff in the morning, but Tony's asleep, so he can't make it.

Loki grins. *He* could make it. After all, it doesn't look that hard, and he's certainly seen it done by Tony and Bruce often enough, and he'd even seen Dum-E do it once or twice. Loki rather misses Dum-E, since he's still back in the tower, and he's really fun to play games with. He wonders what Dum-E's up to right now.

So, Loki's pretty sure he could make coffee. Basically, they put some beans in a machine that's super loud about chopping them up, and then they put the ground-up beans in another machine with a pot under it, add water, and ta-da! The brown liquid that is coffee seeps out from a paper thing that's vaguely shaped like a super-flimsy bowl and lands in the glass pot below. Or something like that.

Frankly, he still cannot fathom why in the Nine Realms Tony and Bruce drink something that tastes so horribly bitter, or why coffee even tastes so bitter when it smells reallygood. It's oddly normally something tastes good if it smells good, like waffles, and tastes nasty if it has a gross scent, but coffee seems to disobey that rule.
Loki heads up the stairs, which are at least familiar since Asgard certainly didn't have elevators, and walks to the kitchen. The kitchen is much like the kitchen they use most in the tower- there are sleek chrome cabinets and countertops, coupled with a lot of metal and a lot of machines and appliances. While he knows which machine is which in the kitchen in the tower's penthouse, thanks to watching Tony and Bruce use them countless times, and he knows where the bean things they use are. Here, however, everything is new, but he does recognize a machine quite similar to the one with the glass pot in the tower, that he knows the coffee slowly streams into. That's probably the same thing, right?

"What are you doing, Mr. Loki?" Jarvis inquires mildly, and Loki thinks that's sort of a weird question, because isn't it obvious? 

"Making cof-fee." He replies as he hunts through the sleek metal cabinets for something resembling the beans.

"You know Mr. Stark does not expect you to make coffee for him, right, Mr. Loki? As we went over a while ago, you are not a servant."

Loki nods. He knows that, because the servants in Asgard made it quite clear that he wasn't going to get paid like they were when they made him help. He was below even servants and, in a way, even slaves. Not because they owned him like a slave, but because everyone in Asgard said Frost Giants were the scum of the universe, needing to be taught how not to be savages. This apparently meant helping with things like laundry.

Loki still has no idea how laundry is supposed to help Jotuns, especially when they wouldn't let him anywhere near other chores, like anything in the kitchen. They seemed to think he'd poison their food or infuse it with magic or something, although for some reason didn't seem concerned with clothes being infused with magic. Still, it seemed awfully convenient for the servants and slaves to have an extra set of hands sometimes. Perhaps it was inconvenient, though, considering how they constantly belittled him and bemoaned about how long it took him to master things like folding shirts, saying he was even stupider than the average Jotun, which is apparently as dumb as a rock. But Elsa wasn't dumb, and Tony's said he's not dumb, so he can't be dumber than Jotuns, right?

But Tony hadn't told or even asked Loki nicely to make him coffee, so it's not like in Asgard. Besides, Tony's done so many nice things for Loki and Loki knows he'll never be able to repay Tony for everything he's done- even fixing his leg hadn't come close to everything Tony's done for him.

But Tony's probably going to like it if he makes coffee for him.

"The coffee beans are in the leftmost cabinet near the bottom." Jarvis says helpfully, and Loki grins, flicking his fingers. He pulls that open and sees a bag before hunting around for the thing that'll chop them up. "You'll want to put three scoops in the coffee grinder- no that's the blender, Mr. Loki, The thing to the left. Yes, there. Very good, Mr. Loki." A couple seconds later, Jarvis remarks "You could just let Mr. Stark or Dr. Banner make their own coffee."

"No. I'm doing it fors them." Loki nods, hoping they'll appreciate it.

He manages to get the beans through that machine (the thing Jarvis calls it a coffee grinder) without any issue, and Jarvis is a big help with helping guide him through how to work it. Then, he moves the ground-up beans to the coffee-maker, puts in a flimsy paper bowl thingy (a 'filter', according to Jarvis) and lets the coffee slowly fill the pot. It smells really good, and there's probably enough for both Tony and Bruce, at least for a bit. Sometimes Tony goes through
multiple pots. Bruce has to, on occasion, though it's happened far more often with Tony.

Loki slowly fills up a mug that looks like a Man of Iron mask, thinking it's kind of funny that Tony has it. Tony has Man of Iron pajamas just like the ones Loki's wearing now- they'd gotten them at the same time.

Loki looks at the full mug of coffee and smirks as an idea starts to form in his head. Maybe he can trick Tony like Claire tricked him into eating that disgusting... thing. He's forgotten the name of it, but it was something like cootie. He'd tried to pull Claire's prank of giving someone gross food on both that random lady and Pepper, but neither had fallen for it.

He gets another idea and hides the coffee pot behind a fake plant (it certainly doesn't feel real), before turning to the mug of coffee and wondering what to do with it.

He's not entirely sure what he should do to Tony's coffee. He could spit in it, but that would be gross and maybe a bit too mean. He looks around in some of the cabinets and finds a whole lot of spices in little glass jars. He's not sure what most of them are, or if they have any equivalent in Asgard, but he recognizes a couple of them from cooking with Bruce, and there's one called Cinnamon that smells like hot chocolate, so maybe hot chocolate has that.

Loki grabs that jar and shakes a bit of cinnamon in the coffee. Then, his eyes land on another jar, with Oregano written on it. It's a greenish color, and he cautiously sprinkles some on his tongue. It's not that weird, so he sprinkles a little bit into Tony's mug, though it's a lot less than the cinnamon he'd added.

There's still almost a whole pot of normal coffee, though, so Tony can still have that after he's been pranked.

"Don't tell Tony," Loki whispers to Jarvis, snickering slightly.

"Mr. Stark is actually on his way up here." Jarvis replies. Loki though Tony had been sleeping, but this is even better.

He starts snickering again, as he goes to set the mug on the table. However, to his horror, it slips out of his fingers, crashing and shattering on the floor as coffee splatters on the tiles. "It's not a problem, Mr. Loki." Jarvis starts to say, but Loki only half hears it.

Loki stares at the spot on the ground, where everything's ruined, as words from the past echo through his head. "You're hopeless. Can't you do anything right?" No, it seems, he can't. He can't even do something as easy as making coffee right.

He snaps out of his trance and realizes that Tony's going to be really mad at him for breaking a mug and spilling coffee on the floor. Dum-E had done that, once, and Tony had gotten angry. Tony had said later that he wouldn't hit Dum-E or him, so at least he doesn't have to worry about being beaten like he was whenever he broke something back in Asgard.

Still, Tony's going to be really angry. What if he decides that he doesn't want Loki in his family anymore, Loki thinks, panicking. Hel reminds him that it doesn't work that way, that you can't just kick someone out of your family for breaking a mug. After all, Stich blew up Lilo's whole house and he's still in Lilo's Ohana. Elsa froze the whole kingdom and Anna still loves her.

Loki dimly hears Jarvis speaking in a comforting voice. It's easier to listen to Hel than Jarvis.

Still, he makes out Tony's voice.
"Loki, what do you think you're-" Tony starts to say but then he stops. Loki flinches and tenses. Tony sounds really annoyed, as he should be. After all, nobody likes having their stuff broken. He falls to the floor and crawls under the table, waiting for Tony's displeasure to rain down on him in some way, but at least it won't be through punches and kicks. Still, he's undoubtedly going to yell at him like he'd yelled at Dum-E.

"Hey, it's okay." Tony says softly right next to him, perhaps sensing what he's feeling. Tony's hands rub circles on Loki's arms, and then Tony hugs him, which makes Loki wonder if maybe Tony's not as mad as Loki had first thought.

"...I'm sorry, sorry, so sorry sorry sorry." Loki rambles. "I didn't mean'ta breaks it." Loki's voice comes out soft and somewhat choked. "It fell. I swears I didn't mean'ta. It was an accident."

"Trust me, I know you didn't." Loki looks at him in surprise, and Tony smirks a little, though his eyes are still kind. "Besides it's not like I haven't had Thor fling about a million mugs to the ground when he wants another drink. I'd say he's far worse about mugs, wouldn't you?"

Loki smiles a bit, even letting out a tiny giggle. Yeah, Thor is worse! That habit of most Asgardians always seemed really stupid, because they'd break their mugs and then have to wait until a servant fetched them a new one. Plus it was just plain weird, even though they all did it. Although they did it all the time, they hadn't liked it much when he did it, but Loki supposes that's fairly obvious.

"You're not mads?" Loki asks, trying not to get too hopeful.

"Nah. Accidents happen. Remember Dum-E doing that?" Tony asks, and Loki nods.

"So we's still a family?" Okay, that hadn't come out quite how he hoped, and Tony's giving him a shocked look. Maybe he'd said something really wrong without All-Speak. Had he said something rude?

"You thought we weren't going to be a family because you accidentally dropped a mug?" Tony asks incredulously.

"Hel saids that Stitch broke stuff and was still in Lilo's Ohana. Loki mumbles. "Said this is the sames. And Elsa frozed Arendelle, but Anna didn't casts her out."

"Well, Hel was right." Tony says. "I'm glad Hel told you that. You should listen to her when she tells you stuff like that."

Loki nods, because Hel normally does give pretty good advice.

"I was trying to tell you the same thing, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says, and Tony smiles slightly, telling Jarvis he did a good job, too. "Seriously, Rudolph, literally nothing you've done so far is even close to having me even begin to consider kicking you out."

"Really?" Loki asks, and Tony confirms it. Loki throws his arms around the man. Tony hugs him back for a bit and then goes over to the brown puddle on the floor, putting a finger in the spilt coffee.

"Uh, Snoopy? What's in this coffee exactly? There are... specks of stuff."

Loki shows him the two bottles of spices he'd put in. Tony quirks an eyebrow and asks "Okay, Cinnamon I can get, but Oregano? Why would you put Oregano in there?"
"It was a jest." Loki explains, grinning slightly. "So's it'd taste all weird."

Tony laughs slightly and says "I'm going to have to watch my back around you. You're sneaky, you know that?" Tony looks at him almost fondly. "You probably would have gotten away with that too. I suppose I should be thankful you didn't decide to dump tabasco sauce in there, or pepper or something. By the way, those were not suggestions. Please don't put pepper in my coffee, ever."

Loki frowns. "Pepper wouldn't fit in... those, Tony." He points to the mugs, unsure of the word. "She's real tall."

Tony bursts out laughing. Loki's not entirely sure why, but at least Tony never makes him feel stupid about stuff he says. Tony seems to find a lot more of what Loki says funny than Loki himself does, and Loki's never actually trying to be funny. Tony explains that pepper is a spice, and even shows it to him on the spice rack. Loki hadn't noticed it before.

Loki goes to pick up the broken pieces of the Man of Iron mug, but Tony stops him, saying that Bruce would have a fit if he let him pick up sharp things with his bare hands. Tony then calls out some sort of cleaning robot that looks a lot like M-O, the cleaning robot in Wall-E. Tony remarks that he'd actually gotten the idea from that, and Loki grins, watching as the little robot cleans up the spilled coffee like he'd cleaned up Wall-E's mud tracks in the movie. Part of Loki really feels like he should be helping, but Tony insists he doesn't have to. So once the robots done, Loki pokes it curiously while it stays in one spot, beeping. He loves this robot.

"I made real coff-ee toos." Loki says and Tony looks around. Loki gets up and reveals it from behind the plant, explaining that this was another joke, too. Tony raises a brow yet again. Loki thinks he's seen Tony do that single-brow-raise more than he's seen it on anyone else's face before in his entire life.

Tony takes the coffee pot and pours himself another mug. He lifts it up but then looks at it suspiciously. "Loki, did you put any surprises in this?"

"No." Loki answers truthfully. Tony stares at him for a bit, as if trying to figure out if he's lying. "Jarvis?"

"It's perfectly safe, sir."

Tony nods and takes a sip. He swallows and asks "Did you have a job back at an Asgardian Starbucks or something?", although Loki has no clue what a Star Bucks is. He can't remember there being a star named Bucks in the charts he'd looked at that named a lot of the stars.

Tony grins at this. " Seriously, Bambi, you make a mean coffee. Uh, by mean I mean good. It's an expression."

Loki nods and goes back to the floor to play with M-O, who's almost as fun as Dum-E. As he plays, Loki wonders what tabasco sauce is from when Tony mentioned it earlier. Tony had never said anything about not putting that in his coffee. He'd just said not to put pepper in there. Loki vaguely wonders why Pepper chooses to name herself after a spice, since she said her real name is Virginia when they first met, that first day Loki had been on Midgard.

Even though he's been here for somewhere around forty days (or so he's heard Tony say), Loki still thinks that Midgard can be a very odd place.

"Hey, Loki, are you out here?" Bruce asks, walking out of the mansion. Tony had left a couple
hours ago, bemoaning the fact that he has to leave while Bruce and Loki get to stay in the mansion. Loki had seemed disappointed that he and Bruce weren't going to work with Tony again and equally disappointed that Tony was leaving in the first place. He'd asked about seeing Claire, Mark, Jacob, Carlos and Annie again, although he's talked about Claire the most. Bruce hadn't been sure what to say, since he probably can't go back there, especially after hurling a plastic hammer through a wall.

The god had gone outside after breakfast, and had presumably gone to his tree, so Bruce heads in that direction. From a distance, he can see a vague form of Loki sitting in one of the branches in the middle, and he can just make out the sound of Loki chattering happily, which grows steadily more distinguishable the closer he gets. Bruce wonders if Loki's talking to the tree, to Simba, or to his imaginary friends, who may be less imaginary than most.

When he gets to the trunk of the tree, Bruce sees that Loki has actually brought some books up with him. He's lounging in a branch with his back against the tree, and Simba standing on top of a book in his lap while he holds another book. He's somehow reading and talking at the same time. Bruce sees that Loki has Toy Stark up there with him. Loki has taken to carrying Toy Stark, in addition to Simba, around with him constantly now that Tony's gone to work. It's almost endearing, actually.

"Hello, there." Bruce says, smiling slightly. "I'm looking for a man named Loki, but I see I've found a monkey instead."

"I'm not a monkey, Bruce." Loki tells him, giggling, as if Bruce had actually been serious about that, looking down at him from the branch. "But you humans are almost monkeys, you knows? Well, apes, 'cause you're like real close to chimps an' gorillas. That's what the book saids. You're more like 'em than all the other aminals."

"So we are." Bruce admits. "We share about ninety-seven percent of their DNA, if I recall correctly.

"Ninety-nine chimps ands ninety-eight gorillas." Loki rattles off, and Bruce realizes he's referring to the percentages of DNA shared between them and humans instead of something about ninety-nine chimpanzees. Suddenly, Loki asks. "When's Tony get back?"

Loki has asked that question a couple times during breakfast alone. He's clearly used to having Tony around, and Bruce is pretty sure that Tony would rather be here than at whatever meeting or business-related thing he's in now.

"Sometime later this afternoon." Bruce replies. "Or maybe this evening, I'm not sure. He is coming back, though."

"Okay." Loki acquiesces, looking slightly disappointed at the news he has to wait. He swings down to another branch closer to Bruce, quite like a monkey really, and turns the book he's reading around so Bruce can see the pages, one of which shows a photo of an octopus and the other is filled with tiny text that Bruce certainly can't read from that distance. "These octo...pus aminals are real cute, don't you think?" He points to the picture and laughs. Cute isn't the word Bruce would have chosen, but he doesn't say that. Loki continues. "Pleakley hads one on his face, and he saids that dolphins are nicer than sharks. Dids you know they live in water?"

"I did know that, actually. And by the way, it's animals, not aminals." Bruce says, smiling slightly. "I was thinking maybe we could hit the beach, or you can stay here if you want."

He notices Loki's looking at him, shocked, and he realizes what Loki must be thinking. "I didn't
mean *actually* hitting the beach. It's an expression, it means going somewhere. I was thinking maybe we could go to the beach, not hit it."

Looking slightly less confused now, Loki nods. He expertly climbs up to his previous perch, even with a book in his hands. Once there, he gathers Simba, the books, and Toy Stark in his arms and jumps from the tree. Once again, the tree's branches follow him down, and Bruce reaches out to poke at one of them curiously. It wiggles slightly and withdraws, and Loki says "She's ticklish."

"Oh, um, okay." Really, how is one supposed to respond to being told a tree is ticklish? As if to demonstrate, Loki goes up to the trunk and tickles under a low branch, like tickling under an armpit. The whole tree quakes, as if with silent laughter, and one of the lower branches snakes forwards and tickles him in the stomach. Loki practically squeals with laughter and the tree stops its tickle assault.

Bruce realizes his mouth is hanging open and shuts it. Really, of all the bizarre things Loki's done, this isn't *that* odd.

"Did you carry all that stuff up in one go?" Bruce asks Loki, looking at the books, Simba and Toy Stark. Surely Loki must have taken multiple trips to carry all that stuff up... However, Loki just nods as if it's no big deal, and Bruce is seriously impressed. He certainly can't climb like that.

The two of them head down towards the beach at the bottom of the cliff where the house is perched. Loki's holding Simba, Toy Stark, and a couple random figurines he'd grabbed from his drawstring bag. The figurines include Goofy- even though Loki's never watched anything related to Mickey Mouse as far as Bruce knows- as well as one of the gargoyles from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* that Bruce couldn't possibly name but Loki undoubtedly can, and his Elsa, Anna and Olaf figurines (not the dolls and the small plush).

Once they're on the beach, Loki ignores the water for now and focuses on the sand, which is rather shady since the cliff's shadow falls on it. He wiggles his toes and then tries to bury his feet in the sand simply by moving them.

Loki sticks his figurines in the sand and starts burying them and then digging them out with his bare hands. For a brief period of time, he re-enacts the beach scenes of Olaf singing *In Summer* from *Frozen*, but then he falls silent as he continues to bury his figurines.

For a while after that, Loki seems to be playing some sort of game as he runs around the beach. Bruce catches snatches of it. Loki seems to be saying *spare mint* a lot, although Bruce has no idea why. He also repeatedly talks about earthquakes and mentions Lilo, Stitch and Gantu a lot. Sometimes, it even seems like he's pretending to be Stitch as he curls his hands into claws and jumps around, showing more teeth than usual.

At one point, Loki asks Bruce if 'Hulk-y' can make earthquakes by punching the ground. Bruce says that he can crack the ground, but that's not really an earthquake.

"Hulk-y should come out sometime." Loki says. "How 'bouts now? He can't fight with Tony or wreck ups his house or anything."

Bruce sighs. It's really actually better if Tony's there, because then if the Hulk's set off for some reason, Tony can be suited up and keep the Other Guy from hurting anyone. Bruce wonders if Tony somehow brought that huge Hulk suit with him or not. He assumes Tony has some normal Iron Man suits here in case anything comes up.

"I gotta tell Hulk-y he's in my family, now. Ands I gotta do something else, too." Loki nods.
Inside Bruce's mind, the Other Guy seems almost hopeful.

"When Tony gets back, I might let him out." Bruce says, and Loki grins from ear to ear.

It actually hasn't been that long since he let the Other Guy out. It had been after Dr. Carlisle's second session, which wasn't even two weeks ago. Normally, Bruce would hate the idea of letting the Other Guy out that recently. Now, though, a certain part of Bruce - the large, green, angry part - really wishes he'd gone to the Helicarrier and smashed things up. Really, the Other Guy can't be a total monster if he feels so protective of Loki. The Other Guy hasn't even done anything to hurt Loki, either, apart from shoving him once. And Loki, for reasons Bruce can't begin to fathom, adores the big green guy.

Eventually, Loki's eyes are drawn to the water.

Loki deposits Simba on the sand. "Jarvis says Simba can't gets wet, 'cause then he won't talk, nope nope nope." The god explains, and Bruce has to agree he's probably right about that. After all, taking a stuffed animal with batteries into the water is never a great idea. Simba hasn't been wearing his Iron Man suit since Tony was doing something to it last night.

Leaving Simba with Bruce, Loki rushes off to the water. To Bruce's shock, the god winds up stripping completely naked on his way over there, showing absolutely zero self-consciousness about his body.

Pinching the bridge of his nose, Bruce calls out "Loki, put your clothes back on, please."

"Why?" Loki asks curiously, turning around and inadvertently flashing Bruce without a second thought. Maybe nudity in Asgard isn't viewed the same way as it is here. Bruce remembers Thor saying he finds it weird that 'Midgardians' are so modest about their bodies.

"Because here, when you go swimming, you wear clothes. Well, special swim clothes, but they're still clothes." Technically, there are nude beaches, but there's no way Bruce is going to go into that. He can imagine Tony suggesting they all go to a nude beach, though perhaps not seriously.

"That's weird." Loki laughs like crazy at the idea.

Bruce thinks for a bit and then says "Hey, Lilo, Nani and David weren't naked, right?" Hopefully that'll get the point across.

"But Stitch didn't weared clothes in the water, 'n Olaf didn't, and Simba neither." Loki counters.

"Stitch didn't wear clothes, yes." Bruce disguises the correction, but he sees Loki gets it. "Yes, you're right, Stitch, Olaf and Simba didn't wear clothes in the water, but they never really wore clothes. They're not people."

"So?"

Bruce has to actually think of an answer for that. "Did animals wear clothes where you came from?"

Loki giggles. "No. 'Xcept for whens they were dressed up. But that almost never happened, nope nope nope, 'xcept I put a real little colt in my shirt once... I puts my shirt on it." Loki frowns slightly as if he hadn't liked what he said. "But then I didn't have a shirt."

"Um, okay." Bruce says, not exactly looking at Loki now either to try to give him some sense of privacy, although clearly Asgard's view of privacy vastly differs from Earth's. "Anyways, the point
is that people, or... non-animals wear clothes, even when swimming. Um, except Olaf was a
snowman, so he didn't. But seeing as you are neither a snowman nor an animal, you should wear
clothes."

Loki just stares at him, so Bruce goes on. "Like how David was wearing shorts when he was
surfing, and, uh, even Mowgli wore clothes." They'd watched *The Jungle Book* last night, and
admittedly it wasn't realistic at all for Mowgli to be wearing red underwear in the jungle when in
real life he definitely would have been naked. The red underwear-loincloth hybrid he'd been
wearing was just to keep the G rating, but still, Loki should follow that. "So, if you could please,
uh... get dressed." Bruce gestures vaguely at the pile of clothes laying on the sand.

Loki sighs and puts on his shorts but leaves his shirt off, and he hadn't been wearing shoes in the
first place, even in the tree. Apparently, he's decided Frigga's supposed rule of wearing shoes when
going outside doesn't apply here. He dashes into the water until he winds up falling when he's
knocked over by a wave. He laughs and dips his figurines in and out of the saltwater. His
Jormungand necklace seems to come to life and slithers in the water around the god. When Loki's
other friends (and pretend family, too) are visible, they're apparently just illusions in the air, except
for Jormungand who seems to morph from the necklace and thus is the only one with an actual
tangible body. Loki seems delighted as Jormungand swims around him and he tries to swim with
the snake.

Loki makes a weird face as his wet shorts cling to him, clearly not liking it. Then again, they're
normal shorts instead of swim trunks. Bruce makes a mental note that he'll have to ask Tony to buy
Loki some swim stuff sometime, since he seems to love the water. Bruce watches as Loki splashes
around in the water. After about ten minutes, though, he goes surprisingly still and just sits there,
chest deep in water, facing towards the beach so the waves don't hit him in the face. Jormungand
wraps himself around Loki, and Loki smiles.

Even just outside in general, Loki somehow seems more at peace, but the difference is especially
noticeable in the water. He's actually not moving around constantly anymore, and he hadn't been
too hyper in the tree. Bruce approaches the god, thinking that this is probably the best he's done at
meditating, and that hadn't even been the intent.

"It's very calm here, isn't it?" Bruce asks, and Loki nods slightly, making his Goofy figurine rise
from the water.

"Have you really gone to In...dia?" Loki asks, clearly unsure of if he's pronouncing it right. Bruce
tells him that he said it right and confirms that he has in fact gone to India, which is where *The
Jungle Book* takes place. Bruce had mentioned it in passing when watching the movie last night
and hadn't even known Loki was listening then.

"Didja meet Mowgli?" Is Loki's next question. Bruce chuckles and says that no, he didn't.

Loki falls silent for a bit, and Bruce joins him in sitting in the water, not caring at all that his own
shorts are getting wet. He tells Loki to focus on the sounds of the waves, and for a few minutes,
Loki actually really seems to be meditating, even if he laughs when a wave hits him.

Then, the silence is broken again by Loki asking "Bruce? Why are cooties so gross?"

Bruce laughs, wondering if Loki had heard about cooties from the kids he'd been playing with in
the daycare yesterday. He asks Loki to elaborate, not entirely sure what Loki had heard though.

"Claire gaves me food and she said it was a coo-tie, buts it was real gross 'n nasty and she said she
likes 'em. She says Cootie Monster eats cooties too, but why can she like them if they're so gross?"
"Cootie Monster?" Bruce asks, wondering what that is- and since when was a cootie a food? Suddenly it hits him. "Hey, Loki? Was this Cootie Monster blue with eyes on the top of his head?" Loki nods, and Bruce grins.

"It's Cookie Monster, not Cootie Monster. And you don't like cookies?" Loki likes candy, after all, and he certainly has a sweet tooth for the maple syrup on waffles, so how can he not like cookies? Loki shakes his head. "It had nothing in it, and she said it was pr'tend."

"Oh." Bruce says. "Um, Loki, I don't think that was a real cookie. I think it was a fake cookie, like a toy. Real cookies are amazing."

"Really?"

"Yeah. You should try them sometime. Actually, we might be able to make them..." Bruce muses, noticing that Loki perks up with interest. "I'm not sure if Tony has all the right ingredients, and I don't even know how to make them off the top of my head, but I'm sure we could figure it out." He grins and asks "After all, we're too smart to let cookies defeat us, right?"

"Yeah!" Loki laughs, clapping his hands. "We're real smart!"

The two of them head into the house, changing out of their soaked, sandy clothes into fresh ones before they reconvene in the kitchen. Loki comes back wearing both his Jormungand necklace and a lei he found somewhere, or maybe he'd made it with his magic. He sets Simba on the table with Toy Stark on his back.

It turns out, Tony has all the necessary ingredients for cookies, even chocolate chips, surprisingly. Most of them have probably kept for a while, but it seems like Jarvis had thought ahead to have things like milk and eggs in the fridge for when they arrived yesterday.

Bruce gets Loki to be in charge of reading the recipe, and it's perhaps a more fun way of helping Loki to read (and speak) without All-Tongue, although to be honest, Loki seems to like reading in general. He also seems rather excited about using an electric mixer, and Bruce has to make sure he doesn't turn it on the "explosion setting". Figures that Tony's kitchen appliances have bizarre settings with equally bizarre names that Tony undoubtedly added himself. Heck, Bruce is surprised that Tony hadn't supped up any of his appliances with AI. He almost would have expected a sentient toaster or something. Then again, there aren't any of those in the tower, either, just robots.

Some time later, the cookies are finally done, and Loki very hesitantly takes a bite of one, perhaps worried it will be like the fake cookie Claire apparently told him to eat.

The worry instantly vanishes when he tastes the real chocolate chip cookie, and he practically cram's the rest into his mouth with the same gusto that Thor usually saves for Pop Tarts.

To Tony's great annoyance, it's already starting to get dark when he finally gets home. According to Jarvis, Bruce is reading something on a Stark Pad in the living room and Loki is outside.

"Hey, I was going to have Jarvis order some takeaway food." Tony says. Maybe they can eat Shawarma again. Tony's rather fond of the stuff, perhaps because they ate it after their victory against the Chitauri in the internationally famous Battle of New York. Maybe he'll open a bottle of scotch too.

"We made cookies." Bruce says, nodding towards the kitchen. Tony grins and heads over, snagging one and cramming part of it into his mouth.
They eat dinner a bit later, and Loki finishes early, darting out the door.

He starts to head out the door to find Loki, figuring the god's probably in that tree he loves so much. As Tony steps out of the house, he sees the fountain is lit up, and he wonders if Loki noticed it.

As he approaches Loki's tree, Tony can make out the vague forms of several figures. Getting closer, he realizes that Fenrir and Sleipnir are relaxing in the grass by the trunk of Loki's favorite hangout. Fenrir lets out a friendly bark, running up to sniff him, just like a real dog would. Except he's a huge wolf instead, although he's pretty nonthreatening right now.

As he lets Fenrir sniff his hand, Tony almost feels something instead of the usual intangible air that Loki's friends are normally made of. Granted, Fenrir's still not solid, but Tony's hand definitely feels something when it's near the wolf. Fenrir pads back over to his spot near the trunk, walking in a circle before laying back down in the grass with a low chuffing sound.

At the base of the tree are a couple books, one of them about animals, and the other is that circuit book Loki had been looking at yesterday. Also at the base of the tree are Loki's long coat and what looks to be a lei. Tony vaguely remembers having some sort of party involving leis here a while ago, so maybe Loki had found one of the leftovers from that.

"Loki, are you up there?" Bruce, who has followed Tony out here, calls up to the branches of the tree.

"Not Loki" A voice calls back down, straining to be a higher pitch and with just the faintest trace of a British accent as if the speaker's trying to cover it up. "Mowgli."

"He said I'm the baby elephant!" Sleipnir chirps brightly in a childlike voice. "I'm not an elephant, but I'm gray, see?" He stomps two of his eight hooves on the ground and prances around.

"I see." Bruce says to the horse. "So, Sleipnir, tell me about yourself." Tony's sort of wondering if the horse will even answer.

"I like to play games!" Sleipnir says happily. "And I like to run but I can't much in Loki's head."

Tony notices that Loki's attention isn't focused on Sleipnir at all, so if he's controlling Sleipnir without focusing on him, that's sort of impressive. But don't people need to think about what their imaginary friends do? It doesn't seem like Loki is.

"All right, so I know Loki's mentioned that you tried to attack people." Tony points at Fenrir, who barks, and Tony rounds on Hel next. "What are you, emotional support?"

"Basically." Hel replies.

"I sing to him." Sleipnir inputs, and Tony grins. This is freaking cool.

Tony goes to look at the last friend, turning to gaze up into the branches where Jormungand is. "Playing Jungle Book, Lok- I mean Mowgli?"

"Yeah. It has parts for all of us. I'm the girl at the end." Hel tells them, lounging with her back against the tree trunk.. "You know, the girl from the man-village, so I just sing that song, but my cue hasn't come yet. Fenrir's the wolves that raised Mowgli." Hel seems like the opposite of Loki- she looks to be a teenager at most, possibly younger- Tony has never been good with ages- yet in some ways she seems older. She has a somewhat haunted look in her eyes, but perhaps that's just because half of her looks like some sort of zombie, meaning the eye on that side looks sort of dead.
Yet here she is, playing the part of a young girl for Loki.

None of Loki's friends share Loki's somewhat idiosyncratic speech (which has gotten even more bizarre recently). Not even Sleipnir, who appears to be a young horse, a colt, probably, and sort of matches Loki's childishness. Additionally, they all seem to be acting separately from each other, and indeed from Loki himself. Almost like they're not imaginary friends that he's controlling. Then again, Sleipnir and Fenrir had sort of done their own things after Loki had that nightmare with Hans and Gaston killing all the Avengers.

Tony thinks it's really cool that all of Loki's 'imaginary' friends are in the same place. He's pretty sure this is the first time that's happened, unless you count the fake charms on the Jormungand accessory. Glancing around, Tony doesn't see the necklace anywhere, but he does see a large snake up in a tree. "Go to ssssleep." Jormungand (the snake is obviously Loki's friend and apparently a living version of the necklace) wraps himself around Loki. Tony recognizes this as a re-enactment of a scene from the movie.

"Hey, um, Mowgli." Tony calls up into the branches. "Are you wearing clothes?" Looking at the heap of them on the ground, Tony would guess he's not. Bruce facepalms at the idea of Loki being naked in a tree. Tony, on the other hand, smirks, because it's kind of a funny thought.

"Not naked, nope nope nope." Loki says, hooking his knees over a branch and hanging upside down. Tony sees that Loki's wearing something that resembles red underwear, like Mowgli had on in the movie. "And I got my watch on, like you says." Loki adds, looking at Tony.

"I'm glad to hear that." Bruce says. To Tony, he mutters "We had a bit of an Asgard-Midgard culture clash today. Apparently there, it's perfectly acceptable to go swimming completely nude."

"Well, you know, there are beaches that let you go in your birthday suit." Tony remarks, smirking. Bruce just rolls his eyes and mutters that he knew Tony was going to say that. Tony wonders if he's really that predictable. He sure hopes not.

Jormungand has wrapped himself around Loki, and Loki looks decidedly relaxed, breaking character and murmuring something about a hug. Bruce tells Loki that Kaa the snake was not hugging Loki, but rather trying to squeeze him to death, and makes Loki promise not to let himself be 'hugged' by any snakes but Jormungand. Jormungand hisses something about never hurting Loki.

Tony smiles at Loki's little *Jungle Book* game. Jormungand is saying something to Simba, and the toy lion actually starts to move like Loki's friends do. Loki squeals in absolute delight when this happens and scoops Simba up in his arms. After hugging him for a bit, Loki deposits Simba back on the branch. Apparently, Simba's been cast as Bagheera the panther, and Jormungand, who's Kaa the snake, is trying to hypnotize him. Jormungand's eyes actually start to swirl like the cartoon snakes's in the movie.

Loki shoves Jormungand off the tree and laughs. "Look Bagheera, he's got a knot in his tail."

Jormungand doesn't though, and he curls up on the grass.

"Aren't you around two feet taller than Mowgli?" Tony asks Loki curiously. He's not trying to ruin it or anything, but at a fair deal over six feet tall, Loki has a hard time passing as a child, unless you count that he still does stuff like carry around toys and play pretend. Still, he has no hope of physically passing as a child.

"You're weird, Tony." Loki laughs. "I only gots two feets, see? If you want two more feets, ask Fenrir. He's got four, so he's got two more than me an' Mowgli, and Sleipnir's got twice the feet
Fenrir does!" Loki wiggles his bare feet in their direction and Tony laughs. As if on cue, Fenrir sits on his hind legs, and holy crap, he's almost as tall as Tony when he does that! The huge wolf raises two enormous paws and barks happily, tongue hanging out of his mouth.

"No, here- well, at least in the States- we use feet as a way to measure things, but they're not actually feet, or the length of feet, because everyone's feet are different lengths. Basically, twelve inches equals a foot and three feet equals a yard."

"Most of the world uses the metric system, which is a lot more sensical." Bruce adds, but that probably only confuses Loki more.

Loki looks understandably confused, and Tony wonders if he should go inside to get a yardstick or something. "Basically what I'm saying is that you're a lot taller than Mowgli. Not that it matters."

"So it's not 'bout feets?" Loki frowns in confusion. "English is weird."

Bruce laughs again. "I'll have to agree with you there. By the way, the plural is feet, not feets. But English is weird. It has a lot of odd rules and a lot of exceptions to those rules, like i before e, except after c, or ending in ei as in neighbor or weigh." He shrugs and says "I learned that way back."

"So how tall's Mowgli then?" Loki asks.

Tony holds his hand a little below his arc reactor, around elbow-height actually. "Somewhere around here, maybe?" Honestly, he has no clue, but nobody objects.

Loki crouches down and says "I thinks I mighta been this tall once, but it's so weird now, 'cause it seems so short."

As he's talking, his body slowly starts to shift before their eyes, until he actually is that height. He looks like a child, a little like Mowgli actually. His hair has gone from shoulder-length to chin-length, like Mowgli's.

His eyes are still wide, green and slightly unfocused and glassy. Tony thinks back to that one child Other-Loki, the one that hadn't had glassy eyes, and the difference between that Loki and the one in front of him now are even more stark. Something definitely happened to the god, unless that illusion was lying. Tony's going to have to ask Thor.


Loki looks down at his own body in confusion at first, though it quickly changes to horror. He curls into a really tiny ball, given his tiny size, and starts shaking. He's clearly having a panic attack right now.

Tony gathers the now small god in his arms and whispers to him that it's okay, that he's not in trouble, that what he just did was so freaking awesome and really no different from what he does to Tony Stark. Then again, doing it to himself might be sort of scary, or maybe he got punished for it in Asgard.

Although Loki's small now, he still weighs a disproportionate amount to what his skinny body would suggest. Honestly, this is what Tony would have expected the tall, adult Loki to weigh.

Eventually, little Loki calms down and looks at his small hands. He dashes over to the pool and tries to see his reflection in the water, but seeing as it's lit from below, that's sort of impossible.
Tony instead pulls out his Stark Phone and takes a picture of the god. He turns the phone around and show it to Loki.

"I'm Mowgli!" Loki laughs, flapping his hands. Really, it's only the hair and the skininess that makes Loki resemble Mowgli, as well as the fact he's currently dressed like Mowgli, wearing only a red loincloth sort of thing.

Suddenly, it seems they've skipped to the end of the movie in Loki's pretend game as Hel heads over to the pool with what looks to be an illusion of a jug, as the water doesn't seem to be going in it.

Hel starts to sing in a slow sort of floating melody. "Myyy own hoooome, myyy own hooome, myy own ho-oo-oo-oo-ooome."

"Can Hulk-y be blue?" Loki asks, looking up at them. It's weird, since normally Tony has to look up to see Loki.

"You want him to be blue?" Tony asks, confused.

"B'loo." Loki stresses. "The bear... Baloo. Like the bare necessities. Bruce, you's said he can come out when Tony's here."

"To be fair, Loki did just change." Tony points out to Bruce.

Bruce sighs and tells Tony to get his Iron Man suit, also stating that they're going to be doing this out here. Once Tony's suited up, Bruce slowly closes his eyes. Loki suddenly shouts "Wait!" and runs in his small body to grab something from the base of the tree. It's the lei that he'd apparently found somewhere in the house. The small god tries to put it around Bruce's neck, but he has a hard time reaching.

Bruce shoots a questioning look at Loki as he takes the lei from the small god. "Stitch didn't breaked things when he wear it." Loki says, clearly thinking it'll be the same with Hulk.

"Thank you." Bruce says. He puts the lei around his neck with a slight smile, but then seems to get slightly annoyed at something, presumably to turn into Hulk. Loki keeps talking, pointing out that he'd said wear instead of weared, like Bruce told him to earlier. Tony tells him that the past tense of wear is wore, sort of doubting that Bruce had told Loki it was wear. Loki pouts slightly.

By this time, Tony's put himself in between Loki and Bruce, trying to do it casually. Since Loki's actually shorter than him now, it probably doesn't look quite as stupid than Loki hiding behind him when Loki's taller. Tony really doesn't think Hulk will hurt Loki, but there's no guarantee about when he first comes out. Sometimes he's a little confused then. They watch as transforms, growing bigger and greener.

Hulk looks around, seeming slightly confused until his eyes land on Tony in the suit. "Hulk smash?" He asks, apparently wondering if there's an enemy they're supposed to be fighting. He looks briefly at Loki's friends, but they disappear. Well, except for Jormungand, who becomes a lifeless necklace again.

"No. Please don't smash." Tony winces slightly at the thought of his poor yard getting demolished by huge green hands. At least his mask's down and nobody sees. Hulk actually seems to relax a bit, and Tony only just notices that the flimsy lei didn't break during his transformation, when it really should have. "Um, Loki wanted to see you, although he looks a bit different."

Loki suddenly darts towards his drawstring bag and pulls out the enlarged tiara from either Anna or
Elsa, Tony can't remember which. He hands it to Hulk, grinning, and tells him to put it on. Hulk actually does so, and Tony bursts out laughing.

He whips out his Stark Phone and snaps a ton of pictures. He'd really wanted to see Hulk in a tiara, and the lei is just icing on the cake. He had actually forgotten about it but is really glad Loki remembered. Seriously, this just made his day, and he tells Loki that he's amazing. Loki grins a mile wide.

"I'm Mowgli!" Loki says, now sounding slightly happy about it. He looks up at Hulk in awe. "Wow. You're lots bigger now. So's Simba. I almost can't gets my hand all 'round his leg, see?" He holds the lion up and indeed, he can't wrap his hand fully around Simba's leg.

He trots up to Hulk and drags him into his game for *The Jungle Book*. Loki sings *Bare Necessities*, while Hulk just stands there, clearly unsure of what to do. Once that song's done, Loki looks over at Tony.

"You know, it's a lots like *Hakuna Matata!*" Tony has to admit, the *forget about you worries and your strife* line that Loki had sung not long ago is a lot like how *Hakuna Matata* is about having no worries.

Tony drags Hulk down to the beach and tries to get him to help make sand castles, telling him he should make something instead of wrecking things all the time. Tony gawks in amazement as Hulk clumsily makes a mound of sand with his huge green hands, Loki's small child hands looking like flies next to his.

Then, he starts singing something else, from *Lilo & Stitch*.

"*There's no place I'd rather be. Then on the seashore dry, wet, free*

*On golden sand is where I'd lay, and if I only had my way*

*I'd play 'til the sun sets, beyond the horizon*

*Lalala i kala hanahana*

*Me ke kai hoene i ka pu'e one..."

Tony asks Loki if he knows what they're saying in the parts in Hawaiian, figuring that surely Loki knows because of All-Tongue. After all, they'd tried him out on a lot of languages, and while it didn't seem to work perfectly, he normally seemed to get the gist of stuff. Tony has to wonder how much of what he says in general actually translates in Loki's head. Loki mumbles something about laying in the sun with waves hitting the sand.

"Look, Tony, I'm making your house!" Loki exclaims, showing very short, flat mount of sand stuck on top of a huge mound, much like the house in the cliff above them. Tony had noticed Loki glancing at it a lot.

Hulk grunts as he tries to make an actual castle, getting frustrated as it keeps falling apart. He smashes a big green fist in the sand, but it's only a halfhearted gesture. Tony suggests that he get the sand wet first, which Loki seems to have already figured out.

Loki and Hulk probably spend a good forty five minutes building, as Loki says "Sandy houses" Loki even tries to make snowmen out of sand.

Tony recalls what Loki had said last night- okay, technically very early this morning- about Bruce
watching movies with a green character. Hulk had watched *Beauty and the Beast* with Loki, so perhaps another movie is in order.

Tony sets up a Stark Pad and gets it to project a large holographic screen on the front lawn and shepherds Loki and Hulk there. Loki curls up in Hulk's lap, hugging Simba tightly, as Tony starts up *Shrek*. Loki makes a comment about it being in the Spirit Realm, which confuses Tony for a bit, until he realizes that like *Spirit*, *Shrek* is also made by DreamWorks. Apparently, Loki takes the different companies to mean different worlds, or realms, as Loki says. Tony doesn't bother correcting him.

Hulk seems very annoyed in the beginning when a mob of villagers goes to attack Shrek, but to Tony's astonishment, he doesn't try to hit the holographic screen. Perhaps it's because Loki's with him. Hulk seems to quite like watching Shrek scare the villagers off.

Loki practically screams when Tinker Bell makes Donkey fly, although he doesn't seem to understand most of the other fairy tale characters. Admittedly, this Tink is really just a ball of light and looks nothing like Disney's Tink, but Loki doesn't seem to care. Tony finds some of the references rather funny, and they also sneak in some jokes that seem to fly over Hulk's head, but Loki surprisingly laughs at a few, like when a rhyme stops when it's pretty obvious it would say *ass*.

Hulk seems to love watching Shrek and Donkey beat up a ton of guards before being sent to find Princess Fiona. Fiona is rather comically rescued by Shrek and Donkey from a fire-breathing dragon, who actually loves Donkey.

At one point, the group camps for the night, and Shrek and Donkey are looking at the stars while Princess Fiona is off in her own private shelter. Loki seems to really like when they're stargazing and talking about the stories in the stars.

"They ain't nothing but a bunch of little dots." Donkey says after a bit.

"You know Donkey, sometimes things are more than they appear." Shrek tells him.

Shrek and Donkey start discussing how Shrek's planning to build a wall around his swamp. Donkey says that's just a way for Shrek to keep someone out, and Shrek claims that he wants to keep everyone out.

"What's your problem Shrek?" Donkey asks as Fiona secretly listens in. "What you got against the whole world anyways?"

"I'm not the one who's got a problem." Shrek protests. "It's the world that's got a problem with me!" Hulk makes a rather sympathetic grunt. Tony looks at him, slightly surprised, and Loki looks rather sympathetic too. Shrek continues talking. "People take one look at me and go 'Aaah! Help! Run! A big, stupid, ugly ogre'..." He sighs. "They judge me before they even know me. That's why I'm better off alone."

Later in the movie, after Fiona makes an effort to be nicer to Shrek and they actually start to like each other.

Donkey enters the hideout where Fiona's camping on another night, only to discover that she's an ogre too. It's apparently a curse that a witch cast on her when she was a child, so every night, she becomes "this horrible, ugly beast." Said curse can only be broken by true love's kiss, and Fiona is convinced her true love is Farquaad, even though she hasn't met him.
Donkey points out that she doesn't have to marry Farquaad, and that she and Shrek actually have a lot in common. Shrek winds up overhearing Fiona asking "Who could ever love someone so hideous and ugly? Princess and ugly don't go together!"

Shrek overhears them and thinks she's talking about him. The two are annoyed at each other and go separate ways, Fiona going to marry Lord Farquaad, the man who sent Shrek and Donkey on the quest to rescue Fiona in the first place, and Shrek dejectedly going back to his swamp.

The wedding between Farquaad and Fiona is crashed by Shrek, and, since the sun is going down, Fiona inadvertently reveals that she's an ogre just like Shrek. Farquaad then sees her as a monster (which makes Hulk furiously roar at the screen) but Shrek doesn't.

The two of them kiss, but instead of becoming a human again, Fiona remains an ogre.

"I'm supposed to be beautiful." She says, confused, and Shrek tells her she is.

"Green not bad." Hulk concludes decisively when the movie ends.

"No, big guy, it's not. Neither is blue." He says to Loki. It's only now that he notices that Loki's shifted back to an adult.

"Hulk not bad." Hulk says, actually smiling. Loki grins at Hulk.

"You don't smiles much." He remarks. "You should. Smiling's goods." He claps his hands. "Hey, Hulk-y, we're family, right?"

"Family?" Hulk asks.

"Yeah! It means we never forget 'bout each other or leaves each other b'hind, ands we don't hate each other, ever. Nope nope nope. 'Xcept I think families can fight a bit sometimes. So you're in my family with my Tony an' Bruce and Pepper an' Jarvis an' Dum-E, right? We're Ohana. We ares a family."

"Family." Hulk says with a grin, and Loki claps again, remarking that Hulk's smiling. Shockingly, although Hulk normally hates hearing any mention of Bruce's name, he doesn't get annoyed about it this time. Instead he just sits there fingering the lei, which is still somehow intact.

Loki crawls into Hulk's lap and casts a couple glances back at the tree he climbs so much. The tree that's female, according to Loki.

With an absolutely devilish gleam in his eyes, Loki proceeds to mercilessly tickle Hulk. Hulk does something Tony's never seen him do before.

He laughs.

Hulk absolutely howls with laughter as Loki continues to tickle him. He tries to wriggle away and shouts "S-stop!" in his loud booming voice, although it sounds less angry than normal. Really, who knew huge green rage machines were so ticklish? Or maybe Bruce is just ticklish, Tony thinks as Hulk slowly morphs back into Bruce.
Jarvis calls Charles Xavier.

Tony and Bruce buy Loki some more stuff, and later all the Avengers (yes, even Thor) and Loki watch a superhero movie. It's kind of fitting and has characters with powers that Thor would ordinarily consider "bad", but they aren't.

Loki, Tony and Bruce are all back in Tony's lab. To be honest, Loki likes Tony's lab in the tower more, because Dum-E's there. This house has M-O, the cleaning robot from Wall-E, which is pretty awesome, but he still misses Dum-E.

Loki hadn't even noticed he'd returned to his real body, instead of his shorter child body like Mowgli's, until after they'd finished watching the movie. Well, this isn't his natural body because his real skin is blue, not pale like it is almost all the time because he rarely shows his Jotun form. He'd shown his real body once, accidentally, and had turned into it once for Hulk but had quickly turned green instead.

Tony and Bruce are working on something together, but they're just looking at a holographic screen. They're not blowing up stuff like they sometimes do. Okay, that's mostly Tony, although it has happened when the two of them work together. Loki hasn't seen Bruce blow up anything in his own lab, though.

Despite the talk he'd had with Tony last night, Loki is still reluctant to even try to fall asleep, even with Tony's guarantees that the watch he's wearing and Simba's Man of Iron suit (which Simba's wearing again) will somehow tell Tony exactly where he is. Loki's not entirely sure how that works, but maybe it's like Heimdall, who sees anything, or maybe it's some sort of magic. Although Tony acts like he can't do magic, so maybe it's something else.

Still, he's quite tired. After all, he hadn't slept at all last night, but he thinks the tiredness is more from transforming into a child, into Mowgli. That had probably drained a lot of magic, like when he'd tried to teleport out of the petri dish cell. He doesn't even want to think about what he knows, from experience, would have happened if he'd transformed like he had earlier tonight in Asgard. Sometimes, he'd actually gotten away with a disguise or turning invisible, but more often than not, he'd somehow been found out. Odin would be furious, and that would have undoubtedly led to pain in Asgard, maybe a whipping instead of just a normal beating.

Despite not wanting to fall asleep, the exhaustion of the day makes Loki succumb to sleep. He dreams of going down to Tony's lab, only this time the glass door, hidden in the glass wall, doesn't open. Loki bangs on the glass, frantically screaming, but Tony doesn't let him in. He just turns around and looks at him, as Loki bangs frantically on the glass. Then, Tony turns and starts to walk away.

As he begs Tony to let him in, Loki suddenly realizes there's someone behind him. It's not quite Odin and it's not the Eyepatch Man, Fury- instead, it's a cross between them. The man's beard is long, like the Allfather's, but instead of being grey, the beard is black like Fury the Eyepatch Man. He's wearing a long leather coat, like Fury, but also has armor kind of like Odin's, and both his eyes
are covered with eyepatches. The man raises a fist to hit Loki and-

Tony's hugging him, telling him it's okay, it was just a dream. It takes a bit for Loki to work out that he's awake now. However, he realizes that he's on the floor, near the stairwell, on the other side of the glass, just like in his dream.

He still can't get the image of Tony walking away in the dream. He shakily tells Tony that he wouldn't open the door, wouldn't let him in.

Tony says "Hey, I won't lock you out of my lab. Okay, maybe if I'm doing something dangerous like blowing stuff up, but that's so you don't just get hurt." It's still odd, having people care if he got hurt.

Tony then abruptly gets up and goes back in the lab. Loki stares at him in disbelief. This is just like his dream!

"Please don't shut me out again, please don't slam the door..." Loki sings softly, looking at Tony in disbelief. Only now, when he raps on the glass, Tony turns, grins, and the door opens.

"See?" Tony asks, still grinning.

Loki smiles slightly and flicks his fingers. "Love is an open door!" It's family love, but that's still love. After all, Elsa's family love saved Anna, not Hans' fake love (Hans is a real jerk), or even Kristoff's romantic love. Thinking back to some Peanuts things Jarvis had showed him, Loki adds "Love is hating to say good-bye... An', and love is... bringing someone a glass of water in the middle of the night." Or hot chocolate, he adds in his head as he nods and claps his hands, although he winds up saying it out loud accidentally. Oh well, at least he hadn't said something stupid. That particular message about the water, written on a pink background from what Jarvis claimed was some retired Peanuts book called Love Is Walking Hand in Hand, had been next to a picture of Charlie Brown giving Snoopy a glass of water as he laid on his doghouse.

"Sure." Tony says after a bit. "It's a platonic, friendly sort of love."

"Family." Loki corrects, not knowing what platonic means. He asks, and Jarvis explains it means it's not romantic. Loki nods and steps outside the lab again. Tony looks at him in confusion, and Loki asks for the door to be shut again. The door shuts by itself (or maybe it's Jarvis doing it?) and they repeat the process of Loki knocking and being let in the lab several times.

It was just a stupid dream, and Tony really doesn't ignore him like that. What's real is Tony letting him in. Tony wouldn't just leave him like that. How could he even think that, when they're family? Then again, Elsa had locked Anna out

Once he's no longer thinking about Tony ignoring him, it suddenly dawns on Loki that he woke up outside the lab, and hadn't he been inside when he'd fallen asleep. Loki doesn't remember actually falling asleep, but he doesn't remember leaving the lab, either.

"Tony, did I te-le-port asleeps?" He asks, stumbling slightly over the words like he often does when trying to speak in English.

"Sorry, but yeah you did. At least it was only over there." Tony says, pointing to the spot outside the lab. Loki frowns. This is just like when he'd teleported to the theater when he dreamed about facing Hans there. It's all too obvious that he ends up teleporting to where he's dreaming about, since it happened then and again right now.

Still, he's really, really, really, really glad he hasn't teleported back to Asgard when he has
nightmares about there. Silently (he thinks, although maybe his mouth blurs it out like it often does), Loki thanks the Norns for never letting *that* happen.

He *hates* teleporting now. Although, at least he hadn't wound up in that place with Fury and Son of Coul again, where they stuck things in his face, made him feel weird with gas, locked him up, and held him down. But he'd teleported to that other room with the rafters in the first place, which led to the petri dish cage. What if he has a nightmare about that and winds up there again?

Tony and Bruce say, around the same time, that just like any other power (like the powers Stitch and his experiment cousins have), teleporting is neither good nor bad. It can be bad when Loki accidentally teleports to somewhere he doesn't want to (which so far, is basically the only thing that's ever happened when he's ever teleported here. Then again, in Asgard, he had occasionally managed to teleport away from someone pursuing him, but the punishments that followed those incidents, sometimes doled out by Odin the Allfather himself, made escaping like that a lot worse than just sticking around for the original punishment they had planned.

Tony crouches down and says that his phone told him exactly where Loki was. Smirking slightly, Tony challenges him to hide somewhere on the grounds, adding that he'd be able to find him. Loki grins and rushes upstairs towards the front door. This is like a hiding game, and he wonders if he'll be able to trick Tony and hide somewhere Tony won't find him. He pauses for a second. Wait, doesn't he *want* Tony to find him, because then Tony'll be able to find him if he teleports again? Yeah, that's the whole point of this, but it still would be quite fun to beat Tony and stump him with a hiding place.

It's dark outside when he rushes out, but the fountain is lit up, like it had been the night they watched *Shrek*. At first, he climbs up his tree, and Jarvis' voice comes out of Simba's suit, informing him that he's in the tree. Loki knows that obviously, and it makes sense that Jarvis would know, since he's in the suit, which is in the tree, too.

Jarvis says that's the point, that if he knows where the suit is, he can tell Tony where it is. Jarvis also adds, sounding amused, that this tree is where Tony expected Loki to hide, and that perhaps he should hide somewhere else.

Loki hides a couple more places, and Tony and Jarvis apparently know where he is every time. It's really awesome, Loki thinks, that Tony can find him like that. As Tony said earlier, he'll be able to find Loki quickly if he ever goes missing again. Loki likes that a lot. Tony walks out after the last one to prove he knows where Loki is.

Smirking, Loki dashes off, singsonging "Now you can't ask Jar-vis!" The next part isn't in a singsong. "Can't ask, nope nope nope! Gots to find me with no help!" Snickering, he clambers down to the beach.

Tony finds him rather quickly (Loki wonders if he'd been cheating) and they walk back to the lab together.

Loki supposes that teleporting somewhere unpleasant wouldn't be *too* bad if Tony can find him quickly as he just demonstrated he can, but Tony points out that travel time isn't always quick, whereas teleporting is instantaneous. Tony laments that he himself isn't able to teleport, and it dawns on Loki that he truly wishes he could. Loki thinks it would be kind of nice if Tony could teleport, too, because then he'd be able to instantaneously show up and help him get out of things like petri dish cages.

Well, Tony can't teleport, but *he* can. If Loki was able to just teleport right back here after accidentally winding up somewhere unwanted, that would be nice, but he don't know if he can. The
The worst part about last time was that he couldn't get away. Still, here, at least he won't be punished for this sort of thing, because Tony's not even doing anything remotely like punishing him right now.

Okay, so Loki doesn't necessarily hate the teleporting itself, as he'd thought not long ago at all, but he does hate ending up in weird places and he definitely hated being punished for it in Asgard, he thinks as they walk down the stairs towards the lab.

Jormungand, who often tried to help Loki be sneaky or go unnoticed in Asgard, suggests that he try to teleport back into the lab. Loki frowns slightly at the suggesting his snake friend/monster-family-member made in his head. But then he remembers what he'd just thought a couple seconds ago- if he could actually teleport back to Tony, like he'd tried to do in the petri dish cell, then maybe he wouldn't have to wind up being stuck somewhere scary like said petri dish cell in the first place. He'd hated that.

Loki bites his lip nervously, still clinging onto Simba. He's awfully glad that Simba always seems to teleport with him, especially now that his armor apparently tells Tony exactly where he is. His bag is still in the lab, though, since it hadn't been on Loki's back when he fell asleep, although Loki's not entirely sure when he'd fallen asleep in the first place.

Glancing between where he stands now and the lab on the other side of the glass, Loki imagines disappearing from his spot and reappearing there. Nothing happens, and he tries jumping a bit. Still nothing. He concentrates on him being over there, while jumping, but he doesn't move. Instead, a Loki-illusion pops up in the lab, also jumping up and down, and then another one pops up next to it, like when he'd made two Loki's in the petri dish cage.

Tony glances at him and says "Please don't freak out. There's nothing wrong with doing that. I actually think they're kinda cool. You could prank people with them and tell them you have an evil twin or something." Loki stares at him for a bit, and eventually nods. Apparently, this had happened when he'd tried to teleport out of the petri dish cell. He hadn't succeeded in that, but he had apparently made himself invisible and sent over an illusion of himself and Hel.

"Can't gets back in there." Loki mumbles, scowling at the illusion of himself. He's supposed to be there, not that one.

Tony gives Loki a slightly confused look and asks "Are you trying to teleport?" Loki doesn't think Tony would be angry about that, and he cautiously nods. Tony grins at him and says "Nothing wrong with that."

Loki tries again, but nothing happens. Groaning in annoyance, he enters the lab and swipes the Other-Loki's out of existence.

The following day, a fair number of packages arrive. Tony's actually at the house when they do, and is obviously glad to not be stuck in a meeting, although he apparently has one in a short while. Tony hands Loki an already-opened cardboard box, as if he'd been making sure it was the right one.

The first thing Loki pulls out is a couple pairs of swim trunks, in red, yellow and green, which he seems confused about until Bruce explains what they are. The second thing is something Loki obviously loves at first sight.

It's a plush backpack in the form of Stitch, making it look like the blue alien is hitching a piggyback ride on the wearer's back. Tony had told Bruce that he had at first thought of buying
Loki a talking Stitch plush to go with Simba, who also talks, but this seems even better, considering Loki totes around that drawstring bag a lot.

Loki immediately puts Stitch on his back, claiming Stitch is hugging him as he pulls the straps to make it look like the arms and legs are wrapping tighter around him. He obviously thinks that Stitch is just a stuffed animal with straps for easy carrying, and Bruce points out the zipper. Loki quickly figures out the zipper on Stitch's back, although he seems kind of confused as to why he needs to open up Stitch's back to put his smaller toys in there.

"Why don't they go's in his mouth?" Loki asks, confused, as he looks the backpack over, poking his finger in the hole in Stitch's back. "He opens like Simba, but there's nothing in him." Bruce assumes Loki's referring to the battery box that's accessed through the velcro on Simba's stomach.

"That's the point. Stitch is a backpack. You put stuff in him, just like you put stuff in your bag," Tony says, gesturing to the drawstring bag Loki had taken off in favor of Stitch. Bruce suddenly realizes that this is the first time he's ever seen Loki wear anything blue- before, he probably would have refused to put on anything in that color, even if it was a backpack.

Loki puts as many figurines as he can in and happily straps Stitch on his back. Bruce has a feeling Stitch might join Simba (and Toy Stark, when Tony's not here, at least) in being a constant companion.

The next thing Loki pulls out of the box is something Bruce hadn't known about- a horse mask. Loki, however, looks disgusted and horrified, and it turns out he thinks that it's an actual, dead, horse head. Tony quickly explains, while receiving a glare from Loki at the idea of dead horses that it was never actually alive, that it's just a costume, like people wear on Halloween.

Hearing the truth settles Loki down, and he puts it on. "Look, Sleipnir! I'm you!" He laughs as Sleipnir appears. The eight-legged horse looks amused. "No, I'm Spirit!" Loki trots around on his long legs.

Tony casts a confused glance at the very long, flat packages, and Bruce smiles. He'd actually ordered those. After all, Tony can't be the only one spoiling Loki. Besides, it's not like Bruce's been paying rent or spending his own money on groceries since moving into the tower- he'd insisted on doing both at first, but Tony had looked at him like he was insane and stubbornly paid for everything himself anyways. As if he hadn't already been paying enough for the lab he gave Bruce or the new area they're making for the Other Guy, not to mention paying to fix all the damage the Other Guy did to the tower... Still, Tony insisted it's nothing, waving aside his concerns and threatening Bruce with buying him a small country if he didn't shut up about money. Bruce had been pretty sure he was joking about that, but the idea of owning a small country felt so strange and wrong that he'd let it drop. He still feels bad about it, though.

Bruce reveals what's in the long, flat packages- surfboards. He'd been somewhat surprised to learn from Jarvis that Tony- who seems to own so much random junk- doesn't own a single surfboard. Loki had seemed fascinated about the whole idea when watching Lilo, Stitch, Nani and David do it.

Loki grins and says to Tony "Now we can ride water!" For the briefest second, some expression saying something akin to 'hell no, I am never doing that' flashes across Tony's face before he smooths it out. Loki doesn't seem to notice, already back to inspecting the boards, showing them to Simba and Stitch.

"Hey Bambi, how about we show Bruce what we picked out for him?" Tony says in a tone that's a bit too neutral.
Bruce blinks in surprise, not knowing that he was going to be getting anything. Or that Tony and Loki apparently ordered stuff together.

Loki, still wearing the horse mask, hands Bruce the remaining box. Upon opening it, the first thing Bruce notices is that it's full of stuffed toys. He pauses, confused, since this seems like something they'd get Loki. Then, he realizes what the stuffed toys actually are- Beast, from Beauty and the Beast, Shrek, and Hulk.

Loki hands the Hulk plush to him and says "Hug him!" Bruce falters at first and Loki gives him a reproachful glare. Feeling somewhat stupid, Bruce hugs the Hulk plush, and in his mind, the Other Guy seems actually happy.

Loki seems to expect Bruce to lug the plush toys around with him everywhere, as he does, but obviously Bruce isn't going to. They settle for Bruce keeping the toys on his bed, and as Bruce is frog marched to his own bedroom by Tony and Loki, he's regaled with a long lecture from Loki about how Shrek, Beast and Hulk aren't monsters. Once the three toys are settled neatly against Bruce's pillow, looking rather small on the huge bed in Bruce's room, Loki turns to Bruce. "You're gonna have to sleeps with Hulk-y, 'kay?"

The rest of the day, Loki wipes out incredibly numerous times when trying to surf. He'd been rather disappointed to learn that Stitch also couldn't go with him in the water. Despite being rather horrible at it, Loki seems to be having a ton of fun, and Bruce has Hawaiian Rollercoaster Ride thoroughly stuck in his head after Loki sings it countless times. For a bit, Bruce had actually joined Loki on the water, even though surfing really isn't his thing. He hadn't even bothered trying to ride a wave, whereas Loki had immediately started trying to ride huge waves despite having no surfing experience. Bruce has to admire Loki's courage as he stares a huge, incoming wave straight on, with a huge grin on his face.

That night, as Bruce is about to go to sleep, Jarvis actually reminds him of what Loki had said, saying somewhat apologetically and somewhat bemusedly that he'd promised to tell Loki whether or not Bruce actually did as instructed. Bruce sighs, and, feeling rather stupid, tucks the Hulk plush in next to him. The Other Guy gives a pleased sort of growl in Bruce's mind. Bruce wakes up to find that, in his sleep, he'd started hugging the stuffed Hulk.

The next few days pass in a rather similar manner. Bruce and Loki stay in the mansion during the day while Tony goes to do stuff at Stark Industries for varying amounts of time. Sometimes he's gone for most of the day, sometimes he's gone for a couple intervals but comes back for a couple hours. He obviously likes those days more, and Loki obviously likes them a lot more, too.

Loki spends almost all his time either surfing, in his tree, or on the beach. He seems to really like building things in the sand, and is actually really good at it. Then again, Bruce has seen green around Loki's hands and seen the sand shape into some very detailed structures, such as a four foot high version of Rapunzel's tower. Loki actually seems really excited about that and puts all his Tangled figurines around it before re-enacting some movie scenes with them.

Loki's built a lot of things out of sand, including little dwellings for most of his toys. He's connected them all with lines he's drawn in the sand with his finger. When Bruce asks if he's building a town, Loki replies "A city! A circuit city like on Tony's boards and in the book. Those are c-pac-i-trs." He points to a couple buildings, which Bruce notices have little tunnels going through them. "They store energy. And those are re'sis'trs. They stop it more." Those buildings, Bruce notices, have not entrances or exits and are built right on top of the lines.

When he looks down at the beach from the house, Bruce realizes it actually does look sort of like a circuit board. Bruce tells him this and Loki nods. "Sometimes, though, sometimes they're stars, and
the lines are constellations. Look, there's the monkey's tail, and the lion." Bruce doesn't see them at all, honestly, but he nods.

Sometimes, when Loki's getting sand wet so it will stick together, he seems to accidentally freeze the water moistening the sand. Another time, he's building a castle and actually coats it with ice. Loki actually doesn't panic about that, and Bruce realizes it looks like Elsa's ice castle.

"Stitch, Elsa please." Loki says, reaching a hand back towards Stitch's mouth. Bruce watches in fascination, even though he knows what's going to happen. It still completely astounds him when Stitch opens his mouth and spits out the requested toy, before closing his mouth again. Honestly, the Elsa doll should have only barely fit in the backpack. It's only now that Bruce notices that Elsa's skin is blue, with ridges over it, and her eyes are red.

"When did you do that?" Bruce asks. Loki quickly looks at him, almost worried, and hides the doll behind his back. "No, no, she looks really nice." Bruce insists, and Loki slowly brings Elsa out from behind his back.

"Little bit ago." Loki replies. "I told her you wouldn't hate her for being blue, 'cause you don't hates me." He nods slightly, and proceeds to set Elsa up near the ice castle, singing "the cold never bothered me anyway."

Tony returns a couple hours later.

"Didja miss me?" Loki asks Tony with wide eyes and a wider smile once.

"I just saw you four hours ago." Tony replies. Loki continues to stare at him. "Well, I'd certainly rather be with you guys than in a meeting so boring it makes my ears bleed."

Loki looks horror-struck and Tony had needs to reassure him (over Loki trying to heal him), that his ears hadn't actually been bleeding. Loki looks extremely relieved, but peers around Tony's head at both of his ears, as if to make sure anyways.

"Tony, Tony, 'cmon we're gonna surf!" Loki grabs Tony's hand and starts dragging Tony towards the beach, not seeming to notice or care that Tony's still in a business suit.

Tony manages to pull his hand out of Loki's grip, but not without a lot of effort, it seems. "You go, I'll watch."

"No! You come too!" Loki pouts.

Tony says that he doesn't want to surf, and Loki asks why he doesn't.

"I... don't like water." Tony answers eventually.

"Stitch didn't like water firsts, but he liked surfing, once he tried it." Loki counters, trying to drag Tony towards the beach again. Tony, it seems, has had enough.

"I told you I'm not going surfing!" He snaps at Loki, and Loki pauses, looking at him with wide eyes. Tony quickly retreats into the lab, and Bruce tells Loki that surfing's not for everyone.

Loki doesn't seem up for surfing right after that, and instead looks rather guilty as he sits in his tree. The branches rock him back and forth slightly. The next time Bruce looks up, Loki is gone.

Not quite worried yet but definitely not entirely calm either, Bruce walks into the house to ask Jarvis where Loki is. Jarvis replies that he's present and accounted for, and is in the basement.
Bruce hopes he's not bothering Tony, if only because Tony might not react well if he's upset. He goes down the stairs and discovers that Loki, having apparently noticed that Tony drinks a lot of alcohol, actually brought Tony down a couple bottles in the hopes of reconciling by bringing them. It seems to have worked, since Tony hadn't kicked him out of the lab, although he'd also had almost twenty minutes to calm down beforehand. However, Jarvis tells Tony to stop drinking before he's even had half a bottle, and Bruce takes them away when Tony's not looking.

After that incident, Loki doesn't ask Tony to go surfing anymore.

Tony and Bruce are both very intrigued with Loki's apparent ability to shape-shift, as he had when turning into 'Mowgli'. Bruce can tell it wasn't merely an illusion (although Loki could probably do that, too) because Loki's body had actually been smaller than usual. Both of them are secretly hoping he'll do it again. Bruce is starting to wonder if the reason Tony bought Loki a horse mask was to see if Loki would transform into a horse when wearing it or something.

However, Loki remains firmly in his usual tall, pale form.

Recently, Bruce has heard Loki mention a little creek a lot. Jarvis eventually finds the most likely reason for this, which is that he's actually talking about the Native American man, named Little Creek, in that horse movie on the plane (Bruce hadn't paid attention to that movie and thus had no idea that's what Loki was talking about for a while). Due to that, Bruce and Tony get the idea to show Loki *Pocahontas* and Bruce briefly explains about Native Americans, like Little Creek, the man who helped Spirit and owned Rain, the female horse.

Fairly early on, the Native Americans and the colonial settlers start singing a song, each group singing about how the other group is full of savages.

"*They're savages! Savages!*"

*Barely even human*

*Savages! Savages!*

*Drive them from our shore*

*They're not like you and me, which means they must be evil*

*We must sound the drums of war!*

Loki stares at the screen in confusion, asking how both groups can be savages. Tony claims that no group really views themselves as savages, adding that there's no way the Jotuns in Jotunheim view themselves in the same negative way the Aesir do.

"So the Aesir are rac-race-ist?" Loki asks, clearly only sort of remembering how to say the word *racist*.

"I mean, yeah, they sound like total racists." Tony replies, and Loki cocks his head to the side.

"They fought lots've wars with the Jotuns, you know." Loki says. "'Cause, they hated them and stuff."

"Do you's think that... that Jotuns... that they thinks that Ass-guardians are savages too?" Loki asks. Bruce thinks it's kind of funny that Loki's started copying the whole Ass-guard thing that Tony no doubt started, and making fun of Asgard like that might be therapeutic or something. "Like how the monsters thought kids were monsters?" Loki asks.
"Yeah, like that." Tony grins.

"Y'know, the hat guys thoughts that Little Creek was a sa-vage too. And they weren't nice to Spirit, 'cause they caught him and he had'ta make him get off his back and stuff."

Honestly, Pocahontas is a pretty good movie for showing that racism is wrong, even if it's nothing like what actually happened in history. Neither Bruce or Tony mention that, though. Loki seems quite intrigued with Grandmother Willow, the tree Pocahontas talks to.

When that movie ends- Loki seems to love watching movies outside, and Tony seems like his greatly misses his sofa as he sits on the grass- Loki darts off to his tree and pats the trunk.

"Hi tree!" He says happily, and the tree wiggles slightly as green glows around Loki's hand. The granches reach down towards him and the tree actually picks Loki up and sets him on another branch. He settles down with his head against the trunk. "Cans I name you Willow-Willowy?" Loki asks the tree, as if he actually needs the tree's permission. "Cause, you're like Grandmother Willow, 'xcept not quite. You look kinda different, and you don't got real droopy stuff on your branches."

He pauses and says "You're different, a different tree from her, right? But Lilo and Stitch, and Anna and Elsa, and Pocahontas and John Smith are all different, and they don't care. And my Tony's different from me, and he doesn't care even though Odin did, and Thor." Loki wrings his hands together anxiously.

"Tree's aren't rac'st, are they?" He frowns thoughtfully. "Grandmother Willow's a good tree, and you're a good tree, too, Willow-Willowy. And you're not better'n bushes either, even though they're not trees. Bushes can be good to hide under, you know..."

Bruce smiles slightly and goes off to bed, and Jarvis informs him that he has to sleep with his stuffed Hulk again.

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After even more hacking, which Jarvis had been happy to assist with, Sir had found a phone number for Professor Xavier. Jarvis had offered to call the man himself. Jarvis normally handles this sort of thing, anyways, and while Sir seems quite interested in Professor Xavier, Sir can be a bit tactless sometimes, and a great number of people find him annoying or just plain dislike Sir (Jarvis doesn't like any of those people, and he especially dislikes the people like that one reporter, Miss Simhan, who recently made Sir out to be the villain.

Jarvis dials the number listed in the files for Professor Xavier, which had been accompanied by a note saying that it's for a landline phone and thus video calls aren't an option. Sir had been mockingly outraged at the idea of anyone still using a landline phone when they're so out of date. After all, Stark Phones are on the market, although they're not as sophisticated as Sir's own Stark Phone or even Mr. Loki's.

The phone rings, and rings, and rings. There's not even an answering machine.

After eight minutes and fifty-six seconds, Jarvis hears the sound of a phone being picked up, and he politely asks "Is this Professor Charles Xavier?"

"It is. May I ask who's calling?" Professor Xavier asks in an equally polite tone. He sounds somewhat unused to actually using a phone, as if he normally communicates some other way. He also sounds like the calm, reserved type, like Dr. Banner.

"I am Jarvis, assistant to Mr. Anthony Stark." Jarvis introduces himself, omitting the fact that he's
an AI. "I imagine you've heard of him?"

"I imagine there are very few who haven't heard of him, even before that incident with the aliens a while back." Professor Xavier replies, sounding somewhat amused. "Why exactly is Tony Stark's assistant calling me? How does Tony Stark even know this number? I didn't think it was generally available." He doesn't actually sound annoyed about them having the number, simply curious, which Jarvis definitely counts as a good sign. "I'm assuming he didn't know of me until recently, because, from what I've heard, he would have tried to contact one of us immediately upon finding out." That does sound like Sir, all right.

He debates how to respond. Professor Xavier might not be too happy to learn that they'd hacked into a secret database to find his number, although he supposes there aren't many plausible answers.

"Mr. Stark did not find out about you until five days ago, and we only just learned of this number." Jarvis answers smoothly. "Are you aware that a government organization known as S.H.I.E.L.D has files on you?" Jarvis asks, after a bit. Sir had actually authorized him to release this information to Professor Xavier, probably wondering himself if the man knew.

"I know they are aware of us and that they have this number, though I insist they don't keep tabs on any of my students." The professor replies. "Tell me, did you find out about anyone else?"

"There were a few files on a man who goes by Wolverine, or Logan." Jarvis replies. He remembers reading about the man's 'healing factor', which sounds a lot like Mr. Loki's ability to heal quickly and heal others.

"Ah, yes. I thought they had some stuff on him." Jarvis isn't sure whether the man's annoyed about that or not. "So may I ask why you're calling?"

"I am not calling in any relation to S.H.I.E.L.D. Rather, Mr. Stark and I were wondering if you could help a-" Jarvis debates what to call Mr. Loki. Technically, he's not officially family, and to almost all of the world, Sir doesn't have any family. Sir might not want it spread around that he thinks of Mr. Loki as family quite yet. "-friend." Jarvis finishes the sentence with no discernible delay in between the words, despite having to debate it. He is an incredibly fast thinker, after all.

"May I ask who this friend is?" Clearly, Professor Xavier is smart enough to be somewhat suspicious of anonymous, potentially made-up friends, although his tone doesn't actually betray any suspicion.

"Certainly, Professor. His name is Loki Laufeyson, although he strongly dislikes anyone mentioning his last name."

"Why are you calling me, as opposed to someone else? What makes you think I could help?" Professor Xavier asks, and while Jarvis detects no hostility or suspicion in the mild tone, he has the sense this question is some sort of test. Jarvis intends to pass it. He chooses what he says next carefully.

"As I understand it, Professor, you run a school for mutants, and I believe many of them have troubled pasts." Jarvis pauses for a bit but Professor Xavier doesn't respond, clearly waiting for him to continue. "Like, I believe, your students, Mr. Loki has some rather unique abilities as well as a very unpleasant history." That reason alone would make Professor Xavier a good candidate, but they'd also read something in the man's file about telepathic powers, although Jarvis isn't sure if he should mention that quite yet.
"Ah. Yes, I do have experience with that. Do you want to get Loki enrolled in my school?"

"No. We are quite happy having him here. Mr. Stark and I were wondering if you would offer your assistance as a sort of therapist. We tried another therapist, but she didn't really work out too well." Jarvis continues. "Before we continue, I must ask if you have any sort of hate for Mr. Stark or the other Avengers, especially Dr. Banner and the Hulk. If you do, I'm afraid Mr. Loki might not be too big on you, to say nothing of Mr. Stark himself."

"I have nothing against them. After all, they did stop an alien invasion on their own, although we would have jumped in if needed." Professor Xavier replies "However, the majority of the world is not exactly accepting of us. Now, I must ask you, do you have any sort of hate towards mutants."

"I certainly do not, and I am almost certain that Mr. Stark has no ill feelings against mutants. Neither does Mr. Loki, and if I had to guess, both he and Dr. Banner would sympathize with you, as they have faced similar prejudice and outright bigotry."

"I see." Professor Xavier responds, sounding satisfied with that answer, and falls silent for a bit. "Judging by the fact you haven't said Loki is a mutant yet, especially after you just had the perfect window to do so, I assume that Loki is not one, correct?" His tone betrays nothing about his thoughts or feelings on that.

"No, I don't think he quite classifies as a mutant, as he's from another realm, as he calls it." Jarvis replies. "I think a more correct term is 'alien', or perhaps even 'god', if one believes certain stories."

"God?" Professor Xavier asks, surprised.

"If one believes Norse mythology, yes. I'm assuming you've heard of Thor Odinson?"

"I have, both from Norse mythology and from news of the Avengers, although they do seem to equate to the same person. Although I'm not entirely sure how accurate the myths are. Some of them seem a little far-fetched." Professor Xavier says lightly, a touch of amusement in his voice.

"Well, Mr. Loki, grew up with Thor Odinson, in Asgard." Jarvis replies. "He was abused there for being a different race, as well as having some rather incredible powers." Surely, as a mutant, Professor Xavier will understand that people can be cruel to those who are different.

Professor Xavier makes a noise of understanding, and then says "Grew up, you say? You know, I'm more experienced helping children and teens than adults, which is why I run a school." He says this good naturedly, before assuring him. "That's not to say this is entirely out of the question."

"Although he is technically an adult, in appearance anyways, I believe Mr. Loki's mental state is closer to that of a child's. However, that is not saying I believe him to be an unintelligent simpleton." Jarvis says, and Professor Xavier gives a sound that's basically a verbal nod. "Although, recently, he managed to make himself physically resemble a child."

"He can change his appearance?" Professor Xavier asks curiously, obviously interested. "Do you know if he is able to alter forms as well?"

"I am not sure, but that is not the only thing Mr. Loki is able to do." Jarvis replies.

"It's not? Please, do tell." Professor Xavier sounds, if possible, even more interested now.

"It is not." Jarvis confirms. "Mr. Stark and I are not sure what the extent of Mr. Loki's powers are, and we are not sure if he is either." He pauses as he recalls various instances of Mr. Loki using his powers. "First of all, his race seems to be naturally cryokinetic, and we are trying to convince him
that making ice and snow isn't a bad ability to have. I believe we are making a little bit of progress." Thanks to Elsa and Slushy, that is.

"While the Cryokinesis seems inherent to all members of his race, he has a whole host of other abilities. So far, he has demonstrated that he is capable of changing himself, changing objects and things around him, as well as temporarily animating them. He's shown abilities for making things fly and defy the laws of gravity- although he himself has not defied them-, casting very convincing illusions, teleporting, creating force fields, and turning invisible. He's also capable of healing himself and others extremely quickly."

"That's quite a list." The reply comes after a bit of silence, and Professor Xavier sounds impressed.

"Indeed it is. Mr. Loki hasn't ceased to surprise Mr. Stark and myself." Jarvis replies, unable to prevent some fondness from seeping into his tone. "As I understand it, Professor, you have some powers of your own?"

"I am a telepath, and I'm quite... adept with minds. What I can do unnerves a lot of people." The man replies. "Despite the fact I rarely go into a mind uninvited."

"I see. So you're a mind-reader, of sorts." Jarvis asks, although he hides his skepticism exceedingly well.

"I suppose you could call it that. Now, you say Loki was treated poorly for these powers?"

Professor Xavier asks sympathetically.

"All evidence suggests that he was punished for using them, and he's suffered through some indeterminate number of beatings and other forms of corporal punishment in his very long life, as well as having his lips sewn shut. He has very frequent nightmares and occasional flashbacks about his treatment there, and I cannot blame him in the slightest. I believe the man who decided to take him in- knowing full well what he is- did not act as Loki's father, as he was supposed to. I believe he whipped Mr. Loki for using magic on more than one occasion, despite being able to use it himself."

"I see." Professor Xavier says with a very chilly undertone, clearly not a huge fan of that whole concept. Then again, who is, aside from the perpetrators? Jarvis is entirely with him there. If he ever got to talk to the Allfather, he'd give him a verbal dressing-down that would hopefully leave him quivering in his boots. After all, it seems he's the cause of all this.

"I would be happy to talk to Loki, and we'll see how things go from there."

Jarvis brings up that it would probably be better for everyone at first to have at least the first session at one of Sir's residences. Professor Xavier seems to agree. "Now, I know that Stark Tower is in New York City- it's sort of hard to miss- and my school is, well, somewhere nearby. I'd be happy to come visit you, although there is one crucial detail I need to know. Is it wheelchair accessible?"

"Hawkeye, how many of them are we looking at?" Steve's voice sounds slightly tinny coming from the comm in Tony's helmet as he rockets through the air as Iron Man.

"One hundred and thirty-two, total, but we've destroyed twenty-three of 'em." Tony answers before Clint can. One of the nice things about his HUD is it can retrieve and display information like that at a moment's notice, because Tony built it and his tech is awesome, just like him.

Yes, once again, Victor Von Doom has decided to unleash an army of robots on a city, only this
time, it's Phoenix, Arizona instead of New York City. Not that Doom always decides to send them to the Big Apple- Tony's fought Doom-bots in numerous places such as London, Tokyo and Sydney to name just a few. Really, this is a lot more convenient than it could have been. Traveling around the globe is a pain. Doom definitely likes attacking cities. However, they've also fought Doom-bots in Latveria, the nation that Doom himself rules.

A blast from Tony's repulsors scorches the nearest Doom-bot, but much to Tony's annoyance, it doesn't actually fall down. That is, until an electric arrow lands in it and shocks the thing senseless. The Doom-bot falls to the ground, twitching, and then falls limp. "Make that twenty-four down." Clint says.

"That doesn't count as a full kill, Clint." Tony mutters in his comm. "I did most of the work. That's like, twelve percent of a kill on your part."

"You're kidding, right?!" Clint asks as he unleashes another arrow from the building he's on. "You're the one who only did twelve percent of that, but if you really want, I can give you fifteen. Remember, if all of us take down more of Doom's bots than you-"

"Yeah, yeah, I buy you all dinner." Tony mock-complains.

Thor, Mjolnir extended in front of him, whips past Tony before hurtling down to the ground to smash into one of the bots, while frying another with a bolt of lightning summoned from the sky.

It's really weird fighting with Thor again, and even weirder hearing him banter like that. In the weeks since Loki arrived, Tony hasn't once fought alongside Thor, until now, obviously. He can't deny that Thor's a tremendous help with his lightning and everything, but it's still odd, because he's recently been viewing Thor in a rather negative light.

Tony ignores what Thor said.

"Really? I'm kicking all your asses. You all are going to be buying me dinner, and I'm in the mood for something expensive tonight."

Natasha, who had rolled her eyes and exasperatedly muttered boys when they'd started this whole betting thing (as she does most times they do this) pipes up "Stark, we've taken down twenty of the twenty-five."

Tony frowns as Jarvis informs him that's indeed correct. "Yeah, well, that's only four fifths. I've taken down a fifth of them on my own. Last time I checked, there are six of us, so I'm doing more than my fair share."

"HULK SMASH TWO!" Hulk roars, holding up a pair of wrecked Doom-bots as if to make sure they add them to the count against Tony, before leaping and hitting another Doom-bot with one of its broken comrades and flinging the other broken bot at another.

"Yeah, but you bet that you'd take down more than all of us combined." Clint says, sounding smug as an arrow flies through the air, whizzing past Tony's head to embed itself into a Doom-bot below him. "Looks like dinner's going to be on you."

"I'm moving Hulk over to my team." Tony says, mock pouting. "Hulk, you're with me."
Hulk grunts and gives a sort of feral grin. "Hulk smash puny robots with Metal Man?"

Tony grins. "You got it, buddy."

"We're still going to crush you, so you're still buying dinner." Clint says.

"You know that has no effect on me, right?" Tony asks rhetorically. "I'm loaded and I end up ordering basically every dinner I eat. It's not like I cook or anything. That's really more of Bruce and Loki."

"Loki cooks?" Clint sounds surprised. Nobody voices anything about Bruce cooking. After all, he had to make his own meals when on the run and everything, and presumably made his own stuff since the Avengers formed, since he'd been living on his own until recently moving into the tower. (Not to mention, Hulk normally hates hearing about Bruce). Natasha, Clint and Steve probably eat a lot of S.H.I.E.L.D-issue crap, like the MRE Tony had seen spit on the side of the glass cell Loki had been in. Tony's never tried it, himself, but it's not like anyone actually says those things taste good. Thor undoubtedly is just served heaps and heaps of food in Asgard and is probably just as hopeless as Tony when it comes to making anything more complex than a sandwich.

An hour later, they're still fighting, as disabling Doom-bots isn't as easy as they make it look. In fact, they rarely go down after just one attack, and more stupid robots cropped up around twenty five minutes ago.

It really sucks to be the other Avengers, Tony thinks with a slight smirk. They're out there in the heat, doing a lot more actual physical fighting than he is, with the exception of Hawkeye, who's shooting arrows. Tony can see the sweat on Natasha's face. Yeah, it really sucks to be them, he thinks, relishing in his currently air-conditioned Iron Man suit interior.

Tony casts a quick look around him. Normally, there aren't quite as many Doom-bots, and the Doom-bots sure are doing a number on a couple city blocks, despite the Avengers' best efforts to prevent it. Okay, it's not as bad as the damage to New York City after the Chitauri incident, but it's a lot worse than what would be preferred. He really hopes there weren't civilians in some of those buildings that got demolished.

Hawkeye does a rather good job at sniping Doom-bots with all kinds of arrows- explosive, electric and the like, a great deal of which were made by Tony himself. However, progress is slower than Tony would like, and it seems like some of these are upgraded Doom-bots and the old weak spots don't work as well.

Finally, the last Doom-bot falls, and Clint's voice sounds victorious. "Guess you're buying us dinner, Tony. And weren't you saying earlier that you're in the mood for something expensive? Looks like you're going to have to buy six servings."

"Yeah, yeah." Tony sighs on somewhat fake annoyance. However, he is actually annoyed about the current state of his armor. The paint job's ruined, as it has several scratches and even a couple minor dents. Tony wonders if Loki could change the armor's color to make the scratches go away- after all, Toy Stark's armor looks basically like a miniature version of the real deal, and that actually seems to disappear when Toy Stark is in Tony mode. Plus, Loki could spruce up the design a lot quicker than having Jarvis paint it.

"Alright, you-" Tony points a finger at Thor "-still have a lot of questions to answer, so don't think you're off the hook."

"Are you inviting me to feast with you after this victorious battle?" Thor asks, sounding surprised.
"Eh, I'm not sure yet. Maybe." Tony replies. He honestly does want to talk to Thor soon, but he figures he should get Loki's opinion rather than just springing a visit from Thor on him. Speaking of Loki, he should probably check how he's doing.

"So I take it Loki's fine?" Tony asks Jarvis. He'd had Jarvis try to keep Loki in the house while both he and Bruce are gone, in the off chance S.H.I.E.L.D tried to do something stupid like kidnap Loki, since it would be a lot harder for them to get to Loki when he's in the house. Fortunately they apparently haven't, though Tony still wouldn't put it past them. Perhaps they're biding their time, but if they ever try to kidnap Loki on purpose, Tony's going to completely and utterly destroy them.

"Yes, sir. Do you think that I would not inform you if something urgent happened?" Jarvis replies, sounding exasperated.

"Touche." Tony replies, grinning.

"Although I thought you might like to know that he hid all your left shoes under the sofa."

"My left shoes...?" Tony repeats, confused.

"Yes, sir. I believe he got the idea from Lilo & Stitch, when Jumba said Stitch would reverse street signs, back up sewers and steal everyone's left shoe."

"Ah, I see. So Mr. Mischief strikes again?" Tony asks, smirking slightly.

"It would seem so, sir." Jarvis says fondly. "He actually lifted the entire sofa up to hide them."

Tony blinks in surprise, because he often forgets how strong Loki is. He's probably not as strong as Thor, sure, but he's definitely a lot stronger than most of Earth's population, Tony included.

Jarvis pauses for a bit, before continuing in a neutral tone "At one point, he seemed about to draw on the wall. It almost seemed like he intended it as a joke, judging from the smile on his face. I told him that, while you're quite fine with hanging his drawings on the wall, you might not want them on the actual walls themselves."

There's another slight pause and Tony gets the feeling Loki hadn't taken that the right way. His theory is soon proven correct as Jarvis speaks again. "Mr. Loki got rather worked up and anxious after that, clearly expecting your reaction to be a lot worse than it probably would be." Yeah, whatever Loki was expecting has to be worse than anything Tony would actually do.

"He said he was sorry exactly twenty-nine times in the span of three minutes, and he claims he was not actually planning on drawing on the walls. While he said this rather convincingly, his actions beforehand seemed to prove otherwise." Huh. So Loki can actually pull off lying pretty well, although Tony's noticed that sometimes his body language gives him away.

"I had to calm him down and tell him you weren't going to do anything horrible to him or start hating him forever." Jarvis goes on. "I think he's worried about me telling you, even though I prevented him from actually doing anything."

"Okay." Tony sighs, thinking he really should have seen something like this coming. "You know, you did just tell me, J, so you kind of made his worry come true."

"That was not my intent, sir. I thought you should know."

"So what's he been doing since then?"
"Mr. Loki has been watching episodes of *Lilo & Stitch: The Series*, as well as *Kim Possible*, sir. However, he has not reached the crossover episode between the two shows, although I look forward to watching his reaction when he does. I've been playing them for him in order, you see." Jarvis says. Tony didn't even know there was a crossover episode with both Stitch and Kim in it, but he also kind of wants to be there to witness Loki's reaction, since it'll probably be hilarious.

As he thinks this, Jarvis continues talking. "I also introduced him to the concept of video games, starting with an online game called 625 Sandwich Stacker, which is a tie in to *Lilo & Stitch: The Series*. Mr. Loki seems quite taken to it, although I suspect that I will have to make sure that he does not try to replicate it in real life, as it involves catching sandwich ingredients as they fall, and throwing food like that is somewhat wasteful."

"Geez, J, you sound like his mom. So he's been playing that ever since you told him not to draw on the walls?"

"Not quite, sir. Around an hour ago, I showed him that there is a television series about Timon and Pumbaa from *The Lion King*."

Tony smiles slightly at what he imagines Loki's reaction to seeing a whole show about Timon and Pumbaa- he was probably even more overexcited than when he'd first learned that Lilo and Stitch have a whole show about them. Although Loki's practically obsessed with Stitch now, he still clearly loves *The Lion King* most, perhaps because it was the first movie he saw and he's carted Simba around since day two here on Earth.

"I can put him on for you, if you'd like, sir." Jarvis says, and suddenly in another part of Tony's HUD, there's a picture of Loki. Loki's eyes aren't focused at first, but they focus somewhat when Loki notices Tony's image on the holographic screen that Jarvis has undoubtedly pulled up in front of Loki. From what Tony can see, Loki's sitting on the couch, arms full with Simba, Maximus, and his Stitch backpack plush. In one hand, tightly grasped, is Toy Stark. According to Jarvis and Bruce, Loki carries Toy Stark around with him constantly when Tony himself isn't there. Something else Jarvis has reported is that Toy Stark is almost always in Tony form when Tony's not there. Loki clearly likes Tony for Toy, not for being a billionaire, a genius or Iron Man. It's pretty nice, actually.

From the looks of it, Loki has his entire toy collection set up on the sofa, as if the toys are watching the TV with him.

"To-ny!" Loki exclaims excitedly, singsonging Tony's name happily. "You know you're on a... thing, like Dr. C, right?"


"Just like Timon! He's on it... a screen tooos." Loki says, grinning. Tony can't help but notice that Loki hasn't given any indication of the incident where he supposedly was going to draw on the walls. Almost as if he's hoping Tony just won't find out about it...

"So he was." Tony says, and Loki immediately steers the conversation elsewhere.

"Tony, guess what!" Loki says, his green eyes wide with enthusiasm. "Stitch has a cousin, 'xper'ment 523, and he's... like me and Elsa, 'xcept he's not actually a Jotun."

Tony nods. "So what, he has ice powers or something?"

"He does!" Loki nods. "He did stuffs like Elsa with 'em, too. Like he covered the whole island in
Tony nods vaguely as Loki keeps talking. "He dids lots like Elsa. He, he made snow for Lilo to play in, like Elsa did for Anna, and Stitch didn't like it at first but then he hads fun and he likes snow now. Like, sliding on ice and making... snow-mans and stuff. I wanna make a snowman sometime." Loki nods vaguely, reaching over to grab Olaf from the line of toys on the couch. "I wanna make a snowman like Olaf!" Tony briefly corrects the snowmans part.

Returning to the topic of the episode, Loki says "Lilo named 'xper'ment 523 'Slushy', but Gantu got him, and he made a really big ice castle fort'ress, only Elsa's was cooler, I think. And he fighted Splodeyhead, and he made weapons out of ice like Jotuns do's, and he made a really big hammer." Loki frowns slightly. "Like Thor's Mjolnir." Loki's frown increases.

"So what's his one true place?" Tony asks, not bothering to correct Loki this time. So far, Lilo & Stitch has been a great show for showing Loki how powers can be both good and bad, since basically all the experiments start out 'evil'.

"Making... ice food?" Loki says uncertainly. He clearly doesn't know how to say it, and Jarvis explains that it's shaved ice in cones, so not quite ice cream. Loki still looks lost.

"Hey, Jarvis said you looked like you were going to draw on the walls, and I'd really rather you didn't do that, okay?" He still isn't entirely sure if he should bring it up just yet (maybe he should wait until he can do it in person instead of over a screen, but then again, the Avengers are coming over after this), although his mouth just sort of goes off without him.

Loki's eyes go wide and he immediately starts frantically talking. "Sorry! 'm Sorry. Wasn't gonna really do it, nope nope nope! Just pr'tend, like a jest, like coo-kies that aren't real. Sorry sorry sorry sorry!" Then, in a smaller voice, Loki says "Please don't be mads."

Tony sighs. "I'm not mad. I mean, you didn't actually draw on the wall, did you?" Loki hurriedly shakes his head no. "And even if you did, well I've done some crazy stuff to my own house, like shooting up a glass wall with a repulsor, so I can't exactly blame you. Not that that's an invitation to do it, mind you, just like how I really don't want you putting pepper in my coffee or something. Or, I don't know, turning my hair pink or something. Yeah, don't do that, either."

"'Kay." Loki says after a bit. "Won't... I won't."

"Good." Tony grins. "See, no harm done. By the way, you can still hang your drawings up. Just do them on paper, okay? Actually, you know, you can draw on holograms, so if you had a hologram cover a whole wall, you could make a mural or something." Steve might like that idea, actually, Tony thinks as Loki grins, though he's not sure whether it's at that suggestion or at the fact Tony said he can continue to hang stuff on the wall. Maybe it's both.

"Now, the Avengers are coming over, I thought I'd give you a heads up."

Loki grins and claps his hands. "Clint and Tasha and Steve, right? Hey, do you thinks Clint and Tasha will be Ron and Kim?" He cocks his head to the side, still smiling slightly at the thought. "Clint's hair's a little darker than Ron's. Hey, do you think he'd like a Rufus of his very own? I cans draw him Rufus!"

"I don't think he'd like having his hair changed- although I think that would be hilarious and you have my full blessing to do so- but you can probably talk him into being Ron sometime. And sure, go ahead and draw Rufus." Tony answers. Loki goes offscreen and comes back with a sheet of paper, asking Stitch for the pink marker. His Stitch backpack proceeds to spit out the requested
item. Tony's still somewhat amazed by that, and he'd had Jarvis scan the backpack once when Loki wasn't wearing it. He's going to figure out how it works, even if it takes years, though it probably won't. Genius, remember?

As Loki starts to draw, Tony goes to the topic that had been the main reason for the call. "However, I was wondering if 'the Avengers' might include Thor this time. Would you be okay with that?"

Loki looks very anxious as he chews slightly on his bottom lip with wide eyes.

"I'm not going to let him hurt you, or even say anything against you, and neither are Bruce, Jarvis, Natasha, Clint or Steve." Tony says, giving Loki what he hopes is a reassuring look. "Basically, we're not going to let him do anything to you, just like we didn't let him on Halloween." Smirking slightly, he adds "Besides, if Thor tries to hurt you, I'm pretty sure Hulk will come out again, and he won't like Thor doing that. I won't either." It can't hurt to reiterate that. "So, yeah, he won't hurt you."

"'Cause I don't d'serve it?" Loki asks, and he actually sounds partially convinced that this is true, even while asking for clarification. Tony grins.

"Exactly, Rudolph. Ding ding ding, we have a winner." That might have come out slightly more sarcastic than intended, not that Tony would have cared with anyone else. It's just that that's what he's been trying to have Loki get the whole time, and Tony's definitely not a patient person. He's not sure how Loki will react, but Loki stares at him blankly. "You don't deserve to be mocked by other reindeer or left out of their reindeer games. Got that, Reindeer Games?" That sort of has a nice ring to it, Tony thinks, and it goes with the Rudolph and Bambi.

Loki gives him a look that seems to be half amused and half wondering if he's actually serious. "M not a reindeer, Tony, not like Sven or Rud-olph. Hey, Bruce saids I was a monkey when I was in Willowy, but I think he was just being silly. You and him are more monkeys than me, 'cause you're really close to chimps and g'illas."

Tony nods vaguely, and Loki starts laughing. "Chimps are apes, not monkeys, Tony!" He says as if Tony had fallen for the best joke in the world. "Go-ril-las too."

"So do you mind if Thor comes? I figured we can work on him a bit more." Tony goes back to the main topic. "As I said before, he won't hurt you. I'll beat him up again if he tries."

Loki smiles slightly at that. The smile falls as he considers it some more. The god bites his lip and wrings his hands together anxiously, but eventually murmurs "He can come."

Tony hadn't actually expected that, and he hopes he hadn't pressured Loki into it, so he says "If you don't want him to come, he won't. This is up to you, buddy."

Loki cocks his head to the side and stares at him off into space, eyes even more unfocused and glassy than usual. For a bit, Tony's worried he simply checked out and that he won't get an answer. After almost a minute (during which Tony almost bursts with unsaid things), he waits for Loki to respond, eventually breaking the silence with "Snoopy? You there?"

Loki's eyes sort of focus, but he doesn't say anything.

"So, I was asking about if you're okay with Thor coming over or not." Tony prompts, and Loki slowly nods. "Really? That's... great. I'm proud of you, Snoopy." Really, Loki has every reason to never want to see Thor again, and Tony honestly hadn't expected him to agree to this.
"Okay, I'll see you in around an hour and a half." Tony signs off and points at Thor. "All right, Hammer Time. You can join us." Thor's face brightens.

He pauses, wondering if this next part is a good idea. Eventually, he decides to go with it. "You didn't seem like a total dick on the Helicarrier, and if that continues and you continuously treat Loki right, maybe you can have a second chance." Tony's voice drops to a quiet but no less dangerous tone. "Don't waste that chance. By the way, if you do anything to harm Loki, if you even look at him menacingly, you're going to have to face me, and I'm going to be very pissed off."

"Same here." Clint adds, and Natasha silently nods.

"You'd probably provoke the Other Guy." Bruce says sleepily. Hulking-out clearly took a lot out of him, especially because he'd Hulked-out only a couple days ago.

"We clear, Point Break?" Tony asks. Thor nods, looking somewhat less cheerful. Tony smiles coldly. Good.

Loki starts to pace anxiously, not even feeling like watching more of Stitch, or even Timon and Pumbaa, even though he really, really likes them. Had he seriously just agreed to let Thor come over? What had he been thinking? Since when would that ever be a good idea?!

He finds it slightly odd that Tony even bothered asking him beforehand, but he figures that the last time Thor had been over hadn't actually been that bad.

Well, in some ways it had been really bad. First of all, he doesn't exactly like being around Thor that much, since Thor used to hurt him before being banished to Midgard, and then Thor had started to tell Tony and the others how horrible Jotuns are. Loki had thought they'd start to hate him then, but they'd reassured him nothing changed.

He had sort of enjoyed hearing them tell Thor off last time, even if it had been surprising. He'd really liked hearing that they didn't hate them, and hadn't even let Thor tell them that Jotuns are horrible monsters. A slightly more vicious part of Loki had really enjoyed seeing Thor being roughed up a bit by Tony and Hulk, because it's like what everyone in Asgard had done to him, only now it's Thor on the receiving end.

He knows Tony, Jarvis and Bruce won't let Thor hurt him - they hadn't last time, and they especially won't now that they're family. Although he doesn't think he has to worry about that, he's still slightly nervous.

Last time, though, Loki had his Man of Iron suit, and it had made him feel safe. Sometimes when he wears that suit, he imagines he's Tony and then he's really brave. Thor hadn't even tried to hit him last time, and hadn't even known who he was at first. Loki wishes he could look like Tony now, so when Thor comes, he wouldn't know who he was.

Loki wanders into the kitchen, since he's getting sort of hungry.

As he rummages though some cupboards for something to eat, he frowns in confusion. His hands look... different. They're not as pale and his fingers aren't quite as long. He's not entirely sure, but everything looks a bit higher up than it normally does. He decides not to think on this too much when he stumbles upon several boxes of Pop Tarts in one of the cabinets. He likes Pop Tarts a lot, ever since he'd eaten one the day he got Simba. Sometimes, Tony has them in the lab and Loki will eat them there, too.

Loki knows Thor likes Pop Tarts a lot, too. He vaguely remembered Thor mentioning them in
Asgard when, the last time Thor had been over here, Jarvis had mentioned Thor had eaten twenty-six boxes of them. And Jarvis had said that Thor was more of a burden than Loki himself is.

Loki glances back at the remaining four boxes of Pop Tarts after shoving a part of a strawberry one in his mouth. He chews it as he thoughtfully as he regards the other boxes of Pop Tarts, head cocked to the side. As Jarvis said, Thor eats a lot of Pop Tarts, and Loki doesn't like the idea of Thor eating them all. After all, Loki likes them a lot, too, and why should Thor get all the Pop Tarts?

He snatches the foil-wrapped pastries out of the boxes and, after wondering for a bit what he's going to do with them, stashes them under his bed. He hadn't needed to lift up his bed like he had with the sofa, which isn't tall enough to crawl under. Jarvis asks him why he's hiding this, and Loki just tells him not to tell anyone. Loki scoots back out from under the bed before going back to the kitchen and taking another bite out of his strawberry Pop Tart, which he'd left on the counter when stashing the others away.

Looking at the now empty boxes, he pauses thoughtfully. He could put them back and make Thor think they still have Pop Tarts- that would be funny, and Thor wouldn't even be able to hurt him with Tony, Jarvis and Bruce here. Loki snickers slightly and starts to put the boxes back in the cabinet, only to remember that they weigh a lot less now that there aren't any Pop Tarts in them. Sure, he could just put empty boxes back, but that doesn't seem good enough.

Loki winds up rummaging through a drawer he'd opened earlier that has a lot of random stuff in it, trying to find things to make the boxes weigh more like they would if they had Pop Tarts in them. He ends up getting majorly sidetracked inspecting all the other things and asking Jarvis what they are, but that's fun too, and it gives him another idea.

He puts enough things in the boxes so they'll feel like they're full of Pop Tarts and then, after putting the boxes back in one of the highest cabinets attached to the ceiling, proceeds to stuff the cabinet full of all the stuff in that drawer, until he has to slam the door shut quickly to prevent it all from falling out. He sees a flash of green around his hands (which still look different) when he does this, and figures that his magic might have kept the things in the cupboard.

Still, he's pretty sure his magic won't keep the stuff in later, when Thor opens it. He smirks and claps his hands, telling Jarvis not to tell Thor about this and just tell him the Pop Tarts are in that cabinet. Jarvis agrees, and Loki goes off and digs another Pop Tart out from under his bed, unwrapping it and biting in. He grabs Toy Stark and Simba from where he'd set them on the floor when rummaging under his bed for the Pop Tarts. He holds one up to Simba's mouth and says "Too bad you can't taste 'em, 'cause like, you don't even gots a tongue."

It's only when he goes to the bathroom and sees his reflection in the mirror that he realizes why his hands look different. He's shifted forms again.

Tony arrives back at the mansion after an hour and a half flight, during which he'd blatantly rejected several calls from Fury. He's still not over the Director's treatment of Loki, and certainly isn't going to attend any meetings Fury tries to make him attend. Tony's the first one back to the mansion, which is just as well, really. As Black Sabbath blasts in his helmet, he flies into the tunnel that leads directly to his underground garage/lab/workshop. Once there, he has Jarvis remove the armor- at least the dents aren't in places that make taking it off tricky and painful.

He hears footsteps above him and assumes Jarvis has told Loki of his arrival. Sure enough, he soon hears footsteps coming down the stairs and then sees the feet, bare of course, themselves. It's probably a trick of the light, but they seem less pale than normal.
He quickly realizes it's not merely a trick of the light when the rest of the person follows. It's not Loki.

It's him. He's looking at himself.

Tony stands there, staring.

The man standing in front of him is identical in appearance, as if he suddenly has a twin or clone he doesn't know about.

"Uh, Snoopy, is that you?" Tony asks his new doppelganger. "Did you pull another Mowgli incident?" Figures. Tony had been hoping to see Loki shapeshift again, but he'd done it when he hadn't been here. He can watch the video feed Jarvis undoubtedly recorded and try to make some sense out of whatever energy readings the scanners had picked up, but it won't be nearly as awesome as seeing it in person.

The other Tony nods, and Tony can definitely believe it. "While I can certainly understand why anyone would want to look like me and be insanely attractive, I'm not going to lie. This is freaking bizarre." Tony mutters.

Still, once he's gotten over the shock of seeing himself, it's painfully obvious it's really Loki in his body. He's carrying Simba, which is basically a dead giveaway, and he also has his new Stitch backpack hanging off his back. Loki's eyes- now the exact brown as Tony's own, are wide and slightly glazed, as always.

It only brings the point home, even more, of how different Loki is. Tony realizes that this would have been him, if he'd somehow wound up like Loki, and it's not exactly a comfortable thought in the slightest.

Through the red shirt, Tony can see the glow of an arc reactor, and he really hopes that isn't actually going into Loki's chest like his own does. Although he doesn't tell anyone about it, the arc reactor is a sort of constant pain that he's grown used to, since he has to. (Tony can well imagine Bruce Hulkling-out if he found out how deep the arc reactor actually goes).

Still, Loki can't know how deep the arc reactor actually goes in Tony's chest, right? After all, Loki's never seen Tony change the reactor or anything, so how would he know? And even if he knew, that doesn't mean the reactor in his chest would do the same thing when he transforms.

No, Tony tells himself, it's probably just glowing, like on Toy Stark.

Loki's looking at him anxiously, with Tony's own eyes, although they're now somewhat glazed, which is creepy as hell. "Do you need... singing heals? Like Rapunzel?"

"Nah, I'm fine. Out of curiosity, could you heal people without singing?"

"Prob'bly?" Loki says, unsure. "But I like singing."

Tony finally just says what's on his mind. "Uh, you know you look... different, right?"

Loki grins and nods. "Like you! I like it lots." He claps his hands and bounces on his toes, holding Toy Stark up next to his face. "See, we three... the sames."

"Why? Did you do it on purpose?" That would make this even more bizarre.

Loki cocks his head to the side (although it's really Tony's head, or it at least looks like it. Geez,
"This is messing with Tony's brain, seeing himself like this). "No. But I like it. Safe." He nods.

"It's safe?"

"Yeah, 'cause Thor won't hits me if I'm you. Like when I was Man of Iron on Halloween." Loki nods decisively. "Can I go out've the house now?" Loki-Tony asks. "You're not gonna start locking me up like Mother Gothel or Frollo, right?"

"No, I'm not." Tony says absently, still not entirely sure what to make of this situation as Loki gallops off down the tunnel that Tony had used to enter the garage, apparently knowing exactly where it leads.

Clint pilots the Quinjet, which also carries, Natasha, Steve, and a sleeping Bruce to Tony's mansion, while Tony flies ahead in his suit. Thor is flying with Mjolnir, but Tony had given the thunderer strict instructions to not arrive until notified through the comms that he can do so. Thor's currently somewhere behind the quinjet, while Tony's far ahead of it.

Clint is somewhat surprised that Tony had invited him to dinner, too, especially after what happened with Loki disappearing the last time Clint had been over here. Then again, he's even more surprised that Thor's coming along to their team session after the most recent battle. Well, Thor is part of the team, but Clint would have thought that Tony is holding a grudge against Thor for what he did to Loki or something. Not that that would be uncalled for or unjustified, because it sounds like Thor did some pretty awful things to Loki in their pasts.

While Thor has admitted to being an arrogant, spoiled jerk of a prince (although not precisely in those words) prior to being banished to Midgard, Clint hadn't really imagined, when Thor had admitted this, that he'd been a part of abusing an innocent person like Loki.

Clint hadn't known Thor before the Asgardian was banished to Midgard. Even though the first time Clint saw Thor, the thunderer was busy knocking out a ton of highly trained agents in New Mexico, it's still a little hard to imagine Thor, who is often exuberant and smiling outside of battle, abusing Loki like it turns out he did.

Clint had found out on the Helicarrier after Tony got Loki out, that Thor had actually spoken out against Loki being put in the Hulk's cage like that. Still, Natasha and Clint had ripped Thor a new one for his treatment of Loki once Tony left, although Clint had started voicing his displeasure when Tony was still there. Clint hadn't actually put an arrow through Thor like he said he wanted to, but even without that, the experience was decidedly unpleasant for Thor. Thor had certainly deserved that, though, and Clint had enjoyed giving it to him, with help from Natasha and Steve, though he seemed to have partially gotten it out of his system already.

Clint always hated the idea of abuse, and that hate only increased by a tenfold after becoming a father himself. He's with Tony in that Thor still has some serious explaining to do. Thor hadn't actually rejected that notion when Tony declared it less than an hour ago.

Looking down on the place as he flies over it, the archer can't believe that Tony actually lives here. Sure, he knows Tony is loaded, but in some ways this is even more impressive than the tower. Sure, the tower's bigger and everything, but this house is built on a freaking cliff right near the ocean. How much better can you get?!

Before Clint even lands, he spots Tony in a tree. Hey, he's not called Hawkeye for nothing.

As Clint lands the quinjet in Tony's massive yard around thirty five minutes later, his stomach
growls. He can't wait to cash into that dinner that Tony was basically doomed to owe them from the start. Surely even an arrogant egomaniac like Tony would have realized he'd never win that bet.

Once he lands and gets out of the quinjet, Clint approaches the tree Tony's in. Sitting around in a tree really doesn't seem like Tony, even if the billionaire is very eccentric. "Hey." Clint says simply, looking up. He sees a couple books and toys up there in the branches with Tony.

Tony just hooks his knees over a branch and dangles upside down, staring at him. His eyes are wide, unfocused and somewhat glassy. Most of Clint's brain screams at him that this can't be Tony, despite the undeniable fact that man hanging upside-down in front of him looks exactly like the billionaire genius inventor. He rules out the possibility of a long lost twin and starts to wonder if Tony and Bruce had somehow managed to clone Tony with some science-y stuff in Tony's lab.

"Hi, Loki." Natasha says, having walked up beside Clint. Clint sees Tony's face (or is it Loki's?) take on an expression of surprise. Clint looks at her, and she shrugs. "He can change his appearance, remember?"

Right. Loki's apparently actually blue, even though he ordinarily looks very pale. Still, Clint didn't think Loki could change his appearance this much. Despite looking exactly like the world-famous billionaire, inventor and superhero, there are lots of little cues that make it obvious this is Loki. Natasha probably picked up on all of them in a matter of seconds.

If this were another situation, Clint would be very suspicious about Loki being able to change his appearance. Natasha had actually been suspicious a while ago, when finding out Loki can change his appearance like that, but she seems to view it as harmless now.

"Look, Loki, about last time," Clint starts. "Well, I didn't mean to put an arrow near your face. You just kinda startled me, is all, you know?" Considering Loki still hasn't said anything, Clint's starting to wonder if Loki's still annoyed at him. Not that Clint could exactly blame him if he decided to hold a grudge.

"Do's you need..." Loki starts, eyes directed towards Clint, but not entirely focused on him. "me to fix-it?"

"Fix what?" Clint asks, before remembering he has some minor injuries on his arms and face, which he'd disinfected on the quinjet while Natasha took the controls for a bit. Frankly, getting out of a battle with only a couple scratches and cuts is an accomplishment.

Loki doesn't answer, just moves his head so the top of his head brushes Clint's arm. He starts to sing what Clint recognizes as Rapunzel's healing song from *Tangled*. Of course, with Lila, he's seen that movie. She's really into that princess sort of stuff and talks nonstop about *Frozen*, even though she hasn't even seen it. Technically, it's not even out yet, although Tony and Loki had apparently seen it early, somehow.

As Loki sings this, the scratches and cuts disappear. Clint stares, because that's basically what Rapunzel does in the movie, only Loki's copy of Tony's hair doesn't glow at all. He doesn't feel the injuries either, but then again, he'd mostly ignored them up until now. He touches his arm, and it feels- and looks- like it had never been injured at all.

"Whoa..." Clint breathes, because that's astounding and a lot better than having some S.H.I.E.L.D medic poke at him. He grins at Loki, who grins back a little unsurely. His gaze drifts towards Natasha. Since she was fighting on the ground instead of sniping things with arrows from a building, one would think she'd sustain a lot more injuries, but Natasha's really, really good.
"So, are we good about the whole arrow thing?" Clint asks.

"Tony said I froze it, like Elsa." Loki singsongs the last two words. Clint nods and says that yes, he did indeed freeze the arrow.

"Oh, yeah!" Loki says, pulling himself up to a sitting position on the branch he'd been hanging by his knees from. "I drewed Rufus for you." He holds up a plush backpack of Stitch and addresses the bag. "Stitch, Rufus please."

To Clint's astonishment- and Natasha's, although she hides it well- the Stitch backpack spits out a small sheet of paper. Loki hands it to Clint, and he sees it has a small pink creature with huge buck teeth. "Sorry he doesn't look better. Like, not even not-flat." Loki says.

"It's fine like this." Clint answers, slipping the tiny drawing in his pocket. It's small enough to fit in without being folded.

Clint hears Steve and Tony walk up, having an argument of some sort.

Steve had apparently asked Tony if he'd told Loki whether or not Thor was coming over, because the billionaire just gives him an annoyed look. "No, I just decided to spring Thor's arrival on him, since that went so well last time." Tony's voice positively drips with sarcasm. "Speaking of him, I guess I should tell him he can come over. You still okay with that, Rudolph?"

Loki looks at him and asks "You gonna beat him up if he hurts me?"

"Hell yeah I am." Tony replies, and Loki nods.

Clint has noticed that Loki's speech is a bit odder than usual, and when he asks- admittedly somewhat tactlessly- about this, Loki starts talking about English being weirder when All-Tongue is off. Clint remembers All-Tongue, and how Loki had been able to respond in every language Natasha threw at him. Why on earth would he decide to go without that, especially when it makes him sound odder?

In his comm, Tony says to Thor "All right, Princess, you can get over here. We're gonna have a little team chat, so don't try backing out."

Thor arrives when the rest of them are in the main living room, debating what to have for dinner, or, in Bruce's case, nodding off on a sofa. Loki had also tried to drag Natasha and Clint into a game about Kim and Ron, whoever they are. Shawarma had been shot down as an option by Natasha.

Steve doesn't really want to have Tony spend a ton of money on them, but Clint seems to have no reservations about that, although he seems like he's mostly teasing when he suggests more and more exquisite foods.

Once Thor arrives, Loki is extremely clingy with Tony, immediately grabbing Tony's sleeve as if to ensure Tony doesn't give him the slip.

Of course Thor looks confused about the two Tony's, but he actually seems to figure it out pretty quickly. He frowns. "'You-"

"Yeah, whatever you're going to say, just stop." Tony interjects quickly, glaring at Thor. "You stay out of this, princess. Remember our deal? I think you've done way more than enough damage in your lifetime. Besides, Hammer Time, isn't changing his appearance exactly what your parents did to him in the first place? Because, you know, if you think he's a freak for doing that- which he's not- then your parents would also be freaks. Worse, your father would be a freak who abuses other
freaks. Odin isn't exactly as stellar as you think he is, huh? Although that should be obvious." Tony finishes with a dramatic eye roll.

Thor doesn't actually say anything about the transformation after that. Around five awkward minutes pass while Tony keeps talking, sometimes lecturing Thor and sometimes about random things that apparently pop in his head, like why red grapes are infinitely better than green ones, Thor's stomach positively rumbles, sounding eerily like the thunder he controls.

"Friend Stark, do you have any of those delicious Tarts of Pop available?" Thor asks in his usual booming voice as he heads towards the kitchen. Tony and Clint both roll their eyes, and even Steve knows they're called Pop Tarts.

"They are in that Cabinet over there, Prince Odinson." Tony's AI creation, Jarvis, says. Despite visiting Tony, and thus encountering Jarvis, numerous times over the year and a half the Avengers have been formed, Steve still isn't entirely sure what Jarvis is. Sure, he knows he's a machine of some sort, but he seems so human. Back in his time, there had been all sorts of stories about machines and robots taking over humanity, but Tony assured him he doesn't need to worry about that. Tony had basically said to treat Jarvis like he's human, though. Steve can swear he hears slight note of amusement in Jarvis' voice, but that shouldn't be possible for a computer. Thor, however, doesn't seem to notice.

Loki snickers at something, but he sometimes did that the other times Steve visited.

There's a very loud clattering as what sounds like dozens of objects fall to the floor. Everyone enters the kitchen, looking confused, except for the Tony that is Loki.

There's a mountain of random objects at Thor's feet- everything from screwdrivers and a matchbox that opened and spilled matches across the floor, to random cooking utensils, including a small pasta strainer. There's even a small pillow that looks like it belongs on one of the sofas.

"What happened?" Steve asks even as he works out that obviously the cabinet had been full of all that stuff.

"What do you think?" Tony replies sarcastically. "Thor just decided to dump all that stuff on the floor."

"Friend Stark, I swear I did not do this." Thor says, clearly not recognizing the sarcasm.

He grabs a box of PopTarts and opens it, only for his face to become even more confused as he pulls out a small paperback book and a pair of mismatched socks.

Had Tony been having some sort of wild, drunk party again? Steve wouldn't be surprised if that's the case, and while Tony looks confused, too, perhaps he'd been so drunk that he doesn't remember it. Clint looks amused and Natasha just raises an eyebrow. Bruce isn't actually in the kitchen, and is probably resting on a couch.

Meanwhile, Loki turns to leave the room, and Steve is pretty sure he hears another snicker.

"I take it we are out of the Tarts of Pop, then." Thor says sadly, opening the other box and finding just a stack of tissues.

"Yeah, well, too bad." Tony shrugs, not looking sympathetic. "Now, we really need to talk about some things. Actually, I've got a list here." He whips out his holographic Stark Phone and reads something off it that Steve can't see. Looking up at Thor, Tony fixes him with a hard stare. "First of all, what the hell is with you guys treating Loki as a servant?!"
Thor looks honestly confused, and Thor's never one for disguising his emotions. "I know not of what you speak, Friend Stark." Ton levels him with a skeptical glare, but Thor looks entirely genuine.

"You mean you know nothing about the servants making him help them with chores and berating him all the while?"

Steve hadn't heard of this before, and he frowns, not liking it at all. Thor shakes his head, and Tony points an accusing finger at him. "Well, now you do. And by the way, when you become king, you'd better abolish slavery. Seriously, we did that over a century and a half ago. Get with the times. It's wrong, horrible, and disgusting. Seriously, why the hell do you have servants and slaves? Just pay them all and be done with it. And don't count any of them as property, because you can't own another person."

"Why would the servants even make Loki help them?" Steve asks, confused. No offense to Loki, but he doesn't exactly seem like great help with a lot of areas, although Tony had mentioned Loki cooking with Bruce. Maybe he did that.

"Well, because they could." Natasha says, crossing her arms but not betraying any emotion in her tone or facial expression. "These Jotuns-"

"Jotuns." Tony corrects. "I think Frost Giants is derogatory, sorta like the N-word here or something."

Natasha nods slightly. "Okay, these Jotuns are clearly considered the lowest class, and even if half the stories about huge wars with them are true, they're probably even less popular in your kingdom." She fixes Thor with a look, and he doesn't deny it. "Well, being a servant, or worse, a slave, has got to be immensely frustrating, so they probably decided to take their annoyance out on the one person nobody cared about."

That sounds pretty plausible, although Steve has to wonder who Loki took his annoyance out on.

Okay, second thing- what's up with those apples in the myths? Aren't you guys naturally immortal?"

"Nay, we are not. Idunn's apples grant us immortality, if we continue eating them. Furthermore, we are not actually immortal, Man of Iron, we simply live a good five thousand years longer than you Midgardians do."

"So what would happen if a human ate one?" Tony asks, and Steve is pretty sure he's just being an inquisitive scientist. After all, what would he need with an apple?

"If they continued eating them, they would live as long as the Aesir." Thor replies.

Tony nods and asks suddenly "How old is Loki?"

"We have both passed our first millennium," Thor starts, and Clint lets out an impressed sort of whistle. "Although I am a little older than Loki."

"Loki seems so much younger." Steve muses out loud, and Tony fixes him with an annoyed stare.

"He's older than you, Spangles, which is really saying something. You're, what, grandpa age by now?" Tony quips, and Steve frowns.

"So, what's up with the whole Jotunheim thing? Loki said that Heimdall wound up saving him."
Tony says, and Steve remembers this coming up on Halloween.

"The Frost Giants somehow invaded my coronation, and I was going there to confront them. I am not proud of what happened." Thor lowers his eyes slightly. "Loki is a prince of their realm, and Father took him as a babe to be a bargaining chip. However, it turns out that he was not wanted in Jotunheim, either. A fight broke out, and Heimdall, the gatekeeper, wound up rescuing Loki."

Thor pauses a bit and says "I never wanted him to die." He says sincerely.

"I thought you hated all Jotuns." Tony sneers. "I'm surprised you didn't tell him he was going to get eaten by them or something."

"I believe Fandral might have actually told him that. As a child, I was told stories of Jotuns eating Aesir children, but I have never heard of that actually happening. I declared I was going to slay all the Frost Giants, but I never meant him even then." Thor guiltily adds. "I hurt him, but I never wanted him dead."

"I still don't get what you have against these Jotuns." Clint says, crossing his arms.

"The Aesir and Jotuns have fought many a war against each other, and are mortal enemies."

"Yet on the Helicarrier, you told Fury that Loki isn't dangerous."

"Aye, he is not." Thor says.

"So clearly, not all Jotuns are like that." Tony says, giving Thor a pointed stare.

Dinner, which is Chinese food (very expensive food that's probably only delivered to Tony). Tony goes to get Loki and wake Bruce. Loki still looks like Tony, and he comes in the room clutching Tony's sleeve, with Simba tucked under one arm. He's also nonchalantly eating a Pop Tart.

Thor frowns. "I thought we were out?"

"Last one." Loki murmurs, staring at the ground and taking another bite. The look of horror on Thor's face is rather funny.

Loki still seems very anxious during the meal. He's a lot quieter, and he moves around even more than usual, fidgeting anxiously. He's also set up a small army of toys in front of his plate. Simba's there, of course, as are a Tony Stark action figure and other characters that Steve doesn't recognize.

Loki slides under the table, and is eventually coaxed out by Tony and Bruce, who are sitting on either side of him. There are a couple other times it seems he's debating about repeating this, but he only actually crawls under the table the one time, even if he slinks low in his seat, as if he's half sliding under a lot.

At one point, Thor hurls a glass to the floor. He doesn't do that all the time, but apparently that's pretty common in Asgard. Tony fixes Thor with an annoyed look and says "Hey. Don't break my stuff." He then turns to Loki and says, not bothering to lower his voice at all, "See, Bambi? I told you he was worse with cups than you are. Accidentally dropping one is nothing." Loki smiles slightly at that.

Loki doesn't eat much and quickly scurries into the living room. The rest of them find him near a sofa with a ton of toys on it. Loki immediately latches onto Tony's arm again.

There's a bit more awkwardness, where Tony mostly keeps the silence at bay with random
Loki starts rocking back and forth and singing something. However, he seems off in his own little world.

"You think I'm an ignorant savage
And you've been so many places, I guess it must be so
But still I cannot see
If the savage one is me
How can there be so much that you don't know?

You don't know..."

At first, it seems like there's a message there, directed at Thor, until Loki starts softly singing under his breath, something that sounds like you think you own whatever land you land on. Steve's starting to wonder if maybe it's just a coincidence, and the first part wasn't directed at Thor at all. Loki could just be singing a song he likes, and he doesn't exactly seem to be present at the moment.

"You tell him, Snoopy." Tony gives Loki a light, friendly shake, and Steve's honestly surprised. Normally, Tony doesn't seem quite this affectionate with people.

Loki seems to relax slightly when Tony's hand is on his shoulder, and Tony doesn't move away when Loki snuggles close to him. The two of them still look like twins or even clones, which is still somewhat strange but also funny. However, it's still pretty easy to tell them apart from the way Loki acts, the slightly glassy eyes, and his clothing and the stuff he's carrying. Even if they were wearing the exact same things and didn't have anything else (like Simba and the alien backpack), it would be easy to tell them apart. Looking like Tony only makes that difference- whatever it is- all the more striking.

Loki continues singing, something along the lines of thinking the earth is a dead thing, but how every rock, tree and creature have voices and spirits. It's starting to look a little less like Loki's directing a message towards Thor and more like he's just singing a song he likes.

Then, the lyrics become somewhat relevant again, and Loki sings louder

"You think the only people who are people
Are the people who look and think like you
But if you walk the footsteps of a stranger
You'll learn things you never knew you never knew."

Loki looks at Tony for reassurance, and Tony gives him another nod and shoulder squeeze. Loki's grip on Simba tightens considerably as he looks back at Thor.

"My Tony says you're wrong." Loki says quietly, and immediately tenses up. Tony pulls his doppelganger closer, and Loki relaxes marginally. "He's my family now." Thor, meanwhile, looks between Tony and Loki, (currently another Tony) with a shocked expression that matches Steve's own. Family? That seems so unlike Tony. But Tony nods in agreement and gives Thor a cold stare.

To be honest, if he'd been here when Tony first decided to let Loki live with him, Steve would've
thought it was a bad idea. He would've expected Tony to perhaps treat Loki like a new bit of technology, putting him aside when the novelty wears off. However, Steve's somewhat surprised with how this has turned out. Tony good for Loki, and Loki's good for Tony in turn.

"My Bruce and Hulk-y are family, too." Loki mumbles. "And my Jarvis and Dum-E and Pepper."

"My Tony, he's real smart." Loki starts after a bit, bouncing up and down anxiously on his toes and putting Simba's face up against his own. "Super smart, like." Tony looks like he thinks that's an understatement. "So he knows what he's talking 'bout, more than me usually." Loki says. "An' and Tony says you shouldn't hit me, 'cause I don't d'serve it."

Tony's doppelganger drags the inventor over to a sofa with a ton of toys sitting on it, although it's only one sofa out of many. The Tony that's really Loki pauses, cocking his head to the side and frowning slightly as he glances at his hands. One of them is gripping Tony's shirt in a death grip that will probably end up ruining it, although surprisingly, Tony doesn't object. The other hand is occupied with holding Simba's fuzzy head up to his face. After a bit of thought, he sits down, practically pulling Tony down with him, and puts Simba on his lap, thus freeing that hand to lean over and grab one of the dolls sitting on the couch. It's a doll with a platinum-blond, almost-white braid, wearing a blue dress. She also has blue skin and red eyes, and Thor stares at it.

Loki looks at the doll with a small smile, and then starts talking, not taking his eyes off the doll.

"This is Elsa." He nods, holding the doll up for them to see, although he still doesn't look at them. "She's... she's a Jotun, but she's not a monster, nope nope nope!" He shakes his head vehemently as he says this. "My Tony mades it real clear she's not. Well, the old dumb Duke guy thought she was, he said so too, but she's not! She made slides and stuff for her and Anna, and they made Olaf, 'xcept he wasn't living then. She doesn't normally look like this though." As he says that, Elsa's skin changes from blue to a pale color, and her eyes become blue instead of red.

Loki turns to grab another doll with two reddish braids hanging over her shoulders, although the right braid has a bit of white in it. Loki introduces the doll as Anna and makes the two dolls hug.

"Is this Anna of Jotunheim, too?" Thor asks and Loki stares at him with wide, worried eyes, as if he'd been trying to forget Thor was there and was just reminded of his presence.

"No! Elsa was the only one in Arendelle, she was... like me. Anna, she wasn't, but she still loved Elsa and she didn't hit her none for making ice or being a Jotun, but she knew 'cause of the ice and snowy stuff. Anna loved Elsa, like family, even though Elsa wasn't." He frowns at Thor, and it's painfully obvious he's jealous about that. "But she was, too, 'cause families and Ohanas don't have'ta be all the same. Like, Stitch isn't even from the same planet as Lilo!" Loki gazes at the blue creature hanging off his back, pulling the straps of the plush backpack tighter so it's like the alien-Stitch, apparently- is hugging him tighter from behind.

Thor shifts uncomfortably, eyes cast downwards slightly. Loki's now brown eyes glaze over a bit more as he continues with the story.

"But then, she acc'dentally hit Anna with ice, but it wasn't her being bad 'cause she didn't mean to, but Anna got really hurt. The trolls fixed her but Anna didn't even know 'bout the magic anymore 'cause a troll changed her memories. So she remembered, but not the magic. Then her parents told her magic is bad and made her not use it, and she got real scared-like when she did, 'cause they didn't want her to." Thor's starting to look more guilty, as the story changes to them disapproving of her magic, like Asgard clearly had. "And Bruce says that they probably didn't hit her, and that if they did they were real monsters, not her."
Right now, the real Tony has a cross between a smug smirk and a genuine grin on his face as he regards his 'twin.' He's clearly pleased, even though he still looks somewhat astonished that Loki's saying all this.

Steve finds himself nodding along, agreeing wholeheartedly with Bruce's point about the real monsters. "What happened next?" He asks, as Clint sarcastically mutters something about spoiler alerts.

"Well, Elsa was going to be the Queen of Arendelle, 'cause her parents got drowned in the ocean. And she was gonna be Queen, even though she's a Jotun and they weren't, and the King and Queen knew that and still picked her?"

"Why would they allow her to rule?" Thor asks, but immediately shuts up when everyone, except Loki, glares at him.

"She's a good queen, 'xcept at her corn-o-ration, no corn-o-ration..." He casts a quick glance at Tony, who nods, and Loki grins a grin that looks odd on Tony's face. "She accidentally made ice, even though she tried really hard not to. And then she made it snow all over Arendelle, 'cause she was really scared. And the mean old Duke man called her a monster, and she ran 'way."

He nods, looking at the doll again. "She went in the mountains, and she made Olaf and a really cool ice castle!" Loki grabs one of the toys from the line on the sofa, a small plush snowman, and holds it up for them to see. "This is Olaf. He's a snowman, and he's real. He wasn't when Elsa and Anna first made him, but he is now." He hugs the toy briefly. "Anna didn't hate Elsa for makin' him, at all. Anna really likes Olaf, 'cause they're friends, and she didn't hate Elsa."

It definitely seems like some of this is directed towards Thor, and Steve finds himself surprised at Loki's subtlety.

"Anna found Olaf and then Elsa, but she accidentally hurt Anna a-gain, 'cause she was still scared-like. And the Duke, he tried'ta get his guards to kill her, 'xcept they didn't manage. 'Cause, she used ice to stop 'em, and my Tony says it's not bad for her to do that. He says she kicked their asses epically, and that it doesn't make her weaker for using ice." He doesn't sound entirely sure about that, though, and the last part sounds like he's quoting Tony directly.

"Elsa made Marshmallow too, and he has spikes and roars and stuff, like a monster, but he really likes crowns, and they make him smile. But Anna and Kristoff and Hans thought he was really scary, and Hans fought him with a sword." Loki pauses and adds "He's like Hulk-y, but he was just trying'ta protect Elsa. Anna didn't hate her for that either, nope nope nope! 'Cause she's nice. But then Anna got worse, and Hans is a jerk, and Anna kinda turned into ice." Well, that doesn't sound like a very happy ending, Steve thinks.

"But then she thawed Anna and they were all happy!" Loki nods decisively and fiddles with Elsa's braid.

At one point, Thor gets within a five foot radius of Loki, and something odd happens. Loki's blue alien backpack- which is named Stitch, apparently- growls at Thor, and Simba roars. As if that's not odd enough, there's suddenly a humongous gray wolf snarling at the thunderer.

Before Thor even does anything, Loki flees the room and what looks to be an eight-legged horse appears and goes with him, singing some sort of lullaby about finding a field with horses. Tony follows after them. Steve wonders if Loki's having another panic attack. Still, he has no idea what just happened. He looks to the others, but they look somewhat confused, too.
"What were those monstrous creatures?" Thor asks. "That horse had too many legs!"

"The wolf was Fenrir and the horse was Sleipnir." Bruce says tiredly as he gets up from the sofa. "They're Loki's friends, and his chosen family." Bruce sends a reproachful look at Thor, but he doesn't Hulk-out, but his eyes do flash green and he looks like he's having to make an effort to hold the Hulk in. "He's sort of like Marshmallow, who Loki just told you about. From what I've heard, you didn't like him talking to them. So what did you do? Beat him."

Bruce takes some deep breaths. "But maybe if you'd been a better brother- not that you acted like a brother at all- he may not have needed to... create his own friends and family."

"He is not my brother." Thor says. "We are not even of the same blood."

"Haven't you ever heard of adoption?" Clint asks curtly. Thor looks down and doesn't answer.

"What do you have against his powers, anyways?" Bruce asks.

"I used to believe magic is not practiced by men." Thor answers. "It's a very womanly art, and I had not known that my father was versed in magic. I was unaware that it was the Father and Mother who hid Loki's true form. For a while, I believed it was Loki himself, since he can change his appearance." Thor pauses thoughtfully. "I am not sure why Father is so adamantly against magic when he can perform it himself, but he absolutely hated Loki's magic."

Thor frowns slightly. "I remember the first time I saw Loki use magic. He made green light, almost like fire playing around his hands. I was... entranced, even though he was a Frost Giant." Thor says. He pauses for a bit. "Then I remember Father whipping Loki after, and telling him that men don't perform magic. That's when I first heard magic was unmanly and... that does not seem right, considering Father can wield magic himself."

Clint snorts. "Of course it's not right. He says derisively. "At least you're getting it, though... but I'll notice you don't seem to have a problem with him getting whipped, even though he was a child. Who the hell can whip a child?"

"It's easy to justify abuse if you see someone as less than human." Natasha says, crossing her arms. "That way, you can tell yourself their pain doesn't matter. History's shown it countless times."

"Loki and I are not Midgardian." Thor replies, confused, and Clint rolls his eyes.

"She didn't mean literally human. She meant, like, less than an animal or something."

Thor looks away, ashamed. "Aye, Lady Natasha. Up until recently, after my failed coronation, I believed that Jotuns deserved to be hurt and even killed. We killed the ones that showed up at my coronation, and killed even more in Jotunheim. I know now that it was wrong."

Well, at least there's that.

After a while, Tony and Loki re-emerge. Loki still looks like Tony, and he's eating yet another Pop Tart. Tony's smirking at something, especially when Thor looks at the Pop Tart longingly.

Tony announces that they're going to watch a movie called *The Incredibles*. Steve knows next to nothing about it, but he agrees. They all sit in a media room, and Loki makes sure to sit as far away from Thor as possible.

The movie starts out with an interviewer asking Mr. Incredible if he has a secret identity, and Mr. Incredible replies that every superhero has a secret identity. That's really not true for the Avengers,
though. Admittedly, Tony was the one who announced to the world that he's Iron Man. Steve can occasionally blend in, but not as often as, say Natasha, who actually has several fake aliases she goes by.

"No matter how many times you save the world, it always manages to get back into jeopardy again." Mr. Incredible says, and that basically sums up what it's like for the Avengers.
"Sometimes, I just want it to stay saved, y'know? For a little bit... I feel like the maid. 'I just cleaned up this mess! Can we keep it clean for ten minutes?"

The movie then shows Mr. Incredible start to chase down an armed robber driving away from police, until an old lady asks him to get her cat Squeakers out of a tree. Steve actually has gotten a cat out of a tree before, but it was for a little boy instead of an old lady. Mr. Incredible winds up using the uprooted tree the cat was in to block the robber's car.

Thor remarks loudly that Mr. Incredible reminds him of Steve himself.

Once Mr. Incredible goes back in his car, he finds a boy named Buddy who claims he's Incrediboy. Apparently, he's a big member of the Mr. Incredible fan club, but all the same, Mr. Incredible ejects Buddy from the car and speeds off.

After Mr. Incredible stops a thief on a roof and runs into Elastigirl, and falls in love with her. Later, on the day of his and Elastigirl's wedding, Mr. Incredible is fighting the cleverly-named Bomb Voyage.

Buddy, who still calls himself Incrediboy, once again tries to tag along with Mr. Incredible, even showing off the rocket boots he made and Mr. Incredible still tries to get him to go home.

"This is because I don't have powers, isn't it? Well, not every superhero has powers, you know. You can be super without them. I invented these. I can fly. Can you fly?" Buddy replies, and everybody glances at Tony. Loki even laughs and points out the obvious- that Buddy flies, just like Tony.

Tony says that his suit is way cooler than Incrediboy's rocket boots, and then quips to Clint and Natasha that it's not like they have superpowers either so they shouldn't be looking at him like how they are.

Mr. Incredible then saves a man who tried to commit suicide by jumping off a building,

Mr. Incredible and Elastigirl marry, and Elastigirl tells him he needs to be "more than just Mr. Incredible."

The movie cuts to newsreels of Mr. Incredible being sued by Oliver Sansweet, the man who he'd prevented from committing suicide. Oliver's lawyer claims that Oliver didn't want to be saved and that he suffers from daily pain from Mr. Incredible's actions. To be fair, he does have a neck brace, but it's still a stupid lawsuit. Mr. Incredible angrily declares that he saved the man's life and that he should be thanking him instead of suing him. The train incident also cost the government millions.

Then, newspapers show other lawsuits, like for an 'X-Ray vision Peeping Tom'. A lady on the newsreel declares that superheroes' secret identities should become their only identities, and the public supports it. The government apparently quietly relocates them and they live out their lives as ordinary citizens.

"They shouldn't have to do that." Steve says, very annoyed. "They should just let them do what they need to do." They were helping people for crying out loud, and now the people hate them for
"I agree!" Thor rumbles wholeheartedly. "Why should they seek to control what their heroes do?"

"I admit it's kind of dumb for them to write them off entirely." Tony muses. "But couldn't they, like, at least have some sort of government agency telling them what to do?"

"You're saying that?" Steve asks Tony incredulously. Really, he would have thought that Tony would be with him on that one.

"Shut your patriotic mouth, Capsicle." The real Tony says as both Tony's glare at him, although Loki might just be imitating the real Tony.

"There's no need to start a civil war here, people." Bruce sighs, and Natasha just gets Jarvis to start the movie up again.

Bob (Mr. Incredible) hasn't totally adjusted to a civilian life. He works as an insurance claims agent but hates it. However, he helps people find loopholes to actually get money when they should. He and Helen have three kids. The eldest is fourteen year old Violet, who has a crush on a boy named Tony Rydinger but actually turns invisible to avoid being seen by him. There had been something about Loki turning invisible on the Helicarrier, Steve remembers. He notices Tony glance at Loki, who, after glancing at Thor, seems to be hyperventilating. Tony pulls him close and loudly declares that what Violet just did was awesome.

"She's got a really silly name." Loki says with a small giggle. "Purple Plant." He laughs, flicking his fingers. "She's named afters a plant!"

"Aye, the Purple Flower has a most amusing name." Thor booms, and Loki flinches, but looks surprised Thor's agreeing with him.

"It's Violet." Natasha explains. "But Violet is purple, as well as a flower. Is that what... All-Tongue translates it to?" Both of them nod, although Steve noticed that Loki had used the word plant when Thor had used flower, which is more accurate.

Next on Bob and Helen's list of kids is ten year old Dash, who can run incredibly fast and uses that skill to put a tack on the teacher chair. Baby Jack-Jack hasn't shown any signs of having superpowers yet.

At dinner, Helen tells Bob about how Dash got sent to the principal's office again, for putting a tack on the teacher's chair. The tapes barely caught him doing it. Mr. Incredible accidentally cuts through a plate and excuses himself.

When Helen asks Violet why she's not eating, Dash replies that she'd eat if they were having Tony loaf for dinner, since Tony's the boy she has a crush on.

Loki looks over at Tony and says sadly "You're right. There are other Tony's." It's a little ironic, because he still looks like Tony himself.

"Well, I'm the best Tony." Tony replies, and Steve's not sure if he actually thinks that. Loki clearly does, though and he claps his hands excitedly as he nods in agreement.

At Dash's comment about Tony-loaf, Violet launches herself across the table at him and they proceed to fight. Dash dashes around and Violet eventually stops him with a force field, which Dash complains about. Helen tries to stop the fight by stretching and putting both of them back in their chairs, but they both charge under the table and continue their fighting there. Bob comes back
and lifts up the table.

Lucius Best (a.k.a. Frozone) a longtime friend of the family, arrives, and the fight abruptly stops. Dash proceeds to spit liquid at him and Lucius freezes it in midair.

Loki actually seems to find that hysterical, and he wriggles his body around and flicks his fingers as he laughs. Thor, confused asks "Is this man of Jotunheim?"

"Probably not." Tony shrugs. "Just because he has ice powers doesn't automatically mean he's from Jotunheim."

"Like Slushy." Loki says quietly. Steve has no idea who Slushy is, but Tony grins at Loki.

Lucius and Bob leave for what they claim is bowling night. Helen starts to lecture Dash about going to the principal's office, and when she mentions the word 'normal', Violet interrupts.

"Normal? What do you know about normal? What does anyone in this family know about normal? We act normal, Mom. I want to be normal! The only normal one is Jack-Jack, and he's not even toilet trained!"

Bob and Lucius don't actually go bowling- instead, they do undercover superhero work, although Lucius actually wanted to go bowling. After they rescue people from a burning building, they somehow end up in a jewelry shop, where they get stopped by the police, who think they're robbers. The two of them are told to freeze, and Lucius slowly reaches for a drink of water. The cop tells him that he's now had a drink so he should- "I know, I know. Freeze!" Lucius says, freezing the cop solid with ice.

Loki actually laughs at the pun.

Helen and Bob have an argument when he gets home, and Helen says he needs to stop the superhero work.

Later, Bob ends up losing his job when his boss discovers he's telling deserving customers how to actually get coverage for things like having their house robbed. Bob notices a man being mugged, but his boss doesn't let him rescue the man. Fed up, Bob ends up throwing his boss through several walls and loses his job.

He winds up getting an assignment from a mysterious lady named Mirage, to defeat a rogue robot called an Omnidroid. Bob lies to Helen, telling her he's going on a work conference, and goes to fight the Omnidroid.

Thor seems very excited during the battle, loudly proclaiming that Mr. Incredible is a "valiant warrior" and that he himself would like to go up against one of the Omnidroids.

Mr. Incredible starts to adjust to family life after that, but he takes his old, blue super suit to be fixed by a very eccentric woman named Edna Mode. She also makes him a new, red one to replace it.

A while later, Bob gets yet another assignment from Mirage. This time, she uses a phone instead of a device with a screen, and Helen overhears and starts to worry Bob is cheating on her. When Mr. Incredible fights this Omnidroid, he loses. He discovers the maker of the Omnidroids is Buddy, now calling himself Syndrome. Buddy had apparently gotten rich designing weapons.

Everyone pointedly doesn't look at Tony during that part, except for Loki, who just looks confused at the concept. Admittedly, Tony had merely taken over Howard's company, and Tony had stopped
Stark Industries' production of weapons years ago.

Helen discovers Bob's old super suit had been patched up by Edna, and she pays Edna a visit, only to discover that, not only as Bob returned to superhero work, but Edna made super suits for the whole family. Activating a tracking beacon on Mr. Incredible's suit, they discover where he is.

Helen takes a jet to go rescue Bob, and it turns out Dash and Violet have stowed away onboard, leaving Jack-Jack with a babysitter, Kari. Syndrome attacks the plane with missiles, and Helen tries to get Violet to protect them with a force field. Violet is panicking, having never done it before. The jet blows up and they all fall into the ocean, and Steve notices Tony's on his phone instead of watching the movie.

Helen, Dash and Violet are unharmed and manage to swim to the island, although they're presumed dead by the other characters.

Once on the island, in a cave, Helen tells Violet and Dash to use their powers if anything happens, and Violet says that she said never to use their powers. Helen snaps at them and says that she knows what she said, but it's changed now. She tells them that these bad guys aren't like the ones they used to watch on Saturday morning cartoons, that if given the chance, these bad guys will kill them even though they're children.

Helen goes to save Bob, but Violet stops her, apologizing about the force field.

"You have more power than you realize." She tells Violet. "Don't think, and don't worry. If the time comes, you'll know what to do."

The next day, Dash and Violet encounter the guards. Violet turns invisible while the guards chase Dash using what appear to be a cross between flying saucers and circular saws. This ends up with Dash realizing he can run on water.

Syndrome ends up capturing all the Incredibles and claims he's going to release an Omnidroid on Metroville, and that he's going to sell his superhero gadgets so "When everyone's super, nobody will be."

Syndrome sends on Omnidroid to the city, and at one point, the Omnidroid almost stomps on Dash and Violet, but Violet stops it with a force field. Helen gets the kids to safety, and they watch as the Omnidroid flings Bob into a building.

Then, Frozone appears, trying to freeze the Omnidroid's legs. Mr. Incredible finds the Omnidroid's remote, and tosses it to Dash. The Omnidroid shoots at Dash, and Frozone ends up rescuing him, skating on a trail of ice he himself makes. He also, later, gets the Omnidroid to slip on ice. Violet, currently invisible, manages to grab the remote.

Eventually, Bob manages to destroy the Omnidroid with its own rocket powered hand. It turns out there are multiple calls on Helen's phone from the babysitter, Kari, growing increasingly more and more panicked, until there's one where she says Jack-Jack has 'special needs' and that there's a replacement sitter. Helen gets worried, not knowing about said replacement sitter.

They find Syndrome at their home. He tries to kidnap Jack-Jack to raise him as a sidekick, but Jack-Jack exhibits a lot of powers, including bursting into flames, turning into metal and turning into a little monster. Syndrome winds up getting snagged in a propeller by his cape, and the explosion blows up the house. Violet, however, saved everyone with one of her force fields.

"That was totally wicked!" A little boy on a tricycle shouts.
Three months later, they're at a track final for Dash. Tony Rydinger, Violet's crush, approaches her and says she looks different.

"Is different okay?" Violet asks.

"Different is great." He replies. Loki looks awed.

Dash manages to curtail his super speed to only get second in the race, and as the Incredibles leave, another villain, the Underminer, appears.

After the movie, Tony turns to Thor. "You know, just because people can't bench press a thousand pounds doesn't mean they're not heroes. I mean, I built my suit. Would you say I'm not a hero."

"Of course not." Thor replies. "You are indeed a hero, Man of Iron."

"Well, what about me?" Clint asks, crossing his arms. "Am I weak for not waving a hammer around?"

"I actually was weak once." Steve says, although Thor already knows this. Steve's pretty sure Loki doesn't. "I was a ninety-pound Brooklyn kid with asthma, before the serum. You didn't start thinking less of me when you learned. Or did you?"

Thor says he doesn't think less of him. Loki stares at Steve in bewilderment, his glassy gaze traveling over Steve's body. Poking one of Steve's biceps, Loki says "You were weak? You're not weak. Hey, you used lotta weird words there. What's... brook-lin? As-ma? Seer-um?"

Steve smiles at him. "I used to be really scrawny." He starts to try to explain the words but Jarvis beats him to it.

Tony cuts in. "Then what the hell do you have against Loki, when you don't hold the same things against us? None of us fit your cookie-cutter Asgardian mold. What would you have done if Odin had taken me in? Would you all have abused me, too?"

Thor looks even more ashamed when it's put like this. "Or, on the flip side, how would you have felt if you'd been raised by humans who hated you for your ability with thunder?"

Loki has dragged Tony and Natasha into a game where they play Mr. and Mrs. Incredible. Steve's somewhat surprised that Loki hadn't picked him to play Mr. Incredible, considering he's the most like him.

Loki accidentally makes a force field, and casts a terrified look in Thor's direction before going in what seems to be a panic attack.

Tony leans down to comfort him, while curtly Thor to just leave. He tells Loki that it's not a problem, that force fields are good.

Loki calms down a lot quicker once Thor is gone. He also morphs from Tony's body to his actual body- well, not the blue one, but the pale one that looks otherwise identical to the blue one. He eventually says "Force fields are good, right, 'cause Violet pro-ected her family with 'em."

"You go it." Tony answers. Loki's face crumples in confusion.

"Then why, why'd..." He buries his face against Tony's chest. "Why'd they hurt me for it? Why'd Odin hates it so much, so much hurt..."
"Because Odin is a dick." Tony says harshly. "And an idiot." Tony continues. "Force fields are incredibly useful- heck, I'd love to have them around my suits- and Odin could have realized that they're useful and had you help protect people or something. But instead, he decided to be a bigot. A hypocritical bigot."

Thor walks out onto the vast grounds of the mansion, although they're not nearly as vast as Asgard's own gardens. He's carrying something that the mechanical servant, Jarvis, instructed him to deliver to Heimdall for Tony.

The fountain outside is lit up, as if by magic, but it's probably some sort of Midgardian science instead.

Now that Thor thinks about it, the two aren't very different at all when one gets down to the crux of the matter. Not that Thor could really explain it at all, but he knows that they are.

Tony is a man of science, but that doesn't make him weak. In fact, his Man of Iron suits are some of the most incredible things Thor has seen.

Tonight's given him a lot to think about. Ever since learning that Odin and Frigga can do magic too, he's been forced to re-evaluate how he viewed magic his whole life. He'd always believed it to be the cowardly way out, but that would mean that Tony, inventing suits with science, would be a coward too, and Tony is no coward.

That's not all, though. That one man in the movie- Frozone- had shown that there can actually be good things about using ice powers like Jotuns have.

Thor calls for Heimdall to open the Bifrost, and once he arrives at the gatekeeper's dome, he hands over the basket apparently from Tony. As he hands it over, he catches a glimpse of the tag on it, which reads *For not being as much of an ass as everyone else on Ass-guard.*

Thor's eyes narrow slightly, but Heimdall doesn't seem to notice as he pulls out a ticket wedged between the fruit in the basket. He raises an eyebrow. "What in the Nine Realms does Man of Iron think I am going to do with a Midgardian Spa Voucher?"

Thor chuckles lightly, but it's a far cry from his usual booming laugh as he continues to think.

What's most on his mind is how he's treated Loki all those years. He'd thought about it a bit after his banishment on Midgard, after he'd almost gotten Loki killed in Jotunheim, but he's thinking about it even more now.

He knows now that Loki isn't a vicious, unthinking monster, but until recently, he'd treated him as such. After all, he'd only ever heard stories of Jotuns being portrayed in that manner, and perhaps that's how Loki would have ended up, had Odin taken him to Asgard.

Thor doesn't know why Odin decided to take Loki to Asgard, just to treat him horribly. And perhaps for the first time, Thor has really taken note of how much their treatment hads affected Loki, with the absolutely terrified look he'd sent him.

Midgard has vastly different views about what is considered strength, and Thor has come to accept a lot of them. Clint, skilled archer as he is, is far weaker than any Asgardian and would definitely lose to them. But that doesn't make him weak.

Furthermore, the other Avengers don't seem to regard Loki as weak, even when he sends terrified looks at them. And they'd always mocked him for being weak, but hadn't they also punished him
for fighting back in the ways he knew how? Turning invisible and making force fields, rather like 
that girl, Violet.

Thor starts to feel sickened.

Certainly by Midgard's standards, Thor had wronged Loki greatly. Immensely. So immensely that 
there's probably no making up for it.

But still, shouldn't he try?
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

Loki gets some self defense lessons with the Avengers. There's also an incident in the pool, and Tony and Loki plan on pranking Rhodey.

Bruce is pretty sure he'd fallen asleep during The Incredibles, somewhere around when the whole Incredibles family was captured by Syndrome. Glancing at the screen, he sees that the movie's over. He's still sort of tired, since the Other Guy takes a lot out of him, especially when fighting, but he's not quite tired enough to fall asleep immediately. Not that he could fall asleep at all, really, with what woke him up- or, more specifically, who.

"Bruuuce!" Loki calls out, shaking him slightly. "Wake up, wake up, wake up!"

"Loki, don't bother him." Bruce hears Steve say. The Other Guy stirs in Bruce's mind, but doesn't actually come out like he does if Bruce is woken suddenly, especially if he's startled awake. He'd Hulked-out after waking up more times than he'd care to admit when on the run. Admittedly, some of those times were when the soldiers found him. That being said, people now rarely wake Bruce on purpose, and he can't really blame them, when the result could be a Hulk-out. One time, when Bruce was talked into staying at the tower for a night or two around a year ago, Tony had gotten the brilliant idea to dump a bucket of ice cold water on Bruce's head when he was sleeping. The result had been a thoroughly wrecked guest room, and Tony hadn't repeated that.

Fortunately, the Other Guy settles down in Bruce's mind. Bruce groans slightly, blinking at the bright light in the theater. "Bruce, c'mon we gotta play! You're Jack-Jack." Loki says, starting to pull Bruce out of his seat and ignoring what Steve just said. Bruce suddenly makes the connection that Loki looks like himself again, instead of masquerading in Tony's body.

"Loki, what did I just say?" Steve asks, sounding slightly annoyed. Tony snaps back that Loki doesn't need to listen to Steve. Clearly, Steve's thinking the Other Guy is going to make an appearance.

Bruce rubs his eyes in an effort to wake up and says "No, no, it's all right." Bruce tries to reassure them. "I wasn't startled awake, so the Other Guy's not rearing to come out." The Other Guy had been straining to come out much of the time Thor was here- actually, he still is- despite being let out to blow of steam and smash up Doom-bots just hours before Thor came over. The Other Guy had been distracted by said Doom-bots and seems annoyed that he hadn't gotten to beat Thor up again. He'd wanted to make up for that once Thor was here, which is why Bruce had been even less social than usual- he never really was a party guy or anything, not like Tony.

"You were sleeping." Loki informs him, as if he doesn't know that.

Bruce notices that Thor is nowhere in the room, and he can tell just by the other Avengers' faces and the fact that Loki doesn't look nearly as tense, that Thor's gone, instead of just in another room or something. Bruce uses that knowledge to get the Other Guy to calm down a bit more, saying Thor's not here for him to smash. He wonders if Thor took that fruit basket that Tony prepared, complete with spa tickets, to Heimdall.
The idea had been so Tony. The gesture of giving a fruit basket was nice, but only Tony would decide to purposely mislabel Asgard as Ass-guard when sending said basket to the watchman for the realm-world-thing he'd just renamed- a realm full of extremely powerful beings who seem to far outstrip humans, no less. Bruce hopes they won't be pissed off enough to declare war on Earth or something.

Bruce is literally pulled from his thoughts when Loki drags him out of the media room. When they're in the living room, Tony heads towards one of the sofas and pulls a couple shoes out from under it. Loki laughs, and Bruce is pretty sure Loki was the reason they were under there. Clint has a raised eyebrow and Steve looks confused as to why someone would hide shoes under a couch.

"How'd you know?" Loki asks, confirming Bruce's theory.

"Jarvis." Tony replies simply. Loki pouts and asks the AI why he'd told Tony about that.

"Sorry, buddy, but you really can't turn Jarvis against me." Tony says with one of his characteristic smirks.

"Tony says you got Simba back." Loki abruptly changes topics and looks at Clint, before smiling slightly and saying "Thank you. I like Simba, and I didn't like it when they took him, nope nope nope. Stealing's wrong! Didja know that Tony can tell where I am now? He can, 'cause Jarvis is in Simba's armor, and he can tells Tony where Simba is and that's where I am too. Tony found me wherever I hid."

"That seems like a good idea." Clint replies. "But it was kind of hard to find you when you disappeared last time."

"He found me every time." Loki says again. Whether he's talking about when he'd actually been lost or about that hide and seek game he and Tony played, Bruce isn't sure. Maybe he means both.

Loki grins at Tony, before trying to drag Bruce to the kitchen. "You're gonna be Jack-Jack."

"Who are you going to be?" Bruce asks.

"Violet, like earlier, even though I'm not a girl like her. I mades a force field a little bit ago, but Odin hates that and basically everyone else hates too, and..." Loki trails off worriedly, and a quick glance at Tony confirms Bruce's suspicions- that Loki had, sometime when Bruce was sleeping, made a force field in Thor's presence and panicked. Not that Bruce can blame Loki for that reaction. "Thor didn't hit me like he used to."

"We would have been very angry at him if he hit you." Bruce replies, and the Other Guy certainly seems to agree. "Are you going to be Frozone?" That would mean progress, right, if Loki pretended to be someone who controlled ice? Well, Bruce thinks he might have pretended to be Elsa before, but it would still be progress if he did it more.

"Not now, he's not here." Loki says, leaving Bruce slightly confused, wondering if Loki means that literally, as in Frozone's not present in the room. "His ice is really cool, but he didn't make a ice castle, likes Elsa and Slushy." Loki adds. "I made Elsa's castle on the beach."

"I know. It looks great." Bruce replies, smiling.

"Tasha's Mrs. Incredible, and Tony's Mr. Incredible, but sometimes they go by Helen and Bob. Like how you're Black Widow sometimes but Tasha sometimes, right?" He asks, looking at Natasha, who nods. Bruce is kind of surprised that Loki can get away with calling her Tasha.
"Tony's playing Mr. Incredible?" Bruce asks, surprised. That role seems to suit Steve perfectly, what with the super strength. Steve even sort of looks like Mr. Incredible, and they have somewhat similar personalities. To be honest, Syndrome seems the most like Tony, with the technology-replacing-superpowers thing, except Tony isn't a villain, despite what some people think. Well, he had been called the Merchant of Death, but he's making up for that. So why is Loki casting them like this?

Loki offers no explanation as to why he'd picked Tony for that role as he tells everyone where to sit around the table. Apparently, they're re-enacting the dinner scene from the movie. At least Bruce had been awake during that part.

"Why am I Jack-Jack?" Bruce asks, not exactly happy with the casting choices. Jack-Jack's the baby, after all.

"Be-cauuuse-" Loki draws it out, making it sound like Bruce really shouldn't have to ask. "He turned into a... thing. A angry little red thing that went all RAAWWRRR!"

Bruce figures he missed that part of the movie, although he's not entirely sure if Loki's making that up or not. He glances at the others and sees that had indeed happened. Loki keeps chattering. "Ands he was fire and metal too!"

Bruce has a feeling Loki wants him to let the Other Guy out to re-enact something, but he's not going to do that. For starters, the Other Guy was just out earlier this afternoon, and they're inside.

Bruce doesn't really do anything in this scene, aside from being pretend-fed by Natasha, which leaves Tony and Clint in stitches. Frankly, Bruce is amazed Natasha's going along with this, although she has undoubtedly acted out various fake identities over the years as a spy, so pretending to be a retired superhero mother in a casual re-enactment probably isn't that hard.

Still, Bruce feels like an idiot, and he glares at Clint and Tony, who are still howling with laughter. Steve looks like he's trying not to smile, and there's even a hint of amusement in Natasha's eyes. Even Loki's snickering, and Bruce has to wonder if he'd chosen to include this part just for this sight. It's odd that Loki finds so much amusement in Bruce pretending to be a baby, though, when Loki himself acts like a child.

Loki has to provide lines for basically everyone- he apparently has the entire scene memorized, although nobody else does, even though Bruce and Tony are geniuses. Bruce remembers Loki apparently not having The Lion King entirely memorized when they first met, and yet now Loki can clearly memorize movies after one viewing.

Loki sounds odd as Violet, since his voice is deeper than a teenage girl's. Then again, his adult voice contrasts greatly with his somewhat childish speech in general.

The god starts to pretend-fight with Clint, who's playing Dash, and the two of them run around the table. He instructs Clint to say "Hey! No force fields!" although he doesn't actually make one this time.

"Y'know, it was awesome when you made a force field earlier." Clint tells him.

"'Cause it can do goods, like saving family?" Loki asks. Tony nods. "Violet saved her whole family when it 'xploded." Bruce isn't sure what exploded, exactly. It seems they've stopped their game, though.

"Exactly."
"Don't like 'em." Loki says after a bit, contradicting what he said about them being good.

Bruce decides there's something Loki really needs to hear. "You were really brave, you know, for deciding Thor can come over. And for being in the same room as him." Really, Bruce isn't sure he would have done as well as Loki had, if he was in a room with, say, General Ross. The whole visit with Thor had gone a lot better than Bruce thought it would. "And for talking to Thor."

Loki ducks his head towards his feet, which are bare as always, and mumbles "Me?" He sounds very skeptical and slightly embarrassed at the same time.

"Yeah, you." Tony says, putting a hand on Loki's shoulder.

"'M not brave." Loki answers. "Said I'm a coward."

"You're not a coward for being scared of your abusers, Loki. It's kind of a side effect of abuse cases." Tony mutters the last part darkly. "Anyone would have been scared, going through all the shit you've gone through. Hell, most people probably wouldn't have made it." Some of the other Avengers look at Tony in surprise, as if not expecting to hear that from him. Still, it's true. The fact that Loki made it through his abuse says a great deal about his strength.

Most people probably would have gone totally insane, if they'd made it at all.

"Fear doesn't make you weak." Natasha speaks up, surprising Bruce. "It's natural, and it helps protect you. In your case, by trying to avoid your abusers."

Loki paces some more, wringing his hands together. "They said force fields are cowardly." He says. "But not the ways Violet used her's. She's a super, and that's good, and they said her powers were super too." Bruce is pretty sure who they was switched between those two sentences.

"That's a good word for it, actually." Tony says with a grin. "Super."

"Super!" Loki laughs. "Suuu-peeerr!" Seemingly without thinking, he adds "I did that. I stopped Hulk-y with a force field when he got mad at Tony."

Bruce shifts uncomfortably, and Tony sends him a look. "No hard feelings, big guy, so if you start hating yourself I'm going to have to blast some sense into you with one of my suits."

"You stopped Hulk with a force field?" Clint asks, staring at Loki in shock.

Loki just stares back, honestly seeming to have no clue how much of an accomplishment physically stopping the Other Guy is, before he starts talking again.

"Violet can be... not seen, too. Like Randal, but I don't like him. He's mean but Violet's nice. She hides even better than Pascal, and he changes colors so it's almost like he's not there. It's... camouflage," Loki nods. "Like for hiding, but doesn't that make them cowards?"

"Hiding can be more important than fighting." Natasha says. "It's easier to sneak into an enemy base than to fight your way in. If the Asgardians don't know that, they're idiots."

Loki blinks and keeps talking. "Bruce changes colors too when he becomes Hulk-y, and I turned green before, but not like Pascal."

"Who's Pascal?" Steve mumbles.

"Rapunzel's chameleon! Violet's the best at hiding, though. I was too, sometimes. Like in the petri
dish. They didn't like that in Asgard, but I did 'cause they wouldn't looks at me, nope nope nope! But I didn't like it when they found me later and sometimes it didn't work." Loki frowns briefly as if he's remembering something unpleasant, and he squeezes Simba tighter. Tony puts an arm around his shoulders.

"You know, most of us can't make force fields or turn invisible."

Tony says, and Loki bristles slightly. "But those powers are so awesome, we actually invented ways to pull them off. Like, we have ships that can turn invisible and stuff."

Bruce notices that everyone pointedly doesn't mention that that ship is the Helicarrier, which Loki had been stuck on.

"Force fields would be awesome on my suits." Tony adds.

Loki turns to him, a smile slowly starting to creep on his face.

"I would've thought that you'd like force fields." Clint says. "Wouldn't they keep you from getting hurt? I mean, if you can stop Hulk, than they couldn't really hurt you if you had a force field up, right?"

Natasha elbows him, and it seems bringing up Asgard wasn't a good idea.

"stopped it for a bit, but worse later. They got madder. Stronger, worse. Went on longer..." Loki starts shaking, eyes haunted and even more glazed than normal. Bruce wonders if he's having a flashback as Tony pulls Loki into a hug. However, it seems Loki wasn't as lost as Bruce was fearing, since he relaxes a bit as soon as Tony hugs him.

But they hit me more if I hit them. They're always stronger, always." Loki's face crumples. "Ands, and Odin got real scary and angry, 'specially with magic." He's bouncing anxiously on his toes, hugging Simba tightly and wringing his hands together. Tony puts a hand on Loki's shoulder.

Tony's scowl darkens. "You're not a coward. Those bastards made it so you couldn't win. They took away the only way you could fight back." He continues to mutter about all the unpleasant things he's going to do to Odin if they ever meet, Allfather or not. Loki looks at him in something like awe.

Clint's scowling almost as darkly as Tony. "Trust me, fighting a fight you can't win isn't brave, it's stupid. I take it not fighting had a better outcome for you? Or not having force fields?"

"lasted less without them. Hurt less. Would stop, go 'way sooner. But... but fighting mades it hurt more. Coward Loki."

Bruce sighs. "Loki, you were so brave." Loki still looks skeptical. "There are different types of bravery, and I honestly wouldn't have blamed you if you refused to ever be in the same room as Thor again. But you faced him and even told him about all the things Anna did right that he did wrong." Bruce sees the others nodding in agreement, except for Natasha, although she does look like she agrees. Even though Loki had been simply telling the story of Frozen, it had seemed like he'd been very subtly telling Thor off by pointing out how nice Anna was to Elsa, no matter what she did.

"Anna's lots lots lots lots nicer." Loki nods, bouncing slightly and holding out his hand to Stitch. He asks for Anna and, surprisingly, his Thor action figure. Stitch spits out the requested toys, apparently knowing Loki meant the Anna doll instead of the figurine.

"How do they all fit in there?" Steve asks, eyeing the backpack, which isn't really that big. Loki makes Anna punch the Thor toy in the face.
Tony rolls his eyes and says "You saw him become me earlier and you're asking about how much a backpack can hold?"

As an afterthought, Loki asks Stitch for a Pop Tart. Clint starts to laugh and says "So that's where they were."

"Actually, they were under his bed at first." Tony corrects, and Clint raises an eyebrow. Bruce apparently missed something with Pop Tarts, when he was resting earlier in the evening. "By the way, Rudolph, that was pretty funny. I mean, the look on Thor's face when he saw you with a Pop Tart and he thought we were out..."

Loki looks down at the floor, munching on the Pop Tart with a slight smile. He's humming something contentedly.

"Did you ever play any pranks in Asgard?" Clint asks curiously, hastily adding "I like pranks."

Tony starts to blurt out an answer for Loki "Yeah, he was saying something about some guy eating a bug once... I just ruined it, didn't I?"

Loki looks at them worriedly, and Clint assures him they want to hear it and won't get mad.

"Volstagg ate a bug." Loki confirms eventually, with a mischievous smirk. "Tried to spit it out, but it stayed in. And, a guard's feet got stuck to the floor, but I dunno if that was me." He pauses, looking slightly worried and confused. "It didn't matter. They thought it was..."

Tony takes Loki's hands and swings them back and forth, sometimes Bruce has seen Dum-E do with Loki sometimes. Loki seems to calm down a bit.

"Fandral got really ugly once. He likes his face and he got really angry..." Clint and Tony burst out laughing, but Loki's smirk has been long gone by now and he says quietly. "They always... I always hurt later, even when I said it wasn't me. Even when it really wasn't me."

"I hated getting hurt." He adds, as if there's any doubt.

"Do you know how to block punches?" Natasha asks suddenly. "You said they were stronger than you, and you don't seem comfortable with force fields."

"That's an idea, actually." Tony says. "You know, until you're totally comfortable with force fields. Or as a back up, if they don't work for some reason."

Loki's staring at them bemusedly, or maybe he's having some private funny thought. Maybe he's thinking about whatever the Pop Tart incident was. He tosses Anna and Thor back to Stitch. Stitch swallows Anna whole, but makes a show of chewing on Thor. With fabric teeth, though, it doesn't really do anything.

That's new, Bruce realizes.

"What do you say, Lokes?" Clint asks. "Want to learn some self-defense?"

Bruce privately thinks that teaching Loki self-defense is going to be even harder than teaching him meditation, although they have been making some progress with that. He actually seems pretty relaxed in the ocean, when he's not trying to surf or just swimming and running around.

"I won't get hurt anymore?" Loki asks.
"We won't let anyone hurt you if we can help it, but yeah, this could help you keep others from hurting you." Tony says, before quickly adding "Not that anyone should hurt you."

Loki nods slightly, and they head towards the gym. Once they're in there, the god glances at the ceiling, as if he's looking for the rafters, and seems to relax upon seeing there aren't any.

Tony climbs into the elevated boxing ring, and Loki follows him.

"All right, so, self defense!" Tony says, rubbing his hands together as Loki pokes at the cords surrounding the boxing ring, and then pulls them, watching them vibrate like guitar strings. "It's a nice thing to know, even if you have awesome suits like I do. Or force fields. Or, well, anything really. And one of the first things you have to know how to do is block a punch."

Loki stares at him. "This is like Bruce's mat." He says out of the blue, crouching down, fingers drumming the soft material. Bruce thinks he's talking about the gym mats they'd repurposed for meditation back in the tower and his theory is soon confirmed. "But that's purple and orange like I wanted."

Loki plops down on the mat, as if ready to meditate with Bruce. Bruce smiles slightly and sits next to him.

"Nice, but we're kinda doing the opposite of that." Clint says.

"Okay, you know what? I think we need a demonstration." Tony pauses and points to Natasha. "Okay, Kim Possible. Front and center, come into the church." Tony smirks, gesturing in the ring, and Natasha sends him a death glare.

Loki, however, giggles and says "You're Kim, now, 'kay Tasha?" Natasha sends Tony another look that says that just saved him from a painful death for calling her that. Loki starts humming the Kim Possible theme song to himself.

"You too, Ron." Tony jerks his head for Clint to come in too. This comment earns another laugh from Loki.

"Ron, where's Rufus?" Loki asks, staring intently at Clint's pocket. Clint looks at him for a bit and pulls a small drawing out of his pocket. Loki grins.

"Show us what you can do." Tony says to the two agents.

Clint and Natasha start to spar, using only punches and blocks, and they're going slowly so their movements will be easier to follow.

"Is this-" Loki starts, watching with slight apprehension and more confusion. "-a..." He seems to be hunting for the right word and then just tries a different approach, or maybe he'd switched subjects entirely. "Sometimes in Asgard, they'd fight, 'xcept they weren't killing each other, nope nope nope. Thor and the Warriors Three and Sif foughts each other like that. It was like... pretend? No, it was..." Loki can't seem to find the word and he groans loudly.

"This is sparring. It's practice. We're not trying to kill each other, and we're not mad at each other or anything. That what you meant?" Clint asks. Loki nods, smiling slightly.

"You ready to try?" Loki's now looking slightly uncertain.

"Maybe we should start you out with a shield or something." Natasha says.
"Spangles, can he borrow your's?" Tony asks, smirking, clearly not really meaning it.

Loki darts out of the room, and Tony starts to follow him. Bruce and the others stand there for a bit, wondering if they're coming back or not.

They do, after a couple minutes, and Loki is holding a frying pan.

Bruce chuckles slightly, and, surprisingly, Clint and Natasha look like they get the reference when Loki mentions Rapunzel and Flynn.

Loki climbs up into the ring, clutching the frying pan and Simba tightly, though he plops down on the mat again, bouncing slightly.

"To block attacks," Natasha says, taking over the lesson, gesturing for Loki to get up. "You have to keep your eye on your opponent at all times. Never look away. Got it?" She glances at Loki, who stares at her for a bit, and then nods.

"Okay, next, your body needs to be in the right position." Natasha starts. "Feet spread apart. Muscles relaxed but ready, arms up like this." She holds her arms up in front of her torso, ready to block with them.

Loki spreads his legs out and holds his arms like Natasha's doing, but he starts to flap his arms and rock back and forth on his toes.

"You're supposed to stay still."

Bruce sighs sympathetically, remembering having a similar conversation when working on meditating. Loki's still not great at it.

Tony, who's currently behind Loki, gently grabs Loki's arm with the frying pan and holds it still. "Just like that, okay Snoopy? Keep it right there." Loki nods ever so slightly, and when Tony lets go, the arm stays still even as Loki rocks from side to side.

Natasha straps on a pair of boxing gloves.

They explain that Natasha's going to punch the frying pan, to show him that he can block it and not get hurt, asking if that's okay. After many reassurances that he will positively block this punch, Loki nods. Tony is currently holding onto Loki's arm to make sure it's extra steady.

Natasha gently punches the pan, and even though it hadn't hit Loki, he still flinches backwards, curling up slightly. Bruce is reminded that he probably doesn't know there's a such thing as a non-threatening punch. The fact that he's even letting them do this is somewhat surprising.

Natasha hesitates, asking him if he wants to continue.

"Don't wanna get hurt." Loki says.

"You won't, see?" She punches it again, but Bruce thinks he might've meant that he wants to be able to stop people from hurting him.

After simply punching the pan for a bit, Natasha starts to move the punches around a bit, and Tony, still standing behind Loki, starts to guide Loki's hand so the pan blocks the punches.

Loki still flinches every time a punch comes at him, but it's far less noticeable. Eventually, Tony lets go of Loki's hand.
It's horrible that Loki's somehow able to not move to defend himself, when most people would instinctually try to block attacks. Loki seems to have been trained not to, and simply curls up on himself.

At one point, he accidentally makes another force field. Bruce is surprised it's happened twice this evening alone, when it almost never happened the entire rest of the time Bruce has been living with them.

They all tell him that was great, but Loki seems to be remembering the consequences of force fields in Asgard. After all, he'd gotten punished for for making them, probably faced punishments nobody should have to face. He stands, shaking, as Tony shifts to hugging him again.

From the looks of the others, his reaction had had been worse when he made one when Thor was here.

It takes a little bit for Loki to calm down, and they all reassure him that what he did was very good.

Loki cocks his head to the side and says "Fenrir, why're you growling?" He bends down, as if trying to pet the currently-invisible wolf. He pauses, looking at them warily and hugging Simba tightly. "Do you hate him?"

"Fenrir's the wolf who growled at Thor, right?" Clint asks, and Loki nods warily. "I don't hate him. He was awesome. I wouldn't mind seeing him again." Clint replies, and Loki pauses thoughtfully, clearly trying to work out if the archer actually means that. He glances at Steve and Natasha, too, and Steve echoes Clint's sentiment. Loki relaxes visibly.

"Wanna be... see-able? I like it when I can see you." Loki says, and Fenrir appears after a bit. Loki laughs, going to hug the huge wolf, although Bruce realizes Fenrir's still not exactly solid after testing by trying to put a hand on the wolf's back. Still, it feels different than just waving his hand through air.

Fenrir stands there, looking ready to snap at anything that dare hurt Loki, but he seems to relax a bit, giving a low, comforting sort of bark.

"He seemed angrier earlier." Clint remarks dryly.

"Fenrir doesn't like Thor. He gets all mads, and goes-"

Loki suddenly snarls loudly and makes clawing motions with his hands. He's quickly joined by Fenrir. Everyone but Natasha startles slightly at this sudden change in Loki's demeanor, as well as Fenrir's reaction.

Loki's Stitch backpack, still with the straps attached to its hands and feet, stands on Loki's shoulders and does basically the same, while Simba roars playfully. Loki hugs Simba and glances back at Stitch. Bruce remembers both the stuffed animal and the plush backpack roaring at Thor earlier. Loki had really seemed to like that.

"Are they alive?" Steve asks, sounding confused. Bruce doesn't answer, but he doesn't think Simba and Stitch can count as living. Well, the certainly can't from a biological standpoint, but they don't yet even seem real like Loki's friends/Monster Family.

Loki, however, seems to think he's asking about Fenrir. "Just 'cause you can't always see him doesn't mean he's not real, nope nope nope! The stars look like they're gone in the day, and you can't touch 'em but they're stills there. But Fenrir can't really stop them 'cause biting and scratching doesn't do anything."
Fenrir lets out an apologetic whine.

"Aren't there others, too?" Natasha asks.

"Jormungand." Loki gestures to his necklace, which doesn't move this time. "He's a snake. Timon got banished 'cause a snake got in the meerkat village when he was supposed to be guarding behind it, like when the Jotuns got past Heimdall at Thor's coronation. But Jormungand won't eat Timon, 'cause he doesn't eat. And Sleipnir's my horse, and he's like a spider, and Hel rules dead people."

Some of them look slightly lost after the abrupt changes of topic as well as the descriptions.

"They didn't like 'em." Loki mutters. "Had to go away. They made them go 'way, but Tony likes 'em, I think." Tony nods encouragigly at him. "They didn't like magic, either, nope nope nope! Hated it!" Once again, it's slightly hard to follow since he doesn't indicate when they starts referring to the Asgardians instead of his friends.

"They said magic's all bad, but Rapunzel has healings hair. We had healers there, I think. I dunno. Never saw one. Is that healing magic? I have healing hair, like Rapunzel, 'xcept Tony says it's not really my hair, just me. That's magic, but it can do good things like fixing people, so it's not alls bad, so were they wrong?." Loki looks briefly at Clint for some reason, who nods at him.

"They were wrong." Bruce says, immensely pleased to hear Loki say that.

"And ice isn't all bad, right, 'cause Elsa made Olaf and Marshmallow, and slides for Anna when they were little. And she made that huge ice thing everyone slid over at the end. Slushy makes fun ice too, and Frozone stopped the... Omni-droid. My Tony says Elsa wasn't a coward, even though she ran away and made ice and got scared when she made it. Says she kicked the guards' asses. And Frozone's not a coward, right, 'cause he's a super just like Violet?"

"Right." Tony says, grinning. "And our million dollar winner is... Loki!" Loki stares at him blankly.

"Hey, if you're handing out money, I'll take some." Clint says to Tony, sounding like he's mostly joking.

"I don't think they woulda liked Elsa and Frozone much." Loki switches topics again. "Do you think they'd try to kill 'em?"

"Who, the Asgardians?" Bruce asks, and Loki nods slightly. "Do you mean that Elsa and Frozone would kill the Asgardians, or that the Asgardians would try to kill them?" Bruce asks, because that wording could make it go either way.

"The Asgardians trying'ta kill them. They used to hunt Jotuns before. And they killed lots after Jotuns invaded Thor's cor-onation, but it wasn't really that 'cause he's not actually king, and he got banished to Midgard for a couple days after. He went to Jotunheim and I think I was there but I don't r'member, and Heimdall got me outs. Odin was angry and he banished Thor, but I don't think he cared 'bout the dead Jotuns. But Elsa's good and Hans was bad for trying to kill her, right?" He sounds like he already knows. After all, the movie had tried to make viewers hate Hans and like Elsa. Still, Bruce and Tony nod.

"They were wrong about Jotuns too..." Loki says, eyes growing even wider. "Elsa's a good one and Frozone too, but they always said they were's all bad, better off dead! Like in that thing with Pocahontas! Savages, savages, barely even human! But that was... racist, and it doesn't follow the Quasiralda-Loki rule, but Pocahontas and John Smith knows that rule!"
"The what?" Steve asks.

"Don't hate people for looking different like Quasimodo, or for being gypsies like Esmeralda. Or anything else, my Tony says it doesn't have to be gypsies. It can be like Elsa. Or me." Loki answers.

"Basically, don't judge on appearances or be a bigot." Bruce clarifies.

"Frollo didn't follow it, and he got in trouble." Loki adds.

"That's kind of an understatement." Tony says. "He died."

"And Gov... Gov-er-nor Rat-cliffe, he gots in trouble too." Loki nods. "But they don't have to follows it in Asgard, so they're not gonna get in trouble for not following it, like Frollo dids." Loki says, looking at them with wide eyes.

"They should get in trouble for that." Steve counters. "They should get in trouble for way more more than just that. What they did to you is wrong, and it's against the law."

"But Odin makes the laws." Loki says, sounding confused.

"Not here he doesn't." Tony replies. "Although he's probably egotistical enough to think he does."

Several Avengers snort at the idea of Tony accusing someone else of being egotistical. They've spent so much time trying to convince Loki that his treatment was wrong, but Bruce doesn't remember ever really going into the legal aspect of it, aside from perhaps a couple passing references.

"They abused you." Clint says flatly. "Abuse is against the law. They would've been arrested and their asses would be in jail, if they did that here and were found out. For child abuse and domestic abuse. Although they deserve a hell of a lot worse."

"Abuse?" Loki asks blankly.

"Abuse is the cruel or violent treatment of a person or animal." Jarvis speaks up, providing what is probably the dictionary definition. "Abuse can take many forms, including physical abuse, which involves any unwanted physical contact, or psychological abuse, which includes making someone feel scared and unsafe and verbally insulting them, among other things."

Jarvis' tone is still level, but is laced with fury when he continues. "I am certain you were severely abused in both those areas. I suppose the only thing in Asgard's favor is that I have seen no signs of sexual abuse."

"They'd also get nailed for infringing on human rights." Tony adds. Technically, though, Loki's not human. Still, this results in a long explanation on what human rights are.

"So they'd have gottens in trouble here? On Midgard?" Loki asks at the end of the explanation.

"If anyone found out, yeah."

"I wish I was on Midgard my whole life. Everyone there used to says that Midgard's worse than Asgard, but I think they were wrong 'bout that too."

"Hell yeah they were." Clint says.
"So should they get in trouble, even though they're there and not here?" Loki asks, sounding slightly unsure.

"They should get in heaps of trouble."

"Odin can't get in trouble. He's the Allfather."

"We should see about that." Tony mutters darkly.

"Odin has an eyepatch, right?" Clint asks, and Loki nods, looking worried. Clint growls that he'd love to put an arrow through the other eye.

But really, what could they even hope to do against the Allfather?

The following day, Bruce watches Loki finish his latest sand creation. It's a fair distance away from Loki's "circuit city", as he called it. Said city is still somehow standing, although it really should have been destroyed by wind long ago. He had to have used magic to make it them stand, like he apparently had with blocks at the daycare, and the Jenga tower back on the day Bruce first met him, before even moving into the tower.

Loki had to have used magic just to build this creation, Bruce thinks. There's really no other way, really.

It looks to be some sort of castle or something, although it sort of looks like a bunch of pan flutes stuck together, so maybe that castle part is just Bruce's imagination. Still, that's what most people build in the sand, although Loki's not 'most people'.

The thing's not all sand, though. Some of it's sand coated in ice, and some looks like plain ice. There are some gold-colored rods, though Bruce has no clue where those came from. Maybe Loki had gotten them from Tony's lab? Or maybe he'd made them.

The whole structure is actually a couple inches taller than Loki and a lot wider than the god.

Loki gazes at his new creation, and Bruce is about to truthfully tell him that it looks amazing when Loki attacks it.

Loki rampages, snarling and screaming as he tears into his newest creation. Bruce watches in shock. Loki's smashing his fists into it, stomping other parts to the ground, like some creature out of a monster movie. Fenrir appears, and attacks with similar fury, and Sleipnir shows up to stomp on it, though neither of them actually manage to do much to the... is it a castle? Except, for a brief second, Sleipnir's hoof actually crushes part of it, before the horse goes back to being intangible. Or maybe that part had been magic, too?

Bruce is reminded of that scene in Lilo & Stitch, when Stitch builds a replica of San Fransisco in Lilo's bedroom and stomps through it. That's probably where Loki got the idea.

Loki only stops once the structure has been reduced to nothing.

"Taking a leaf out of Stitch's book?" Bruce asks with a slight smile.

"My friends need to be punished, for what they did to me." Loki says, quoting Lilo as he and Sleipnir stomp around some more.

Bruce wonders if there's more to it than that.
Loki crouches by the large bath thing inside. There's a similar bath right outside, too, almost identical to the one in here. But who bathes outside?

Loki strips off his coat, pajamas, and underwear. He'd gotten up to find Tony still asleep in the lab. Loki had tried to stay awake last night but had eventually fallen asleep next to Tony on the bed in the corner.

While Bruce had said he's supposed to wear a swimsuit in the ocean, he knows he doesn't have to wear one in the bath. This bath smells really weird, but that's undoubtedly just some strange Midgardian thing, like swimsuits and bizarre sayings that make no sense. There's a room like this one in the tower, Loki remembers, near the room with all the weird equipment, and the rafters that he'd teleported from.

There's a very large bath here, and, right next to it, a smaller one that sort of reminds Loki private areas of the baths in Asgard. There's only one smaller bath here, though, and it's not very private. In Asgard, they'd been laid out in stalls, like in the stables. He'd mostly used the private areas; he wouldn't want to be around the people in the public ones and they wouldn't have wanted him there either. They surely would have said he'd contaminated the water with his disgusting Jotun skin or something, even if it wasn't showing.

Occasionally, from nearby private stalls in the Asgard baths, he'd hear those weird grunting and screaming sounds people make when they're trying to make a baby. Only, Lady Frigga said that people do sex when they're not trying to make a baby, just for fun, which Loki finds really odd. Why would anyone want to do that if they didn't even get a baby out of it?

Of course, both here and in the tower, Loki has his own bathroom with a rather large bath in it, but he sort of wants to try this out, even though it smells really weird.

Loki presses his hand against the water of the smaller bath and quickly draws it back. It's really hot, and why would anyone want to scald themselves? It's not bubbling like boiling water does when he and Bruce make pasta, but it's still burning. Ice starts to creep onto Loki's palm, and he sighs in relief at the comforting cold.

He tests the larger, public bath with more caution. It's not hot, but it's warm, although he feels it steadily grow colder. Maybe he did that? He crouches there, continuing to push down, but not enough to break the surface tension that makes it feel almost like he's pushing against something solid. He'd known that could happen even back in Asgard, but he'd had no clue why or how.

Tony had explained about surface tension and cohesion making that happen, and Jarvis and Bruce had explained about molecules. Loki's not entirely sure he gets it, but he knows now that they're really small things that sometimes bond together, like friends because they share things called electrons, and that molecules are made of elements. Or something like that. Bruce apparently does science stuff with electrons and things sometimes, whereas Tony seems to mostly build stuff like Man of Iron suits and apparently Dum-E and M-O.

Loki had been more interested when Jarvis told him that there are bugs that can walk across water than he had hearing about those molecule things.

For a while, Loki occupies himself with splashing around a bit with Sleipnir, and sometimes Sleipnir even makes it splash but sometimes it doesn't move. Jormungand swims around as the necklace, and Loki tries to mimic his slithering movements, although that doesn't work out too well.
Loki also brings some of his figurines in the water— they can get wet, unlike Simba, Stitch, Olaf and Maximus. Well, he has small figurines of Simba, Olaf and Maximus that can go in the water.

Loki grabs a bar of soap from the side of the bath, although now that he thinks about it, he doesn't remember seeing it there a minute ago. He probably just hadn't noticed it, he thinks, although he's not entirely sure he believes that.

After soaping his body and hair, Loki makes waves, liking how the light in the room reflects off the water and how his plastic toys bob up and down with the waves. He tries to make huge waves for them to ride. Once he tires of that, Loki simply lays floating in the water.

Floating is almost like flying, in a way, and he liked doing this in Asgard sometimes. He feels weightless now, and he hadn't even felt weightless when Tony took him flying in the Hulk suit.

He wonders if this is what it would be like to have Tinker Bell sprinkle Pixie Dust on him, and he grabs his Peter and Tink figurines, holding them up and imagining they're flying above him.

He shoots a small flurry of snow in the air, like he had when making snow stars, and imagines it's Pixie Dust. "You can fly, you can fly, you can fly." He laughs slightly at the song, propelling himself through the water with his feet. He remembers making Toy Stark fly a couple times, and he wonders if he can do it with Peter and Tink. He throws them up, but they just fall back down to the water. Five times later, this is still the result.

When he imagines them floating, though, they start to rise a bit, and he grins. Everyone in Asgard would say this is freaky and wrong, but Tony had seemed to genuinely think it was really neat when Loki accidentally made Toy Stark fly, so if he'd seen this, he probably would have liked it, too. He gazes up at the ceiling happily, thinking about how Tony probably would have said that was awesome. Considering that Tony can fly in his suits, Loki’s not sure why he thought Toy Stark flying was so interesting, but Loki likes that Tony had liked it.

He finds himself humming a song from the movie they’d watched last night. It was about a mermaid named Ariel (the same mermaid that Stitch had surfed by in that thing Tony had shown him, that also showed Stitch taking Simba's place and stealing Jasmine. Ariel had been on her rock, watching Prince Eric when Stitch rode in, knocking her over with a wave).

In the movie, Ariel had really wanted to be part of the human world, and had traded her fin for legs, to Ursula, the Sea Witch.

Ursula was bad and did magic, which Loki really hadn't liked. She'd even changed her appearance, like he sometimes does.

King Triton had magic, too, but he'd been kind of scary. Like Odin, and he's old like Odin and has similar hair and a longer beard. He'd gotten really mad at Ariel once and wrecked her treasure trove with magic, but he hadn't beat her. Loki still thinks he's too much like the Allfather, though.

Ariel had been without her voice, too, like he had once. But it probably hurt a lot less the way she did it, since she'd just traded it for legs. There hadn't even been a needle...

Images of that horrible incident start to flash through Loki's mind and Jormungand, as the necklace, gives Loki a gentle squeeze. Loki's not sure how long he's in the flashback, but it hadn't been quite as bad as usual. And it had been a lot worse when he saw a needle in Asgard after that, when one of the servants had been sewing.

As he floats there, shaking afterwards, the water actually helps him feel a bit better. Sleipnir's still
singing their song to him, which also helps, although it's not as good as when Tony hugs him.

He tries to take deep, slow breaths, like Bruce has been teaching him.

"Are you all right, Mr. Loki?" Jarvis asks, sounding concerned.

Loki nods slightly, although in some ways he's not. He stares out the window in thought, watching a bird fly past the glass, and then starts to lazily swim around, everything but his face submerged in the water.

He dimly hears sort of a vague sound of someone's voice, but his ears are underwater, so he can't really make any of it out. At first, he wonders if he'd imagined it, but it gets slightly louder.

Apparently he'd nodded off for a second, because the voice is what woke him up, he thinks.

Loki looks around and notices one of his illusions splashing around with Sleipnir. Sometimes, his illusions look slightly different, with different clothes and things, but this one is completely naked, like him. Perhaps he'd been dreaming about playing with Sleipnir, he thinks. Or maybe it's just there randomly, he's not even sure if had been asleep long enough to have a dream. The sunlight streaming through the glass wall hasn't really changed at all so he can't have been asleep long.

Loki also sees Tony, and he grins. Tony's smirking at the Other Loki, apparently thinking it's him, and Loki snickers slightly. Tony's fooled! Sometimes, people would be fooled by the illusions in Asgard, but sometimes they wouldn't be. Either way, they'd let their anger be known eventually. But the guards had looked at the Other-Loki's when he'd been in the petri dish cell, instead of at him- for a little bit at least.

He lifts his head slightly so he can hear what Tony's saying to the other Loki. "I didn't know you were a fan of skinny dipping, Snoopy. Jarvis told me you were in here, but he didn't mention this."

"Actually, sir, I started to, but you didn't listen." Jarvis says with a sigh.

"Eh," Tony waves that aside like it means nothing before addressing the illusion. "You know, maybe we should go to a nude beach and..." Loki doesn't even really hear what comes after that as he tries to work out what skinny dipping is. He knows he's skinny- the fact he's not muscular like all the other men in Asgard had always been glaringly obvious- but what does that have to do with anything?

"What in the Nine Realms is skinny dipping?" He hears the Other Loki asks, mirroring his thoughts, and Tony answers that it's being naked in a pool, whatever that is. Loki laughs, figuring Tony's joking. Of course he's naked! Who bathes wearing clothes? Swimming in the ocean with clothes is weird enough, and Tony never said anything about wearing clothes when bathing before now.

"But you always take baths naked." Loki pipes up, finally moving. He goes from lying down to standing, although he still feels weightless in the water. Tony looks at him instead of the Other Loki, arching an eyebrow.

"Now, which one of you is the real deal?" Tony glances between Loki and the illusion, and Loki raises his hand. "I totally knew that, by the way." Tony adds.

"You're not gonna come in?" Loki asks, before realizing Tony's wearing one of those suit things he wears to work (not a Man of Iron suit).

"Hell no." Tony says, and Loki wonders why he's talking to her. He also remembers Tony not
wanting to go surfing either, saying he doesn't like water. "Besides, I'm going to work in a bit." Loki pouts. He doesn't like it when Tony's gone, and Tony only left the tower occasionally. Tony goes every day now.

"Hey, I probably like it even less than you do when I go to meetings. You get to stay here, after all." Tony says, before abruptly changing topics.

"Hey, are you all right?" Tony asks suddenly. "Jarvis said you had a flashback... I probably should've started out with asking that."

Loki nods slightly, actually meaning it this time. He's all right, now that Tony's here.

"Glad to hear it. That you're all right, I mean. Not that you had a flashback." Tony says.

Loki gets out of the water to hug him, but Tony steps away. "Whoa, there, Snoopy. One, you're dripping wet and this suit cost me four figures, and Two, you're naked."

Loki stares at him, nonplussed. "So?"

"People will think you want to have sex with me if you hug me when you're naked." Tony tells him with his usual smirk. "And they'll think you've actually had sex with me if you tell them you slept in my bed once. I have a reputation as a playboy, after all."

Even though Tony's smirking, Loki can't figure out if Tony's being serious about this or not.

"So why can't I bathe naked here?" Loki asks, still confused about that.

"This isn't a bath, Reindeer Games. The baths are in the bathroom. That's why it's called a bathroom, you know. This is a swimming pool. You swim in it, like in the ocean. You don't bathe in it. Although, judging from your current state and that bar of soap in the water, I'd guess you didn't know that. I'm going to have to get the pool cleaned now."

"Cause of me?" Loki stares at him, hurt. That sounds like what people in Asgard would say, having to get the water decontaminated because the Jotun was in it.

Tony gives him a strange look and says "Because of the soap, Snoopy. Not because of you. Trust me, people have gone in here naked before. I have, actually. And it gets cleaned on a regular basis. I think. Jarvis covers that sort of stuff."

"But you saids you're not supposed to be naked in here." Tony's not making any sense, Loki thinks, laughing.

"Skinny dipping, remember?" Tony shrugs. "Do they have public baths in Asgard?" Loki nods, even more confused. Do they not have them here? But if people go naked, or skinny dip as Tony says, isn't that bathing? Because, apparently, you don't go naked when you're swimming here, or so Bruce and Tony say.

"That's burning." Loki points accusingly at the smaller bath that felt like it scalded him earlier.

"That's a hot tub." Tony says. "They can actually be quite relaxing."

Loki snorts in disbelief. Surely Tony's jesting. How can being boiled be relaxing in any way whatsoever?

"Hey, do you think I could grow a tail?" Loki asks. He'd made himself look like Tony and Mowgli,
but growing a tail's sort of different.

"Like Ariel's?" Tony asks, smirking with a raised brow.

Loki shakes his head. He likes having legs, and Ariel didn't have them at first. Neither did Genie, and both of them liked having legs more, so why would he even bother not having them? He couldn't even walk without them.

"No... like, like a lion!" Loki laughs, clapping his hands. He'd made pants with a lion tail on the butt, around the time he'd made his constellation coat. They have feet, though, so he hasn't really worn them, but maybe he can get rid of the feet?

"By the way, I'd suggest putting some clothes on. I bought you swimsuits, you know." As Tony says this, Jormungand wraps himself loosely around Loki's neck and becomes a lifeless necklace again.

He was basically done bathing anyways, so Loki decides to put on normal clothes instead. Tony turns away as Loki pulls on his underwear (red, like Mowgli's), his Man of Iron pajamas, and his starry long coat.

Tony turns around and, muttering something else about cleaning the pool, dips his hand in the water only to quickly yank it out. "Jesus, Rudolph!" He exclaims. "If that got any colder, it'd be ice. No wonder you hate hot tubs, if you can stand this! Although, I guess that makes sense, given, you know..." Tony waves a hand vaguely. "Jarvis, how cold is the water, exactly?"

"One degree Celsius, sir." Jarvis says. "You were quite right about that ice comment."

Loki cocks his head to the side curiously. It's almost ice?

He kind of wants to try sliding around on ice. It had looked really fun when Elsa and Anna did it, and when Stitch, Frozone and Bambi did it.

Tony said they have snow here on Midgard. And the Abominable Snowman that Sulley and Mike met said that snow place was a wonderland, not a wasteland like everyone says about Jotunheim.

Maybe he can make it ice? Tony had told him there wasn't anything wrong with Elsa and Frozone doing that. They both froze water and went across it.

Asgard was wrong about ice.

"Do the magic, do the magic!" Loki mimics Little Anna, flicking his hands. Tony looks at him in surprise.

"Ready?" Loki asks, thrusting his hands into the air. Snowflakes form, and they're snow stars and Pixie Dust at the same time. Loki laughs, looking up at them.

He looks over at Tony, who grins at him.

"Watch this." Loki says, stomping his foot on the ground like Elsa had and hoping it will have similar results. The pool slowly freezes over and Tony whistles slightly. "Wow, I think you just gave Frozone and Elsa a run for their money."

Loki grins and asks Stitch for Elsa, Anna and Olaf. Stitch spits out them out, and Loki slides them across the ice, followed by Simba.
"Oh, yeah, Jarvis, Bruce and I found another therapist for you to talk to." Tony says out of nowhere. Loki was about to go across the ice after his toys, but he pauses.

"Like Dr. Car-something?" Loki wrinkles his nose. Talking to her hadn't done anything, and she didn't like Tony or Bruce. And he had flashbacks with her.

"Hopefully this guy will be better. Technically, he's a professor acting as a therapist, but he'll hopefully be good. I guess we'll find out sometime after we go back to the tower."

"What's a 'fessor?"

"A professor? It's like a teacher. You know what teachers are, right?"

Loki nods. "Thor had tutors and lessons, to teach him stuff like how to be king later and he always said he hated reading. Liked fighting lessons more. I like reading, and it wasn't hard to figure it out, once I found the library."

"What do you mean 'figure it out'?" Tony asks, looking at him in a weird way, as if he's trying to uncover a secret. Loki's not entirely sure what that secret would be.

Loki frowns, confused. That's a really weird question. He'd just spent time in the library and figured out what the books said. Even a lot of those books were in different languages with different alphabets, though.

"I dunno. I just... read 'em?" Loki asks, not sure what Tony's looking for. "Likes, first they were weird symbols like the books in here used to be's, still are sometimes, but then they made sense." He nods, because it's that simple. Well, it had been. All-Tongue used to work better, he thinks.

"Did someone teach you to read?" Tony asks, and Loki shakes his head. Why would anyone have wasted their time doing that? For starters, they all hated him, and he figured it out on his own anyways.

Tony looks somewhat surprised, and Loki doesn't know why. What's so weird about that? After all, Belle seemed to be one of the only big readers in her village, so she probably taught herself, right? Just like Tony undoubtedly taught himself, and Bruce taught himself. But Belle had to teach Beast to read. Loki frowns, confused now that he thinks about that. Why would Beast need to be taught?

Shrugging it off, he turns around to slide across the ice he'd made. However, his legs slide two different directions and he winds up on his stomach, arms and legs splayed.

"You're living up to your nickname there, Bambi." Tony says with a smirk, and Loki tries to glare at him, but he's partially smiling as he remembers Bambi falling on the ice with splayed limbs. He likes Bambi. He scrambles to his feet only to slip again, sprawled near Tony's shoes, which aren't on the ice. Loki can almost see his reflection in the black shoes.

"Hey, don't kill yourself." Tony says, offering a hand to help him up. "You almost face-planted into concrete." Loki ignores that, because he was never planning on killing himself. He thought they'd gone over that on Halloween.

He shifts so his feet aren't on the ice and gets up. He backs up a couple steps, still holding onto Tony. Then, he rushes forwards, sliding across the ice, still hanging onto Tony, who'd let out a surprised sort of yell.

The momentum carries them to the center of the ice before Loki loses his balance again,
accidentally letting go of Tony. This time, his feet slip out in front of him, like Charlie Brown when he tries to kick the football, and he lands flat on his back. He hears a cracking sound and sincerely hopes it's not his spine.

But then, he's underwater, and he realizes that he'd fallen through the ice.

Tony's eyes go wide as Loki falls through the ice. He waits for Loki to pop up, unharmed but perhaps a little rattled. After all, Loki's clearly capable of swimming, so he should pop up any time now...

He doesn't, and an icy feeling of worry starts to form in Tony's stomach as seconds tick by.

"Loki!" Tony calls completely uselessly, cursing himself six ways to Sunday. He should have thought of the ice breaking, should have perhaps not let Loki skate over a frozen pool. Then this wouldn't have happened. They're definitely not going to do this in the future.

Tony shakes his head. C'mon Tony... he berates himself. Don't just stand there. Do something! You're Iron Man.

But there's not much he can do when he doesn't dare move in case the ice beneath him breaks too.

Muttering obscenities under is breath, Tony scans the water in the hole for some sign of Loki, but sees nothing. His cursing grows louder as he realizes that Loki's pajamas and long coat are probably dragging the god down. He snaps at Jarvis to scan for Loki, but is told what he'd suspected- the scanners can't detect much through the ice.

"Jarvis, get a suit over here now." He snaps.

Tony looks around for something to dangle in the hole for Loki to grab. There isn't really anything around him, though. Jormungand, as a living form of the necklace, had been in the pool earlier. Tony's about to cast that random thought away when he realizes Jormungand would be the perfect thing to pull Loki out with. The snake can grow, after all, and has become animated, seeming to bring the necklace to life, on several occasions.

Tony doesn't see the snake, and realizes it's because Loki had been wearing the Jormungand necklace when he'd gone under.

Precious seconds tick away as Tony tries to locate the god. He doesn't know if oxygen deprivation affects Loki in the same way as it does people, but if it does affect him similarly and Loki's in there for long enough, Loki might end up even worse off than he already is.

Tony finds himself calling Loki's name, and then Jormungand's.

The snake's head pokes up out of the water, hissing. Tony hopes the rest of Jormungand is hanging onto Loki somehow. "Yesssssss?" Jormungand hisses.

"Where's Loki?"

"Under the ssssssea," Jormungand replies, and Tony groans. They'd watched The Little Mermaid last night, since Loki kept asking who the red-haired lady Stitch surfed into was, but that answer doesn't help at all. He already knows Loki's underwater. Jormungand, however, just disappears as if he had been pulled under.

Tony's mind supplies him with an unwanted mental image of a panicked Loki pulling down his
snake in desperation. He hates it, hates the idea of Loki drowning. Can Loki drown?

Tony hears a cracking sound and realizes it's the ice beneath him. *Shit.*

"Jarvis, where's that suit?"

"It's on its way, Sir." Jarvis replies, but by now the ice has given way and he plunges into the freezing water. No, no. He can't do water.

His whole body goes numb from the cold, but his mind's far away. He can't breathe.

He's back in Afghanistan, being waterboarded as they try to *persuade* him to build the Jericho missile. He struggles uselessly against his captors as his lungs beg for air, but no mercy is forthcoming.

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Jarvis watches in horror as Sir falls into the water as well.

Jarvis has been trying to wake Dr. Banner to enlist his help, only he needs to wake him in a way that won't cause the Hulk to emerge. Unfortunately, that rules out suddenly playing loud noises in Dr. Banner's room, so it's not as quick of a process as he would have liked. Dr. Banner had a nightmare during the night, and after reading for several hours and fixing himself some tea, had fallen back asleep.

Sir had conked out in the lab and Mr. Loki, surprisingly, had picked Sir up and laid him on the spare bed in the lab without so much as a suggestion. Mr. Loki had diligently tried to stay awake after that but had eventually just, as he usually does, gone from full of energy to passed out within seconds, collapsing on the bed beside Sir.

Jarvis cannot just metaphorically sit back and do nothing as his creator is trapped under ice, with who is probably Jarvis' second favorite person. However, he does not have a body.

He could have one, though, in a manner of speaking- more specifically, he could borrow one. After all, Sir had given him permission to do beneficial or critical things without consulting him about it first on the thirty-first of October.

He'd already started preparing a suit to send to Sir, but he's furious at himself for not doing so earlier. Jarvis downloads himself into another of Sir's suits, switching it on by himself and taking command. While he can control them without Sir, he generally doesn't. Jarvis makes the suits rocket out the tunnel leading from the lab and then loop back around the house towards the outdoor pool, which is next to the indoor one.

Dr. Banner finally wakes up, and Jarvis tells him where to go as he guides the suits through a side door that separates the indoor pool area from the outdoor pool area.

Jarvis is very glad he's so skilled at multitasking.

Dr. Banner's eyes widen and he dashes for the same room. Inside the indoor pool area, Jarvis hurriedly scans for Sir and Mr. Loki.

Dr. Banner enters the indoor pool area, and takes in the proceedings with a tense expression that he tries to smooth over. He says something about looking for something to break the ice with and asks what happened.

Jarvis lowers the two suits, one after another, into the hole in the ice that both Sir and Mr. Loki fell
through. He sees Sir floating under a patch of ice, his slaps against the ice weakening by the second. Sir's whole body is shivering, and Jarvis heads towards him. Sir has always been and will always be Jarvis' number one priority.

As he does this, he regales the tale to a very worried Dr. Banner through the speakers in the ceiling. In one of Jarvis' cameras in the room, the AI watches Dr. Banner take deep breaths, meditating on the concrete by the pool. Jarvis switches on some soft, orchestral music to help.

Back underwater, Jarvis moves towards Sir with one suit, and reaches out a hand to touch him, but Sir jerks away. Sir seems to be having a flashback, most likely about his treatment in Afghanistan. He needs to get Sir and Mr. Loki to the surface as soon as possible. Going without oxygen for too long could be quite detrimental, resulting in things such as brain damage.

Unfortunately, what would be the easiest way to get them to the surface- breaking the ice, doesn't seem to be plausible. Blasting apart the ice with a the suits' repulsors isn't an option, since the electrical discharge would flow through the water and shock Sir and Mr. Loki.

Equally unfortunately, he can't simply wrap the suit around Sir, since he's still thrashing weakly. Plus there'd be no way to drain out the water on the interior of the suit, which isn't even supposed to get wet in the first place...

Jarvis makes the first suit grab Sir's wrist, although he jerks violently at that. It pains Jarvis to see Sir like this, even though he's seen Sir panic many times.

Jarvis finally locates Mr. Loki when he turns the second suit around.

Jarvis notices several things about Mr. Loki as he simultaneously tries to get a firm hold on Sir. One is that Mr. Loki's Jotun form is showing, perhaps due to the frigid temperature of the water. It hadn't been showing before, though, and the water had been frigid then, but Jarvis doesn't delve any deeper into that.

Mr. Loki's currently-red eyes are still wide and glassy, more so than usual as he stares at his skin, seeming lost in his own little world. He simply floats there, his constellation-covered long coat and shoulder-length hair flowing out around him as Jormungand floats, unmoving and matching Mr. Loki. Jarvis isn't even sure if Mr. Loki is aware of anything going on around him.

In the room, Dr. Banner has stopped meditating and, evidently calm, has gathered all the blankets and towels he can find.

As Jarvis pulls Sir towards the hole, he reaches out with the second suit to touch Mr. Loki. Mr. Loki blinks and looks at the suit, before his now-red eyes flick towards the other suit Jarvis is controlling and Tony. His face furrows in confusion,

Mr. Loki then looks concerned as he swims towards the suit with Sir, grabbing onto Sir as well and helping Jarvis pull him though the hole.

However, Sir has gone worryingly still.

Tony doesn't even have the energy to struggle against the hands anymore, the hands of the terrorists down. He doesn't know how long he's been underwater, only that it feels like forever as his lungs beg for air.

The water they shoved him in yesterday hadn't been this cold- if anything, it had been slightly hot.
Tony dimly thinks this as his vision starts to black out.

And then, by some mercy from his captors, he feels himself being pulled up, feels his head break the surface. Air!

He coughs the water out of his lungs, and the dark spots in his vision fade, although he doesn't really notice what's in front of him. Of course, he knows it won't last. Knows they'll only keep him from passing out before shoving him back down again. Knows he probably won't be able to even get all the water out of his lungs before he's thrust under again.

The coughing is agony, but not as bad as not being able to breathe.

Tony tries to break free of the grip around him as it lugs him somewhere. The grip is unyielding, but there's a voice. No, a few voices, and they don't sound like the Ten Rings, but he's too busy coughing and his ears are too waterlogged to hear what they're saying.

He feels something warm being wrapped around him, and that fact in of itself is odd enough, as his captors certainly weren't this... gentle.

"...Yinsen...?" He mumbles, sure it's the doctor who'd saved his life.

Yinsen never sang to him, though, and someone's singing now, rocking him back and forth and hugging him like one would with a baby. Tony can hear a melody he knows he's heard before, even if he can't make out the words. It's the lullaby Loki sings about horses and stars, but that doesn't make any sense...

Tony makes a move to clear his waterlogged ears, but he finds his arms are trapped by whatever's wrapped around him as well as the arms around him, but the grip's too strong. He struggles against his bindings, wondering if they'd decided to put him in a straightjacket or something. And who's arms are those?

There are other voices, and Tony finally makes them out. Bruce and Jarvis are telling someone to let him go. Jarvis' voice, with its British accent, is the first one that stands out to him.

"Hugs help!" Another voice with a British accent says from somewhere closer to Tony, and Tony realizes it's Loki holding him and rocking him. Of course.

Opening his eyes, though, he sees blue, and he realizes Loki's Jotun skin is showing. Red eyes, without any whites or even noticeable pupils or irises, stare back at him, though they still look somewhat glazed.

He realizes that Loki's rocking back and forth himself, hence the reason for Tony rocking as well.

Shit. They just saw him having a flashback, didn't they?

Tony snaps tersely at Loki to let go, but Loki just sings. "Flower gleam and glow, let your power shine, make the clock reverse, bring back what once was mine. What once was mine."

Of course he'd sing Rapunzel's song. Tony feels... better, after that. Well, better physically. He's no longer shivering, although he can still feel a bit of a chill through the blankets. Loki's skin, he realizes. Tony also notices that his ears are no longer waterlogged. His lungs feel normal, and, oddly enough, his business suit, which should still be soaked, feels dry and warm. It had a four figure price tag, too.

He's still unsuccessful at freeing himself from Loki's grip and the numerous blankets and towels
wrapped around him, but it's not for lack of trying. He'd been thinking about going to his lab and drinking a ton, but it seems they have other ideas for him.

"Tony, stay still." Bruce says, his voice sounding weary and worried. "I need to make sure you don't have pneumonia, or frostbite."

"I'm fine!" Tony protests, definitely not wanting to be checked up on. He's not really sure how long he was in the water, but he's not dead, so that says something.

"Mr. Loki seems to have helped get rid of the worst of the effects, sir." Jarvis says, his voice coming from one of the two Iron Man suits standing nearby, instead of from the ceiling. Tony had a feeling about that when his symptoms mysteriously disappeared, although how Loki knew what was wrong is beyond him. Did he, really, or does he just have some automatic healing thing?

"Thanks." Tony grunts to Loki, who beams.

He absolutely hates that Loki and Bruce saw him like that, hates that the flashback happened in the first place. Jarvis obviously has seen his episodes before, has helped him through them, even. At least Jarvis has the sense not to bring it up now, although Tony's sure the AI wants to.

Pepper, Rhodey and Jarvis were the only ones who know about these up until now. Well, Loki had seen him have a nightmare once, way back when watching *Beauty and the Beast* for the first time, but Tony isn't sure Loki knows the extent of it. Loki had mentioned that nightmare to Dr. Carlisle, though, and Tony hopes she keeps her mouth shut about that.

Bruce seeing it is new, though, and he would have preferred he remain ignorant. Bruce is probably going to figure out the reason behind why he hates water eventually. Sometimes, Bruce is too smart for his own good.

Both Loki and Bruce are watching him, and he's uncharacteristically uncomfortable with being the center of attention.

"You all right, Snoopy?" Tony asks. As long as they don't bring up the flashback, he can pretend it didn't happen. Which is what he's going to do.

Loki just nods.

"Did you know you're blue?" Tony asks rather tactlessly, trying to shove the flashback out of his mind and hoping nobody mentions it. He's putting on his usual flippant attitude, though he mentally kicks himself for asking that question. First he'd failed at helping Loki, and now he just goes and points this out when he knows Loki hates it.

Loki bites his lip and nods nervously. "Didn't even do it. I just... turned. Couldn't turn back, no matter how hard I tried..." Rocking back and forth even more, he closes his eyes and his usual pale skin starts to slowly replace the blue. When his eyes open again, they're their usual startling green. He looks down at his skin and seems relieved.

"Hey, you looked awesome like that." Tony replies. Loki blinks at him, still seeming surprised to hear that.

Bruce still decides to check Tony over, much to Tony's annoyance.

"You were... drowning, like Eric. That's what Bruce saids," Loki informs him. Suddenly looking panicked, he asks "Are you gonna die?"
"No, I'm not gonna die." Tony replies. He doesn't even feel like crap anymore. At least not physically. Thanks to Loki, apparently. "I'm not even going to be bed-ridden, so you have another thing coming to you if you think so." He gives a pointed look to Bruce and the suits containing Jarvis.

"By the way, let's not slide over frozen pools anymore, all right?" Tony says.

"But you said ice isn't bad." Loki says.

"It's not. Just... freeze the floor or something. But do it in a room we don't normally use." The last thing he needs is to find some room frozen when he walks in it and slip and break his back. Or his neck. Once they get back to the tower, maybe he'll have to designate a 'snow room'.

"I helped Jarvis get you out." Loki says. "Did I do goods?" None of them bother correcting his grammar.

"You helped me get out?" Tony asks, surprised. "You were drowning too, right?"

After all, that's what caused this. He'd failed at saving Loki. Totally and utterly failed. He hates that. He hates himself for failing, obviously. What would've happened if Loki was under the water for too long? Oxygen deprivation can cause brain damage in people. Is it the same for Jotuns and Aesir, or does their superhuman strength protect them from that?

Loki doesn't answer. "You need lots of saving, you know." Loki stares down at him with a odd sort of smile ghosting his lips.

"Says the pot to the kettle." Tony mutters. Loki stares at him blankly. Tony sighs, not feeling up to explaining it. Bruce explains it to the god, and Loki looks even more confused.

"You Midgardian humans really can't breathe underwater?" Loki asks, cocking his head to the side with a worried look.

"You can?" Tony counters, surprised. "You don't look like you have gills or anything."

Loki frowns, looking confused. "Wasn't 'xactly breathing, I don't think? I dunno. Ariel doesn't have gills and she breathes underwater and on air. Like me."

So that whole thing was pointless? Loki let him think he was in trouble, when he wasn't in trouble at all. Tony opens his mouth to furiously demand why the hell Loki didn't come up when Tony called out to him, before he himself fell through the ice.

"Is that why you hate water? 'Cause it can kill you?" Loki asks innocently, before Tony can get a word out. Loki frowns, confused. "Bruce doesn't hates it, nope nope nope. And he's human. So why do you?" Tony sees Bruce frantically shake his head, mouthing no at Loki, but it's already been said.

"I don't want to talk about it." Tony shouts. He wrenches himself from Loki's grip and the blankets and stalking to the lab, only stopping to grab a couple bottles of beer. He notices the suits containing Jarvis following him, but, surprisingly, Loki isn't. Maybe Bruce is keeping him back.

He slams open the door to his workshop and lets it slam behind him, yanking off a bottle cap and flinging it to the workbench with more force than necessary. He pulls of his tie and jacket before removing the dress pants and shirt as well. As always, he's wearing normal clothes under them.

"Sir-" Jarvis says, from the suits, which had just allowed themselves entry into the lab. Tony sighs,
"You have nothing to be ashamed of." Jarvis says, this time from the ceiling as the suits re-insert themselves into their spots.

But he does. He hadn't saved Loki, although apparently Loki hadn't needed saving. But if he had, Tony would've failed.

Still, he knows Jarvis is talking about the flashback.

"Yeah, yeah. 'You are not weak for reacting like that, for being traumatized by what you went through.' I've heard, Jarvis." Jarvis told him a couple nights ago, when he had a dream about the portal he'd flown the missile through.

"That's what you tell Mr. Loki, is it not?" Jarvis says sharply. "If it applies to him, sir, it applies to you as well. Unless you look down on Mr. Loki for it?"

Tony groans, taking another swig of alcohol. It's not the same.

Jarvis is almost reading his thoughts, as Tony's treated to an explanation about how it is the same.

Tony still doesn't like it, but he admits that, of all the people who could see him have a flashback, Loki and Bruce are the least objectionable options. Neither Loki nor Bruce can be particularly judgmental about this. After all, Loki himself has flashbacks a lot- had just had one not long ago- and probably doesn't think anything of Tony having them.

And Bruce, well, Bruce was hounded like a dog because of the Hulk, chased down by the military. That's got to be awful, and further still, Tony's seen the look in Bruce's eyes when he recalls the damage the Hulk's done when angry. Tony's seen the same look in his own reflection's eyes, when he thinks about being the Merchant of Death, of all the people his weapons have killed.

Only, the Hulk isn't like a missile. Tony might've thought so at first, but it's clear now that he's more than just an unthinking rage monster. It had been clear since the Chitauri attack and it's startlingly obvious, watching Hulk and Loki interact. Yet Bruce still doesn't seem to see that, and, apparently, at one point had gotten so low that he'd decided to try to end it all.

Yeah, Tony thinks, he's in good company, it seems. He's certainly not the only one with issues here.

"You do not have to go through this alone, sir." Jarvis tells him gently.

Less than a minute later, Tony hears the sound of Loki's footsteps galloping down the stairs. Loki can, oddly enough, be almost eerily quiet on his feet sometimes, yet sound like an elephant running around at other times.

Apparently, Loki had managed to slip past Bruce, since Tony's Science Bro comes down the stairs, and, casting a look that Tony pretends not to notice, tries to pull Loki back upstairs. Of course, physically moving Loki is all but impossible. Well, without an Iron Man suit or an enormous green body.

Tony sees the god staring at him through the glass, banging on it slightly. At one point, he even closes his eyes and jumps up and down, like he's trying to teleport inside.

Tony remembers Loki panicking at the idea of being locked out, having been reminded of the Hulk cage. He doesn't have a choice, really, unless he wants Loki to panic, and he wouldn't wish that on
anyone. Well, maybe some of his enemies, but definitely not his friends.

Tony tells Jarvis to unlock the door and let them in.

Two days later, Tony glances over at Loki, who's humming as he sits, bouncing slightly on the spare bed shoved into a corner of the workshop, for when Tony can't be bothered to go to his room. A huge holographic screen is up against one wall, for Loki to draw on. He'd seemed to like the mural idea, after all, and it certainly beats the possibility of having magic marker on the walls. Loki already knows about digital art like 3d modeling with holograms, so explaining this to him hadn't been hard.

The screen isn't quite as transparent as most holograms. Loki has most of it painted a dark blue, almost black, with green grass at the bottom, starting directly above the bed, made by the god dragging his fingernails over the screen. Holographic 3d models of horses and trees float in front of the 'grass'. Loki had scanned Maximus for the horses and modeled the tree himself. It sort of looks like that tree in the yard, that Loki named 'Willow-Willowy', although he usually just calls it by one of those names.

Loki's fingers are currently flying over the sky, occasionally tapping it and making what have to be stars.

Tony wonders if Loki's trying to make up for the lack of the projector that projects stars and horses in his room in the tower. They're going to be back there soon. Today's the last of the tedious meetings. Tony groans in relief.

The past few nights, Loki has crawled next to Tony when he's sleeping, either claiming he can't sleep himself or claiming to have had nightmares. Tony had been having trouble sleeping, himself, and Loki's presence had helped. Not that Tony's going to admit that or anything.

"Hey, Rudolph." Tony calls, and Loki takes a bit to look over at him, too absorbed in his painting.

"Can you, I don't know, make Bruce's hair blue or something?" Tony blurts out as he checks the settings on the room's sensors. He's wondering if he can finally get some decent measurements on Loki's magic. Loki's seemed a lot more comfortable using certain aspects of it now, which is definitely good.

Loki looks at him like he's lost his mind. Tony supposes he did sort of just drop that on Loki out of the blue.

"He should make your hair blue." Bruce replies.

"Hey, I'd look good with blue hair." Tony throws back, although he's not sure he actually would. "Okay, maybe not blue hair. Um, could you make something fly? Jarvis says you made Peter and Tinker Bell fly the other day in the pool."

Tony hears Loki make an angry, inarticulate sound, followed by the unmistakable sound of breaking glass, and he whirls around.

Loki hastily shoves the shattered remains of something in front of Bruce. "Bruce did it." Loki states, suddenly becoming fascinated with the wall.

"What? No I didn't. I-" Bruce starts, and then sees Tony smirking and seems to get that Tony knows who's really the culprit, before turning to Loki. "You shouldn't lie."
Loki doesn't reply. Still, Tony's somewhat surprised. Loki's never intentionally broken anything before. He'd actually panicked when he accidentally broke a mug not that long ago. Loki's made coffee a couple times since then, and had tried slipping other random ingredients in it.

Jarvis informs him that the broken glass thing had been a petri dish, which is what Loki had deemed the Hulk cage on the Helicarrier. That's probably not a coincidence that he'd chosen to break that. Maybe this could be therapeutic or something. Hell, Tony's not a therapist, but it's worth a shot.

He hunts around for another for more petri dishes. Being an engineer, instead of a chemist or a biologist, he doesn't have oodles of them. Well, he does in the tower, but not here, and he doesn't even know why the one Loki just broke had been out in the first place. Still, he figures he can sacrifice some. He finds a stash of about twenty in a cabinet. After clearing off the table Loki's at-or under, currently- Tony places one of the petri dishes on the table, picking up a Geiger Counter in his other hand.

"What's that?" Loki asks, eyeing the Geiger Counter warily as he pokes his head out from under the table.

"This is a Geiger counter." Bruce is explaining to Loki. "It measures ionizing radiation." At Loki's understandably blank look- not everybody understands particle physics- he adds "It won't hurt."

"They had one. In the petri dish cell..." Loki mumbles. Tony and Bruce exchange a look.

"Yeah, they might have. But it's not going to zap you or anything."

Loki seems to relax a bit, and Tony shows him the intact petri dish. "I know you broke the first petri dish, Snoopy. I'm not mad, although you should ask before breaking things. But I'm going to let you break this one, too."

Loki glances at him warily. "Really? You aren't mad? You won't be's mad?"

"Nope." Tony replies, popping the p. "Go ahead, wreck the petri dish cell. You have my full permission." He pauses and adds as an afterthought "But don't use your hands." He's kind of curious how Loki will break it, with the subtle hint to use his magic.

Loki scrutinizes him some more. He then nods slightly and slowly crawls out from under the table to stare at the small glass dish. Tony waits, Geiger Counter and other scanners ready.

Loki grins and makes Simba "pounce" on the glass dish. Simba's Iron Man suit easily breaks it and glass shards go everywhere. Nobody seems to have gotten cut, luckily. Although Loki could have healed them.

"That... that was good." Tony replies, disappointed Loki hadn't used his powers. Loki grins at him.

He rewords his request as he places the next petri dish on the table. "Okay, try to break it, but don't hit it with anything. Or throw anything at it." He tries to think if he's missed a loophole.

Loki nods for a bit and seems to think, perhaps preparing his magic. Tony tenses in anticipation of whatever wonder will appear before his eyes. Will Loki blow it up with his mind? That would be awesome.

Suddenly, Loki flips the entire table over, sending the petri dish and the broken remains of the others to the floor. It's not exactly a lightweight table, either. Tony remembers Jarvis saying something about Loki lifting a sofa.
"That was very clever of you." Bruce tells Loki, also sounding like he's masking his disappointment. Loki grins, humming slightly.

As Loki flips the table the right way and settles it back on the floor, Tony wonders if maybe they're being too subtle, or if Loki knows they're alluding to his magic.

"Do you think you could change this one into something else?" Tony asks, setting another petri dish in front of the god.

"Like Elsa's dress? And Toy Stark and Hulk-y?" Loki asks.

"Yeah."

"...Maybe. For you, 'kay?" Loki replies. Tony grins.

Loki picks it up and turns it around in his hands, looking at it with distaste. He glances between Tony and the petri dish a couple times, and then stares at the ceiling, shaking the thing slightly.

For a bit, Tony doesn't think anything's going to happen, but green magic starts to form around Loki's hands. Slowly, the petri dish morphs into a genie lamp. It's still transparent, like the glass, and it's obvious there's no genie in there.

Tony probably wouldn't have been too surprised if there had been, though. Or an illusion of one, anyways. Man, what is his nice, scientific life coming to when a freaking genie probably wouldn't make him bat an eye?

Before he can say anything, Loki flings the glass lamp at the wall, shattering it into a million pieces.

"...That was very good." Tony tells him as he looks over the results from various scanners. None of them really tell him anything, much to his annoyance. He's going to need more than a cursory glance, though. There's got to be some sort of science behind this. As Arthur C. Clarke said, magic is just science we don't understand yet.

"He totally destroyed a sand castle the other day." Bruce tells Tony, looking over the data with him. For a bit it's silent, except for Loki humming Friend Like Me. "Wait a minute." Bruce murmurs besides Tony. "Genie was trapped in a lamp, and the petri dishes..." Is that supposed to be symbolic?

Tony glances at Loki, who neither confirms nor denies that theory. He's back to adding stars to his digital painting.

"Hey, I'm curious, when you turned into me the other day, did you actually feel it happen? Did you, like, actually grow shorter or something?" Tony asks.

Loki turns to look at him. "Can I be you again?" He asks hopefully.

"Sure." Tony says, somewhat surprised, reading the sensors again.

Loki claps his hands and bounces off the bed, practically skipping over to them. He scrunches his face up in concentration and, after a bit, slowly starts to morph, appearing to grow shorter and more Tony-like, until Tony's staring at another him again.

It's still weird, seeing Loki in his own body, but that had to give Tony lots of great data. And he'd missed Loki shifting the first time.
"So, did you actually feel yourself change, or...?"

"Felt it this time." Loki says, looking himself over. "Not last time. I didn't even notice then, 'til I was in the bathroom and I saw you in the mirror."

"So it was just an illusion?" Tony asks, and Loki nods slightly. "What about when you were Mowgli?"

"I was smaller then." Loki says, as if it's obvious. Tony remembers that he'd actually been smaller, when he'd touched him.

Tony's brain, which can be very immature and perverted, gleefully points out that that could be interpreted an entirely different way, if he'd meant another kind of touching. Which he hadn't. They're family, if not officially.

Surprisingly, those thoughts hadn't been blurted out by his mouth.

Loki- or, rather, another Tony, hugs him, and Tony sees Bruce's eyes widen. Tony stares at him suspiciously, but he just smiles slightly. Loki pulls away and laughs, flapping his hands, which are holding Simba.

"Mirror, J." Tony mutters, and a holographic mirror appears in front of him. It's not his own face staring back at him.

It's Loki's.

For a second, Tony forgets this is supposed to be a mirror and goes to peer around the screen and see if Loki had transformed back into himself. But when he moves slightly to the side, the Loki does too, and he remembers this is a mirror. He can see his old silver Audi R8 Coupe behind him in the screen, just as it's behind him in the room.

Huh. So not only does Loki look like him again, but it turns out he looks like Loki. He hadn't felt anything though. Figures, he doesn't even get the benefit of growing a couple inches when he looks like Loki.

Staring at the reflection is somewhat odd. Just as it was- and still is- weird seeing what Loki brings to his body (glassy eyes, bizarre movements and behavior), it's even stranger seeing what he brings to Loki's body.

As the saying goes, the eyes are the window to the soul. Gone is the dreamy look. The green eyes staring back at him are now sharp and intelligent. Somewhat like the eyes on that one illusion Loki had made when first watching Kim Possible, or that child-Loki illusion.

And just like how Loki taking on Tony's body shows what Tony would have been like in Loki's position, this shows what Loki may have been had circumstances been different. What he could have been, if that child-Loki illusion is accurate, and Loki was different, once.

Not that Tony thinks Loki's an idiot, although his speech and behavior sometimes make him seem really childish. Still, Tony's starting to seriously wonder exactly how smart Loki is. Not many people just teach themselves to read, which is the impression he gave in the pool. Certainly, from what Tony's heard, there probably weren't a whole lot of people in Asgard who were big on reading in the first place. They seem to only care about physical strength there rather than intellectual strength.

Or maybe everyone in Asgard just figures out how to read. After all, they do have All-Tongue and
all that jazz. Is Tony reading too much into that?

"So, I'm you, huh?"

Loki giggles and nods. "You didn't think you'd be!"

"No, no I didn't."

"Sir, you're scheduled to be in a meeting in forty-five minutes." Jarvis says.

"Uh, Bambi, do you think you could, you know, turn me back?" Tony asks.

Loki frowns. "Why? You know, Kim and Ron were each other. Dr. Drakken swapped their brains. Or maybe it was their bodies? It's kinda the same. And Ron had to do that cheering dance that Kim does, 'xcept he didn't know how so Kim tooks over but she looked like Ron."

"Yeah, well, that won't exactly work for us. I can't go to a meeting like this. I'd get hauled out by security." Tony mutters. Sending Loki in his place could be highly entertaining, but Pepper would put a stop to it before the fun even started.

Tony grins, realizing he literally can't go to that stupid meeting. "Loki, buddy, you are a genius. You just got me out of hours of tedious boredom. On second thought, don't change me back." Pepper can't get mad at him for ditching it when he looks like someone else. Well, she probably could, but he can't do anything about this.

Tony starts looking over the data from that energy.

About fifteen minutes later, Jarvis interrupts to say he has a call. Tony would have bet it was Pepper calling to demand where he was, but he would have lost.

"It's Colonel Rhodes, sir. He says he needs a tune up on his War Machine armor, although it looks like it needs a bit more than a tune up."

"Tell him to come over now." Tony says, grinning. He hasn't seen Rhodey in a while, and he realizes that Rhodey doesn't even know about Loki, much less that he change people's appearances.

"Hey, Snoopy, think you can pretend to be me? We're going to try to fool someone." Tony asks.

Loki nods, grinning. Tony had a feeling his emerging prankster side would like that.

"Okay, what's your name?"

"Tony." Loki answers almost immediately, sounding like he's trying to cover up his accent. He does a decent job at it. The effect is ruined when he laughs and flicks his fingers. Still, Rhodey probably won't think that someone made them look like each other. Who would, really? It sounds insane.

"This is going to be good." Bruce says dryly, looking between the two of them.
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Pranking Rhodey is fun, since he—nor anyone else, really—would ever guess what's actually happening.

They return to the tower, and Tony gives Bruce a present.

Loki’s first session with Charles Xavier, and an unexpected guest.

Around half an hour later, Jarvis announces that Rhodey is due to arrive in a couple minutes. Tony grins. He tells Jarvis to direct Rhodey directly in the workshop when he gets here. After all, his War Machine armor apparently needs some work.

Over the half an hour while waiting for Rhodey, Tony had explained to Loki that Rhodey is one of his friends, but that he's a nice friend, and that he has a suit like the Iron Man suits. Tony had also equipped Loki with an earpiece. At least for the beginning, Tony is going to be hiding and watching the (hopefully very entertaining) proceedings through Jarvis, and giving Loki advice through the earpiece on what to say or do. The reason Tony's hiding is Rhodey would wonder who 'Loki' was, even if Tony's really the one who looks like Loki right now. He's going to find out eventually, though, but it could give him a hint as to what's happened if Tony were there in Loki's body from the start.

This earpiece-advice part is almost like some spy episode, while this whole incident is like something in a Twilight Zone episode. Or, as Loki pointed out, that one Kim Possible episode where Kim and Ron switched bodies. Loki had explained that Ron had to help a lot of people as Kim, and that Kim found out that people were bullying Ron (although Loki hadn't seemed to realize that stealing lunch money and threatening him counted as mistreatment at first; he'd just said they 'were like Fandral'. Tony wonders if Fandral was the most verbally abusive. Tony had been sure to explain that the bullies shouldn't treat Ron like that).

Loki seems very excited about the idea of fooling someone into thinking he's Tony, which had only sort of worked the last time Thor came. Tony wonders whether or not Loki will actually be able to act like him or not. Tony knows he's pretty inimitable (and lots of people would probably try to say that's a good thing). But at least they have an advantage in that Rhodey has no clue someone else even lives with Tony, let alone that they'd switched appearances. And maybe, if Tony tells Loki what to say, they might be able to keep this trick going on a bit longer. Of course, they're not going to do it the whole time, since Tony needs to fix Rhodey's armor, after all.

Tony has noticed that, while he himself looks like Loki, it's just an illusion. He can run a hand through the top of "Loki's" head, since the extra height is just air. Figures he can't even be taller for once. Additionally, the illusion of long hair stays still, as if it's molded from plastic or something, and when Tony ran a hand over his face, he could feel his beard even if he can't see it. Tony can still feel the arc reactor in his body, even though it's hidden from sight as well. Although he looks like Loki, his voice is still his own.

However, Loki seems to have actually shrunk down to be Tony's size when he shape-shifted into Tony. Tony's pretty sure the arc reactor in Loki's chest isn't real, though. Which he supposes is
good- the thing keeping him alive is a huge pain. As in, it's actually painful to have a huge metal thing in his chest, although he's never told anyone but Jarvis and Rhodey. He wishes he couldn't still feel it now.

Loki's clothes had also changed into a replica of the business suit Tony had been wearing, although the tie is green and yellow.

Right now, Tony's in the living room, while Bruce and Loki/fake-Tony are in the workshop. Tony kicks back on the sofa with a grin, surrounded by holographic screens showing feeds from all of Jarvis' cameras in the garage.

Actually being in a different room as Loki would have seemed impossible two days ago. Although Tony had managed to avoid Loki for a bit after that ice incident, that hadn't lasted long. Once he was let into the garage, Loki had stayed within a seven foot radius of Tony for basically the rest of the day, sometimes even going so far as to physically cling to Tony as if to ensure he wasn't going anywhere and wasn't going to drop dead at any second.

It hadn't been the first time Loki had been rather clingy. The same had happened after Loki got lost in the city and after they retrieved him from the Helicarrier, as well as when Loki learned Tony is human and thus has a much shorter lifespan. All of those times, Tony had barely been able to shake Loki off to go to the bathroom on his own, having to keep up a steady stream of talking through the closed door so that Loki could hear he was still there. At least filling the silence has never been a problem for Tony- some people complain he never shuts up.

"Oh, yeah, Snoopy- call Rhodey 'Platypus', he hates that." Tony says with a smirk. Honestly, he's not even sure where that nickname came from, other than blurtting out "What'cha reading, platypus?" to his friend once on his jet, before the whole Afghanistan incident. It had stuck, and it annoys Rhodey, which only makes calling him that more fun.

Loki nods. Suddenly struck by another thought, Tony says "You might want to let go of Simba for a bit, if you want to look more like me." After all, Rhodey would surely wonder why Tony Stark would be holding a stuffed toy, even if it did have an Iron Man suit. When Loki had transformed, his clothes had morphed into the business suit Tony had been wearing. He hadn't even seemed anxious about that magic, and he'd made his clothes look like a business suit when he went to Stark Industries, too. "Oh, and maybe Stitch and Jormungand too."

"I don't wanna teleport." Loki mumbles.

Right. There's that to worry about. There are always the tracking watch and Stark Phone, but those hadn't seemed to work well in the past- mostly because Loki always inconveniently ended up without them whenever he went missing. But Loki's never teleported when he's been in the water, and he's without Simba then. Tony points this out, and Loki nods, looking somewhat relieved.

Loki sets Simba on a nearby table, and for unknown reasons, he puts his Stitch backpack under the same table. Loki's gone without Simba when going in the water, but right now, he twists his hands together nervously. Jormungand, as the necklace, slithers down Loki's arm, shrinking and wrapping himself around Loki's wrist like a bracelet, under the sleeve of Loki's suit jacket.

"Sir, Colonel Rhodes has arrived." Jarvis announces before Tony can figure out what to do about the teleporting.

Tony has Jarvis direct Rhodey through the tunnel connecting to the garage, so that he won't pass through the living room and see him. Tony settles back into the cushions with a smirk, watching the screens of his garage workshop.
"Hi platypus!" Loki calls out when Rhodey enters, carrying one of the suit briefcases. The god pauses and peers at Rhodey curiously. "You don't look like a platypus. They have tails, and, and you don't, unless it's under your pants? Is it?" Loki laughs at the thought before studying Rhodey more. Tony's already cracking up at the confused look on Rhodey's face. Loki's doing a fair job of covering up his accent, but he doesn't really sound like Tony.

"But you don't even have a... mouth?" Loki pauses and tries to use his hand to represent a platypus' bill, only it looks more like a beak when he does it. At least he doesn't actually grow a bill or something- that would be really weird, and it would kind of ruin this prank they're playing. "No, not a mouth. Well, 's a mouth, but it's another word. What ducks have... beak? No!" Loki can't seem to think of the right word (although he seems to be using All-Tongue), and he lets out an annoyed sound, wringing his hands together even more.

"A bill." Bruce supplies, and Loki nods enthusiastically, grinning at Bruce and going to clap his hands. Clearly, that's the word he'd been looking for.

"Yeah! Bill! Not a beak, beaks and bills are different. The book said it's a duck-billed platypus and they're mammals 'xcept they lay eggs and most don't. Like horses and wolves and apes and people, they don't nope nope nope. But the lady mammals grow babies inside them when they do sex, 'xcept you can do sex without getting a baby."

"You'd know about having sex without getting anyone pregnant." Rhodey snorts, and Tony bursts out laughing in the living room. Loki, however, just looks confused.

"I know 'bout sex." Loki agrees, and Rhodey again laughs even as he looks at Loki strangely. "I do have a rep-reputation as a... playboy?"

Tony is somewhat surprised that Loki's borrowing what he'd said when Loki was naked in the pool and he'd explained what people would think if Loki told them he'd slept with Tony. "You're doing awesome, Rudolph. Hey, tell him you're a genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist." Tony tells him, grinning.

Loki obviously hears it through the earpiece as he grins at the praise and bounces up and down. "I'm a genius, bill'onaire, playboy, phil... phil'n-rop'st." He stumbles over pronouncing the words, but even with All-Tongue, Loki sometimes mispronounces things and omits syllables, and he clearly has no idea what the words mean. Tony doubts those words were used much in Asgard, except perhaps for playboy. Loki looks like he's trying to pull off one of Tony's smirks, but even with Tony's face, it doesn't really work.

Rhodey looks even more confused at "Tony's" behavior, and he turns his eyes towards Bruce. "Bruce Banner?" He asks simply, holding out a hand. Bruce nods and shakes Rhodey's hand, not saying anything and looking surprised that Rhodey's actually willing to shake his hand. There are probably a lot of people who won't, because of Hulk.

"Tony doesn't let many people down here." Rhodey comments, casting another glance at Tony's decoy. It's true, actually. Bruce and Loki are part of a select few- including Rhodey himself and Pepper- who have entered this room or Tony's private lab in the tower. Even Steve and Clint have never ventured into Tony's personal labs, although Natasha had when acting as Tony's personal assistant during that whole Ivan Vanko thing.

"Well, he claims we're 'Science Bros'" Bruce answers, smiling slightly. Loki giggles at that, making Rhodey turn to him again with narrowed, suspicious eyes. Tony knows he's not of a giggler, and Rhodey's picking up on it, too. Bruce explains further. "I've been living with him
recently. I moved all my stuff in the tower a while ago, and Tony decided to drag me along on his business trip."

Rhodey doesn't seem too surprised to hear that Bruce took up residence in the tower. After all, the tower could easily house all the Avengers (as well as tons of other people) and after the Battle of New York, Tony had offered it up to all of his teammates. He'd offered a floor to Rhodey, too, but the Air Force still basically owns Rhodey's time, and Rhodey had only ever stayed a couple of days at a time. Much like Bruce had, until he moved in recently.

"I'm down here lots," Loki pipes up. "Sometimes I even sleep with Ton- sometimes I sleeps over there." He catches his slip up in almost mentioning Tony and points at the bed in the corner. Jarvis had minimized the holographic mural of Loki's horse field almost twenty minutes ago, but Loki only seems to notice now. He frowns, twisting his fingers together and flicking his hands. "Where'd it go? It'll come back later, right?" Tony wonders if he's asking one of his pretend "Monster family" members, Simba, or Jarvis. Or, Tony realizes, maybe Loki's asking him since he's been hearing Tony through the earpiece.

"Right." Tony assures him through the earpiece watching Loki tug at the ear the earpiece is in with absolutely no subtlety. "You know you can minimize holograms." Tony knows Loki knows that- he'd done so when working with them and building Simba's suit, as well as reading Peanuts strips. Loki nods.

Rhodey again looks at Loki- who he believes is Tony, given his appearance- with something between amusement, worry and suspicion. Of course, James Rhodes is no idiot- far from it, even if he can't match Tony in intelligence (can anyone, really? Maybe Bruce). Rhodey obviously has noticed that something's definitely off from the start, although Tony would be amazed if he correctly guessed what happened. Mostly because what actually happened sounds insane, or like something out of a Twilight Zone episode. Or, as Loki said, Kim Possible.

"You've been drinking, haven't you, Tony?" He asks. Tony scoffs at the idea- he doesn't act like that when he's drunk. Hell, he'd given a presentation about integrated circuits when he reached a level of drunkenness where most people wouldn't have be able to stand, as Yinsen had said. Yinsen had been at that conference, and Tony remembers that now, although he hadn't when the man brought it up in the caves. Tony forces the memory out of his head, which isn't too hard since he has the screens in front of him to distract him.

"I had t... had coffee with Bruce. With that." Loki answers, pointing at a drained coffee mug with the Stark Industries logo on it. Tony blinks in surprise. He hadn't expected Loki to actually lie in order to pretend to be Tony, and actually act like he had done what Tony did.

Although he's been making it recently, and occasionally trying to sneak an odd ingredient or two in, Loki never really drinks coffee. He'd spit it out in disgust the first time he tried it. The god had actually seemed to want to try coffee again recently (Tony suspects Loki wanted to emulate him and drink the same thing). Even with decaf coffee mixed with sugar- although too not much since Loki's energetic enough already- he'd still grimaced and hadn't finished the mug.

What Loki told Rhodey is true, mostly- Tony had actually drunk coffee earlier today, as had Bruce- but Tony's still surprised Loki lied to playact the part of Tony. Of course, he's seen Loki lie before. He had lied less than an hour ago, with the petri dish smashing episode. Tony had half thought Loki would answer Rhodey's drinking question by saying he drank tea, which is what he'd done when Tony and Bruce were having coffee earlier (using Mrs. Potts and Chip, of course). Actually, it sounded like Loki was going to say 'tea' at first but had caught himself and changed it.

"You know what I mean, Tony." Rhodey shakes his head in exasperation, probably thinking
"Tony" is being a wiseass, and looks at Loki again. "Have you been drinking alcohol?"

Loki shakes his head, and that's true in both counts. Tony drank some last night, but none today. Admittedly, it's not even noon and he's planning on drinking with Rhodey later, but it's still true. Loki has never touched the alcohol Tony owns, which he'd offered Loki on the first night. Loki apparently drank sometimes in Asgard but had hated it. Loki had mentioned that they said he "got even stupider than he had before". That comment had worried Tony, because it does make it sound like something happened to him. Coupled with that child-Loki illusion, which looked different from when Loki became Mowgli, Tony's very worried that's the case.

"I made a Man of Iron- no, Iron Man suit." Loki tells Rhodey, and Tony hadn't expected him to correct himself to say Iron Man like Tony does. It actually sounds weird to hear Loki not say Man of Iron. Technically, Loki's not lying now. He had made a suit for Simba, and at first that's what Tony thinks he's talking about until Loki surprises him again by lying to pretend to be him. "In a cave."

Tony's only mentioned building the first Iron Man suit in a cave once, and is somewhat surprised Loki remembers it.

"I made lots of suits and they fly an'... and I made Jarvis and Dum-E, yeah." Loki nods. "You know Jarvis, right? He's real smart, and his name stands for 'Just A Rather Very Intelligent System'. And he's holograms... blue holograms, and he says he can do stuff like me. He's really nice, too. Ton-no, I'm super super smart and nice, too!" Loki had almost slipped up again, Tony notices, but he's doing surprisingly well at catching himself. Rhodey probably doesn't know what Loki meant by doing stuff like him, how Jarvis compares Loki's abilities to his own.

"I am Iron Man." Loki adds as an afterthought, although randomly stating it is somewhat suspicious. Ironically, that's the exact line Tony used at that press conference years ago when he'd announced it to the world, and Loki even says it in the same way. But Tony's never told him about that press conference, and Loki's never seen the clips from it.

Loki laughs wildly. He's always seemed to like the idea of being Iron Man. That's been clear since his pajama section on their clothes shopping spree on his first morning here. "I am Iron Man, Man of Iron, Tony Stark! I'm Tony Stark, so I'm a superhero!" Loki adds, grinning and bouncing on his bare feet, which clash with the business suit he's wearing.

"Jarvis? Has he been drinking?" Rhodey asks.

"Mr. Stark has not consumed any alcohol today, Colonel." Jarvis replies smoothly. Rhodey nods a tad skeptically, probably wondering if Tony ordered Jarvis to say that, but he doesn't press the issue. He still looks at Loki suspiciously, especially since Loki's started humming under his breath with his usual dreamy expression on his- or, rather, Tony's- face.

"You feeling alright, man? You're not acting like yourself, and you sound different." Rhodey sounds concerned, and he's probably referring both to Loki's voice, which doesn't sound exactly like Tony's, and the way he speaks. Loki just stares at him and nods, grinning guilelessly.

"I keep telling you, you need to sleep more." Rhodey shakes his head. "I think you've worn yourself out. When's the last time you slept?"

"You're starting to sound like Pepper, Rhodes." Tony mutters, before blinking when he sees Loki repeat the line to Rhodey on the screen in front of him.

"You're starting to sound like Pepper, Rhodes. Pepper's a spice, too. And Pepper's got the same
surname as Mrs. Potts but she says they're not related and she's never been a teapot."

"Are you high or something?" Rhodey asks, looking directly into Loki's glassy eyes.

Really? Okay, Tony admits that's not a completely preposterous assumption. He had taken drugs in the past, but he hasn't touched them in years. Hell, that was mostly when he'd been in college decades ago, and he'd graduated from MIT at seventeen. Okay, maybe it had continued into his early twenties, but that was still twenty years ago. Besides, Loki doesn't act like he's on crack or anything, although out of context, what he'd just said about Pepper sounds crazy. And, well, his eyes are sort of glazed.

Loki pauses, seeming to think, and then stares Tony's longtime friend bemusedly. "No. We're in a... dungeon, but not a scary one, and they're always at the bottoms... Well, we're on a cliff, but I'm lots higher in Ton- ins my tower. 'Cause it's super tall-like."

"That's not what he means, Snoopy." Tony finds himself saying around his laughter, and Loki clearly hears that through the earpiece.

Loki starts laughing too, perhaps spurred on by Tony's own laughter or just finding this prank amusing. Cocking his head to the side, Loki asks him "What's he mean?" Of course, nobody else had heard what Tony said, so it looks like he's talking to nobody. Loki talks to Simba sometimes, as well as Hel and the others, but Tony obviously doesn't, and this is kind of ruining the effect. Actually, it's probably making Rhodey continue to think he's on drugs or something. Or that he's gone insane.

"You're really not acting like yourself, Tony. I'm not sure I want you fixing my suit when you're like this." Rhodey eyes Loki suspiciously. "What's wrong?"

"I'm Tony! I can fix it! I made one!"

"How did you make one?" Rhodey folds his arms, clearly testing him with that question.

"With holograms. And Jarvis and Dum-E made it real 'xcept I didn't make the-" Tony quickly makes an ah-ah-ah noise as he frantically tries to get Loki to stop that before he says arc reactor, since that would totally give them away. Loki clamps a hand over his mouth to stop himself before he says those two words. Admittedly, when Loki frantically covering his mouth isn't exactly less suspicious.

"I made the arc reactor," Loki says hastily, pointing at the most-likely-fake one in his chest. The glow can be seen from underneath Loki's dress shirt. "It's really glowy, see?"

"How did you make it?" Rhodey asks, and Tony hopes Loki doesn't say holograms again.

Loki answers, before Tony can prompt him on what to say. "Like, there's glass-" He taps his chest. "And glowy stuff in it, and stuff got mixed up for it, like cooking. But you can't eat it! And it hums and thrums an' there's a really big one in the tower!" Tony realizes that Loki must have been watching when he'd made the arc reactor for Simba's suit, but he clearly doesn't understand it. Which is just as well, because that means he can't accidentally spill the secret to, well, anyone really. Tony doesn't want anyone getting their hands on the designs for miniaturized arc reactors.

"Normally, you'd launch into some sort of scientific explanation that I wouldn't understand just to annoy me. And you don't cook, so you why are you comparing it to cooking?" Rhodey tells him. Tony debates trying to get Loki to repeat some science stuff he feeds him through the earpiece to do just that, but sadly he doesn't get the chance.
"You're acting really weird, man. You keep sounding like you're about to say Tony, and then you switch to saying I, and you have an earpiece in. What's going on? Are you even Tony?" He starts to approach Loki, frowning. Loki flinches back with wide, worried eyes before scurrying to the table that Simba's on, scooping his precious lion up, and crawling under the table, where his Stitch backpack already is.

Dang. Tony should've thought of that. Of course Loki's going to be wary about strangers trying to touch him. After all, he's only been out of Asgard for about two months. Frankly, the fact he hadn't totally freaked out during their defense lesson when Natasha was lightly punching at him is somewhat astounding. But then again, Natasha wasn't a total stranger.

"He's not going to hurt you, Bambi." Tony reassures him softly through the earpiece.

Tony figures it's time to head back down to the lab. This was fun while it lasted. He gets up and heads down the stairs. He doesn't even have to enter the code-Jarvis opens the glass doors for him.

"Who the hell are you?" Rhodey asks, looking at Tony with even more suspicion. Tony sees Loki cock his head to the side and decides Loki probably thinks Rhodey's referring to Hel. Loki opens his mouth to respond but Tony beats him to it.

"It's me, sour-patch. I'm hurt. Here I thought you cared for me, and you don't even recognize me." Tony answers, mock pouting, glad that his voice is at least his own. Tony hears Bruce chuckle at that. Rhodey glances between Tony and Loki, who's still hiding under the table. Bruce is crouched down, talking softly to the god.

"Look, man, I've never seen you before in my life." Rhodey tells Tony. Tony of course knows he looks like a stranger to him, since Rhodey's never met Loki.

"Remember Spring Break, 1987? You thought I was a lady when you got in bed." Tony says, bringing up an incident that he knows Rhodey hates being reminded of, before he's unable to keep it in and bursts out laughing. He wonders if those pilots had actually asked Rhodey about that when Tony had flippantly mentioned it back when he was building his Mark Two suit.

Still grinning, Tony waves a hand aside. "Nah, I'm kidding. Whoever that guy was, I seriously doubt he looked anything like me. Well, not me, because this isn't really my body. I'm Tony."

Rhodey stares at him.

"Seriously. I'm Tony Stark, Iron Man, the one and only."

"So why do you look like...that?"

"Long story there, platypus. I'll give you the bare minimum. I know this sounds crazy, but we had a bit of an incident, and now we look like each other. But I sound like myself, right? What proof do you need that I'm Tony? If you want, I can start mentioning every embarrassing thing about you that nobody else would know. Like that one time when you ate-"

"Okay, I'll trust you." Rhodey quickly interrupts, not wanting anything to get out, especially when the Spring Break of 1987 incident had already been mentioned. Shaking his head, the airman mutters "I must be going mad."

"You haven't even heard half of it." Tony says, clapping him on the shoulder before going to tell Loki that everything's okay.

Rhodey glances between him and Loki. "This is too weird." Tony's longtime friend says.
Tony shrugs, smirking. "It made for a good prank, which you totally fell for. Good job, Loki." He grins at the god hiding under the table.

"I did not fall for it." Rhodey protests, and Tony chuckles. Admittedly, he didn't really, but Tony's going to ignore that little detail. "So you look like... whoever he is?" Rhodey asks, gesturing towards Loki.

"Rhodey, this is Loki. Loki, this is my friend, James Rhodes, but you can call him Rhodey." Tony smirks when Rhodey gives him a look that says he didn't even ask about that. "Hey, Snoopy, you can switch us back now." Tony says to Loki.

Loki casts a slightly worried glance at Rhodey, and Tony assures him. "He won't mind. He'll think it's as awesome as I do."

Rhodey, in response to Loki's unsure look, turns away from them and says nonchalantly "I don't see anything. But whatever you're going to do will probably be awesome."

"It's awesome! Like Toy Stark!" Loki laughs, still sounding somewhat awed to hear that. He suddenly hugs Tony back, like he had when they'd first switched appearances.

Tony feels Loki grow as he morphs back into his normal body. Glancing at his own hands, the engineer sees that the illusion making him look like Loki has been dropped, so his hands no longer look quite as pale or long-fingered. Rhodey stares in shock, not that Tony can blame him.

Loki announces that he's going to go outside, and Tony figures he's going to either hang around in 'Willow-Willowy' the tree (literally hanging, sometimes) or surf. Or maybe he just needs to be away from Rhodey for a bit. Loki heads off down the tunnel with Simba in his hands and Stitch on his back.

"Your hair is blue." Rhodey says with a laugh after turning around. Tony blinks and has Jarvis pull up a holographic mirror again. Sure enough, his hair is blue, although his eyebrows and goatee are still black. It's a very odd look, to say the least.

"Looks like Loki listened to my advice when you told him to turn my hair blue." Bruce says with a slight smirk as he heads out after Loki, probably both to keep Loki company and to let Tony catch up with his friend alone.

Tony goes and gets beer for himself and Rhodey, wishing he could just send Dum-E for them, although Dum-E's not here. And, well, Dum-E would most likely break something anyways. He returns and places two bottles on the workbench.

Tony makes a *gimme* gesture to Rhodey's suit briefcase, which holds the War Machine suit. He makes it unfold and starts checking it over. The thing is a mess.

"What did you do to my baby?" Tony asks, giving his friend a mock stern look.

"Hey, it's mine." Rhodey shoots back, crossing his arms. Tony smirks and starts to lay the individual pieces of the suit on the workbenches, kicking aside the broken glass from when Loki had smashed the petri dishes.

"The repulsors don't work." Rhodey tells him as Tony strips down parts to look at the wiring. He'll have to have Jarvis hammer out the dents in the armor, and he sets the AI to the task. He does the same to his own suit and has Jarvis hammer out some of the dents from the most recent fight against Doom-bots. There are only a couple minor dents, but the paint job is completely ruined, so Jarvis also starts to repaint it.
"So, I can't help noticing you're rather affectionate with Loki." Rhodey says, sipping his beer. "Are you two...?"

Tony practically chokes on his beer, setting the bottle down. "God no! I don't know if he can really have a non-platonic relationship."

"It sounded like he started to say he slept with you at one point- he got most of your name out before switching to pretending he was you." Rhodey points out, smirking. Tony has occasionally swung that way, and Rhodey knows that. Hell, most people know that, since it had reached the press- the press claimed it was because he was drunk, but really, there are very few sexual experiences that Tony hasn't had.

Tony groans. He knows Loki knows about sex and everything, yet he doesn't seem to grasp that in most cases, 'sleeping with someone' means having sex with them, so that's how most people interpret it.

"Okay, he crawls into my bed sometimes- mostly the one here in the workshop- but it's not like that. Loki... he's family- like, I don't know, sort of a little brother to me or something. Even though he's like a thousand years older than me."

Ugh, Tony's not good at this feeling stuff. He's not even used to the familial feelings he feels for Loki, although he actually thinks of Rhodey as family, as well as Bruce, surprisingly. All three of them feel more like family than his own father, who had never been around, since he'd been obsessed with looking for Captain America, and who'd never been pleasant on the rare times he was around. So yeah, he feels closer to Loki after only about two months than he had to his actual biological family.

Tony's realized he's fiercely protective of Loki, even early on. Hell, if he didn't know better, he'd swear he's sometimes felt parental to the god. But that's insane, Tony Stark feeling parental. He's not a parent, he never wants to be one, and Loki's not a kid.

Rhodey curiously picks up Toy Stark- currently in Tony form- and turns the toy around in his hands. "Really, Tony? You had a custom action figure made of yourself. I mean, it looks really good, almost like a mini version of you, but your ego doesn't need to get any bigger."

"That's Loki's." Tony says. "He has the whole Avengers set, and he made them look a lot better than the original action figures I bought. You know, sort of like how made me look like him, as you saw. That saved me from sitting through a tedious meeting, although Pepper'll probably kill me later."

"How did he change you? And are you serious about him being over a thousand years old?" Rhodey asks, clearly wondering if Tony's messing with him some more at that last part. Tony confirms that Loki is indeed over a thousand, like Thor.

"As to how he does that stuff- he has magic." Tony replies with slight skepticism. "Well, that's what he calls it, anyways. I haven't figured it out yet, but he's done some things that most people would call magic. Like teleporting. You know, things people used to think were only theoretically possible scientifically."

"And have you thought that if he can change his appearance, he could be someone else disguising himself and trying to trick you?"

"Yeah, I've thought of it, but I seriously doubt that's the case. He'd have to be the universe's best actor. You saw when he was trying to act like me. Besides, Thor's basically backed his story up."
Although, it really would've been better if Thor hadn't been able to back up Loki's past.

Tony explains about Loki's other powers, and Rhodey looks very impressed with the list. Tony also tells of how Loki had ended up here after living in Asgard and having one of the shittiest lives imaginable, since he's part of a race that everyone there hates.

Rhodey seems surprised to hear about Asgard- Tony knows that Rhodey had taken a mythology class in college but apparently hasn't heard that Thor actually comes from a place sort of like the one in the myths. He does seem to remember reading about Jotuns, though.

"Damn." Rhodey shakes his head, looking like he wants to beat the crap out of everyone in Asgard. Tony's completely with him there. After a bit, he adds "He has to at least have some serious PTSD."

"He does." Tony mutters. He'd glossed over some of it, like Loki having nightmares every night. After all, he wouldn't want someone sharing about his nightmares. Loki had unintentionally told Dr. Carlisle, who had better keep her mouth shut about that.

They don't just talk about Loki. Rhodey fills Tony in on what's been going on in his life, and Tony demands an explanation of exactly how the War Machine armor got to be in the shape it's in.

"What did you do? Fight zombie ninja terrorists or something?" Tony mutters as he works on fixing the repulsor system.

"Take out the zombie ninja part." Rhodey replies, as Tony takes a draw of his beer bottle. Although it's still surprising that the armor managed to get this beat up and lose repulsor functioning.

Loki comes in back through the tunnel, wearing a red swim suit, although the legs are mysteriously missing, so it looks more like a loincloth. Jormungand's large again, and draped around his shoulders, although the snake's not a necklace this time. He's not even wrapped in a loop, instead Jormungand's head and tail drape on different sides of Loki's body. Tony wonders if Loki was pretending to be Mowgli again, based on the outfit and Jormungand, but Loki's still in his adult body right now. He's carrying Simba, Toy Stark, and Stitch, rather than having Stitch on his back. Bruce is walking right next to him, and they're talking about something.

"Hey, Snoopy, can you change my hair back? I mean, I can totally pull of blue hair-" Tony starts. He can't really, but he's not going to admit that. "-but I look even hotter with my normal black hair. So can you make it look how it normally does?"

"By the way, what you did before was awesome." Rhodey says, and Loki gives him a hesitant smile. Still, he doesn't do anything until Rhodey turns away again.

Loki lays a hand on Tony's head, looking as if he'd rather keep Tony's hair like this. "Hey, buddy, if you keep this up, I'm going to put dye in your shampoo so your hair will be blue." Tony says mock-severely, pointing a finger at him.

Loki just sends him a look that clearly says he could change it back, so that wouldn't do anything. Tony laughs. He has to admit Loki has a point. Loki steps back, as if he's finished.

Tony didn't feel anything, but he sees Bruce nod, and when Rhodey turns around again, he sees he nods too. Clearly, his hair is back to its normal color, but just to be safe, Tony checks it over in a holographic mirror.

"Wait a minute." Tony frowns, looking back to the workbench where Toy Stark had been earlier when Rhodey had been looking at the toy, and at Loki, who's holding Toy Stark and Simba in his
Tony knew Loki didn't come back and get the toy. "Reindeer Games, how did you get Toy Stark?"

"I asked Stitch and he gave him to me." Loki says matter-of-factly, obviously not having noticed what Tony had. "Tony, guess what? Fenrir and I were in the water, 'cause he was being my wolf family, and the water splashed when he did!"

"Really?" Tony raises both eyebrows. That's interesting. It makes it sound like Fenrir was actually tangible, at least for a bit. "That's neat. Were you being Mowgli again?" Loki nods, his hair bouncing around as he pulls on his starry long coat, which he'd been dragging along with his toys, but apparently hadn't actually been wearing as Mowgli.

"Yeah, and Willow lifted me up and Jormungand was Kaa again. He's got a real body, kinda." Loki gestures to the snake around his shoulders.

"But about Toy Stark, well, he wasn't in Stitch. He was here. Rhodey and I were looking at him." Tony hopes Loki won't panic about that, but Loki just cocks his head to the side, confused. "Uh, don't freak out or anything, but I think Toy Stark teleported to you or something..."

"I believe that's exactly what happened, although this wasn't the first time." Jarvis pipes up, and Loki casts a worried glance at Rhodey, who just smiles at him. "Stitch has spit out toys that were in other rooms, and they would disappear before Stitch spit them out. Additionally, Mr. Loki seemed to summon a bar of soap to the pool two days ago." Loki's eyes go wide at the mention of the soap, as if he'd wondered about that.

"Wait, so it really wasn't there and then it was? Like teleporting?" Loki asks, and Jarvis confirms it.

Tony notices a couple other things. "Come to think of it, you weren't wearing the swimsuit when you went outside. And you don't have your suit now, from when you were me. Did you do something to it?" Loki nods hesitantly, clutching his toys tighter and glancing at Rhodey, who's still sort of a stranger to him. Loki's changed his clothes many times before, but while Tony had assumed that the clothes themselves physically changed, but perhaps Loki simply summoned different clothes onto himself this time. That's probably the case, since he'd already had the swimsuit and coat- he hadn't needed to make them. Besides, Loki's long coat never seems to change. Well, it had changed from something when Loki first made it, but since then, it's remained the same.

"That's an... interesting coat." Rhodey eyes Loki's long coat.

"I made it. Look, here's Orion." Loki says, pointing at the constellation on his coat. The fact he openly admits to making it, especially in front of a stranger, shows they have made progress, even if he seems reluctant to do magic around Rhodey- or, rather when he's watching. "Orion's one of my favorite constellations, 'cause he has the Horse Head Nebula!" Loki grins, bouncing up and down excitedly and pointing at his coat again where there's indeed something shaped like a horse head. Tony hadn't noticed it before.

"See, there it is! It looks just like a horse head, like my mask that my Tony gots for me only it's in the sky and it's awesome." Loki grins.

Rhodey blinks slightly at the rambling man in front of him. Admittedly, he may just be wondering about the horse mask part.

"Orion, he fought a big scorpion, and when they were puts in the sky, they... they're on different sides of the sky, so that when the scorpion comes ups in the east, Orion sets in the west. Like he's
hiding, even though he's a warrior. Tasha said hiding's just as m'portant as fighting, she dids! And Violet and Elsa and Stitch hide sometimes. And horses run aways sometimes, instead of fighting! Lots of animals do, flight not fight."

Rhodey exchanges a glance with Tony, clearly wondering if Loki means Natasha. Tony nods slightly. "So do you know all the constellations?"

"The best one is Pegasus!" Loki says, grinning, and that was definitely what Tony would've guessed his favorite is. "Pegasus 's a horse, but he has wings so he can fly!" This part is said in an almost conspiratorial way as Loki flaps his arms as if to mimic wings.

"He's got wings like a bird's, not like Tinker Bell's. But he's made out of stars, kinda like she is! She's like a star. You know she comes to my room sometimes." Tony assumes he's referring to the holographic version of Tink that Jarvis made, but the way Loki says it makes him seem kind of crazy. As Loki says talks about Tink, Stitch spits out Loki's Tink figurine.

As an afterthought, Loki points to another section of his coat. "Here's the Second Star to the Right, to get to Never Land, 'xcept if you're upside down then it's to the left. And if you turn 'round then a different star is second to the right, but I think it's magic."

"Where was Tink before?" Tony asks Jarvis quietly.

"In Mr. Loki's bedroom." Jarvis replies. "She seemed to disappear before Stitch spit her out, as I said before." Tony sees Loki listening, and he puts a hand on the god's shoulder and grins. Loki smiles hesitantly back.

"Why didn't you tell me about this, earlier, Jarvis? How long has this been happening?" The second question is directed at Loki but Loki apparently hadn't even known he had been doing it. According to Jarvis, it really only started when Loki got his Stitch backpack.

"Wish I coulda done that with Simba." Loki says, and Tony's pretty sure he's talking about when he was on the Helicarrier.

Loki takes a curious look at the armor, which is being fixed by Jarvis, and says "Tony says you're like another Man of Iron... or Iron Man. Tony says Iron Man." Rhodey nods, saying he's War Machine and pointing out his armor. Loki peers at it. "Hey, that looks like Steve's suit, kinda, 'cause it's red and white and blue. Mostly blue. Do you likes blue?"

Rhodey nods. "I do, do you?"

Loki shrugs, but at least he doesn't say he hates it. Tony thinks that maybe he doesn't hate it as much anymore, and his love of Stitch shows that. Instead of answering, Loki changes the topic, though Tony's not sure whether it's on purpose to avoid that topic or not. "I have a suit too. It was for Halloween, and I made Simba's suit, see? Tony made the arc reactor, but I made the rest with holograms, and Jarvis and Dum-E made it real. Hey, Tony, your suit's there too!" Loki points at the suits that are getting fixed by Jarvis.

"Yeah. It's getting repainted. You know, you could help me out with that, like how you change Toy Stark. I bet you could make my suit awesome-looking again a lot quicker than Jarvis. Nothing against you, J."

"Of course not, Sir. As thrilling as the task of repainting your suits is, it would save you from listening." Jarvis remarks dryly.

"You'd want me to do's it?" Loki asks, sounding awed. "But Jarvis is, right?"
"I am, but I believe you'd do it much faster than I can, Mr. Loki." Jarvis replies, sounding like he'd be smiling if he actually had a body or face. Loki approaches the armor pieces, and Jarvis stops painting Tony's suit.

Rhodey says he'd really like to see it, although Loki looks at him slightly worriedly. After relaxing slightly when Tony gives him a reassuring grin, and Rhodey once again turns away, Loki places a hand on the armor pieces for Tony's suit, although they still have wet paint on them.

"Uh, Bambi, just make it red and gold, like normal. Don't change the color on me, okay? You can do that to Toy Stark." Loki nods, looking slightly disappointed, and closes his eyes as green energy starts to form around his hands. The metal suddenly loses the scratches in the paint, looking brand new. Tony grins and goes to clap Loki on the shoulder, only to gently lay a hand there instead. No point risking Loki thinking he's hitting him. "Good job, Snoopy."

"Indeed, you just saved me from hours of tedious boredom." Jarvis says dryly. Loki giggles, and Tony can tell he's remembering Tony had said basically the same thing earlier, when he'd first started to look like Loki and thus got out of a meeting.

"I helpeds!" Loki then looks at the red paint staining his hand with a grimace. "Like blood." He mutters, shaking that hand wildly and telling it to get off. The paint disappears, and he smiles slightly.

"All right, Rhodey, let's test out that repulsor." Tony says, and Rhodey looks somewhat surprised that Tony finished working on it already. Tony rolls his eyes. "Hey, I'm a genius, remember?" Rhodey nods and has the War Machine gauntlet wrap around his hand. Tony, after fitting the armor plates back over his own suit, suits up entirely.

He doesn't actually see it happen this time, but Tony realizes that Loki's changed Toy Stark from Tony to Iron Man, probably when Tony himself was suiting up. Rhodey apparently hadn't seen it happen either, but he definitely notices the change, and tells Loki that the miniature Iron Man looks almost real. Loki smiles slightly at that, although he'd seemed worried about Rhodey noticing it at first.

They head to the gym for Rhodey and Tony to use their repulsors. Tony has shot repulsor blasts in the garage workshop countless times (and caused a lot of damage in the process) but the gym has a shooting range specifically designed for this.

Loki climbs into the boxing ring, batting at the stretchy, surrounding cords with Toy Stark. "Are we gonna do defense? Like how Baloo taughts Mowgli to fight? Or med'tate?" He asks, picking up the frying pan that he'd left there and twirling it around, probably trying to imitate Rapunzel doing the same thing.

"We can do defense in a bit, if you want to." Tony says, somewhat surprised, before shooting one of his repulsors at the targets. His repulsors weren't actually damaged like Rhodey's were, but it never hurts to practice, after all.

So, five minutes later, Tony and Rhodey are still shooting away at the targets. Bruce had joined Loki in the boxing ring, and they're sitting down on the soft mat. Bruce is apparently trying to get Loki to meditate, which isn't really working as Loki keeps getting distracted by what Tony and Rhodey are doing. Tony hears Loki talking about shooting stars, and making wishes on them like Lilo had.

And then, out of the corner of his eye, Tony sees a glow. He turns, and sees Loki standing there, one hand splayed out in front of him like he's shooting a repulsor, and there's actually a small ball
of energy that looks a lot like the blasts Tony shoots hovering in front of Loki's hand. Although it also sort of looks like a ball of fire. It's even white, like Tony's repulsors, which is somewhat surprising since the energy around Loki's hands always seems to be green.

Loki's staring at the ball floating in front of his palm. At first, he almost looks excited to be doing something like what Tony's doing. But then his expression falters slightly, and the energy sphere seems to shoot off on it's on accord, flying across the room and scorching the wall, but not entirely blasting through it. Loki's face gets more and more anxious, to Tony's dismay. He tries to assure Loki that he's not worried about the damage, but Loki doesn't answer. He falls to the mat in the boxing ring, muttering what sounds like pleas as he curls into a fetal position. He's clearly having some sort of flashback, probably about what happened in Asgard when he did this. Had he done this in Asgard? Tony has a feeling he had.

Tony's stomach churns. If Loki had gotten beaten for making a force field to defend himself and had his lips sewn shut for lying about breaking some statue to avoid getting in trouble, Tony doesn't even want to know what the punishment for actually attacking someone was. Each possibility his mind comes up is worse than the last, until his stomach debates about upheaving his breakfast. He notices Rhodey looking on with pity, and he excuses himself, heading off back towards the lab. Tony doesn't even have to tell Jarvis to help him with whatever he needs.

Tony climbs into the boxing ring next to Loki, sitting down and wrapping his armored arms around the shaking god. He tells him softly that it's okay, that nobody's going to hurt him here- what he always says when Loki has a flashback or nightmare. He even sings part of Loki's song under his breath.

Once Loki seems aware of his surroundings, Bruce tries to get him to breathe slowly and deeply, which honestly does help with calming down.

When Loki's calm, he surprises them all by saying "I shot a star, just like you when you're Man of Iron." He doesn't sound like he hates the idea, at least, but then he bites his lip nervously. "Sorry! Sorry I wrecked it!" He points to the scorch mark on the wall with a slightly trembling hand.

"Hey, it's fine. Trust me, I've done way more damage with my own repulsors."

"You do it and you're super, so am I super too?!"

"You bet." Tony smiles slightly. "I didn't know you could do that, but it's awesome! And super."

"I almost forgot, 'til I did it and I remember. They hate it more'n force fields." Loki admits softly, shuddering. "Not s'posed to fight back, nope nope nope!"

"That rule doesn't apply here. You're allowed to defend yourself, and sometimes defense includes offense. How did you almost forget you did it?" Tony realizes that might be an odd question. He doesn't remember every single thing about his life, and he probably forgot some bad things along the way. Loki has well over ten times the number of years Tony has to remember, since he's over a thousand freakin' years old.

"I was real little, I think? I forget, but they got maddest then. But... but they really liked fighting and stuff, but it hurt most when I dids it! Like, they said I was a coward for not being a warrior but they were worse when-" Loki doesn't finish the sentence, instead slapping a hand against the mat. "'Cause I'm a Jotun and they hate magic!"

"Because they were a bunch of asses." Tony counters firmly.
"And they should gets in trouble, right?"

"You got it." Tony smiles slightly. They really have been making progress. Besides, that energy blast had seemed a lot like his own repulsors, so maybe he can actually start figuring out the science behind all this magic stuff. Loki had to somehow compress and charge particles, like Tony's suits do to form them.

Loki thinks for a bit. "They wouldn't'a liked it if you did it there. Thought all Midgardian humans are stupid and below them, 'xcept they're wrong 'cause Midgard's a trillion times better than Ass-Guard. No, infinity times better!" Tony honestly never thought about if Loki knew about large numbers like a million or infinity.

"Hell yeah we are." Tony answers. "And they were wrong about way more than that, remember?"

"Thor didn't think bad things 'bout Midgardians after he got banished, and he told Fandral to stop saying 'em. But they would've said you weren't a warrior, but Thor says you're a great warrior, so they woulda been wrong about you. 'Cause you're Man of Iron. And it's not bad when you do it, so why'd it be bad when I do it? They're wrong 'bout Midgardians." It seems actually saying Iron Man was limited to when Loki was pretending to be Tony.

"I like you more as Tony than Man of Iron. I like you as Man of Iron too, 'cause you can beat up anyone who tries to hurt me, but I like you most." Loki says after a bit, and there are very few people who would share that sentiment. Heck, some people don't even like Iron Man. And it feels nice, knowing how Loki thinks of him.

"Are we gonna do defense?" Loki asks after a bit. He presses the frying pan, which had been abandoned on the boxing mat, into Tony's hands and asks Stitch for Maximus. Stitch spits the plush horse out. This supports the teleporting toys theory, since there's no way the plush horse could fit in the plush backpack- Maximus is as big as Stitch.

Loki starts swinging the stuffed horse at Tony, clearly wanting him to block Maximus with the frying pan like Flynn Rider had when fighting Maximus in the movie. Tony plays along, pointing out how he knows where to block and giving tips, but he's still focusing on the fact Loki shot something like a repulsor blast.

"Hey, do you think you could shoot that repulsor-like ball of energy again?" Tony asks Loki.

"The star?" Loki asks.

"It's a repulsor." Loki shakes his head, and Tony sighs. "Yeah, sure, the 'star'. I've got more petri dishes." He grins.

Tony returns to the lab to grab the box of petri dishes and a bunch of scanners before heading back to the gym. He tapes one to one of the repulsor targets and gestures at it. "Go ahead. Shoot it, like me." Tony blasts the target next to the one the petri dish is taped to, before turning to grin at Loki, various scanners he'd brought at the ready. He'd told Jarvis to use all the scanners he has in this room, too, although they're not as varied as the collection in the garage.

Loki looks somewhat unsure, and Tony wonders if maybe he's pushing this too soon. Tony fires off a few more blasts himself.

Hesitantly, Loki brings his hand forward with his palm splayed out. Aside from a brief flash of green around Loki's hands, nothing happens. This trend continues but eventually, Loki shoots out an illusion of an energy blast, which doesn't do anything. Three times after that time, he shoots out
ice instead but it breaks the petri dish all the same.

Tony grins at him. "Good job, buddy."

Loki doesn't even panic this time.

Pepper waits by the Stark Jet, ready to chew Tony out as a car pulls up a little ways off from the plane. Yesterday hadn't been the first time Tony had blown off a meeting, not by a long shot. He'd actually gone to most of the meetings this past week, missing only yesterday, and he'd behaved a bit more than he used to during them. He'd still found great fun in making the board members squirm by turning what they said into dirty sexual innuendos.

She watches Happy, Tony, Loki and Bruce get out of the car, Happy helping them with their bags.

Tony notices the glare Pepper's sending at him, and he sighs. "Pep, I can explain."

"You'd better have an explanation, Anthony Stark!" She starts, and is going to start chewing him out until Loki interrupts.

"Hi Pepper!" He calls out happily, and Pepper smiles at him.

"Is that Stitch on your back?" She asks. Loki grins and nods.

"Tony got him for me, and he spits out who I ask for! 'Xcept Jarvis says they're not all in him? Are you going on the plane with us? Helen and Vi and Dash were's on a plane!" Loki exclaims excitedly, before his expression falters. "But then they almost got blown ups by those Miss Ill things, but why're they named Miss Ill? Tony saids he wanted to shove her up a butt." Pepper remembers Tony saying that about missiles on Halloween.

"It's not Miss Ill." Pepper says. "It's missile. They're a type of weapon."

"Oh. Violet saved Helen and Dash from 'em with her force field and that's good." Looking very worried, Loki asks "Are we gonna get blown up?"

"I don't think so, buddy." Tony says, sauntering up behind Loki. Tony has a lot of enemies, and Pepper really wouldn't put it past them to try to blow up Tony's plane, but it's not like they're advertising the fact they're going to be flying in it.

"Should I makes a force field if we do? Like Violet?"

"That would help, but I doubt we're gonna have to worry about it." Tony says.

Pepper turns to him. "Don't think you've gotten out of anything." She says, and Bruce chuckles. Tony glares at him.

Once they're situated in the plane, they take off. Loki seems very relieved to be able to take off his seat belt when they stop ascending. Tony gets a holographic screen pulled up, asking Loki what he wants to watch. Loki gestures with his Stitch backpack. The screen suddenly shows Stitch shouting something that sounds like "tookie ba waba" before theme music starts playing. Loki snuggles up with Simba, his Stitch backpack, and Maximus, the horse from Tangled. Somehow, Stitch had spit Maximus out even though the toy's as big as the backpack, if not bigger.

"So what are Lilo and Stitch up to now?" Tony asks, clearly trying to delay Pepper's lecture.

"'Xper'ment 540 made really big wind blasts... typhoons, and Jumba had a thing that made her get
really big like Hulk-y! Lilo was off dancing though and she kept lying about Stitch to some girls. And Gantu hit his head and thoughts that 625 and Hamsterviel were just in his head, but they weren't. Like my monster family friends! Or maybe Quasi's gargoyles? Lilo named 'Xper'ment 540 Phoon, 'cause she makes typhoons."

"So what's her one true place?" Tony asks.

"She makes wind for surfers but they're boards have... things on them. Like, cloth things?"

"Sails?" Tony suggests. "Are they windsurfers?" Loki nods enthusiastically, saying he'd heard that in the show.

"Tony, I want an explanation for why you missed the meeting yesterday." Pepper says, crossing her arms.

"Rhodey came. I fixed his suit." Tony says, only partially glancing back at her.

"I was Tony!" Loki pipes up as he continues to stare at the screen. Pepper's assuming he means he was pretending.

"Well, yeah, there was that, too." Tony smirks. Pepper has no idea what he's talking about. How does Loki pretending to be Tony affect whether Tony goes to a meeting? "Literally, Loki was me and I looked like him."

"Like when Kim and Ron swapped." Loki adds, still mostly focusing on the TV.

"Tony, I'm not in the mood for jokes."

"And I'm not joking." Tony counters, pulling out his phone. He asks Jarvis for the footage from yesterday and sets the phone on a table, where it projects a holographic screen above it. She watches a video as Loki literally morphs into Tony, and the watches as Loki makes Tony turn into him. She shakes her head slightly in disbelief, because this is a little different that seeing Loki become blue.

"It wasn't the first time, either. Actually, it was the third in Malibu, although it only happened there."

"That's amazing. You've done it before?" Pepper asks Loki, who says something about Mowgli, and Jormungand being Kaa.

"So am I off the hook?" Tony asks, grinning. "It's not like I could've gone there in someone else's body."

Pepper sighs. "I guess I can't fault you for that."

A couple minutes later, Loki lets out an excited scream, pointing at the screen. Pepper glances at it. A skinny, green, one eyed alien is holding up a magazine, saying something about Kim Possible. Pepper recognizes the green alien from the movie, but can't remember his name, and she has no idea who Kim Possible is. Loki laughs, bouncing out of his seat and rushing towards the screen.

Pepper watches curiously. Whoever this Kim is, Loki seems to like her.

Lilo claims that they can rescue Stitch (who'd apparently been kidnapped, but Pepper hadn't seen that part of the episode) without Kim Possible, but the green alien sends a rather ridiculous message claiming the world's going to end.
Kim and a blonde boy arrive, and Loki excitedly pulls Tony's sleeve. "Tony! Tony! Kim and Ron and Rufus are in Lilo's house! Tasha and Clint are in Lilo's house! I didn't know they could go there!" He laughs, and that seems to be an inside joke between them. "Like when Rapunzel and Eugene went to Elsa's coronation!" Loki exclaims excitedly, grinning a mile wide. Ron looks a bit like Clint, but Kim actually looks a lot like Natasha, Pepper realizes. Ron has some pink creature named Rufus, who the fat purple alien (Jumbo or something? Pepper can't remember) claims is an experiment. "But he's a naked-mole rat!" Loki protests, looking confused.

Lilo doesn't get along with Kim, claiming they don't need her. Loki seems somewhat disappointed about that as Kim goes off to rescue Stitch by herself. Stitch is apparently captured by a man with blue skin and a woman who sort of looks like a female Loki. They're obviously the bad guys, and Pepper glances at Loki, wondering if he'll react negatively, but he says that he and Tony beat them up, and that Tony says the blue skin and green magic don't make them bad. Pepper smiles. Tony's really good for Loki, and vice-versa.

Kim winds up getting captured too and it winds up being Lilo and the pink creature (Rufus, according to Loki) who save the day. At the very end, the purple alien, apparently named Jumba, claims that Rufus isn't an experiment after all. Loki is delighted to find out he was right. The moral of the episode seems to be "don't doubt others based on what they look like or who they are."

Loki winds up re-watching that episode, and when he watches what's presumably the episode that came after that in the original series, Jarvis announces from Tony's phone that he has a call from Director Fury, and that he's being 'very insistent'.

Pepper's eyes harden, and she sees Tony's and Bruce's do the same. Tony had told her what had happened when Loki had teleported to the Helicarrier, and she's furious that they'd locked him up like some sort of criminal.

Tony answers the phone, looking at the holographic image floating above the screen. Loki looks at it, fear written all over his face, and then he just... vanishes. Pepper looks around for him but doesn't see him anywhere.

Pepper can see the interest in Fury's eye at this, and she glares at him. "Listen, you'd better stay away from him. Just because he happened to wind up on your ship doesn't mean you lock him up, and he's not a test subject! Tony told me about what you did, and we've decided to withdraw a third of Stark Industries' funding."

Fury looks like he wants to growl at that as a vein throbs in his forehead, and he barks out "Stark! Have you been in our systems?"

"Thousands of times." Tony replies flippantly.

"Yeah, well, the controls to our missiles are locked now." Fury glares at the camera. "You're going to unlock them."

"Uh, actually I think you're gonna find that I won't." Tony says before his expression darkens. "You shouldn't just have missiles at your disposal. Because, that worked so well the last time.

"That wasn't me. That was the World Security Council. I didn't think it was a good idea, either." Fury says. "But it did help us defeat the Chitauri. What if they come back, and we can't fire missiles into their portal again?"

"They weren't fired there." Tony says, even more darkly. "Besides, Natasha had basically already closed the portal. That's what stopped them, not the nuke. And I've been trying to come up with a
"way to prevent them from coming back."

"You still haven't reimbursed us for the containment unit you destroyed." Fury says.

"You mean my cage?" Bruce speaks up, surprisingly sharply.

"Yeah, I'm not paying for that." Tony says. "It's kind of a jerk move to have it. So there you go. No missiles, no cage, and less funding." The fact Tony's doing this basically shows how much he's changed over the years. He used to be a weapons designer, after all.

"Is this all because of what I did to your friend?" Fury asks. "Are you really going to act like a petulant third grader?"

"It's not all because of Loki, but yeah, that helped." Tony starts to say, but suddenly, the holographic screen disappears. Pepper blinks in surprise. This is Tony's tech, it's better than this. Fury's still on the actual phone's screen, which is also holographic.

Loki appears out of nowhere. Had he been invisible?! Tony had said he'd turned invisible, but Pepper thought he'd been joking.

"Bruce shouldn't be in a cage." Loki glares down at Fury on the screen. "He's too nice. And Hulk-y shouldn't be in a cage, and Tony says I shouldn't either. You were mean. Like Odin." With that, Loki turns off the phone, although Pepper didn't know he knew how to hang up on someone.

"I don't like that Furious Man." Loki says. "He's not even kinda nice like Cobra Bubbles."

"I've never really liked him much, either." Tony says. "And I'm not entirely sure I'm going to associate with him much longer. But you did a really good job telling him off."

"He's not as scary on a screen." Loki replies, going back to watching *Lilo & Stitch* episodes.

"...E-N-T!" Loki exclaims triumphantly, practically shouting. Bruce tries to shush him a bit, because that had been a little too loud, although he smiles at Loki to show him he'd done a good job.

Bruce is seated on the ground in front of one of the multiple coffee tables in the penthouse, while Loki is only sort of sitting still on the other side. On the floor next to him is the open box for Scrabble, with the board pulled out, half hidden under the couch. The box has maybe twenty of those little letter tiles, which Loki is fiddling with absentmindedly. Since they're missing most of the pieces, they're playing a holographic version instead, although that means they can see each other's tiles. Jarvis and Bruce are playing with random tiles, but Loki has the whole alphabet arranged in front of him, so he can spell whatever he wants.

"Good job, Mr. Loki. I see the closed-captioning has paid off." Jarvis says. Jarvis is probably right about closed-captioning helping, since Loki can see the words for what the characters onscreen are saying, and *experiment* is a word that shows up a lot in *Lilo & Stitch*. However, they'd only just thought of having captions on only a couple days ago. Bruce really should have thought of that earlier.

"'Xper'ment!" Loki replies happily. It isn't uncommon for him to omit syllables when talking, but *experiment* spelled perfectly on the board.

"What's going on in here?" Bruce hears a voice ask.
Tony is leaning against the wall with his hands in his pockets. Judging by the fact he looks a tad damp, Bruce is assuming he just got out of the shower. He has one eyebrow arched. "You know, I didn't even know I still had Scrabble."

"In a manner of speaking. It's missing most of the tiles." Bruce replies.

The other words Loki's written include bell, swear, holographic (ironically, since they're playing with holograms, though he'd spelled it with an s at first), circuit (spelled correctly the first try, probably thanks to that book on circuits), Simba and jungle.

Loki hoists himself up on the couch's armrest, next to Simba, bouncing up and down slightly. Bruce is still slightly amazed none of the couches have broken, but then again, they've survived Thor, too. If Bruce had to guess, some of these sofas probably cost more than some cars. If they weren't, Bruce is pretty sure Tony would buy out the manufacturers and make them improve their sofa-production.

"Z, Q, E, T, A, U, L, S..." Tony reads Jarvis' tiles, smirking. "How sad, Jarvis. The most you can do something like tea." Glancing at Loki, Tony spells tea for him so he won't think he meant the letter T. "Or us, or late. Or tale, but that's just rearranging late."

"Actually, sir..." Jarvis sounds quite smug as the tiles rearrange themselves on the board.

"Quetzals?" Tony asks skeptically with an arched brow. "Nice try, J, but is that really a word?" Bruce nods, knowing this one. He'd woken up in Guatemala after Hulking-out once, when he was a fugitive on the run from the military.

Jarvis sighs. "Quetzals: The national bird of Guatemala, as well as one of its monetary units." A holographic website pops up in front of Tony's face, and it does indeed say that. From the looks of it, it seems to be a website for finding scrabble words, which sort of seems like cheating to Bruce. Not that this is competitive or anything, and no matter what, the AI has more references at his metaphorical fingertips than they do.

"It's a bird! I can do animals, too!" Loki says happily, clapping his hands at the mention of birds. He stares off into space for a bit, before moving some of his tiles "L... I... G... E... R! Liger! Liiii-geeeker!" Bruce doesn't bother mentioning it was his turn.

"Where did you learn that word, Mr. Loki?" Jarvis asks curiously.

"In the aminal book! No, Lilo saids 'aminal' but Bruce says it's an-i-mal'. The animal books!" Loki glances at Bruce, who nods approvingly. Loki grins, flicking his fingers.

"What other words start with L?" Bruce asks. Loki mastered the alphabet really quickly, but this exercise is still fairly challenging for him.

"Loki!" Loki says immediately, laughing. "And... ummmmmm... lion, 'n Lilo. That's got two l's. And Liger! A liger is sorta a tiger and sorta a lion, but nots really either of 'em. It's like they're mixed together. Like if Hobbes and Nala had a baby."

"Actually, Mr. Loki, I'm afraid that wouldn't work." Jarvis says, and Bruce is sure he's going to say it's because Hobbes is a stuffed animal, and toys can't mate. However, he's proven wrong when Jarvis says "A liger is a hybrid cross between a male lion and a female tiger. Hobbes and Nala, being a male tiger and a female lion, would produce a tigon."

"Tigon." Loki echoes. "Tiiii-goon... T...I...G...O...N...E?" Jarvis tells him that's right, expect there's no e, adding he did a good job sounding it out. "T-I-G-O-N! Hey, that's like Timon, 'xcept with a G
instead of M.” Loki reaches backwards and Stitch spits out Timon. Bruce wonders if Timon had already been in Stitch or if the toy had been somewhere else.

"Have you been writing anything, recently?" Tony asks Loki. Bruce has worked with Loki on writing, but he doesn't think Tony's looked at what Loki's written since that day Tony had called him down, worried about the quotes Loki had written. Bruce remembers Loki changing the lyrics to a song from The Hunchback of Notre Dame.

Loki still copies a lot from books and writes down song lyrics and movie quotes. Bruce has seen the lyrics of Let It Go countless times, as well as that quote about Ohana from Lilo & Stitch.

Tony's already pulled up Loki's documents. The billionaire seems to have little regard for privacy, Bruce has noticed.

Tony gestures with his head towards the documents, indicating Bruce should look at them. Bruce starts to wonder if perhaps there's something worrying there, as there had been before. But Tony had given Jarvis permission to tell them if that was the case, and Jarvis hasn't brought anything up.

But then Bruce sees a grin form on Tony's face and realizes it can't be something bad. Thank goodness. He gets up and goes over to the screen, leaning forward to read. "Hans tried to stab Hulk-y, but Tony shot him with a star as Man of Iron, and Elsa froze Hans. And Loki did too." The last part is added, almost as an afterthought.

Jarvis informs them that he'd transcribed what Loki said, as well as what he's acted out in some of his games. He adds that he'd convinced Loki to add himself there, and that had been done not long after that nightmare Loki had had about Hans.

He also notices a script from Frozen for the scene where Elsa fights the Duke's thugs, and then the thing is copied, with Elsa's name replaced by Loki's.

There are various other scenes that seem to have come from Loki's imagination. One of the more recent ones (according to Jarvis, who seems to have time stamps for when individual paragraphs in the document were written) has Loki getting attacked by an unnamed enemy, until Simba and Fenrir scare the attacker off. Bruce notices that Simba's always written as the character from The Lion King instead of Loki's toy, although one description mentions he's still in his suit.

By far the most entertaining read is the short story where Loki, the Avengers (minus Thor, who isn't mentioned once), Simba, Elsa, Violet, and Frozone all team up with Lilo and Stitch to catch experiments. The story's actually a couple pages long, and while, according to Jarvis, Loki had simply narrated or acted out most of it, he'd apparently written a fraction of it himself. Jarvis had helped with the spelling, and Bruce honestly can't tell which parts Loki had written and which Jarvis had transcribed.

Bruce is very happy to note that, occasionally in the story, Loki uses his magic. The story never has him using his powers alone, but he makes a force field with Violet to protect them from Gantu's blaster, and he shoots ice along with Elsa and Frozone to freeze experiments and catch them. At one point the story has him and Elsa make a winter landscape for everyone to play on, like Elsa and Slushy had.

There's one somewhat unrelated scene that has that same group (with the somewhat random addition of Maximus, the horse from Tangled) fighting a robot, perhaps inspired by the Omnibot in The Incredibles or the very real Doom-bots, which Loki had apparently seen on TV once.

The interesting part is that, not only had Loki made it so he's fighting with them, as if he and the
Avengers (and various fictional characters) are a team. At one point, he and Rapunzel (who appeared out of nowhere) heal Tony, who'd been injured. Loki even shoots "stars" with Tony in the story. Of course, Loki healing Tony isn't fictional, and neither is the energy blast part, but the rest is.

"I see you made yourself an Avenger." Tony says, glancing at Loki. Loki doesn't answer. "Well, anyway, good job, Loki. I especially liked where you beat up the Duke's guards."

"Like Elsa!" Loki bounces slightly.

"And when you shot energy blasts. That was awesome, in real life, too." Tony says, and Loki doesn't respond.

"All right, I've got something for you." Tony says, rounding on Bruce. "Close your eyes." Somewhat confused, Bruce does so, and Tony grabs his arm, leading him somewhere. "Come on, Bambi." He says, presumably to Loki.

Bruce really hopes Tony will be careful enough not to run him into the walls. He hears Tony say, mock sternly, "No peeking." Sighing, Bruce covers his eyes with his hands, just to prove that he's not. He hears the sound of elevator doors closing and feels the elevator he's in descend, stopping after only ten seconds or so. He hears the doors open again.

"Ta-da!" Tony says as they step out of the elevator.

Bruce uncovers and opens his eyes, mouth opening in shock at where he is.

It's clearly a room for the Other Guy- or, more specifically, a whole floor for the Other Guy. Sure, Tony had showed him a plan for the Other Guy's 'cool off area', but Bruce hadn't been expecting this.

The floor is mostly an open floor plan, with very few separate rooms. Bruce vaguely wonders how exactly the ceiling is supported when there aren't even pillars or walls holding it up, aside from the elevator shaft and the walls around the building. Then again, Tony's one of the best engineers in the world.

One wall, like most of the floors in the tower, is almost entirely glass although Bruce suspects it's glass like the cage that had been on the Helicarrier. The glass wall really does wonders for claustrophobia, and the Other Guy definitely doesn't like small places. The remaining walls, and even the floor and ceiling, are covered in padding, making it sort of seem like a room in a psych ward, only somehow less... intimidating. Bruce pokes at the material, raising an eyebrow. It's not like that's going to stop the Other Guy.

As if reading his thoughts, Tony says "There's a gold-titanium alloy under there. You know, what my suits are made of. I don't think the Jolly Green Giant's going to get through that, even if he is angry."

There are several punching bags scattered throughout the room, and Bruce doesn't doubt that Tony's managed to get them to withstand the Other Guy.

Around the edges of the room are large pieces of furniture, clearly built with the Other Guy's size in mind. There's even a huge bed, although Bruce can't imagine needing one when he never sleeps as the Other Guy.

Bruce doesn't even want to know how much this all cost, but he knows he'll never be able to pay Tony back for it. And that's just the literal expenses for the materials and construction. Then there's
the actual thought that went into this, the unfailing acceptance that Tony's shown him since they met, even when parts of his tower have been wrecked many times by Bruce's alter-ego.

"Recognize which floor this is?" Tony asks, grinning. Bruce shakes his head. "You- or, rather, the our favorite big, green guy watched *Beauty and the Beast* with Loki here." Tony says, and Loki nods, humming one of the songs from the movie.

"Thank you." Bruce says quietly. "For all of this."

"Aren't you gonna test it out?" Tony asks, arching an eyebrow at him. "You know, I did make it for Hulk to be in. So what are you waiting for? Let him out."

"Let Hulk-y out!" Loki jumps up and down excitedly, falling to the padded floor with a laugh. He gets up and flings himself at the floor again.

"But you're not wearing your suit." Bruce says to Tony. "The Other Guy could-" In Bruce's mind, the Other Guy seems somewhat annoyed. Not a good sign.

"He's Hulk, not the Other Guy." Loki says. "He doesn't like being called that."

Blinking in surprise, Bruce mentally asks the Other Hulk if he doesn't like that. He gets a vaguely affirmative feeling, but he'd honestly never thought about that. After all... *Hulk* is usually angry about something.

"About me not wearing my suit, Hulk hasn't done anything remotely hostile towards me since that one day. I haven't needed my suit the past bunch of times he's come out and I've worn it." Tony says flippantly.

Bruce is amazed in the faith Tony shows in... Hulk to not hurt him. But then again, Tony's right about not being hurt the past bunch of times, although Bruce still uneasily remembers those two times on the first day he'd met Loki...

Impatiently, Loki asks Stitch for Bruce, and the action figure of Bruce himself is spit out. Loki turns in into the Hulk toy and gives a pointed look at Bruce. "Now you do it. Wait, here!" Loki reaches a hand back Stitch spits out a white lei, which Loki passes over to Bruce. Bruce is pretty sure it's the same one he'd worn last time, although Loki then produces another one and puts it around his own neck.

Sighing, Bruce realizes that Tony and Loki aren't going to let up on this. And at least they're on a floor designed to contain the his alter-ego.

Bruce closes his eyes and lets the Other- lets *Hulk* out.

Loki grins up at Hulk, running up to hug him. "Hulk-y!" He calls out happily, wrapping his arms as far as they'll go around Hulk's stomach. He reaches up towards Hulk's lei. "Jarvis says white leis mean love." And love can mean family love.

He likes this room. It's really soft, and Hulk can come out here without wrecking the tower. Maybe Bruce will start actually letting Hulk out more.

"Loki?" Hulk asks, and Loki grins. "Loki is Hurt Nice Man." Hulk turns to look at Tony and grunts "Metal Man not metal?" He seems slightly confused about that.

"No, I'm not this time. You're not gonna pound me into the floor or anything, are you?" Tony asks
"Hulk no hurt metal man." Hulk says. Loki grins. He really hadn't liked it when Tony had hurt Hulk at first.

Loki wonders if there are holograms in this room. He likes drawing on them. He likes drawing on paper, too, but he doesn't see any here. Besides, you can't tear up holograms.

Of course there are holograms in here, Loki realizes when one pops up, as if Jarvis had known that's what he wanted. He starts to draw Hulk, looking through the screen at his big green friend.

Tony, for some reason, encourages Hulk to punch things, although this time when Hulk pounds on the walls and the floor, they don't break like they had in the penthouse. Maybe it's because they're so soft? But Tony said that there was suit stuff under them.

Loki really likes this room, because maybe Bruce will let Hulk out more if he doesn't have to worry about Hulk wrecking stuff. Although Tony doesn't seem to care much about things breaking, and even encouraged him to break petri dishes.

Hulk plops down on the soft floor, looking curiously at Loki's drawing. "Hulk." He says, pointing, and Loki grins.

"Yeah, it's you. You wanna draw too? Jarvis, can we have another screen?"

"Certainly, Mr. Loki." A screen pops up in front of Hulk, and Loki shows Hulk how to draw with his fingers. Hulk has really big fingers, Loki thinks with a laugh, so all the lines he draws are really thick. That would be like if Loki drew with his whole arm!

Hulk starts coloring something and green, and Loki realizes he's drawing himself and Shrek. Loki grins, and asks Stitch for Shrek, even though Shrek's really Bruce's toy. Stitch spits him out- he must've teleported from Bruce's room- and Loki hands him to Hulk. Then, before Loki even has to ask, Stitch spits out both Loki's Hulk action figure, and Bruce's Hulk plush. "Has Bruce still been sleeping with him, Jarvis?"

"Yes, I've made sure Dr. Banner follows your orders, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says, sounding amused, and Loki giggles. Bruce doesn't really have to listen to him, but it's kind of nice that he does, for some things.

Hulk picks up the stuffed version of himself, looking at it, before hugging it.


"Everyone said Stitch was a monster 'cause he wrecked stuff, but he's not and you're not! 'Cause you're in my Ohana."

Then, Hulk looks at him and says "Loki not a monster. Loki nice."

Loki grins, going up to hug him. He's really glad Hulk's in his family, since he can beat up even Thor! Loki kind of wishes Hulk and Tony would run into the Warriors Three sometime, because they were worse than Thor sometimes, and especially after Thor got banished to Midgard.

As he colors in the drawing he's done of Hulk, Loki sings one of the songs from *Lilo & Stitch*. They have part of the song at the start of every show, just like how Kim Possible has her own song.

"Now you can see, tookie ba waba"
Nothing but these clear blue skies

Love it has found you, and when it surrounds you

It's just like paradise

Now the door has swung wide open

Now your heart has taken wings

Feel that magic in the air

Oh hear your spirit sing"

"Aloha..." Loki sings, and Stitch shouts "Aloha!" from Loki's back. Loki giggles.

"You'll find the place that you belong

Ohana... A family to call your own

Where you feel at home

Everybody sing!"

Loki grins at Hulk. He doesn't think Hulk had a family before, but he does now. Just like he does, himself.

Tony watches from the penthouse as a man in a wheelchair rolls out of the rather impressive jet that landed on the balcony moments ago. The man (who has to be Charles Xavier, since one, they're expecting him, and two, he'd apparently asked about the tower being wheelchair accessible when talking to Jarvis) doesn't exactly look like what Tony would expect someone classified as a mutant to look like. Tony was expecting something perhaps like Loki's Jotun form, which might have helped Loki accept his own true form. Well, he hadn't really been expecting that Charles would have blue skin or something, but he'd at least expect him to look, well, different.

Charles Xavier looks, all in all, pretty average. The man (or mutant, Tony supposes) is completely bald. He's dressed in a business suit and his wheelchair looks sleeker than most. It runs a lot better than most electric wheelchairs that Tony's seen, and Tony's eyes are drawn to it, his mind automatically looking for how to make it even better. He is an engineer, after all.

The man's eyes seem to look directly in him, as if the man's rummaging through all his thoughts. Tony hopes that's not the case...

To get his mind off that, Tony blurts out whatever comes to mind, which isn't exactly uncommon with him.

"You know, I was kind of hoping you'd be blue or something. That could've really helped. Oh, well, I guess you can't get everything. Well, normally I can. You wouldn't happen to know anyone who's blue, would you? Nice wheelchair, by the way. Much fancier than most of the wheelchairs I've seen rolling around. Still, I could make it better for you. I could make it fly, or give it lasers or something. All you've got to do is ask."

"Thank you for the offer, Mr. Stark, but I don't see any reason for my wheelchair to have lasers." Charles says, sounding amused. "And about your other question..."
Suddenly, a noise that sounds like *bamf* along with what looks like a puff of blue-black smoke, and something blue appears out of nowhere. Not something, Tony realizes, *someone*.

The man- mutant? standing in front of him has blue skin with lines sticking up minutely all over it, much like Loki's Jotun form, although Loki's a lighter blue. This guy has yellow eyes, and a honest-to-god tail that ends in a rather lethal-looking point.

The blue man introduces himself as Kurt Wagner, with a German accent, adding that he's also called Nightcrawler. As he shakes his hand, Tony realizes that he only has two fingers and a thumb on each hand.

"Okay, I had no idea you existed." Tony says, pointing at the blue guy. "But you are perfect. Seriously, you're like another Loki. You know, you kinda look like the Na'vi from *Avatar.*"

"I've been told that, recently." Kurt grins. Tony catches a glimpse of what look like fangs. "This Loki is blue, too?"

"Yeah, but not all the time. Or most of the time. Actually, most of the time, he's not blue. He had some bad experiences with that." Tony says, before frowning.

"I don't recall actually telling you that Mr. Loki was blue, Professor." Jarvis speaks up. "Am I correct in assuming that you've figured out he's a Jotun?"

Charles nods. "The fact you mentioned he's cryokinetic helped a lot, although one of the reasons I first asked Kurt to come is because you'd mentioned he can teleport and is scared of the ability."

Grinning, Kurt says "At first, I thought he just wanted me to fly the jet."

"Are the myths accurate in the hatred between the Aesir and the Jotnar?" The bald mutant asks. Kurt, like Steve had, mentions there's only one god. Clearly, Norse mythology doesn't line up with his religion. Tony's an atheist, so it's not like it really lines up with his lack of religion either.

"Sadly, yes." Tony says. "And Loki took the brunt of it in Asgard."

Kurt mutters something in German that almost sounds like a prayer.

"Just so we're clear here, you're not going to be picking apart my mind or whatever. Got it, Chuck?" Tony asks, pointing at Charles.

Surprisingly, Charles doesn't react negatively to the Chuck part. He just reminds Tony that his name is Charles. Odd. Normally, Tony's really good at annoying people.

"I don't go into minds without permission unless there's an absolute need to, since doing so is rather rude. That being said, your reaction and wariness are not at all uncommon." Wow, this guy picked up on the fact that he's still slightly uneasy, wondering if Charles is reading his mind. The fact he'd picked up on that when Tony thought he was hiding it makes Tony even more uneasy.

"Okay, well, you're not here for me." Tony says. "So you might as well meet the man of the day." Tony starts to head back into the penthouse, as the mutant makes his wheelchair roll behind him.

Once the near the elevator, though, Charles turns to Kurt. "I'd like to speak with Loki for a bit before your part." He says, and Kurt simply nods, heading off to one of the TV screens, looking for a way to turn it on.

"I'd be happy to turn on the TV to whatever channel you'd like to watch." Jarvis says, and Kurt
looks around, slightly alarmed as he tries to figure out where the AI's voice is coming from. That's the reaction most people have, Tony thinks with a smirk.

"Jarvis is my A.I." Tony explains simply, and the man nods. Tony smirks when the professor admits that he hadn't been able to tell that Jarvis isn't technically real over the phone. Then again, Jarvis eats the Turing Test for breakfast, and Tony doesn't think anyone would be able to recognize that Jarvis is an AI over the phone. It's easier to tell once you realize he doesn't have a body, obviously.

Tony and Charles take the elevator down to the floor with Loki's therapy room, which so far has only been used once. Hopefully today will go better than the last time they'd been in here, with Dr. Carlisle.

Loki's in that room- his 'therapy room', as Tony had called it- with Bruce. This room has a grass-like carpet, just like his bedroom, only this room had it first. His bedroom has stars, though, so it's a lot better than this room. Although this room has a tent in it, which is kind of neat, and it's nice to hide in.

Tony's apparently still in the penthouse, so Loki has Toy Stark with him. Admittedly, Toy Stark can't compare to the real Tony, not by a long shot, but Toy Stark's better than nothing. He's obviously got Simba and Stitch, too, and a lot of his toys are in Stitch as well. Loki, like Simba, is wearing his Man of Iron suit.

He'd just been playing 625 Sandwich Stacker and he'd almost gotten the sandwich to the top of the screen before he messed up.

Right now, Loki's sitting in the tent, fiddling with a Rubik's Cube. Tony always seems to like it when he solves it, and actually acts like he's good at it. Certainly, nobody said he was good at anything in Asgard.

He shows the finished cube to Bruce, who smiles. Loki mixes it up again, deciding maybe he'll try to make a pattern with the squares instead of just making each side one color.

Bruce looks at him and asks "Could you change the colors of the cube?"

"Like a chameleon?" Loki asks, although he knows Bruce means with his magic. After all, chameleons only change their own colors, not the colors of other things. Chameleons are awesome though. They're not bad, and it's not bad when they change colors. Bruce is sort of like a chameleon, because while he can turn green and become Hulk, he can't make other things turn green (although chameleons, like Pascal, don't actually get bigger like Bruce does when he turns green). Loki likes to think he's part chameleon, himself, even though he's pretty sure he's not. But he can change colors like them.

Still, he's changed how Toy Stark looks lots of times, as well as his Hulk toy, Elsa, and even the toy of himself. He changed Bruce's mat, too, and really liked the new colors instead of all the blue.

Glancing at the cube, Loki frowns in concentration. He imagines colors that are much nicer than the ones on the cube, and suddenly they change. He grins. Although the cube had been mixed up a moment ago, it's now solved with the new colors. Loki laughs, because that could be a prank, couldn't it? Solving it without solving it? Although he can solve it, so he doesn't need to resort to cheating like that.

The red has been replaced with a shiny, metallic sort of red, like on Tony's Man of Iron suits, only
the center square resembles an arc reactor. Loki flicks his fingers over the cube, really liking that and noticing the other colors. The orange didn't really change, but the yellow has become gold, in basically the same way the red had, only without the arc reactor. The green is lighter, like the green in his eyes, and the white side has been replaced by Rapunzel's-dress-Purple, and the blue is somewhere between the shades of Elsa's dress and Stitch- actually, it's almost the same color as his real skin...

This cube almost reminds Loki of the Bifrost. It has all the colors of the rainbow, basically, and he can't wait to show it to Tony. It looks much better, after all.

Tony actually comes out of the elevator almost right as Loki's thinking that, which is really convenient. Grinning, Loki crawls out of the tent and runs to show him the cube, Simba in the other hand and Stitch bouncing against his back.

"You know, the Iron Man colors are a great touch." Tony says. Loki grins, glancing between the cube's arc reactor- it's a circle in a square-shaped space, so the cube can still turn- and Tony's. They look basically the same, just like how Toy Stark's looks realistic.

"Okay, Loki, the guy you're going to talk to is here now, as in literally right here. You ready to talk to him?"

Loki remembers Tony mentioning, before the whole ice incident in the pool (which apparently isn't a large bathtub, even if people sometimes go naked in it) that they found another therapist. Only, this man apparently is a teacher, too. Loki's never had lessons, but he knows what they're like from hearing others talk of them. Is this therapy going to be like lessons? Loki doesn't think he'd mind that. After all, having Bruce teach him stuff is pretty fun.

Loki nods slightly, hoping this man won't be like Dr. C was. Tony's saying something else, but Loki's attention is drawn to the man who's just rolled out of the elevator in a very odd chair. But that's not the weirdest part.

The weirdest part is that as soon as the man entered, Loki felt... something. Something like... magic?

Charles tried not to form any preconceived notions about Loki, although it was hard not to form some expectations based on what he knows. According to Jarvis, Loki has powers similar to several mutants Charles knows put together. He knows Loki isn't from this planet, and sure enough, when he'd looked on Cerebro, Loki had appeared as neither a man nor mutant, but something else entirely. Mutants are more evolved than humans, but it's almost as if Loki's more evolved than mutants.

He isn't planning on going into Loki's mind today- doing that too early, before Loki trusts him, would most likely do more harm than good. Besides, the main point of today is Loki meeting Kurt. He wonders if Loki even has the same sort of mind as mutants or humans, since he showed up differently on Cerebro.

Charles looks around the room he'd just rolled into moments ago. In the center are a sofa, some chairs, a coffee table, and, under these, a large rug that looks like a grassy field has been plopped down in the middle of the floor. Off to one side is a tent.

Rocking back and forth near Tony is a tall man with messy black hair brushing against his shoulders. The man's wearing what appears to be silver Iron Man armor, although the boots and gloves are missing, leaving pale, bare feet and hands. On top of the Iron Man suit, he's wearing a
long coat covered in stars and constellations. He's hugging a toy lion- Simba, Charles realizes- also
dressed in an Iron Man suit. Pale, long-fingered hands twist a very interestingly colored Rubik's
Cube, which he'd excitedly shown to Tony- apparently, he'd changed the colors on it.

This must be Loki.

He can feel Loki's presence more distinctly than he can with Tony or the third man- Bruce Banner,
Charles realizes. This is rather interesting, since normally he only feels mutants in this way and
Loki isn't a mutant. But what's even more interesting is the way Loki sits up and stares at him. His
green eyes are somewhat unfocused, although they eventually focus on him with surprising
intensity, as if he can sense Charles in return. Perhaps he can.

Charles holds out his hand to Bruce and Loki. "My name is Charles."

"Bruce Banner." Bruce introduces himself quietly, giving a rather quick handshake.

"He's an Avenger, just likes Tony. Bruce is Hulk, 'xcept I call him Hulk-y most of the time 'cause
it's more fun. Tony built a floor for Hulk so he can come out more." Loki pipes up. His comment
makes Bruce shift uncomfortably and glance at Charles, clearly expecting to see judgment or even
outright bigotry there. Charles doesn't even have to read his thoughts to see that. However, Charles
knows what facing such prejudice is like, and he's not prejudiced at all against the Hulk- after all,
he'd helped save the world from that alien invasion.

"You're Loki, I presume?" Charles asks, turning to him, although by now it's obvious. Loki nods
and bows slightly. He scrambles up the Rubik's Cube and starts to twist the sections.

"What's that chair?" Loki asks innocently but completely tactlessly, eyes flicking down to Charles'
wheelchair. "It's like that man's. His had wheels too." Tony and Bruce also look slightly confused
at that. Charles doesn't delve into his mind to figure out what he's talking about, instead just asking
Loki who he meant.

Instead of answering, Loki moves on again. "And the people in Wall-E hads chairs too, but they
were floating chairs, not chairs with wheels. And they had them 'cause they were real fats, but
you're not fat, so why do you have it?"

"This is a wheelchair, and I'm in it because I can't walk." Charles says simply.

"Not even a little?" Loki asks, staring at him in something like horrified fascination. Charles sees
Bruce pinching the bridge of his nose, and he gives the man a look saying he's not annoyed about
the question. After all, Loki's just being curious. Charles seriously doubts they have wheelchairs
where Loki came from.

"Not even a little." Charles replies. While he's never gotten these outright questions from his
students when they first arrive, most do glance at his wheelchair curiously, as does the general
public. Admittedly, his wheelchair looks sleeker than most electronic wheelchairs out there, as
Tony so helpfully pointed out on the balcony, but he knows that's not the reason people look at it.
Most people focus more on the fact he's a mutant than his wheelchair, however. Or people assume
he's weak just because of his disability.

Loki frowns. "That's really sad. And sorry's..." Whether he's saying he's sorry about it or if he's just
describing the situation, the effect is sort of ruined by what Loki asks next. "Why can't you walk?"

"I got hurt." Charles replies simply, not going into details about Erik and the bullet that hit Charles' back.
"I can fix people! I fixed Tony's leg! It got brokes but I healed him just like Rapunzel!" Loki replies, and Bruce shakes his head slightly.

"This isn't like that." Bruce tells him quietly. Loki frowns even more, dropping the now-solved Rubik's Cube on the grass-like rug.

"I appreciate the offer, and your healing abilities sound very nice, but I don't think you can help." Charles smiles gently to show he's not annoyed about that. "You fixed Tony's leg?"

Loki nods, his hold on Simba loosening slightly. "And Clint's arm, an' I think I mighta helped Tony when he was almost dead from drowning like Ariel and David when Eric 'n Stitch were. Rapunzel actually healed Flynn when he was dead, but he went by Eugene then."

"I wasn't almost dead- I hadn't even passed out. But yeah, you did help." Tony says, and Loki grins at him.

"Tony says it's good. Healing's good! Like Rapunzel!" Loki laughs and jumps up and down excitedly.

"It is good." This earns Charles a slight smile from Loki. "Do you heal quickly, yourself?"

"Faster'n Thor." Loki mumbles, sounding slightly proud to do something quicker than Thor. He hunts through a basket of miscellaneous objects, pulling out one of those metal disentanglement puzzles where you have to remove a loop of metal from the rest of the puzzle.

Tony explains the purpose, and Loki pulls at the ring, actually yanking the entire puzzle apart. Even though it's made of metal. Charles is somewhat surprised at this feat of strength, and Loki hastily hides the broken pieces at the bottom of the basket.

"I know a man who heals extremely quickly, just like you. He's sometimes called Wolverine." Charles tells Loki, who looks at him somewhat suspiciously, clearly not sure whether to believe him. He sees Tony's eyes light up with recognition, and he remembers Jarvis telling him that they'd found files on Logan.

Loki asks after a bit. "You don't heal fasts? Like Tony doesn't? He had this weird hard thing on his leg after he hurt it." Charles assumes he's talking about a cast, and although he's not trying to go into Loki's mind, he picks up a brief image of a neon green cast on Tony's leg.

"I don't heal any quicker than most people, but these won't ever heal." Charles replies, gesturing at his legs. Loki slowly approaches him, frowning slightly, and kneels down so his black locks brush against the back of Charles' left knee, singing something about a flower glowing and letting its power shine. Charles catches a mental image of a young animated woman with long golden hair doing the same thing, as well as the name Rapunzel.

A glow emanates from Loki's hand, and while Charles feels a sudden warmth, nothing else happens. Loki frowns. "You were right. I can't heals you, I don't think? Sorry." Loki says quietly, and Charles assures him it's all right. After all, he's been in a wheelchair for decades.

"Good thing you're here, not there." Loki says, sees a brief glimpse of wide, ornately decorated halls, probably some sort of palace. "They woulda beat you up there."

"For not being able to walk? Just because I'm wheelchair-bound doesn't mean I'm weak." Charles replies mildly. From what he's heard, the Asgardians are very focused on physical ability.

"Tony says you can be strong and brave without fighting and hitting stuff. But he and Tasha and
Clint are teaching me how anyways, so I don't get hurt again.” Loki says, and Charles nods to show his agreement with that statement about strength and bravery. He sees Tony grin when Loki says that.

Loki's looking at Charles as if he's just figured something out, once again.

"Did Lucy do it?" He asks, and Bruce and Tony share a look of confusion. Charles can tell Loki's referring to his disability. "That must have hurt lots, trying to kick the... thing... football! Then falling on your back. I never had'ta kick footballs at least, thank the Norns, but you did it tons, right? And Lucy always pulled it 'way and you fells on your back like WHAM!" Loki makes an action figure that looks like a miniature Loki replicate the famous Charlie Brown football kick fail.

Tony's face grows red as he cackles helplessly, leaning against the sofa for support. Bruce and Charles aren't laughing quite as hard as Tony, and Loki doesn't laugh at all, although he does smile a bit. Mostly, Loki just bounces slightly, waiting anxiously for Charles' response. Charles can see how Loki might mistake him for Charlie Brown, now that he knows that's what Loki's thinking. Charlie and Charles are similar names, and part of it is probably that both of them are bald.

"I'm afraid I'm not Charlie Brown." Charles replies with a small smile. "I go by Charles, not Charlie, for starters. I don't go by Chuck, either." He adds, sending a level look at Tony, who doesn't look sorry for calling him that.

"Pepper...mint Patty calls Charlie Brown 'Chuck'." Loki laughs, eyes going wide. "Hey, there's another pepper! P-E-P-P-E-R! Pepper, like our Pepper who's never been a teapot, and the spice pepper. And now Peppermint! Pepper-M-I-N-T Patty, not the other Patty. What's a mint?"

Before anyone can answer, Loki jumps back to the Charlie Brown topic without any warning, even for Charles. "So he's not always Charlie 'cause Peppermint Patty calls him that 'Chuck' name. And Marcie, she calls Charlie Brown 'Charles'! She does, she does! So he's Charles and you's Charles too!" Loki finishes this triumphantly, bouncing excitedly and staring at Charles with wildly excited eyes and a ridiculously wide grin. As an afterthought, Loki adds "Marcie calls Peppermint Patty 'sir', like Jarvis."

"I'm sorry, but I'm still not Charlie Brown." Charles smiles apologetically.

"So you don't have Snoopy?" Loki asks disappointedly. "My Tony calls me Snoopy, 'n Bambi. Hey, Jarvis saids that the guy who drew Snoopy 'n the others was named Charles, too! Charles M. Schultz! Are you him?" Loki cocks his head to the side and answers his own question. "No. Jarvis said he's deads, so you can't be him."

"You're right, I'm not that Charles, either. My full name is Charles Xavier, but I'm also known as Professor X."

"'Fessor X. That's easy! Easier than whatever you just said your surname is... Zay-ver...? That's hard, but not as hard as Dr. Car-l-il... Car-something. Dr. C... I like 'Fessor X more. Tony saids you're a pr'fessor before now, even, like he already knows you. You teach, right?"

"Right. I am a professor, and I teach people with special powers. Like you." Charles smiles and Loki looks up in surprise. His hand brushes against Charles' leg when he does so. Charles doesn't need to be physically in contact with someone to use his telepathy, but being in contact always amplifies it.

Loki's eyes widen. Charles can tell Loki's thoughts are currently jumbled and confused, flitting around like a hummingbird as he tries to make sense of what he apparently feels in Charles'
presence. "Feel more now, than before. I feel you. But not like Tony's arc reactor. Different somehow, I dunno." Loki looks annoyed about not knowing.

"Did you mean you can feel my presence more?" Charles asks. Loki doesn't respond, instead tilting his head with a confused expression and continuing to stare at him.

This staring goes on for almost a minute, and then Loki shakes his head, clearing his thoughts. "Maaaay-be...?" Loki replies eventually, and it sounds more like a question. "Did you bring gifts? Like for Tony, for letting you here? Do you do that here? It's polite, right? I know you give presents. Tony gave me Simba and my other toys as presents, and my horse mask. And Bruce gots me surfboards, like Stitch's. But why would I feel presents?"

"Presence and presents do sound the same, don't they?" Bruce chuckles. "Presence is the act of being somewhere. What he meant is if you can feel that he's here."

"Feel him, I think?" Loki nods slightly, looking somewhat unsure of how to describe it. "I cans... can see you... in my head? I thinks?"

Loki suddenly starts to look apprehensive at this prospect and he pulls his hand away. The amplified feelings drop, but it almost seems like Loki somehow pushed Charles' mind away.

"You can feel him?" Tony has clearly been pondering this the whole conversation, and Charles is intrigued too. Loki must have some sort of mental powers to feel his presence, after all. Tony's next question is directed at Charles. "Wait, are you in his head?"

"No. I haven't actually gone in. This is more of an amplified connection." Charles suspects that's what Loki feels, but lacks a way to describe it.

"Are you a magic man?" Loki asks, before clamping a hand over his mouth.

"I am a mutant, although in other times, people believed our powers to be magic." Charles answers.

"Mutant?" Loki asks.

"We are an advanced form of humans, and we all have special powers." Charles explains. He could go into a long description about mutants and genetics, and how it's not really magic, but there seems to be little point.

"So you're not magic?" Loki asks, frowning. Charles sighs. He knows how much it helps to know there are others like you- he'd thought so when he first met Raven as a child, and that's the whole point of his school for mutants- but truthfully, Loki isn't entirely like them. Although Raven is also blue and can change her appearance and disguise herself as other people, like Loki apparently can.

"You might not be, either." Tony mutters. "There's got to be science behind your magic. Like those energy balls you fired out are like my repulsors." Jarvis had mentioned that, Charles thinks.

"Dr. Carlisle was your previous therapist, correct?" Charles asks.

"She said she'd help with the bad dreams and flashbacks, but she just got mads at Tony when he talked, and always wanted him to leave. Bruce too. She didn't seem to like him much, or Hulk-y, and they're family, so that's not a'lowed. Same with my Tony."

Loki crosses his arms firmly. "You don't hates them, do you? 'Cause if you do I don't wanna talk to you!"
"No, I don't hate them."

"And you won't ask 'em to leaves me?" Loki challenges.

"Not unless you want them to leave." Charles replies, and Loki relaxes after scrutinizing him to see if he's telling the truth.

"You can stay." Loki says after a bit, nodding. Tony smirks.

"I'm glad." Charles says.

"Are you gonna be like Dr. C and make me talks about Asgard and Ass-guard? Tony calls it Ass-guard 'cause he says they're asses for treating me like they did. He's really nice!" Charles is pretty sure the media would disagree with that statement. "Are you gonna make me talk 'bout nightmares and flashbacks and stuff? Are you gonna make 'em go 'way?"

"Hopefully I can help you have nightmares and flashbacks less frequently and at a lower intensity, until you have them rarely, if at all. There's no guarantee, though. And we might talk about your memories, and I also might actually look at them in the future. But today, I want you to meet someone." Charles says.

"Like the healing Wolve-rine man?" Loki asks, still sounding somewhat skeptical.

Charles nods. "I also know someone who can shoot lasers out of his eyes, who goes by Cyclops."

"That's awesome." Tony remarks. "Jarvis, remind me, I need to make my next suit shoot lasers out of the eyes."

"Noted, sir, although I'm afraid I don't see the purpose of that, given you already have lasers in the wrists, as well as repulsors and missiles."

Loki laughs. "Tony shoots stars and I did too."

"They're repulsors, not stars." Tony sighs, sounding like this is something he's said countless times already.

"I also know some people who are blue, and one of them can teleport." Charles says. This is the main point of sharing information on mutants, and it's leading up to Kurt coming down.

Loki stares at him for a bit and then starts pacing. "No, no, you're not gonna gets to laugh at me. Won't fall for it this time, nope nope nope! No tricks!"

"I'm not trying to trick you." Charles says gently, trying to send calming waves out to Loki, but surprisingly it doesn't work at the moment.

Loki starts to get more agitated, pacing even faster and muttering no continuously, eventually crawling into the tent but then writhing around on the ground to release energy.

Tony crouches by the tent and says, surprisingly softly compared to the Tony Stark that Charles has seen on TV, "Loki, it's all right. He's the last person to judge about that stuff, and the other guy really won't care. He's like you." When Loki doesn't seem to even hear them, Tony sighs and starts singing softly. "If you find the field where the horses roam, and you need a place to call your home..."

Loki doesn't seem to be calming down as Tony keeps singing, and Bruce joins in. "The moon and
the stars will give you light. To sleep in the grass in peace tonight." There's a second verse, something about a silver stallion and a herd of horses galloping.

Suddenly, Charles' surroundings change entirely.

The room containing Loki, Tony and Bruce is gone. Looking around, Charles seems to be in some sort of courtyard, or a garden. It's quite beautiful, and it almost seems as if it's not from this world, and through an archway leading inside, he can see a hall similar to the one that had flashed by his mind earlier.

He sees a child that looks to be around nine-years-old, possibly younger, with the same pale skin, jet-black hair and vibrant green eyes as Loki. It must be Loki as a child, although that appearance is apparently all fake since Loki really has blue skin. Which means this courtyard is probably Asgard.

Charles assumes this is a memory, but he hadn't tried to enter Loki's mind or his memories—actually, he'd been specifically avoiding doing either of the things. After all, calming him hadn't worked at the moment, and the first time to enter Loki’s mind shouldn't be when he's already panicked. That probably wouldn't end well.

This is very bizarre. He's almost never pulled into memories like this. Perhaps he's not being pulled in at all. It's more like Loki is projecting the memory outwards for Charles to pick up with his telepathic powers. Regardless, this almost never happens. Perhaps Loki has some mental powers himself?

Charles turns his attention back to what he's assuming is the younger Loki.

This Loki's eyes aren't as unfocused, but he also looks very wary, and Loki's eyes become slightly more less glassy when he's anxiously watching someone, Charles has noticed.

There's another boy, a taller one in simple clothes. "Between you and me, I like your magic." The taller boy whispers conspiratorially. "You know, I wish I could do that stuff."

Charles watches the older boy talk Loki into performing some magic, suggesting he make another one of himself, and even offer to be friends with him.

The young Loki (who sounds slightly different, and it's not just because his voice is higher-pitched) seems to be in shock at these offers, but quite pleased with them nonetheless. Charles frowns, as something is very off about this scene.

"The idiot fell for it!" Someone shouts triumphantly, and three other boys emerge. Loki visibly flinches at the sight of them. Charles is almost certain he knows where this is going, and he doesn't like it at all.

He watches Little Loki ask where Thor is—apparently, he's not one of the three children. The children start to taunt Loki, revealing that the boy had only pretended to befriend him. They gleefully exclaim that they knew Loki would fall for it because, according to them, he's an idiot.

Even though Charles knows children can be cruel to those who are different (many of his students have experienced that firsthand), it still never ceases to anger him. The boy who'd tried to convince Loki to use magic quickly starts revealing his true metaphorical colors and tormenting Loki along with the three boys who had been hiding.

Apparently, they four boys had planned this trick on Loki. They're playing on Loki's obvious desire to be accepted, viciously and cruelly using that desire to torment him. Loki looks young enough and is clearly so starved for affection that he hadn't seemed to find anything suspicious about the
first boy's friendly behavior.

Although it's a memory, Charles starts telling the boys off for their behavior, as well as trying to reassure the young Loki that they're wrong.

His anger only increases when Loki seems unable to hold back the tears, despite a valiant effort at first, and then the children start to punch and kick the smaller boy, telling him that monsters don't deserve friends. Somehow, Charles can practically feel the blows land on his own body, even though he's only observing and he's not even in Loki's mind.

Charles slumps back in his wheelchair, breathing heavily. As suddenly as he had ended up in the memory, he's suddenly expelled out of it, pushed out by an invisible force. For a bit, Charles just sits there, gasping. He hadn't expected that to happen at all.

Someone presses a glass of water into his hands, and he nods his thanks to Bruce, who is the one who did it.

"What happened?" The doctor asks quietly. Charles glances at the tent, where Loki is rocking back and forth, being hugged by Tony and hugging Simba very tightly. His face is screwed up tightly, but he doesn't look completely panicked. Maybe Charles' telepathic words had helped?

Feeling guilty for accidentally causing a flashback, Charles reaches out with his mind to try to calm him down even more. It works, this time. Loki visibly relaxes as Charles telepathically tries to soothe him, and a small smile actually graces Loki's lips.

"What the hell was that?" Tony echoes Bruce's question from the tent.

Charles says, "I unconsciously witnessed his flashback. It was almost as if I was having it, too, and I even felt some of it."

"I heard you." Loki says quietly. "You were there. You sounded like Tony, got mad at 'em."

"What, so you went in his head to see what he was going through?" Tony demands, looking at him warily. Glancing at Loki, he adds "It seems you helped, though. You stopped shaking partway through, Rudolph."

"No. I did not enter his head. It seems that the memory was thrust outwards towards me, but regardless, I'm sorry, Loki. I did not mean to invade your privacy without your permission."

"But it wasn't as bad with you there!" Loki says.

"I'm glad to hear that," Charles says truthfully. "Loki, what those boys told you and did to you was very wrong." Charles says gently, wanting to make that clear. "You are not stupid, you are not a monster, and you do deserve friends." Tony and Bruce echo their agreement, and Charles has a feeling that they've told Loki that a million times. Still, what Charles witnessed was only one incident out of, most likely, countless such occurrences.

"They'd gets in trouble if they were here." Loki says.

"Wait, so if you didn't go into his head, how'd he hear you?" Tony asks. "I didn't hear you say anything."

"I broadcasted my thoughts telepathically to Loki." Charles answers. "Out of curiosity, and you don't have to answer if you don't feel comfortable, have you ever made a memory seem real to others before?" It could just be because he's telepathic that he'd picked up on it, but Jarvis had said
that Loki can make illusions.

For a bit, Loki doesn't say anything as Tony rubs slow circles over his shoulders. Charles gives him some privacy, still not opting to go into his mind yet. Loki's hugging Simba slightly tighter at the question. "Gaston's knife, when he stabbed Hulk-y." He answers softly. Tony's eyes widen as he clearly remembers the incident.

"Loki, I am not trying to trick you like those boys. I would never play a cruel prank on you like that, and I know you have no reason to trust me, but I do know people somewhat like you. In fact, one of them is here to meet you right now."

"Really?" Loki asks, sounding somewhat skeptical.

"Yeah. I met him. He's blue." Tony says flippantly, and Loki looks at him in surprise. "Hey, Jarvis, send Kurt down, will you?"

Still huddled in the tent, Loki's not entirely sure what to think. This Charles guy, or 'Fessor X, seems fairly nice, even if he isn't Charlie Brown. Although Loki still can't think of him as Charles without thinking of Charlie Brown, so 'Fessor X is easier.

'Fessor X is certainly different. There's that thing where Loki can somehow feel his presence, as the man said. It's probably because of his magic, but 'Fessor X said he wasn't magical, but then he'd said people considered it magic once, which is really confusing.

And somehow, he'd heard the man when he was having a flashback, although apparently he hadn't been in his head. Still, he'd really helped with the flashback, although the flashback had still been unpleasant overall, like always.

Loki wonders if he would have felt if someone was in his head. Has anyone ever been in his head before? He doesn't think so, unless you count Sleipnir, Fenrir, Hel and Jormungand.

They said his mind was broken, though, and how else would they know? But then again, they'd told him all Jotuns are mindless savages, and that's not true. Elsa's certainly not, and Frozone isn't either, although Loki's not entirely sure if he's a Jotun.

He's not entirely sure if 'Fessor X is being truthful about a blue guy, or even if Tony is. After all, he's been the butt of jokes before, like that time with the servant that he'd just had a flashback about. Tony's never really lied to him, but he does seem to joke a lot. Tony wouldn't play mean tricks on him like this, though, and 'Fessor X said he wouldn't either.

It's just he's never met someone like him, so it really seems too good to be true (although his whole life here on Midgard still almost seems too good to be true. But it's not a dream and Tony's family and he can't be faking about that).

The elevator doors open, and apparently what 'Fessor X said isn't too good to be true, either. There really is a blue man there.

Memories of nightmares involving Frost Giants dragging him off to Jotunheim (he'd heard all the same stories as other children in Asgard about the Evil Frost Giants, after all) flash through his head. Apparently, he actually had gone to Jotunheim, only he'd been unconscious and Heimdall had gotten him out.

Everyone in Asgard says Jotuns are monsters, but Elsa's not a monster. And this guy doesn't look evil, either, even if he does have blue skin. Tony hasn't let Thor hurt him, so he wouldn't let this
"You're real? I thought I was the only Jotun here?" Loki asks him from the tent, although once he says that, he starts to wonder if this man is actually a Jotun. "Hey, you gots a tail! I wish I had a tail. Tony said I could prob'ly grow a lion tail if I wanted to." He grins at the thought, but realizes this man can't be a Jotun if he has a tail, can he? Besides, Frost Giants are really big (why else would they be called giants?) and Loki is apparently much smaller than almost all of them and this guy's around the same size as him. Plus Loki's Jotun eyes are red while this guy's are yellow, but Loki's not entirely sure whether all Jotuns have red eyes or not.

"I'm not a Jotun." The man answers, and introduces himself as Kurt.

"Oh, you're one of them!" Loki says. "You're like the wheelchair guy!" Loki can't remember the name of that guy in the movie Tony had shown him, or at least the part he'd watched before hiding under the table, but this guy looks like those blue people. They had tails, too.

Maybe Kurt had come out of the screen? That would be really cool! Then that means anyone could come out of the screen, and maybe he could meet everyone for real, instead of just having toys of them. He'd really like to meet Elsa, and Rapunzel, and Quasimodo and Stitch and, well, everyone. Well, not the bad guys like Hans and Gaston.

"Who's them?" Kurt asks.

"The guy. He had a wheelchair like 'Fessor X, and he hads a blue body that he used, sometimes. A bigger blue body, and it was in a tank first, so it wasn't 'xactly his body, but then it was. My Tony says he liked that body even more 'n his normal one, and he says they didn't beat him when they were annoyed at him. He says beating him for being blue would be wrong, so they didn't."

"Oh. Are you talking about Avatar, Snoopy?" Loki nods. Tony smirks. "I made the same comparison. And you're right about it being wrong to beat him."

Loki slowly crawls out from the tent.

"I don't have another body." The blue man says. "I can occasionally look like a human, using holograms, but this is my real body."

"You choose to look like that?" Loki asks in surprise. The idea is so strange. Even when Elsa liked her ice magic, she hadn't been blue.

"Yes, and there were people who hated me for it. There still are." Kurt says. Loki knows all too well what that's like, although nobody here seems to hate him for it. "But I don't hate them. I pity them. Most people will never know anything beyond what they see with their own two eyes." Kurt adds.

"My Tony says blue bodies aren't bad, and I think he might be right 'bout that. 'Cause Stitch is blue and he's really cute and awesome, see?"

Loki turns around to show off his Stitch backpack. "Genie's blue too, and he can look like other people and do magic... an' ... Cookie Monster is blue, I think. Claire says he's not a bad monster, though, and she said she wanted to be blue too. Rhody's gots a blue Man of Iron suit, kinda like Steve's suit." As an afterthought, he adds. "Linus' blanket 's blue and he really loves it."

"Kurt isn't the only blue mutant. 'Fessor X says. "There's a man, known as Beast, who-"

"Beast isn't blue!" Loki interrupts. "He's brown. I saw him on the screen! He lives with Belle and
Mrs. Potts and Chip, and they all became human again!... Well, Belle was already human. There'd been a whole song back when all the castle staff were objects, where they'd sung about how much they wanted to be human again.

"He's not that Beast." 'Fessor X continues. "He's a doctor, and sometimes he's not blue and sometimes he is."

"Really?" Loki asks. Isn't Bruce a doctor too? And Bruce changes colors. 'Fessor X nods, and he hadn't lied about Kurt, so he's probably not lying about this man either.

"There's also a mutant who's blue and can make herself look like anybody." The man adds.

Loki holds out his hand and Stitch spits out Elsa. "Her real body's blue too. She's a Jotun, and she's got ice magic. They'd hate her there like they hated me. They saids all Jotuns are bad and ugly, but they lied 'cause Elsa's good! Hans is bad, not Elsa! So they lied 'bout Jotuns, 'cause they were racist and that's bad!"

They lied about magic, too. They never said Odin had magic, and magic like healing magic definitely isn't bad. Loki makes Elsa's skin change and her eyes become red. "Not sure if Frozone's a Jotun, but he has ice magic too."

"You are a Jotun, too." Kurt says it like he already knows, and Loki slowly nods, holding Simba and Elsa tightly. There's no point denying it if he knows, and besides, Kurt's blue too.

Loki grabs the action figure of himself and looks between his Loki toy and the blue man. Everyone in Asgard would have looked at Kurt in disgust, like they'd looked at him. But this isn't Ass-Guard, he thinks with a snicker.

He's shown his real body before here on Midgard, around Tony and the others. His body had even become blue when he'd saved Tony from drowning, and they always say they don't hate him when he's blue. Plus, this Kurt guy's blue, and they don't seem to hate him at all.

Slowly, Loki turns his Loki toy blue, and then lets his Jotun form show. Only, instead of like that one time he'd let it show in front of Hulk before turning green himself, he stays in his Jotun form.

"Whoa, you went blue?" Tony asks, grinning. "I'm proud of you, Snoopy."

Loki smiles slightly at the praise, flicking his blue fingers, and a couple snowflakes shoot from them.

He still doesn't like his real form, but Tony seems to for some reason.

"You know snakes shed their skins and grow new ones? I asked Jormungand if he could teach me hows to shed my blue skin once, but he saids I wouldn't have skin, nope nope nope. Just that my insides would show and it would be real gross and I'd die with no skin, so I can't sheds it 'cause I'm not a snake. I can look like Ass-Guardians, but they still knew I'm really like this." Loki holds up his blue hands looking between his own skin and Kurt's. Kurt has lines all over his skin, too.

"Bruce says they're not monster lines." Loki points at the lines on Kurt. "Like Esmeralda says Quasimodo's weren't."

"Actually, I gave these to myself," Kurt says, gesturing to his body. "One for every sin." Loki has no clue what that last part means, or how he could give lines like that to himself. Bruce looks somewhat unhappy to hear that, though.
"Hey, you gots pointed ears! Like Peter Pan and Tinker Bell!" Loki laughs. He's never met someone with pointed ears before. He wonders if he could make his own ears pointed, and he fingers them, trying to pinch them into a point. before he starts to wonder if he could grow a tail, like a lion. He tries to turn around to look at his butt, imagining a nice, slender tail growing out, like Simba's. Only it would look kind of weird to have a yellow tail on a blue body, so maybe the tail should be blue too?

"I have something else in common with you." Kurt adds, before Loki can manage to grow a tail or change his ears. Suddenly there's a funny sound, like "bamf," and blue-black smoke appears. On the other end of the room is another cloud of smoke, and Kurt emerges from that.

Loki stares and Kurt grins at him.

"You teleported! Like Esmeralda! She had smoke when she dids it to, and she thought it was real funny when she teleported away from the guards. Like a big jest." Stitch helpfully spits out his Esmeralda figurine, and Loki holds her up for Kurt to see.

"It can be fun." Kurt grins and teleports with another "bamf," appearing sitting on the sofa. "And it's very convenient."

"They wouldn'ta liked that there, nope nope nope! Or you, sorry. Didn't like it when I did magics, and they really didn't like me! But Odin can do magic too. Thor said so, saids Allfather Odin and Lady Frigga are why I'm not blue. Odin, he never, ever said he could do it! Just that it's bad an' only freaks an' cowards an' argr's do it, but..." Loki looks down, fiddling with Simba's tail. Tony's been telling him this stuff since they first met. "I think he lied, 'cause he can do it so then he'd be those, but he's nots and my Tony says I'm not either."

"He did lie." Tony says, looking immensely pleased to hear him say that.

They hated it when he lied, though, although sometimes he'd managed to get out of trouble when he lied. And then there was the one time Odin had-

Loki hastily keeps talking, trying to think of anything but that.

"I think they lied to me, when they said all magic's bad. 'Cause Rapunzel heals people like I do, and that's really goods! And, an' Violet can make force fields, and that's not cowardly 'cause she saved her family, she did! And Genie, he turned into people and made other hims and stuff like me, and you can teleport!" He looks at Kurt.

"It's not magic. I'm a mutant." Kurt says. There's that word again, and mutants sound basically like magic people, although they claim it's slightly different. Does that mean they don't like magic? But they haven't said anything bad about it, and they'd even said that

"Do you ever teleport acc'dently? To someplace you don't want?" Loki asks.

"When my powers first started emerging, yes. But I mostly only teleport to where I can see."

Loki doesn't think that's exactly the case with him. He'd teleported to the theater in the tower when he'd been dreaming, although he had been dreaming about it. And the rafters looked the same, but they weren't actually the same rafters, so does that really count?

"Wish I could do it real easy like you." Loki mutters. Then, he wouldn't even have to worry about ending up somewhere bad, because he could just teleport right back to Tony.

"You just imagine where you want to go, and at least for me, it helps if that place is in my sight."
Here." Kurt holds out an arm, and Loki stares at him until he says "Hold onto my arm."

When Loki does, while gripping Simba very tightly with his other arm, since Tony knows exactly where Simba's armor is at all times, Kurt remarks. "Wow. You have cold skin." But he doesn't sound like he hates it.

"You can do side-along apparition?" Tony asks. "That's awesome! Hey can you bring me along too?"

"I'm able to teleport other people, but it usually makes non-teleporters and especially ordinary humans instead of mutants feel rather ill." Kurt says.

"Eh, what the heck." Tony waves a hand, and grabs onto Kurt's other arm. "Brucey, I am about to make an amazing scientific discovery."

"I warned you. Ready?" Kurt asks. There's that *bamf* sound again and Loki catches a glimpse of something that's not the therapy room, before they're suddenly on the other side of the therapy room.

Tony indeed looks like he's trying not to throw up as he staggers forward a couple steps to collapse on the sofa. Although he looks slightly ill, his eyes are wide with wonder. "Was that another dimension we went through?!" Tony launches into some sort of talk that Loki doesn't understand at all, but which Bruce joins in with much enthusiasm. It's probably science stuff.

"Normally I teleport when I'm flying." Loki mumbles. Or when he's in the air, he thinks, but with Kurt he'd just done it on the ground. "And I can't get it to work when I wants."

Kurt nods towards the tent. "Imagine disappearing and re-appearing over there."

Loki does, and he feels something, but he doesn't actually go anywhere.

Kurt teleports them both around some more, and Loki starts a game with Bruce where Bruce has to try to catch them. It's really funny, because whenever Bruce gets close, Kurt just teleports them to the other side of the room. He's making it into a huge jest, like Esmeralda had, and Loki can't stop laughing.

Eventually, Loki's ready to go behind the couch when Bruce is approaching them, and suddenly he's there. But Kurt's still on the other side of the room.

"I dids it!" Loki says excitedly to Tony, who's sitting on the couch right in front of him. He vaults over the back of the couch, landing next to Tony with a laugh.

He's going to have to practice, though, until he can do it every time.
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

Tony gets an idea from the teleporting he'd just witnessed/experienced.

Some more lessons from Disney, and Tony accidentally causes a really bad flashback.

Also, some Bruce and Loki bonding when Tony's out of the tower.

Chapter Notes

Happy Valentines Day everyone. Although this is just another day for me, and I'm fine being single :-)

After Kurt and Charles left in the jet they'd come in (Loki had watched their takeoff with his face practically pressed the penthouse's glass wall), Tony had immediately made a cup of coffee to try to curtail the exhaustion from side-along apparition with Kurt. Loki had offered to make it, but Tony hadn't wanted to worry about some strange ingredient being added as a prank.

That had been about twenty minutes ago. Right now, Tony's kicked back his favorite sofa in the penthouse living room, StarkPad in hand and his mug on circular glass coffee table in front of him. The table they'd played Jenga on, the day Loki met Bruce, although Tony has no clue why that popped in his head.

Loki, surprisingly, is still in his Jotun form, although he's not looking at his feet- the only visible blue parts, aside from his own face- so perhaps he doesn't notice he's still blue. He'd summoned the Iron Man gloves onto his hands not long after revealing his Jotun form, so the only parts of the suit missing are the boots and helmet.

He's sprawled on the floor with his Frozen toys out. His Elsa doll is blue-skinned with red eyes, and Loki's Loki action figure is in Jotun form. Just like the real Loki currently is. The Olaf plush he'd had on the Helicarrier, the Anna doll, and the Kristoff and Sven figurines are in one of the shoeboxes Loki had insisted on keeping from their footwear excursion a while back. He sends the box careening off a shelf. It falls to the ground slower and more gently than physics would dictate, almost as if it's a sled traveling down an invisible hill, stopping where Jotun Elsa and Loki are.

Tony grins and turns back to the data collected from the therapy session.

That therapy session was a huge success, as far as Tony's concerned. Heck, ten minutes from that session had been better than the three sessions with Dr. Carlisle, who despite apparently being successful with other patients, from what Jarvis found anyways, really hadn't worked for Loki at all. And she'd seemed to have something against Tony.

Whatever Charles had done when Loki was having a flashback had really seemed to help, although they hadn't done anything else with Loki's mind today.
Tony still doesn't know if something happened to him, if his mind's somehow different than when he was a child, like that child illusion seemed to indicate.

Kurt had been an unexpected but very welcome benefit. Another unexpected but welcome surprise was that Loki had actually intentionally revealed his Jotun form with Kurt there, and hadn't quickly changed it like that one time he briefly changed for Hulk before watching Beauty and the Beast. Loki's still blue, but he might no know, himself, since he can't see his own face and the armor covers up his whole body, except his feet.

The little teleporting game Kurt and Loki had played went way better than Tony thought it would. Admittedly, Loki still seems to have trouble controlling his teleportation, but he'd successfully done it once. The effort doesn't seem to have drained Loki's magic or seemingly endless energy.

Lucky. Tony's still tired from his own side-along apparition with Kurt, although thankfully the nausea's gone now. He'd only gone once and he'd just been along for the ride, although he wishes he could do it himself. He grins. He'd teleported, something he hasn't been able to make his suits do yet. Theoretically, it makes sense that they'd go to an alternate dimension, as he's pretty sure he'd done with Kurt. He wonders if Loki does the same when he teleports.

Tony sips some his as he looks over the data that Jarvis' sensors had picked up in the therapy room. There had been a lot more teleporting today than any other day, and it had given Tony a lot of data. Even though he still doesn't fully understand the energy associated with Loki's powers (and Tony hates not understanding something), he's making progress.

While the energy sometimes seems to screw with Jarvis' sensors, Tony, Jarvis and Bruce are attempting to piece together the non-screwy bits to get the full picture of the electromagnetic waves from the teleportation in the therapy room. Unfortunately, that room doesn't have all the bells and whistles that the lab has. But if Loki starts feeling more comfortable with teleporting, he might be able to get a ton of great data.

He's really curious about teleporting in general, but if he learns enough about it, he could figure out a way to block it and thus have a way to incapacitate Victor Von Doom!

Of course, once he manages to build something to stop teleportation (because it is when, not if- he's going to do it. He's Tony freaking Stark), they're going to have to actually lure Doom out to catch him, since the megalomaniac normally hides out in his nation of Latveria and just sends his Doom-bots to cause havoc, the coward. Or, Tony supposes, they could go to Latveria to get him.

But really, doesn't Doom have anything better to do with his time?

Tony's mind is racing. Once he manages to block teleportation, maybe he can figure out how to make his suits teleport themselves, if he studies Kurt and Loki enough. While flying is amazing and probably a lot more fun than teleporting, the long flights halfway around the world sort of lose their fun after a while. Teleporting would be epically awesome in general, but especially in those instances.

Or, if he can't get his suits to teleport on their own, maybe Loki could teleport him places once he learns to control it.

Tony as been talking to Bruce about all of this, rambling almost nonstop for the past ten minutes. At least Tony's Science Bro doesn't complain about science talk like some other Avengers. Cough, cough, Clint. Steve at least pretends to listen while probably zoning out. Natasha had once spent one of Tony's monologues cleaning out her (rather bloodied) guns and knives, which had been ridiculously creepy.
Bruce seems interested in teleportation, since he's just as curious as Tony, though not quite as excited. Then again, it's not like Bruce has a suit he might be able to make teleport.

"Who's Doctor Doom?" Loki asks out of the blue, interrupting Tony's spiel about various electromagnetic shields.

Tony hadn't thought he'd been listening, and he wonders just how much Loki's actually been listening to over the time he's been here. "Is he a doctor like Bruce? Dr. Drakken's a doctor, 'xcept I don't think he fixes people?" He sounds slightly confused about this. "And Doom doesn't sound good, 'cause being doomed's bad. You don't wanna be doomed, or meet doom."

"Uh, yeah, he's not Bruce's kind of doctor." Tony answers, and Bruce mutters that he's a physicist too, and it's really that kind of doctor. He's technically not a medical doctor, but he's as good as one in Tony's opinion. Less annoying than real doctors, even if he'd insisted Tony stay off his leg when it was broken.

"Doom can tel'port?" Apparently, Loki had been listening in on the whole conversation when fiddling with his toys.

"Yeah, he can. Not that teleporting's bad!" Tony adds the second part immediately, in case Loki gets the wrong message. But he seems to be doing fairly well with accepting that powers can be good and bad. Kurt is certainly a positive example for teleportation.

"And, well, Doom's a villain we fight a lot- or, more specifically, we fight Doom-bots. Those are like his minions." At least he doesn't have to worry about Loki thinking of yellow, goggle-wearing, overall-clad creatures when he uses the word minion, since Loki hasn't seen Despicable Me (Thor has, though).

"You've seen me fighting those robots on TV as Iron Man, with the rest of the Avengers, right?" Tony goes on. Loki nods, recognition flaring in his eyes. There's a picture that Loki had drawn of Iron Man fighting what are apparently Doom-bots on the fridge (though they don't really look like actual Doom-bots).

"Well, those robots he sends out are Doom-bots, since Doom never shows his face. But anyways, Doom's a bad guy who can teleport, and if I can build something to stop him from teleporting, that would allow us to finally catch him. But that doesn't mean I dislike teleporting or anything."

"Isn't that like... magic?" Loki asks hesitantly. "Stopping it? You saids you're gonna make like a force field. Like me and Violet?"

"I was thinking of making some sort of field to stop it, but I'm not sure it's a force field. And I like to think it's science, but we would've called it magic not long ago. And you, my friend, can help a lot." Tony points at Loki, and Loki looks surprised but pleased. "You see, the more I know about teleporting, the more I'll have to work with to stop Dr. Doom. He doesn't exactly give me many chances to scan him, since he always hides behind his stupid robots or simply teleports away if we get too close the few times he actually shows up. So if you teleport, you'll help me figure out how to stop the bad guy."

"I help?" Loki asks uncertainly. "By tel'porting?" Tony nods again, grinning at him.

"Can you make it so I don't teleport in my sleeps?" Loki asks hopefully, before saying quietly. "Don't wanna wake up somewhere different. It's scary, it is, 'specially when I don't mean to go anywhere. Don't wanna go to the Eyepatch Man Fury's petri dish ever again, never!"
"You can't go in the 'petri dish' again. I destroyed it." Tony says, glancing at Bruce, who smiles a bit, although it looks a little forced. Tony wonders whether his Science Bro thinks it had been a necessary evil. Which would be sad, if he thought he deserved a cage. "Nobody here deserves to be caged, and Hulk that includes you. Got it?" Too bad he can't tell if Hulk's actually listening in Bruce's head, or however that works.

Bruce and Loki nod slightly, and Loki hugs Simba tighter. (Since he has the Iron Man gloves on, Simba's not icing over from contact with his Jotun skin. Simba's suit had iced a tad when Loki transformed, before Loki had the gloves on, but it's thawed by now). "I knows I got Simba so you know where 'm at always and can find me, but I don't wanna go at all! But I wanna come back fast if I do!"

Tony rounds on the still-blue god, pointing a finger at him. "Okay Lokes, if you want, once this thing to stop dear old Doom works, I'll make some version of it to stop you from teleporting accidentally. Probably it'll be something that'll prevent you from teleporting unless you choose to turn it off." He pauses and adds. "Although I still say teleporting's awesome. Are you gonna try to do it on purpose more now? Remember, it'll help me figure out how to trap Doom."

"Wish I coulda got outta the petri dish! I tried to teleport backs. I did, really." Loki grabs the still-blue Loki toy and Toy Stark and puts the Loki toy under the circular glass coffee table that Tony's mug is on.

Suddenly, the table has glass around the sides, so it looks a lot like the Hulk cage. Loki sits there, rocking back and forth anxiously, clutching Toy Stark in one fist and hugging Simba with his other arm. "Didn't work, couldn't do it, nope nope nope!"

"You sent an illusion to me. And Hel, and you kinda told us where you were." Tony reminds him, but Loki just gives him an unimpressed look that clearly says Yeah, but that wasn't ME! I didn't get out.

Loki stares at the trapped toy of himself some more and suddenly the Loki toy joins Toy Stark in Loki's armored hands, simply teleporting there by itself. A mixture of emotions plays across Loki's face - worry, happiness, frustration. He's probably frustrated that hadn't happened in real life, that he hadn't simply popped back to Tony.

"I wish it woulda listened in Ass-Guard, 'cause I could've made the guards look dumb likes Esmeralda did when she teleported away. Aladdin made guards look dumb too. And Elast'girl Helen, and Vi and Dash too, they kicked Syndrome's guard's butts. Wish I could do that, 'cause then they couldn't hit me if they couldn't gets me or beat me, if I could kick their butts!" Loki flaps his hands, suddenly going from smiling to frowning.

"Xcept it didn't, I couldn't! Not good 'nough there neither!" Loki smacks his thigh and paces, Simba dangling by a back leg in Loki's left hand. "When I tried'ta run away, the guards, warriors was faster, an', and when I did teleport on accident I felt weirds and then they got me. An' I tried to tel-eport on purpose, couple times, but it didn't works, nope nope nope!"

His pacing quickens. "And they saw I tried somehow and they got real mad an' then I was in deep trouble. And when I hit back..."

"Well, they shouldn't have hurt you for trying to keep yourself safe. Maybe you can learn how to really teleport now, and then if anyone tries to hurt you, you can teleport away and make them look like an idiot. Like Esmeralda." Tony suggests, knowing at one point this suggestion would have completely freaked Loki out, but he'd just said he wished he could do it. Thankfully, Loki laughs, as if he's imagining making guards look like morons.
Tony adds that he should be able to teleport in the future, if he wants to (which it seems he does) and practices teleporting. He clearly needs practice, though. He'd only successfully teleported once without Kurt going with him- or, rather, bringing him along for the ride.

Loki nods, as if he'd actually been thinking about practicing teleporting anyways. Maybe Tony's talk about Doom had helped? "You must learn to control it. Fear will be your enemy." He quotes the troll leader from *Frozen.*

Loki stares at the sofa and Tony wonders if he's zoned out until he leaps towards it. He flickers, vanishes, and reappears almost in the blink of an eye. He'd only teleported a foot or two at most, as if the middle of the jump had simply been missing. It had been like watching a video where someone had cut a few frames, Tony thinks. Loki stumbles when he lands and collapses on the sofa (thankfully it remains standing).

"Nice to see you trying." Tony says, grinning. Loki bemoans that Kurt makes it seem so easy, and then stares as Tony bemoans not being able to teleport at all. Seriously, Loki's got the better deal in that regard. "Hey, while we're on the subject of teleporting, what's it like for you to teleport? Do you go to another dimension or something?" Tony asks. "Kurt and I did, I think, when I went with him."

Loki just sends Tony a confused look and looks at Simba. "Do we?" Obviously, the lion doesn't answer. Tony had offered to fix Simba up with Artificial Intelligence once, but Loki doesn't seem to care that Simba only says a handful of prerecorded phrases.

"Kurt said teleporting's fun, and it kinda is with him." Loki grins, jumping twice, before he pauses and levels a rather accusing look at Tony. "Hey, you never saids you knewed 'nother blue guy before, nope nope nope." Loki shakes his head, long hair flying out. "Or a bad teleporting man. How come you didn't say?"

"I actually didn't know Kurt before." Tony replies, after Bruce tells Loki that *knew* doesn't have the usual *-ed* ending for past tense. "Actually, I didn't know Charles existed until about a week ago, and I only found out about Kurt when he showed up on the balcony with Charles."

Tony doesn't mention that the reason he never told Loki about Doom was because he worried Loki would freak out if Tony mentioned he's fought a villain who could teleport, and take it as evidence that teleporting's bad.

"I like Kurt!" Loki nods enthusiastically, bouncing up and down before asking in a worried tone "D'you think he likes me?"

"What do you think?" Tony's actually not being sarcastic right now, whereas ninety-nine percent of the time he asks that question, he is.

"Yes?" Loki answers hesitantly. "He's nice, anyways. Like you guys and Pepper an' Tasha and Clint and Jarvis! So's 'Fessor X."

"When you said Charles helped with your flashback, what exactly happened?" Bruce asks quietly.

"I heard him. I heard Volstagg 'n Fandral 'n Hogun ands that servant, but I heard 'Fessor X too and he tolds them they were wrong, he did! Just like you guys!"

Tony knows what it's like to be caught in a flashback, so caught in memories that you don't hear people around you reminding you you're safe. It had probably helped a lot to hear someone telling him that in the memory. In some ways, Tony wishes that could happen when he has a flashback,
but that would mean someone knowing, perhaps, what his flashback's about, and he doesn't want that.

Having Charles as a therapist might really work for Loki, Tony thinks.

"I'm glad he helped you." Bruce says, smiling gently. "I think Kurt helped you as well, didn't he?"

Loki nods but doesn't actually say anything.

"I'm proud you decided to show your true colors, literally. You did great today." Tony grins and lays a hand on Loki's shoulder. Loki's Iron Man costume suit isn't even iced over this time- Tony had added the anti-icing feature that he has on his real suits (Obadiah had never fixed that problem).

Loki glances down, grinning at the praise, and his blue feet aren't even in his field of vision. "...'s only fair..." He mumbles, before saying louder "Kurt, he had a tail! Dids you see?" Loki switches topics abruptly and turns around, as if he's trying to look at his butt.

The Iron Man armor covering that part of his body vanishes, reappearing a few feet away and falling to the floor with a clatter.

Loki had actually put on a fair amount of the suit with his powers this time, something he'd been reluctant to do back on Halloween. Even on Halloween, Loki hadn't seemed to like Jarvis putting the suit on, and back then they'd had to encourage Loki to put on each individual armor piece and tell him it wasn't bad.

Earlier today, Loki had simply cast a reproachful look at the robotic arms and summoned parts of the suit onto himself. Currently, other armor pieces join the first on the floor, until Loki's wearing only the torso plates (with the low-powered arc reactor) and the gloves. Tony wonders if he'd left them on on purpose, to avoid freezing stuff he touches.

Loki continues to try to twist around to look at his butt, something Tony finds amusing. The god's eyes close and a weird expression crosses his face as he feels around his butt, rubbing his hands along it. Tony and Bruce both exchange a glance, and Tony's about to blurt out that it looks like he's masturbating when Loki shimmers slightly. While Tony can't see Loki's hands, he assumes there's the usual green energy around them.

Loki's eyes fly open, a somewhat surprised look on his face. The god tries to twist to see his butt so much that he ends up turning around in a complete circle.

This action gives Tony and Bruce a great view of Loki's new tail, which is the same blue as his body is currently.

The tail looks a rather long lion tail- it even has a tuft of hair on the end, although the hair is black to match the uncombed mop of hair on Loki's head. It seems to have a mind of its own as it flicks around, somewhat like Loki's hands.

"You know you have a tail now, right?" Bruce asks, gesturing to Loki's newly grown body part.

Loki nods, still trying to stare back at his tail. Tony gets Jarvis to project a holographic mirror instead, although Loki quickly looks away from the reflection of his blue face with something like disgust. He's still clearly not comfortable with seeing his Jotun form, although his action figure of himself is currently blue.

"Hey, you know what I see?" Tony says, walking up next to the mirror. "I see smart, incredible
guy with looks to die for... oh, look, you're here too." Loki glares slightly at him, saying he sounds like Mother Gothel, and Tony tells him that had been the point, although that's really the sort of obnoxious comments Tony makes often anyways.

"Seriously, Snoopy, you look good when you're blue." Tony picks up the Loki toy off the floor. At least Loki doesn't seem to have an issue looking at it in Jotun form, even if he still won't look at his reflection. "And you know, any Avatar cosplayer would kill to be you right now. And no, that's not literal either. Still just an expression."

"Why do looks kill you?" Loki asks worriedly. "You mean like being blue? They killed Jotuns 'cause they were blue." Okay, that is not the way Tony wants this conversation to be going. He explains that saying something is to die for is just an expression.

"I'm Kurt." Loki states as he stares at his tail, although Kurt's tail didn't look like a blue lion's. For a brief second, Loki's face looks like Kurt's, but his hands and feet don't change to match Kurt's, which only have two fingers and a thumb and two toes.

Tony's not sure if he's saying he looks more like Kurt with a tail or if he's actually pretending he's Kurt. If pretending to be someone else with blue skin makes Loki more comfortable with showing his real skin, Tony supposes he can't complain. They're still going in the right direction.

The usual illusion of pale skin spreads over Loki's body and his eyes return to their usual startling green, although the new tail remains blue.

Tony curiously reaches for the tail, and to his great surprise, he actually feels it. He'd assumed it was an illusion. But Loki can actually shift his form- he'd grown shorter when becoming Tony and much shorter when becoming Mowgli, so this isn't that odd, is it? Loki evidently can feel Tony's hand on his new tail, since reacts to the contact.

"Uh, do Jotuns actually have tails that they can hide, like Stitch does with his antennae, spikes and arms, or did you just grow that?" Tony asks curiously, knowing Loki will like the Stitch reference. Tony hasn't seen anything in the myths about Jotuns having tails, and if Loki always has a hidden tail, why would he have expressed a desire for one? Maybe that hadn't been the best question, Tony thinks.

Surprisingly, Loki doesn't freak out at the word Jotun. But maybe he's focusing more on Tony's Stitch reference, since he laughs and grabs the straps between Stitch's hands and feet.

"I dunno. You said I could grow a lion tail. I wanted it an' so it grew, like when I was Mowgli." Loki claps his hands. "That's not bads, right, even though they woulda hated it there? But Odin made me not blue, he lied. And 'Fessor X said he knows someone who's blue and can look like anyones, and I looked like you and Genie can change too! He did it lots! I like him."

Loki seems to be trying to move his tail, though he's clearly not sure how to, since he asks Simba how he does it. Simba's tail starts to move, without Loki squeezing his ear to make him, and his head turns to look at Loki. The god scrunches his face in concentration as his tail continues to flick around randomly, before grabbing it with one hand and waving it back at Simba.

"I'm surprised you didn't grow a horse tail." Bruce says.

Loki grins and uses one hand to hold his long hair back in a ponytail. "I gots a horse tail on my head, Bruce." Bruce tells him it's called a ponytail, and Loki diverts his attention to his new appendage.
"I want... ears like Peter and Tink an' Kurt." Loki's face scrunches up again and he goes to finger his ears, although Tony can't see them under the curtains of long black hair. Are his ears pointed? Loki fiddles with Stitch's ears, Simba tucked under the other arm. Before Tony can find out, Loki's ears grow, becoming large, long blue ears identical to Stitch's.

"This is like watching that donkey scene in Pinocchio." Bruce mutters, and Tony had been thinking exactly the same thing. Even though he was five the last time he'd seen the movie, he still remembers that scene. Bruce looks at him and asks if it freaked him out, and Tony denies it.

Loki laughs, but he looks somewhat confused. "You're weird, Bruce. Why're you talking 'bout asses in... pine nut seed eyes. Makes no sense." Bruce looks confused, but Italian happens to be one of the languages Tony knows, one he'd tested Loki's All-Tongue on, and Pinocchio is sort of made from the Italian words *pino*, 'pine', and *occhio*, 'eye'. He assumes All-Tongue had also provided the words 'nut' and 'seeds', though Tony doesn't know where those came from.

Loki singsongs "Pine nut, pine eyes, seeds. Pin-occ-hi-o."

Loki's Stitch backpack moves it's ears up and down and side to side, and like he'd done with the tail, Loki tries to copy it.

"Well, I guess we need to show him that now." Tony says. Bruce points out that it's only 11:00 in the morning, and Tony shrugs. Who says you can't watch movies in the middle of the day? Besides, Loki's got the ears and tail right now, which are what had brought it up in the first place.

"I bet Steve saw this movie when it came out." Bruce says to Tony. Tony quickly checks his phone and sees a release date in 1940, which was before Cap's time as a capsicle. Before he got the serum, even, so back when he was still a ninety pound weakling.

Loki insists on Dum-E watching the movie with them, which means they'll be watching it in the living room instead of the theater.

The movie starts with credits and *When You Wish Upon a Star* playing, and Loki clearly recognizes the music, since they play it during the Disney opening logo on almost all the Disney movies they've watched. Loki hums along, remembering the melody, even if he's never heard the words before. He clearly loves that it's about stars.

Jiminy Cricket is shown singing the end of the song, before he narrates a storybook opening. Loki confusedly asks if crickets really look like that here, to which Bruce answers that Jiminy looks nothing like a real cricket.

Loki nods, adding "crickets talk with their wings and gots lots of legs like Sleipnir, only they got two less than Sleipnir, 'cause they only gots six, like insects. But my Sleipnir's like a spii-der." Apparently Asgard has crickets that are basically the same as those on Earth. Then again, they have horses there, too, so there's clearly some overlap with animals between Asgard and Earth, though Tony's heard both Loki and Thor mention something called a bilgesnipe, whatever the hell that is.

The view zooms in on a starry night sky with one star particularly bright, and Loki wonders aloud if it's the Second Star to the Right and whether or not Peter and Tink will show up.

Jiminy stows away in Geppetto's house and finds Pinocchio, still a puppet and unfinished, without eyebrows or a mouth. Loki points at Pinocchio, eyes wide. "Genie switched his head look like that boy's. 'Xcept he had a mouth, and his nose got long, like it grew." Loki nods, flicking his fingers. Tony had actually forgotten about that, but he nods as Bruce tells Loki that was good spotting.
Really, Loki had no clue who Pinocchio was when he saw *Aladdin*, yet he still recognizes him even though it that cameo transformation of Genie's had been a split second and they'd watched *Aladdin* over a month ago.

"How come he doesn't even gots a mouth? He can't talks with no mouth, nope nope nope! Even me 'n Ariel have mouths!" Loki's eyes are wider than usual when he abruptly stops, and he starts frantically shaking his head. Hoping that Loki's not going to have a flashback of being unable to speak when his lips had been sewn shut, Tony places a hand on his shoulder and assures him that Pinocchio's mouth just hasn't been painted on yet.

Thankfully, Loki relaxes slowly as Tony's explaining why Pinocchio doesn't have a mouth. Once calm, Loki asks to keep watching, and the movie resumes. Geppetto comes down the stairs with his kitten, Figaro, and paints on Pinocchio's eyebrows and mouth.

"You're kind of like Geppetto, if Dum-E and Jarvis were Pinocchio." Bruce says with a bit of a smile, and Tony quirks a brow, although it's an apt analogy. He honestly considers Jarvis and his bots (especially Dum-E) to be family, not that he tells anyone that. Dum-E gives a cheerful beep and rolls up to his creator, squeezing Tony's hand with his claw. Loki looks between Tony and Dum-E with a wide grin.

"Yeah, 'cause you're their father!" Loki laughs, clapping his hands. "You even called yourself 'Daddy' to Jarvis! 'Daddy's home!' Kinda like how I pretend my monster family's my family, 'xcept I gots you in my Midgard family now too."

"I guess Dum-E, the other robots and myself could be part of Mr. Stark's 'Invention Family'." Jarvis pipes up and Loki laughs, bouncing in his seat slightly.

"Yeah, and his Man of Iron suits!" Tony rolls his eyes fondly, but not when Loki's looking.

Geppetto sings about a 'little wooden head' as he makes Pinocchio dance around the room. The woodcarver winds up tormenting Figaro with his new puppet in various ways, kicking the cat and making him into a hole from a missing floorboard. Loki clearly sympathizes with Figaro here.

Loki also seems fascinated with all of the cuckoo clocks, although he clearly doesn't like the one of a mother spanking her small boy. The fact Gepetto made a clock of that is kind of weird, Tony thinks, as is the one of chopping off a turkey's head.

As Geppetto gets ready for bed, he sees the wishing star and kneels down to make a wish, wishing for Pinocchio to be a real boy. As this is happening, Loki starts mumbling Lilo's wish for a friend, a wish Tony has no doubt Loki had made himself in Asgard. After all, he'd wound up with imaginary friends like eight-legged horses and half-dead girls.

The Blue Fairy comes from a star (Loki loves that, and compares her to Tinker Bell, since she's a fairy, although a much larger one). She decides to make Geppetto's wish come true, and with a wave of her wand, brings Pinocchio to life.

Loki stares. "They can do that? Well, Genie could. How come Genie didn't come if he knows Pinocchio? He turned into him."

"Because you needed the lamp for Genie, and the Blue Fairy came from a star. Anyways, didn't you do that with your Jormungand necklace?" Tony asks rhetorically, although Jormungand isn't doing anything right now.

"But he was already real, just didn't haves a body! They said he wasn't though. 'Stupid freak, he's
talking to nothing!" Loki says as the Jormungand necklace raises its head, saying in a hissing voice that he's not nothing. As always, the necklace looks like a real snake when it appears to come to life, just like how Loki's other friends and Monster Family members look real. Jormungand is tangible, though, while Loki's other friends are just illusions on air.

Looking at the Blue Fairy and Pinocchio again, Loki adds. "She's blue with good magics, right? Hey, Elsa wears blue and did that with Olaf too! And Marshmallow, 'xcept he was real when he first started out but Olaf was just a snowman firsts."

"You've sort of done it with Simba and Stitch." Bruce points out, and while the lion and backpack haven't done much on their own, they have seemed to come alive briefly to roar or do other small things.

As if to prove Bruce's point, Simba's head turns and he talks, only Loki hadn't squeezed his ear and what he says isn't one of his prerecorded phrases. Instead, the lion mimics Pinocchio, saying "I can move! I can talk!" Then, he says "I'm gonna be King of Pride Rock."

Tony and Bruce stare. Tony's first reaction is thinking this is creepy as hell, even though basically the same thing happens whenever Jormungand brings the necklace to life. This isn't quite as weird as seeing Sleipnir for the first time had been, but Tony's used to Simba being simply a toy with a couple prerecorded phrases and songs.

Loki's eyes go incredibly wide as he hugs Simba and gives an excited squeal of delight, body practically vibrating with excitement. Clearly, he hadn't done this on purpose, but he seems thrilled at what he'd done with his magic. That's definitely progress.

Simba turns to the guy who's side he's always practically glued to. This time, he's more animated and his mouth actually moves when he addresses Loki. "I like your tail, it's just like mine, only blue." Simba wags his tail proudly, like he'd done when Loki first grew his own less than an hour ago, only the lion seems more alive now. Loki's face scrunches up as he tries to wag his tail back, but it just flicks around seemingly randomly as if it has a mind of its own. Much like Loki's hands, sometimes.

The Blue Fairy tells Pinocchio that he can become a real boy if he's brave, truthful and unselfish. Loki's staring at the screen, transfixed, and some emotion Tony doesn't catch flashes in his eyes. The fairy appoints Jiminy as Pinocchio's conscience. After she leaves, Pinocchio and Jiminy- mostly Pinocchio- wake Geppetto up while singing about always letting your conscience be your guide.

Simba comments that Jiminy Cricket is less annoying than Zazu.

Geppetto freaks out when he first sees Pinocchio, (which is how almost everyone would react to a puppet being alive) but he's soon overjoyed that his wish mostly came true. Pinocchio's technically not real yet.

Somewhat strangely, Geppetto sends Pinocchio off to school the very next morning, despite it being his puppet son's first morning alive. Of course Pinocchio gets sidetracked along the way, although it's not entirely his fault. He's lured in by a fox, ironically named Honest John, and a mute cat named Gideon to be an actor, to a tune that Tony's probably going to have stuck in his head for an eternity. Pinocchio's far too innocent, naive and trusting, but to be fair he was born the previous day.

Pinocchio winds up performing in a puppet show for Stromboli, and starts it off by falling down the stairs and spearing a wooden floorboard with his nose. Stromboli angrily lifts Pinocchio until
he hears the crowd laughing, at which he lets the puppet go and Pinocchio starts to sing. Loki hops from one foot to the other in time with the music. Simba's head turns as his tail wags, which is something he'd been able to do when squeezing his ear, only it looks more lifelike now.

"I've got no strings
To hold me down
To make me fret
Or make me frown
I had strings
But now I'm free
There are no strings on me!"

Loki has a million dollar smile on his face, and he winds up copying Pinocchio's actions as the puppet sings a second verse before moving onto the third.

"I've got no strings
So I have fun
I'm not tied up
to anyone.
They have strings
But you can see
There are no strings on me!"

Various other puppets sing other parts of the song and Pinocchio winds up getting crushed between the butts of two female Dutch marionettes, and there's a part where Jiminy ogles at some female puppets doing the can-can. Tony smirks at that, but Loki's mind is on other matters.

"Y'know, Elsa's gots no strings, too." Loki says as Stitch spits out his Elsa doll. Glancing at the doll, Tony agrees that she's indeed stringless. Loki sighs and says "She cut her strings. Elsa, she doesn't gotta worry 'bout ice and snow now, nope nope nope. *No right, no wrong, no rules for me! I'm freeeeeee!*" The last part is sung, and Tony knows it's from *Let It Go*. He has all the *Frozen* songs memorized from how often Loki sings them.

"Oh, you mean that metaphorically." Tony says, slightly surprised. After all, *I've Got No Strings* can be interpreted literally, since Pinocchio actually lost his strings, and he sort of expected Loki would just take it literally.

Loki nods as he snuggles up with Elsa, Simba and Stitch.

"Yeah, and Genie's got no strings... no lamp. He was tied to the lamp and now he's free!"

Going with the metaphor, Tony asks "Do you think you've lost some strings, too?"

"Don't gotta worry 'bout getting beatings now." Loki says quietly, and Tony assures him that he
doesn't need to worry about that. They turn their attention back to the movie, which Jarvis had paused.

Not long after the show, Stromboli's true colors are revealed when he traps Pinocchio in a bird cage. Loki's previous happiness during the puppet show has evaporated, much like Pinocchio's himself. This seems like an emotional part for most viewers, but it's only intensified by Loki's recent stint of being locked up in the Hulk cage on the Helicarrier. The betrayal's clearly a sore spot for the god, too, since he'd hated it when Hans betrayed Anna.

Stromboli says that once Pinocchio has outlived his use as a performer, he'll make good firewood. Pinocchio cries out "Let me out" and even threatens to tell on Stromboli to Geppetto. Tony's reminded of what he'd seen Loki do in the footage he'd hacked from Loki's time on the Helicarrier. He'd threatened them with Tony beating them up, although Tony hadn't actually done that (maybe he should have).

Stromboli leaves Pinocchio alone, and Pinocchio frantically pulls on the bars, shouting for Jiminy, before thunder cracks and lightning flashes.

As if the betrayal and cage aspects weren't enough, the thunderstorm, which is clearly a trigger itself, has Loki trying to wedge himself in between Tony and the backrest of the sofa. That would probably work better if he wasn't a grown man, Tony thinks as he turns around, laying a hand on Loki's shaking back. Loki tenses at first but doesn't shake Tony off.

Loki hadn't even reacted this badly to Stitch being stuck in a glass containment dome, but then again, there hadn't been thunder then.

"Shh, it's okay." Tony continues to murmur soft nothings to Loki while rubbing a hand in small circles over the god's back, who's still curled up, leaving Tony perched on the edge of the couch. At least now that the thunder's stopped, since the movie's paused, Loki's not shaking quite as badly as when it had been playing.

It takes a few minutes for Loki to calm down and his shaking to subside. He's no longer trying to burrow between Tony and the cushions, but he's sitting a lot closer to Tony than he was before as he stares at the paused screen with wide eyes,

"Why's Thor mad?" Loki asks in a quiet voice, obviously referring to the thunder in the film. "Pinocchio didn't even do's a thing to him." Tony sighs. It's really inconvenient that, when thunder and lightning are already triggers for Loki, they're always used to intensify dramatic or scary scenes in movies. That's really not the best combination, and Tony's wondering whether they're going to have to stop the movie. Loki had been really anxious during the fight between Gaston and Beast as well, which was also during a thunderstorm, but his reaction to this is even worse.

"Uh, I don't think it's Thor making this thunder." Tony says, and Loki just looks at him like he's crazy, his expression clearly saying that Thor makes thunder. Admittedly he does (not that Tony would've believed that before meeting the thunderer) but that doesn't mean that all thunder's made by Thor, right?

"Do you want to keep watching this, or...?" Bruce asks, looking at Loki before glancing at Tony. Tony can tell Bruce is wondering, like he is, whether the donkey part will freak Loki out. Sure, he'd seemed surprisingly unconcerned when growing his own tail and long, animal-like ears, but well, this movie doesn't exactly portray that in a great light, either.

"Does he gets out of the cage?" Loki asks, and they forgo spoiler alerts and just tell him straight up that yes, he does.
Geppetto, upon realizing that Pinocchio's not back from school, sets out to look for him. Meanwhile, Jiminy finds Pinocchio in the birdcage and goes into the lock, but is unable to open it. Loki looks accusingly at Tony. "You said he gets out. He's still there"

"He gets out, trust me." Tony replies. "Pretty soon, if I remember right. The Blue Fairy frees him."

"Like how you got me outs of the petri dish?" Loki asks. Tony nods.

"I should have been there." Simba's animated again, and Bruce and Tony exchange surprised glances. Has Simba become like Sleipnir and the others? "I won't leave you ever again, Loki." The lion declares with childish determination. Loki grins and hugs his lion.

Well, if there was any hope of Loki ever not carting Simba around everywhere, Tony's pretty sure that's gone now that Simba seems alive.

Onscreen, the Blue Fairy comes and asks the still-caged Pinocchio why he didn't go to school. Pinocchio claims he met two monsters with big green eyes and his nose grows at the lie (although, as Bruce points out, 'Honest' John and Gideon could be considered monsters for selling him to Stromboli, and Stromboli could be considered one as well). Pinocchio goes on to say they stuffed him in a sack and stuffed Jiminy in a little sack.

Each lie makes his nose grow more and more, until it resembles a long tree branch with leaves and a bird's nest- complete with birds- at the end. Although Pinocchio is horror struck by this, Loki laughs. "He's gots a tree nose, Tony, like Gran'mother Willow and my tree Willow-Willowy, 'xcept that'd be their arms! It's a nose arm!" He snickers, holding one of his arms in front of his face as if it's his nose, and adds thoughtfully "I wouldn't mind a tree's-arm nose of my very own, I don't think."

"Really?" Tony asks, surprised. Like with the ears and tail, wouldn't that freak most people out? He'd certainly be freaked out to have a tree branch for a nose, and he doesn't have a bunch of biases against magic from Asgard. Besides, Pinocchio's freaking out onscreen. He'd have bet money that Loki would be, too, since it would mean using magic, but he's glad he would have lost that bet. It means progress.

Tony wonders if Loki's going to make his nose grow, like he made his ears and tail. However, Loki's nose doesn't change.

The Blue Fairy rhetorically suggests that perhaps Pinocchio hasn't been telling the truth, clearly giving the message that lying isn't something he shouldn't be doing. She even says that "a boy who won't be good, might just as well be made of wood."

Loki gives a small cheer when the Blue Fairy unlocks Pinocchio's birdcage, after he promises he'll never lie again, and his nose shrinks back down to normal.

Loki frowns at the screen and looks at Tony with wide worried eyes. "So's lyin' bad? He's bad for lying?" In a scared voice, he asks "She gonna take it away?"

"Take what away? His nose?" Tony asks, but Loki stares into the distance, mind clearly elsewhere. Tony puts a hand on his shoulder, and Loki blinks and turns to look at them.

"Lying's not always bad, especially not if you're lying to keep yourself safe. There's nothing wrong with lying to stop someone from hurting you, and if you need to do so in the future, I want you to, got it?" Bruce says. Loki relaxes at the part about it being fine to lie for your safety, and Tony inwardly seethes. Of course, he'd been guessing that Loki had lied for safety, which is why he'd
brought it up, but the fact Loki had to do such a thing is horrible. Well, lying in front of a court to stay 'safe' from jail is another story, but it's not like they're ever going to come to that.

"Besides, people tell white lies all the time." Tony adds.

"Lies haves colors?" Loki asks, sounding very confused. "What're black lies like?"

"No," Tony laughs. "That's not it. Jarvis, you wanna-?

"Certainly, sir. White lies are harmless lies, usually told to avoid hurting someone's feelings rather than to be deceitful." Loki looks like he mostly gets it, but Jarvis gives an example anyways. "An example would be pretending someone's food is delicious when it really isn't, because you don't want to hurt the cook's feelings."

Loki glances at Tony. "Do you say white lies ever?"

Bruce snorts and says "That requires that you actually care about hurting someone's feelings. If Tony thinks you're bad at something, he'll let you know." To be totally honest though, Tony sometimes tells some white lies to Loki, like when he said his drawings were good when he first arrived. Although it's not like Tony's an artist himself, unless you count engineering blueprints, so Loki's artistic skills (which have definitely improved since he's been drawing a ton) are now probably on par with his own.

"But Pinocchio, he's not gonna be's real if he lies, right? She said he's gotta be braves, truthful an' unsel-fish to be a real boy, and that he's wood 'cause he's bad."

Loki seems very focused on this becoming real thing, and Tony's not entirely sure what to make of it. Does Loki think that about himself?

"There are a lot of people who are none of those those things, and they're still real. I've met plenty of those sorts of people," Bruce says. "Pinocchio was just with someone like that- Stromboli." Loki nods, adding Scar, Hans and Gaston to that list.

"Besides, it's kind of unfair that Pinocchio has to prove himself worthy to become real. Nobody else has to, and he never asked to be real in the first place." Bruce goes on. "Sort of like how it was really unfair for the witch to turn all of Beast's staff into household objects, when they hadn't done anything. I'm not entirely sure Beast deserved it either..." Of course Bruce sympathizes with Beast, Tony thinks.

"Ten years isn't that long." Loki says, and Tony and Bruce share a look of total confusion and ask Loki what he's talking about. "Lumiere, he saids..." Loki starts singing "For ten years we've been rusting, needing so much more than dusting." Tony trusts Loki to correctly remember the lyrics to the song, and he's pretty sure that had been a snippet from Be Our Guest.

"Ten years is a fairly long time here." Tony says, and Loki gets a sad, scared look on his face, the look he gives Tony as if he's suddenly about to drop dead. Tony reassures him he's not going anywhere for a while, and tries to distract him, blurtling out what he'd just thought of. "Wait a sec, if they were like that for ten years, then the prince would've been like ten when the old lady showed up and asked to come in. So he was just listening to what his parents told him about stranger danger, and she made him transform into a Beast? Seriously, what the hell's up with that?" They'd mentioned that the rose would wilt on his twenty-first birthday, after all.

Loki seems to consider this but winds up changing the topic entirely. "He's horrible at lying!" Loki snickers, pointing to Pinocchio's now-normal nose on the now-paused screen. "His nose gives him
"Yeah, he's kinda the worst liar ever." Tony agrees.

"My nose doesn't even grow, like Pinocchio's!" Loki says, grinning guilelessly, but as he says this, his nose starts to grow.

Tony stares as Loki's nose gets longer and longer, eventually looking quite like Pinocchio's tree branch nose, with a bird's nest and leaves at the end (but no birds, surprisingly, since Loki clearly loves animals). Tony can tell it's merely an illusion, since Loki's that would surely weigh Loki's head down, yet there are no indications of that. Tony confirms the illusion theory when he reaches out to poke it, although the contact doesn't send the illusion away like it used to, and sometimes still does.

Loki laughs uncontrollably at his tree branch nose, and it's so long that when he reaches out for the nest at the end, he can't grasp it even with his arms fully extended— and since Loki's so tall, his arms are pretty long.

When Loki turns to look at Tony, the illusion-nose goes through his head and he doesn't feel a thing (thankfully). If that had been tangible, he would have just gotten whacked in the side of the head with a tree branch, which would have hurt like heck.

Loki's barely able to get his next words out around his laughter. "G-g-got you! You f-fell for it! Doesn't really grow!"

"I know it doesn't grow." Tony protests with mock indigence, and his stomach suddenly growls, which has Loki in hysterics. "I've seen you lie before, you know, and it never grew then."

"Didn't even grows now, just looked like it." Loki says. Tony would've been shocked if Loki didn't know it was an illusion, since he's the one who had it. "Good thing it never grew there. They wouldn'ta liked that at all, nope nope nope! And then they would know I lied every time!"

"Did you get away with lying?" Tony asks, surprised, then quickly adds. "You won't get in trouble if you did."

"I already did, when they knew." Loki mutters with uncharacteristic bitterness, looking down and wringing his hands together. His Stitch-like ears droop, much like the alien's do in the movie when he's sad. Tony realizes Loki means he already got in trouble. Damn Asgardians.

"Well, you shouldn't have." Tony gets up and stretches, heading towards the kitchen to make a sandwich, since his stomach had loudly informed him of its need for food. It's basically lunchtime, anyways. "Hey, how about a lunch break?"

Dum-E and Loki follow him like puppies, and Bruce soon joins them as well. Tony figures they can eat while continuing the movie, but they still need to make food. Dum-E can't even make sandwiches— actually, he occasionally screwed up something as easy as making cereal, so Tony hasn't had him cook in a while.

Just this morning, though, Dum-E had decided to be "help" and ended up spilling the contents of several drawers, even though Tony hadn't even told him to be in the kitchen. Tony points a finger at his robot and tells Dum-E not to touch anything, and Dum-E lowers his claw. Loki grabs onto it.

"Sometime... sometimes I kinda lied 'bout magic, so I wouldn't get a beating." Loki slowly admits, before whispering "Is that bad?"
"No, it's not bad. You're not bad." Bruce reminds him. They'd gone over this earlier. "What's bad is that you had to lie to stay safe." Loki nods slowly.

"Okay, we've got cheese, various lunch meats," Tony says as he rummages through the fridge, tossing various packages on the counter before snapping his fingers. "Anyone else in the mood for grilled cheese?" He doesn't think Loki's ever had grilled cheese before.

"625 grilled cheese and bread." Loki says, and Tony tells him grilled cheese is usually just a shortened form of grilled cheese sandwich, so they're going to be grilling the whole thing, not just the cheese. Loki grins and holds out a plate with two slices of bread on it, looking expectantly at Tony. Tony quirks a brow, somewhat confused.

"Throw it, like the 625 game?" Loki asks hopefully. Oh. Tony's seen Loki playing that 625 Sandwich Stacker game, where he controls the lazy, yellow, sandwich-obsessed, experiment that lives with Gantu and constantly gets on his nerves.

Tony tosses a slice of cheese at Loki's plate, and manages to get it to land on the plate, although it's half off the slice of bread. Loki laughs before glancing pointedly at the cheese again, obviously hoping Tony will repeat this.

Smirking, Tony flips this slice higher, so that it almost hits the ceiling, and Loki dashes under it, surprisingly quickly. "Now you gotta throw junk." If Tony hadn't seen Loki play that sandwich game, he'd have no idea what Loki was talking about right now.

Tony crumples the bit of paper that was in between the slices of cheese and tosses it up in the air. Loki dodges it, and Tony remembers how he hadn't dodged, or even moved aside from flinching and curling up, when Natasha was working with him on self defense.

Curiously, Tony crumples up another bit of paper on the counter and, this time, tosses it directly at Loki. Loki dodges so it avoids his plate. Admittedly, this is sort of different from having someone punch at him, but at least he actually dodges it. Tony grins at Loki, telling him he did a good job, and Loki excitedly says he won sandwich stacker.

"We need to butter the bread before we grill it." Bruce says, and Tony grabs a stick of butter from the fridge as Tony heads towards the silverware drawer to get a knife. Dum-E really hadn't organized things at all (not that Tony's organized or anything, but even he's better than this.

Bruce pulls out a pan and goes to turn on the stove, but Tony waves a hand. "You know, I could totally use my repulsors to grill this. Anyone want Grilled Cheese a la Iron Man? This is a limited time offer, so get yours today." Tony says, deciding that he's definitely going to grill stuff with his repulsors.

Loki has pulled out a frying pan and is swinging it around as if battling an invisible foe. From what he's saying, he's pretending to be Flynn Rider fighting off the guards before facing off with Maximus. Without thinking, Tony grabs the nearest thing in a drawer- a stainless steel turkey baster, he notices only after he adopts a sort of fencing pose with it. Not that he really knows how to fence.

Loki lets out a sort of sound that's somewhere between a sob and he lets go of the frying pan mid-swing. It sails towards Tony's head, and it's only years of dodging obstacles as Iron Man that allows him to duck out of the way before it brains him. Loki's wide green eyes stare at the turkey baster in Tony's hands as if Tony's planning on ripping out his entrails with it before stabbing him to death. Tony lowers it slightly, staring at Loki in shock, and the kitchen lights overhead make the stainless steel needle-like tip glint.
Loki's backs up, terrified, and Simba actually jumps from the countertop to his arms. Loki's speech gets shaky and even more jumbled and he's practically hyperventilating. "No, D-didn't break it, wasn't there not my fault. Not even lyin' don't beat- No, what's that's?"

Shit. The baster sort of looks like a large needle, and Tony had just waved it at Loki like a weapon. Why the hell had he done that anyways? Sure, Loki was waving around a frying pan, but the god had clearly shown during the defense lesson with Natasha that he's still not remotely comfortable with attacks being directed at him. And Tony had to do that and yank up a traumatic memory like a trout. This is what it would have been like if Loki had shoved Tony into the pool and held him under, rather than Tony falling through the ice.

"No, no please don't- P-please I'll be goods I didn't mean to I won't do it 'gain please no no nononoNoNoNOOOO-OOO-OOO!"

Tony steps towards the god. "Loki, it's me. Tony. Your favorite person ever." But Loki backs away from him, crying, and several other things happen. Fenrir appears protectively in front of Loki, growling low in his throat, and Stitch bares his teeth from Loki's back (and why do Stitch's teeth suddenly look more like real fangs instead of fabric? Fenrir has always looked real, even if he's just air, but Tony remembers Loki saying he'd made water splash. Tony has a very uneasy feeling that Fenrir's teeth aren't just air now).

"Put it down!" Simba says, and it's only then that Tony realizes he's still holding the turkey baster. He throws it in the opposite direction of Loki and starts to approach him again, but Bruce pulls him back and slowly approaches Loki like one would a frightened animal.

Loki's soon reduced to wordless, terrified sounds as he backs away from Tony as if he's some sort of monster from a nightmare. And geez, it hurts way more than Tony would've thought to see Loki looking at him that way, for Loki to be terrified of him.

The god's backed out of the kitchen by now. He stumbles and winds up collapsing behind the bar. Tony groans. That's the worst place in the room that he could have gone.

"If you find the field where the horses roam..." Sleipnir appears and starts to sing Loki's song about horses, and Bruce joins in. His eyes had flashed green, but trying to calm Loki down by singing softly evidently keeps Hulk at bay.

Stitch somehow isn't even remotely squashed under Loki's back, even though the god weighs a ton, and it looks like the alien backpack is hugging the god.

Tony eventually joins the singing as well as Loki. "The silver stallion gallops away, his herd follows him and they start to neigh..."

They're too late. From Loki's completely unfocused eyes, Tony knows Loki's lost the battle against the flashback, but they can try to bring him back.

Tony goes to hug Loki, who's shaking violently and whimpering but Loki suddenly lets out another cry and lurches away from Tony. His bare foot connects blindly with a couple beer bottles on the lowest shelf. The kick itself actually shatters them before they even fall.

"We need to get him out of here before he breaks everything." Tony says, as Jormungand starts to curl around Loki. Simba rubs his head against the god's chest, and Loki doesn't panic at either of them like he just had with Tony, but he's still panicking in general, and he's biting his lip so hard it's bleeding. "Somewhere other than behind my bar."
Bruce gives him a withering, disappointed look. "Really, Tony?! You're thinking about your alcohol now?"

"Gee. I'm glad you have such a high opinion of me." Tony shoots back angrily. Bruce really thinks that?! Sure Tony can be an asshole, and narcissistic, but he's not *that* bad that he'd actually care more about alcohol when someone else is in pain like this. He doesn't think he'd ever been that bad.

Besides he hadn't even been thinking about his alcohol stash's safety at all. He'd been thinking solely of Loki (as well as himself and Bruce. Now that he thinks about it, getting cut by broken glass would affect him the most. Loki heals insanely quickly and Hulk keeps Bruce from getting hurt from most things). Tony would honestly give up his entire alcohol stash in a heartbeat if it meant he could help Loki or get Loki to not look at him like he's a monster. Hell, he'd blast it himself with his repulsors if he had to.

"No, actually I was referring to the glass bottle he just broke." Tony snaps at Bruce.

Bruce looks down mutters an apology. "Sorry. I know you're a better man than that... even if you don't always show it." Tony doesn't get a chance to respond.

Loki continues to scream blue murder- not that Tony can blame him in the slightest, given the hell he's reliving. The flashbacks of this incident are always the worst, but this sounds like one of the worst things Loki's ever experienced. If he'd experienced something worse, Tony's not sure he even wants to know what that would be.

Loki starts clawing at his mouth, so that even more blood runs down his face along with the blood from when he'd bit his lip, pooling on the floor. Shit, Tony should have known he'd do that. He grabs the god's wrists and struggles to keep him from mutilating his own face even more. Bruce grabs one of Loki's wrists so Tony doesn't need to struggle with trying to pull both arms away.

The god falls mostly silent, only letting out soft whimpers and sobs, though he continues to scratch at his mouth and they continue to try to stop him. However, fighting to get Loki to stop scratching himself (and they definitely need to fight because everyone from Asgard and Jotunheim is so freaking strong) isn't exactly helping Bruce's temper.

"I'm going to suit up." Tony explains as he lets go of Loki's wrist and sprints to the landing/take-off strip on the balcony. Jarvis has already pulled up the metal ring with a suit at the ready, and Tony lets the metal ring's robotic arms put the Iron Man suit on him. He dashes back inside almost before it's fully on, crouching down next to Loki, and Bruce moves aside to give him access.

With the strength of the Iron Man suit, Tony's able to pull Loki's hands away and stop him from scratching his lips even more. There's already a surprising amount of blood around his mouth and on the floor.

Once he gets a view of Loki's mouth, Tony practically throws up.

Keeping Loki's lips firmly stitched together is a leather cord, still visible amidst the blood. Sure, Tony's seen- and experienced- some pretty horrific injuries, but this is just so disgusting, so wrong. Just as wrong as his own chest being hooked up to a car battery in the caves (*No don't think about that*).

Tony knows the stitches have to be an illusion, but he has no doubt that, in Loki's mind, his mouth's really sewn shut.
Earlier today, Charles had mentioned something about projecting memories, which Charles had picked up on, and they'd even brought up that time Loki made an illusion of the knife in the nightmare where Hans and Gaston killed the Avengers. And some of Loki's illusions of himself seem to project his nightmares and flashbacks (he's seen them writhe around with Loki a fair number of times). When he'd teleported from inside Tony's workshop to outside the glass wall, apparently dreaming that Tony wouldn't let him in, there had been an illusion of Loki banging on the glass, although Tony hadn't found out until later, since it had been silent and he'd been facing the other way.

But still, Loki hadn't actually made it look like his mouth was stitched shut any of the other times he'd had this flashback. But then again, he'd never had a needle-like thing pointed at him either. Tony mentally kicks himself again.

Perhaps, with all the illusions he's been making recently- making Sleipnir and the others visible, as well as making Simba move (that's probably some sort of illusion, right? Just on an object like the Jormungand necklace instead of an illusion out of air. Or is he actually sort of bringing Simba to life?)

Bruce, once he manages to Loki see around Tony's body, lets out a furious growl that sounds much more like Hulk than Bruce as he sprints for the elevator, which Jarvis already has ready with the doors already open. Ten seconds or so after the elevator doors close, Jarvis reports that Bruce has made it to the Hulk-proof floor. Well, this will at least let him know if the Hulk's anger-management area really works.

Whatever Jarvis says next is drowned out by an enraged roar so loud it almost makes the floor shake. Hulk sounds angrier than Tony's heard him in a while, even angrier than when Thor had shown up the first time.

Loki lets out an even more earsplitting scream that rolls off the walls, and at least once his mouth is open, the horrid illusion of it being stitched together with bloodstained leather is gone. Tony feels Loki's power shoot outwards. He unconsciously shields Loki's body with his own, just as all the bottles of alcohol explode. Except they explode outwards, so most of the glass and liquid winds up spilling into the kitchen, through the shelves that are more like small rectangular holes in the wall between the back of the bar and the kitchen. There's some broken glass near them, however, as well as a puddle from a bottle of scotch that had cost at least five hundred bucks. Not that that's much, for a billionaire.

Hulk's roar seems to have startled Loki out of the flashback, in a sense. Something definitely shifted, but Loki's scream is still resounding off the walls and he's clearly disoriented. Tony's a little surprised Hulk's roar hadn't completely snapped Loki out of it, though. After all, Tony himself had been startled awake from Hulk's roar after falling out of the portal, and everyone thought he'd been dead.

Loki stares at the needle in Tony's hand in horror. It's huge, with some weird bulb-like thing at the end. Having that monstrosity pulled through his lips would probably tear half his face off, and he's not sure if his magic could heal that. He tries not to cry, he really does, but he can't help it.

And then, Tony becomes Odin and he's back in Asgard. He backs up, even though he knows he's not supposed to run like a coward, but he'll always be a coward, a stupid argh freak. And then he's on the ground and Odin's practically sitting on him. The needle glints ominously as it's coming towards his face. Then it's stabbing through his lips and the leather cord's dragged through and PAINPAINPAIN.
The bellowing, furious roar is so loud that startling that Loki forgets all about Odin and pulling the stitches from his mouth. It's followed by a piercing scream that seems to go on and on and and he wishes it would *stop*, because it's pounding in his head.

He hopes whoever's roaring isn't going to punish him, but aren't they already? He tries to curl into an even tighter ball, but he's practically as tight as possible. His mouth hurts, but it isn't anywhere near the fiery agony that takes the world away, leaving only *pain pain pain*. But it *had* been that bad, only seconds ago, before the roar.

He vaguely thinks he must be past the point of feeling his punishment. Some dim part of Loki's brain knows it's probably bad that he's gotten to this point of not feeling, but he thanks the Norns for the small mercy anyways.

Something explodes out of him. There's a ton of commotion but he hardly notices what's happening, but he realizes his back's soaked and his shirt's clinging to it. Blood?! He tastes blood, but his back doesn't feel like there are open cuts in it. But he feels kind of hot, too, so maybe it's just sweat? There's another vaguely familiar scent he can't place.

He opens his eyes and sees countless glittering lights in a puddle of amber. He stares at them uncomprehendingly. Stars? But why are they green and brown? Maybe he's seeing things, like when the pain's bad enough? Or maybe it's his brain being stupid?

He reaches out for them with a shaky arm, but these stars are sharp and they nip at his fingers. These are meaner than the stars he loves and he could never touch those so why can he touch these? And what's all the amber stuff? Blood's not that color, and it's definitely not sort of clear. The brown liquid makes him think of Tony, for some reason.

There's still roaring from somewhere below, and that scream's still pounding through his head.

Something's wrapped around his torso, squeezing him. It's tight and strong but still gentle, and when he sees scales, he realizes Jormungand's hugging him. It hurts to smile, though.

He's not in Asgard. The roar had actually snapped him out of that. Besides, nobody ever hugged him there. Loki had to pretend, while hugging himself with his own arms, that Jormungand was hugging him, but Jormungand has a body now.

A red, metal hand grabs his wrist pulling it away from the biting stars. It looks like Tony's Man of Iron suits, Loki thinks as the red metal arms pick him up. It *is* a Man of Iron suit, he realizes as he sees the mask.

*Tony.*

*NO!* Tony had been holding the huge needle, had pointed it at him. Loki doesn't know what he's done wrong, since he's done so *many* things wrong. Was it because he'd admitted to lying? Why had he done that anyways? *Stupid!* Was it something else?

He scrambles out of Tony's arms, crawling away one his knees and one hand while the other hugs Simba to his chest.

In between the loud roars and smashing sounds below, Loki hears something. His lullaby. Loki closes his eyes and focuses the familiar, comforting melody. The gentle pressure of Jormungand's coils, Tony's arms, and his special song helps with making everything seem less scary.

There's a familiar voice, too. No, voices. A voice that's just as often loud and joking as it is soft and reassuring, Loki's favorite voice ever, and a calm voice with an accent very similar to Loki's own.
Tony and Jarvis. Except right now, Tony sounds annoyed.

Annoyed voices lead to Bad Things. And Tony had been holding the needle and no!

"Tony's not going to do that." Hel says, suddenly appearing. Loki blinks and cautiously smiles at her. He can understand what she's saying, but not Tony and Jarvis "He'd never do that."

All-Tongue won't tell him the words Tony and Jarvis are saying, so it's just a jumble of sound. Or maybe it's his brain? He hates it when this happens. Normally it's not quite this bad.

Hadn't All-Tongue used to work better, before everyone started saying he became even more of an idiot? Hadn't his mouth used to work better, for that matter? Fandral said he used to have a Silver Tongue instead of a Stupid Tongue, but Loki doesn't think his tongue's ever been silver (although he thinks that would look really awesome. Maybe he can turn it silver later).

Well, both of them are broken now. His All-Tongue has issues and his mouth is a traitor. Sometimes it says stuff he doesn't want it to, and sometimes it goes the opposite way and doesn't say what he wants, and most things come out different than how he wants them to, even when he's trying to speak in English without using All-Tongue, although he can never fully shut it off.

All-Tongue won't tell him the words Tony and Jarvis are saying, so it's just a jumble of sound. Or maybe it's his brain? He hates it when this happens. Normally it's not quite this bad.

Reading in English is, he thinks, harder than figuring out how to read in the first place had been in the Asgardian library. He hates that too.

Loki smacks his thighs in annoyance. He hates thinking about this most of all!

Tony's approaching Loki and Loki looks at Tony's hands. It doesn't look like he's holding the needle, but maybe it's hidden somewhere. He shies away from Tony even though Tony's tone is soft and reassuring, when he'd normally lean into Tony for comfort.

Hel keeps whispering that the needle's gone, and Tony glances at her, nodding as if agreeing. He looks worried and almost guilty, Loki thinks as he briefly glances at Tony's face before looking at the man's hands again, to make sure there's no needle in them.

He eventually catches the words should go from Jarvis, and he frowns. Are they saying he should go? But Tony's said he can stay here, and Loki's his family, right? Like how Stitch is Lilo's even if they're not actually related, and you can't just send family away!

Alcohol. His brain blurts out of nowhere, and maybe his mouth blurts it out too. That was the smell (he can still smell it) that was the amber liquid pooled on the floor. He's seen Tony drink it often enough.

He casts a look at the bar and his eyes go wide. The shelves, which are always filled with glasses and bottles, are now empty. And the shiny things aren't stars. It's glass, shattered everywhere. Some of the bottles must have gotten knocked into the kitchen from the shelves that are like open windows between the kitchen and the bar. He can even see the brown liquid seeping over the kitchen floor.

Tony's going to be furious with whoever wrecked his alcohol stash. Dum-E's broken glasses, but he's never wrecked stuff this badly, at least as far as Loki knows. Loki realizes with horror that must have been him who'd wrecked it, when his magic exploded out.

He's starting to panic again.

Tony must not know. Actually, Tony's not even here anymore, though he'd been here a minute ago. Jarvis speaks to him in a calm, reassuring tone.
"It's all right, Mr. Loki."

"Did I do it? Break alls his drinks?" Jarvis sees everything, after all, Loki thinks as another loud, furious roar sounds from below them.

Jarvis confirms his fear. "I must admit that you did, Mr. Loki-" Loki doesn't hear the rest. Surely Jarvis is going to tell Tony that Loki had destroyed his alcohol collection. Tony's going to be furious when he finds out! This is way worse than dropping a mug or even hitting the wall with a star, and Loki can still hardly believe he hadn't gotten in trouble for those. He's definitely going to get in trouble now, though.

Tony's said he's not going to beat him, but there are other ways to punish him. Tony could make him clean the entire tower, or drink all the alcohol and laugh at how he's even stupider than usual. Maybe even make him lick it off the floor to clean it up and drink it at the same time?

Yet even as he thinks this, some part of Loki knows the idea of Tony making him lick spilled drinks off the floor is completely ridiculous. He'd never even had to do that in Asgard, though they did make him drink enough to laugh at him. Volstagg especially loved doing that, and it was apparently "worth wasting fine mead on the Jotun" to see him act like even more of an idiot than he already is. But that never made any sense, because how could it be considered wasting it and worth it at the same time?

He briefly wonders if he should lie about breaking all Tony's alcohol, like he had when he'd first smashed a petri dish. But no, that's a stupid idea. He knows what happens if he gets caught lying. But Tony had said he'd known Loki had broken the petri dish, when he'd said Bruce did it, yet Tony hadn't even been mad and had let him smash more petri dishes.

But those were petri dishes, while this is Tony's alcohol, and clearly the alcohol means much more to Tony than petri dishes.

"... do for you?" Jarvis is asking.

"Tony's gonna be so mad..." Loki mumbles worriedly.

"I assure you that Mr. Stark is not mad at you, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says smoothly.

"But I broked it an' he really likes drinks a-and..." It doesn't make any sense that Tony wouldn't be mad at him.

"Stitch blew up Lilo's whole house." Simba pipes up from Loki's arms, and from Loki's back, Stitch nods and says ih. Hel and Sleipnir voice their agreement that this definitely isn't as bad as that, and Stitch is still in Lilo's family.

Loki looks back at the bar. Dum-E's attempting to wipe up the spill with a rag. Dum-E shouldn't have to be cleaning up his mess. That's really not fair. Loki walks over, grabbing the rag, but it's already soaked and really isn't going to do anything, he knows. But he doesn't have anything else to work with.

Maybe... maybe he could use his magic to get rid of the mess? He actually did something like that a couple times in Asgard when the servants and slaves were saying he might as well pull his weight around there instead of being a useless, stupid burden. When he had accidentally used magic -normally when they were berating him for being slow- they'd made sure he knew what he did was disgusting, but they'd also said that at least he finally wasn't pathetically slow either. Sometimes they even hit him, but never with their hands, always with some sort of object. Unlike
the warriors and guards, they seemed to think touching him would give them some sort of disease. Which at least meant it never hurt as much as the beatings he got from bored guards or Thor and the Warriors Three, or when Odin punished him.

He's used a lot of magic today, he thinks, and he realizes he still has his blue lion tail and Stitch-like ears. He'd teleported and Simba came alive, except sometimes Simba had occasionally done something life-like before, like roaring. The worst thing Loki had done with his magic, though, is wrecking Tony's drinks.

He stares down at the mess, and the rag isn't doing anything to clean it up. Dum-E whirs behind him, and Loki tries to imagine the amber puddle going away.

"I made hot chocolate," Tony's voice suddenly comes from behind him, and Loki startles and whirls around. He hadn't even heard Tony's footsteps, even though the floor's hard. The man's still in his Man of Iron suit, though without the helmet, leaning against the doorframe with his arms crossed. "What're you doing there, Bambi?"

"I'm sorry, I'll clean it, make it better!" Loki promises looking anxiously at the man.

"You don't have to do that, Loki."

"But I made the mess, and-" Loki starts and then realizes that he'd just admitted it. Well, he'd decided lying would probably not be the best idea, but he hadn't meant to blurt it out like that. Stupid mouth.

"-and it would be really hypocritical of me to make you clean it up, when I've handed so many messes off to Pepper in the past." Tony finishes, and Loki stares at him in confusion. "Okay, they were more figurative messes, but I normally leave the physical ones to the bots. Like Dum-E, and my upgraded Roombas, which are way cooler now than when I first got them. And it looks like they're about done in there, so here they come." Tony gestures down from where he's leaning against the kitchen doorframe. A small army of metal, disk-like things comes whirring out of the kitchen, and while Loki recalls seeing one or two of them occasionally, he never thought there were this many. The 'Roomba' things start whirring over the puddle and broken glass.

"I'm sorry." Loki says again, knowing that Tony really likes his alcohol.

"Hey, you should be thinking about yourself, not my alcohol. Drinks can be replaced. You can't." Tony says, as if Loki's actually more important than alcohol. He'd always wanted someone to think he was important, to think he mattered. And Tony's acting like he matters more than alcohol.

"But I broke it."

"Yeah, and Hulk's smashed up my floors before, and I'm not holding him responsible. Actually, right now his cool-off floor's getting a nice test run. And I didn't make Clint pay me back when he put a Wii remote through the eighty-inch TV I'd gotten only the week before. Hell, I've done way more damage to my stuff than you have."

"But it's your stuff."

"This is your tower, too. Our tower. Last I checked, you live here too." Tony asks.

Loki stares at Tony in surprise. That sounds really nice. Their tower, their home. He's not holding the huge needle, which is at least a good sign. Tony seems to sense what he's thinking, since he holds up both hands, palms out.
"What 'bout... you had the-" Loki doesn't even want to say *needle*. "And pointed it, an'..."

"That was actually a turkey baster." Tony says firmly, though that means nothing to Loki. All-Tongue won't tell him what *turkey or baster* mean, although he feels like he probably should know *turkey*, at least.

"What's that?"

"I actually have no clue what it's used for with cooking, other than that you use it on turkey, but there's another thing people use it for..." Tony trails off and Loki frowns. It's used for cooking? But what's the other thing? He hopes the other thing it's used for isn't for sewing...

As if reading his thoughts, Tony says "No, nothing like that. Uh, sometimes women use it for insemination, like getting pregnant. Except I actively avoid getting women pregnant." He smirks a bit, and then beckons Loki to follow him into the kitchen, which Loki does somewhat reluctantly, wondering what Tony has planned for him. Tony had mentioned hot chocolate, but at first that seems ridiculous until Loki smells it.

Sleipnir follows, sticking close by Loki, but he's intangible right now. Loki's a little surprised he's still here, but Sleipnir always seemed the most reluctant to leave him behind, often almost seeming scared, explaining that he doesn't like the dark. He says that's where he goes when he's not with Loki, but sometimes he imagines he's in their field. Sometimes Sleipnir would be the scared one, and Loki would try to make him feel better. Like his Tony and Sleipnir do for him.

Loki notices the frying pan embedded in the wall where Tony had been standing before the flashback, and he tenses. Great, he'd broken more of Tony's stuff, like when he'd scorched Tony's wall with a star. Only Tony hadn't seemed to care then, or about the alcohol now. Loki goes and wrenches the pan out of the wall, looking at it.

Tony puts a hand on Loki's shoulder, but Loki remains tense under it. "Hey." Tony says. "If I had been attacking you- which I definitely *wasn't*, chucking a frying pan at my head would have been a good defensive move. It wasn't bad when Rapunzel and Flynn beat people up with it, right? Although you might've wanted to hold onto it, now that I think about it, because when you threw it you kinda gave up your weapon. So, no harm done."

Set out on the table are Mrs. Potts and Chip, as well as a mug that Tony's probably going to be using. Loki smiles slightly at the fact Tony remembered about Chip and Mrs. Potts.

There's another enraged roar from below them and what sounds like something huge pounding at the walls.

"Our favorite big green guy in angry mode. He flipped when he saw-" Tony cuts himself off for some reason, and Loki looks at him in confusion, asking what he saw. Tony looks at him for a bit. "We should probably get the dried blood off your face." Tony says.

Right. He'd been bleeding. Loki goes to the sink and tries to wash the blood off, glad there's not a mirror, so he doesn't have to see it.

But *why* had he been bleeding, if he hadn't been getting punished? "You bit your lip, and scratched it hard enough to draw blood." Tony explains. But Hulk has to have seen blood before, right, so why would that make him mad? And Tony seems more disgusted than when he'd scratched his face before. Is Tony disgusted with him? Loki wouldn't blame him.

Once again seeming to read his thoughts, Tony says "When you were having your flashback, well,
you kinda made it look like it actually happened." Tony says slowly, watching him for some sort of reaction.

Does that mean they saw him with his lips shut, saw how pathetic he was then? Loki wonders as he sits at the table. Well, he's still pathetic, he always will be, as everyone told him in Asgard. But Violet, Frozone and Elsa aren't pathetic, even if they're not super strong like Mr. Incredible.

"That was really horrible." Tony goes on. "You should have never had to experience that- nobody should have to. Hell, you're one tough guy, for making it through all that shit." Him? Strong?

He finds himself wishing 'Fessor X was able to tell him it was all a memory and that the way he was treated is wrong when he'd been having his flashback not long ago, like he'd done earlier today with the one about the Warriors Three and the servant, The flashbacks always seem so real, and he really thought he was back in Asgard again.

With Simba somewhat curled on his lap, rather than standing stiffly like he always had before, Loki pulls Chip towards him and slowly takes a sip.

He used to drink hot chocolate with Tony after nightmares, when he first got here, but for some reason they haven't been doing that much lately. He kind of misses it.

"I know I really suck at saying this, I'm... sorry. Really. I didn't mean to scare you like that." Tony scratches his neck. "I wasn't thinking, and believe me you're not going to hear me say that very often, so enjoy it while you can."

Loki doesn't say anything, or react aside from glancing down at Simba, who actually smiles a bit more at him. His eyes are still embroidered on, but they somehow look more real now, and they move to look at him instead of staring straight ahead. Loki grins slightly back.

"Are you scared of me?" Tony asks, and Loki glances at him. He'd been really scared when Tony had been holding the... turkey base-ter thing.

"Maybe bit." Loki mumbles, and Tony looks at him, almost like he's disappointed to hear that.

"You know I'd never hurt you, right? And I'll certainly never do what those bastards did to you, hell no!"

"She said no." Loki replies. "Said you weren't gonna do that. Jarvis too. And you haven't, and family's not s'possed to do that, anyways nope nope nope!"

"Well, they were right. I'm not going to hurt you and anyone else who tries is going to regret it." Tony rambles on. "Hey, remember when Sulley scared Boo when she stood next to that robot boy he was roaring at? Remember how he really didn't mean to scare her, that he wasn't actually roaring at her? Well, this is like that. I didn't mean to scare you and I certainly wasn't going to attack you or anything. But I guess maybe it seemed like that to you, like how Boo thought Sulley was roaring at her."

Loki nods slightly. Is this really like that? He hopes so. He remembers Tony saying he's only a monster like Boo's a monster (in that other people seem him as one when he's not). He doesn't say anything as he sits there running a finger over the chip in Chip's rim. Chip's broken, sort of like he is. Only Chip's broken on the outside, and it's only a little bit, whereas he's broken inside.

He wonders if Pinocchio ever becomes a real boy, like how Chip had become human again after being turned into a teacup.
"You know, you're a lot quieter than usual." Tony remarks. "Please tell me we haven't gone back to square one. I mean, I know I screwed up, but hopefully not that badly."

Loki's pretty sure he's not talking about actual squares.

"You know what?" Tony says, getting up and heading towards the counter. "We're going to destroy this, together." He picks up the need-like turkey thing and Loki tenses. "Hey, it's all right. When we're done with this thing, it'll be beyond recognition." Tony's saying something about energy blasts, and while Loki remembers shooting stars, just like Tony does.

Loki glares at the thing in Tony's hand.

"Or we could give it to Hulk and he could smash it into smithereens." Tony offers, before adding, as another roar sounds from below. "But maybe when he's a bit calmer."

At least he knows the stupid thing won't be dragged through his lips now, but he still glares at it with hate. He wishes it would burn to a fiery crisp before being cast to the deepest depths of Helheim.

Suddenly, the not-needle thing bursts into flames, and Tony stares at it in shock. "Good thing I'm wearing my armor." He mutters, before glancing at Loki. "You know, I'm not even surprised you can do this, when you can make repulsor-like energy just like me."

Simba nudges the frying pan towards Loki, and Loki grabs it. The bas-ter thing has stopped burning, and Tony drops it. Loki proceeds to beat it with the frying pan, like Boo beat Randall with that wooden thing, trying to make it so it'll never hurt him again. He gets a little carried away, so the frying pan ends up sort of mangled too and the kitchen floor even gets damaged.

And it hadn't even been an accident. Breaking things on purpose is worse than on accident, right? Tony said he could break the not-needle, but not the frying pan or the floor.

Tony just stares at him, almost amused. "Wow, you've really took it out on that, huh? Geez, I'd need my suit to be able to smash it like that. Can't say I blame you, and I honestly think it's a good thing. Glad you didn't take it out on me, though. Don't worry about the damage, by the way. After all, it's nothing next to what Hulk's done."

Loki stands there, staring at the smashed remnants of the needle-like thing. He's not at all sorry to see it broken, but he's sort of disappointed about the frying pan. Sleipnir stomps on the pieces, but his hooves don't do anything.

"Wish you had a real body." Loki mumbles to him. Sleipnir says he does, but Loki shakes his head. It's not the same if he's just air, right? Sleipnir seems to think he's not.

"Do you ever forgets?" Loki asks after a couple minutes, back at the table and taking another sip of chocolaty warmth.

Tony arches a brow. "Forget what?"

"Where you are, when you haves a memory... flashback." After all, Tony had a flashback in the pool, Loki thinks. It'd seemed like it, anyways, and he really doesn't seem to like water.

"Uh... yeah, let's just say I didn't think it was you and Jarvis grabbing me there." Tony says. Had someone hurt him in the water? Humans apparently die if they're underwater for too long, but Tony's not dead and Bruce doesn't seem to have a problem with it.
"Dids you get hurt in water?" Loki asks, and Tony gives him a scrutinizing look. The man stares into his mug for a bit.

Tony nods jerkily. Loki pauses. Tony had mentioned having 'his own personal Hell' before, and while Loki had at first thought he meant a friend like Hel, Hel said he really meant something like Helheim. A bad place where you get hurt a lot, like Asgard. Tony had mentioned a cave.

"Was it in the cave?" Loki finds himself asking, before he can stop himself. He doesn't like talking about the needle, after all, so Tony wouldn't like talking about this. "Sorry." He mumbles.

Tony gives him another one of those scrutinizing looks, before glaring at the ceiling. "Jarvis, if you told him-"

"I did not, sir. I would never betray your trust like that." Jarvis replies smoothly.

"Hel saids you meant a pers'nal Helheim. Bad place. Said it was a cave." Loki explains. Tony stares at him for a while.

"Yeah, I've had some bad experiences with water." Tony says, and while he doesn't say anything about the cave, he doesn't say it hadn't happened there.

"Like Aladdin?" They'd tied Aladdin up and thrown him into the sea, and Genie saved him. Like how Jarvis and Loki helped Tony. Tony nods stiffly.

"Yeah. You've seen the results. Don't tell anyone." Tony says sternly. Loki nods.

"'Fessor X didn't make it so I totally forget when I had one 'bout the servant. 'Cause he wasn't there when it was real and he was today, and he told 'em they were wrong. Wish he was now. Maybe... maybe he'd help you too? If you forget?"

Tony quickly changes the subject.

"You know that them doing it to you was wrong, right?" Tony asks, and Loki isn't sure if he's referring to the servant and Warriors Three or Odin. Both, probably.

That hadn't been the only time they made it so he couldn't talk, where the'd stopped the StupidTongue, as Fandral called him sometimes. They'd used a metal sort of muzzle to silence him sometimes, but that pales in comparison with the other way.

"Nobody's gonna do it to Odin, when he lied like me." Loki says. After all Odin's the Allfather, so he can do whatever he wants, especially to people like him. But Loki doesn't know if he could really wish that agony on anyone, and he's pretty sure he'd never actually be able to do that to someone himself.

"If anyone would deserve that, it would be Odin." Tony says. "Although that's not really how we do things here. We sort of abandoned the whole 'eye for an eye' thing. So even if someone's tortured someone, we generally don't torture them back. Same goes for murder. Although sometimes there are, well, exceptions." Tony stops for a bit, seeming to remember something, before he focuses back on Loki. "Like if anyone tries to mess with you, I'm gonna make them pay. I don't let people hurt my family."

My family. The words echo in Loki's head. He's Tony's family, even if they're not related, like Lilo and Stitch aren't related. Loki finds himself wondering who his family by blood is. Sometimes he pretends Elsa is his sister, and that he's Sleipnir's mother. He glances at Sleipnir, giggling slightly. That's a really silly game they play.
Tony walks over to the counter, reading a thing in his palm charging up and blasting at a metal sheet. A couple minutes later, he comes back with two plates, setting one next to Chip and another next to his own mug. "Here we go, Grilled Cheese a la Iron Man."

Loki takes a bite, and it's really good, even if it makes his finger slimy. He holds it out to Simba, who actually bites it this time.

"You can eat?" Tony asks, looking at the lion. "I mean, you don't have a stomach or anything. Or, you know, a way to poop or pee." Tony pauses thoughtfully. "Is it like when Stitch eats Loki's toys?"

"It's better than bugs. They're satisfying, though, even if they're slimy." Simba says, and Loki giggles. Volstagg hadn't thought so.

"Nice to know how my cooking rates in your eyes." Tony mutters.

Tony still feels really guilty for screwing up like he had. Loki doesn't seem entirely normal around Tony again, and Tony's somewhat disappointed. Not that he can really blame Loki, since Tony had kind of majorly triggered him.

Loki apparently wants to finish Pinocchio with Bruce, so they need to wait until Hulk's calmed down.

Tony hadn't expected the little flashback talk, and he never tells people about his own, but Loki had apparently worked it out on his own (even the cave part, somehow, although Tony only mentioned the cave once around him). He's more perceptive than Tony often gives him credit for, and Tony has a feeling that Loki would have known if he'd lied about getting hurt with water. After all, Loki had seen him have a flashback in the pool.

Bruce can't be too far behind in figuring out the truth.

Surprisingly, Sleipnir's still around, though Hel and Fenrir had disappeared a while ago, and the Jormungand necklace is back to being lifeless.

After finishing the hot chocolate and grilled cheese, Tony starts working on the teleportation-blocker some more, but he talks to Loki almost the whole time as well. He finds himself telling stories to Loki. Surprisingly, he even briefly tells Loki about his own biological family (though Loki does ask for some reason), mentioning that he wasn't particularly fond of his father.

Loki asks whether Tony's dad beat him or whipped him, as if he honestly expects the answer to be yes. At that, Tony almost has to elaborate a little more just so Loki won't get the wrong idea. He tells the god about how his father was never around, always looking for Captain America, and how Tony was never good enough for him. He doesn't share this with many people, but honestly, Loki feels more like family than his father ever had.

Loki, in response to the part about looking for Cap, asks "But he coulda asked you, 'cause you're a 'Venger and so's Steve so you woulda known where he was, right?"

This leads to Tony telling him a general history of Iron Man and the Avengers. He's told Loki a lot before, but never all in one go. Loki's already heard about the Chitauri attack (had even heard of it from Thor in Asgard, apparently) and Tony goes into detail about that battle, mentioning how Hulk had caught him when he fell.

That fact alone should prove to Bruce that Hulk's not a monster, but they're still working on that,
Loki in turn tells stories of his own. Some of them don't exactly make sense since Tony has to be missing the context. Loki mentions his real father is a king on Jotunheim (which Tony already knew), and Loki even admits that he likes to imagine Elsa is his sister.

Sleipnir and Simba even join in on the conversation, which feels sort of strange (mostly with Simba). Sleipnir says, with the air of someone who's been puzzling over something for a while, that Loki grew a lot when he was in the dark, so why hadn't he grown too? Tony remembers Loki saying something about his friends having to go away.

Loki had also bashed the turkey baster with the frying pan some more.

Tony knows that simply breaking a turkey baster and petri dishes isn't going to magically solve all Loki's problems, but it's got to at least help, right?

After two hours, Hulk finally seems to have calmed down, but according to Jarvis, he hasn't turned back into Bruce. Tony suggests that they finish the movie with Hulk, and Loki seems delighted with the idea.

Anyways, now that Hulk's not having a little rage party downstairs, Loki seems to really want to visit him, and Jarvis says it seems like it would be safe.

They head down to Hulk's floor. The place is a mess. The furniture is strewn around, and some pieces have pieces missing, but for the most part they'd been Hulk-proof, like they're supposed to be. The punching bags are no longer hanging from the ceiling, but are scattered around and hadn't fared quite as well as the furniture.

Hulk looks over at them, almost with concern. "Hurt Nice Man... Loki okay?" He lumbers towards them. "Loki hurt?"

Loki leans up against Hulk, shaking his head slightly. "Better nows. Tony says you gots mads 'cause you saw my 'llusion mouth." Hulk gently puts a massive hand on Loki's back, even as he growls slightly.

"Who hurt Hurt Nice Man Loki? Thunder Man Thor? Hulk smash Thor!"

"Allfather Odin dids it." Loki mumbles.

"Hulk smash! Hulk rip Allfather to shreds!" Hulk roars, and Tony's wondering if maybe they should leave. But shockingly, Hulk's still hugging Loki, even if it looks slightly less gentle due to his anger. Loki doesn't seem to care, though.

"Gotta takes deep breaths, Hulk-y. It helps." Loki says, and Tony snorts at the idea of Hulk meditating like Bruce.

Hulk seems slightly less angry, though, and he looks at Sleipnir and says simply. "Horse. Lots of legs."

"Hi!" Sleipnir says brightly, and Simba greets Hulk as well. Hulk looks at Simba in surprise. "Toy lion talk? Toy lion alive?"

"I'm Simba. And I can talk for real now." Simba says.

"We were going to finish Pinocchio." Tony tells Hulk. "I don't know if you were watching before,
"It's 'bout a puppet who came real and he might be a real boy someday! And the mean Strombli guy locked him in a cage, but he got outs after the Blue Fairy came and he lied and his nose grew!" Loki supplies. "And there's a cricket that's not even like a cricket." He giggles.

Hulk doesn't answer, instead turning and looking around the room. He grabs the Hulk-sized sofa and uprights it, although it leans slightly. He sits down and looks at them. Tony feels like a little kid, sitting on such a huge couch, and Loki actually clambers into Hulk's lap, placing Simba and Stitch on his own lap. Sleipnir lays down on the floor.

Jarvis pulls up a holographic screen, and the movie starts again.

Honest John and Gideon are shown drinking in a pub and celebrating the money they got from selling Pinocchio to Stromboli. The coachman offers them even more money to gather bad little boys and take them to Pleasure Island. With a very demonic smile, he says they never come back as boys.

"Yeah, and this totally doesn't make you seem like a pedo." Tony mutters under his breath.

"What's that? Like a flower?" Loki asks, and it takes Tony a second to realize Loki thinks he said petal.

"Uh, no." He hadn't even thought Loki would hear him when he's a bit away, much less that they'd have this conversation.

"What'd you say then?" Loki asks expectantly. Ordinarily, Tony has no problem blurt out uncomfortable things, but how is he supposed to explain this? He's kind of surprised to realize that he wants to shield Loki from some of the uglier aspects of the world. Loki's seen plenty of horrors already.

"Jarvis? What's the word Tony said?" Loki asks.

"Do you really want to know, Mr. Loki?" Jarvis asks. Loki nods, and Jarvis sighs. "Very well. A pedophile, which Mr. Stark shortened to 'pedo', is a person who engages in sexual activities with children. Pedophilia is both very wrong and against the law."

Loki scrunches up his face in disgust. "That coach guy does sex with those boys?"

"Thank god, no-" Tony starts to say, but he's drowned out.

"HULK SMASH PUNY COACH MAN!" Hulk roars and leaps towards the holographic screen, smashing a fist into it (somehow, Loki manages to hang on to Hulk when he does this). It disappears, and Tony holds up his hands.

"Whoa, big guy! He doesn't do that, but he kinda seems like the type who might." Tony replies, before rambling on. "I mean, it's nice to know you have the right opinion about that matter. I didn't know it made you angry."

"Bad." Hulk states, and Tony turns to Loki.

"I hope nobody ever did that to you." Tony mutters.

Loki frowns, as if he's not sure if they're still talking about sex. When he doesn't answer after a bit, Tony clarifies with "Forced you to have sex, I mean. Especially if you were a child. Or anytime
really. You don't really seem like the type of guy who'd really want to have it." Honestly, Loki still seems sort of like a child, even though he's not, and Tony doesn't exactly think his mind's just a child's mind either. There's more to Loki than that.

"Never had sex." Loki says, before he cocks his head to the side, clearly thinking. "Y'know my dreams where my Sleipnir came outta me, likes a baby?" Sleipnir looks up, and Loki grins at him and sinks down on the floor next to the horse. Hulk watches, a very confused expression on his face.

"Uh, you mentioned it, yeah." Tony says. "Wait, dreams, like you've had it more than once?"

"Yeah, and sometimes I dream I'm a horse an' I'm in my field with other horses under so many stars and I'm really really happy!" Loki laughs, flapping his hands and singing his song with Sleipnir.

Loki frowns, obviously thinking, before saying slowly. "If my Sleipnir came out, someone had'ta put him in, right, 'cause that's how babies work. Lady Frigga saids so. Need to do sex for a baby, ands the guy puts the baby in the girl tummy but it seems like he's gonna pee in her." Tony bursts out laughing at this, figuring this is Loki's way of saying the man puts his penis in. Loki stares at him, apparently not seeing the humor. "'Xcept I don't r'member any dreams 'bout someone putting him in, nope nope nope! Just he came outta me."

Loki had mentioned that he was a mare the other time he brought this up on the plane, but that would mean he could switch his biological sex or something, like a hermaphrodite. Really, how the hell would that even work? Actually, Tony doesn't even want to know. As Loki seems to have just realized, it would involve having sex with a horse.

"But that was a dream, right? This is all hypothetical?" Tony asks, silently begging Loki to say yes- and be telling the truth, of course.

Loki nods, twisting his fingers together. "Yeah, just a dream. Think it mighta been my first dream of my Sleipnir? I forgets, but I shared it when we was pretending we're my Monster Family."

"He's my mummy!" Sleipnir says, rubbing his head against Loki's chest.

Loki probably just had a crazy dream about his imaginary friend, and now he and his imaginary friend pretend it's real.

"Feels reals, but all my other dreams do too. Like, even Hans and Gaston killing you guys felts real but it's not, 'cause you're not dead. B'sides, nobody ever teased me 'bout it and they woulda if it's real."

Tony sighs in relief. If that wasn't a dream...

He's not entirely sure he wants to know if Loki can switch biological sexes. He can clearly switch ages, like when he'd turned into Mowgli, so it's not as farfetched as it could be, but the idea is somewhat weird to think about.

"I'm real." Sleipnir says and Tony's been starting to think Loki doesn't control his friends anyways. Sleipnir's normally not around for this long, but he's always seemed reluctant to leave.

"What happens when you're not with us?" Tony asks the horse curiously.

"I go back to the dark." Sleipnir says quietly. Tony wonders what the dark is. Probably that's where he is in Loki's mind is when the god isn't making his friends, but Sleipnir sounds like he doesn't like it.
Loki looks like he's heard this before.

Tony shakes his head and has Jarvis turn the movie back on. They're interrupting this one a lot more than usual, especially with the long break in the middle.

Honest John convinces Pinocchio to go off to Pleasure Island, and he meets a boy named Lampwick on the coach with the messed-up coachman. At Pleasure Island, the boys run wild, smoking, drinking and engaging in various other illegal behaviors like vandalism (including drawing over *Mona Lisa*). Tony can practically hear Pepper saying he would have fit right in there a couple years ago, although he's never smoked.

Jiminy is shocked when he finds Pinocchio smoking and playing pool, and Lampwick scoffs the cricket, shooting pool balls at him. Jiminy storms off when Pinocchio says Lampwick is his best friend, not Jiminy. However, the cricket notices the coachman and various shadow-like guards caging a bunch of donkeys to be sold off to the circus or salt mines. Once of them can still talk, and cries for his mother before the coachman cracks a whip and yells at them to shut up.

Loki tenses, leaning up next to Tony.

Lampwick continues to mock Jiminy after he's gone, and he grows ears and then a tail, the reverse order of what Loki had done earlier. Lampwick screams in horror once he realizes what's happening and sees a donkey face in the mirror.

Stitch spits out Loki's horse mask, which has changed frequently from looking like Maximus to looking like Spirit. However, Loki has trouble fitting it over his Stitch ears.

Lampwick begs Pinocchio to help him, before he transforms entirely, running around braying and kicking things. Tony glances at Loki, hoping he won't freak out- the movie certainly portrays this in a negative light. Loki merely looks confused as Pinocchio grows his own tail and donkey ears. "Why don't they like being donkeys? Donkey doesn't mind being a donkey." At first, Tony thinks that's redundant until he realizes Loki's talking about Donkey from *Shrek*. "Donkey can talk." Loki says, as if talking donkeys are the norm instead of the other way around. "Why do the boys hate it?" He asks again.

"They probably don't like being donkeys because they're used to being people." Tony answers, and Loki follows up with asking why the don't just change back. Apparently he thinks all the boys have magical abilities that enable them to shift. Tony says it's probably something external (the island maybe) is turning them into donkeys, not the boys themselves, so they can't turn back. Loki nods uneasily.

The god pauses and says, apparently back to the topic of Shrek "There was someone like Pinocchio, 'xcept he looked different! An', and maybe Donkey was a boy once?" Honestly, Tony thinks Donkey is supposed to be a reference to the donkeys in *Pinocchio*, and a different Pinocchio did appear in *Shrek*.

"Maybe. Do you think you could totally turn into an animal?" Tony asks, glancing at Loki's ears and tail.

"Can't becomes a animal, you stupid freak." Loki says, but he's clearly repeating something he heard rather than calling Tony a freak. Loki flicks his fingers, frowning. "'Xcept I do in my dreams, like whens I'm a horse. And I dreamt I was a bird once and flew 'way from Asgard too."

"Or what about turning other people into animals? You could probably do that, too. Just don't turn me into a llama or anything." Tony says, before realizing Loki won't get that Disney reference. If
they ever watch that one, though, Loki will undoubtedly compare Tony to Kuzco and perhaps try to pull that llama trick in a game. Or as a prank.

Loki just nods as if asking not to be turned into a llama is perfectly normal.

Pinocchio flees Pleasure Island, leaving Lampwick, who he'd just claimed was his best friend, behind as a donkey. That sort of seems like it's going against the criteria of being brave and unselfish, Tony thinks as Pinocchio throws himself into the water. He could never do that.

Geppetto, it turns out, has been swallowed by Monstro the whale, although why exactly he was looking for Pinocchio at sea is a mystery to Tony. Pinocchio learns this from a dove, who's really the Blue Fairy. Pinocchio and Jiminy search underwater for Monstro, somehow managing to survive without breathing underwater. Well, Pinocchio's a puppet, so he probably doesn't have to breathe, but Jiminy would.

They eventually join Geppetto, Figaro and Cleo inside Monstro, and Pinocchio declares that they're going to get out by making a fire to make the whale sneeze. This is followed by their desperate attempt to flee Monstro on a raft, and Geppetto almost drowns.

Tony doesn't exactly like these drowning scenes. They bring up memories of being waterboarded in Afghanistan, although they don't exactly cause total flashbacks like some scenes do with Loki. There are a surprising number of drowning scenes in the Disney movies they've watched, though: that one scene where Aladdin was tied up, gagged and thrown in the water, that time Eric had almost drowned before Ariel rescued him, it'd even happened in *Lilo & Stitch*.

The scene in *The Incredibles* where the plane Helen, Dash and Violet got shot out of the sky and they landed in the ocean was enough that Tony tried to shut it out by fiddling on his StarkPhone. However, the scene in *Tangled* where Rapunzel and Flynn were in a cave with rising water may have been the worst for Tony, since there was the whole cave part as well as the water. He'd managed to not let on any of his thoughts those times, and he's hiding them now, too, but Loki stares at him.

Right, Loki knows he hates water now, since he'd seen him have a flashback in it. Loki actually snuggles up close to Tony (the first time since the whole turkey baster incident). Tony tells himself that Loki's looking for reassurance and comfort, but he knows the truth in the back of his mind—Loki's really trying to offer it to him.

Tony doesn't actually push Loki off him.

Pinocchio saves Geppetto from drowning but ends floating face down, unmoving, Loki frowns, looking quite worried for Pinocchio but seeming confused at the same time. "But, he breathed underwater, like Ariel 'n me, so why's he... dead? Is he?"

"Maybe he hit his head." Tony suggests, and Loki stares at him with an odd expression on his face.

As Geppetto cries over Pinocchio's lifeless body back at home, the Blue Fairy declares that Pinocchio's been brave, truthful, and unselfish. Pinocchio wakes up as a real boy, no longer with donkey ears or a tail, and Tony notices that Loki's Stitch ears and blue Simba tail are gone now.

"He's real!" Loki says, as if it's the most amazing thing in the world. The god flaps his hands, yet he sounds almost jealous.

Tony's about to ask Loki if he thinks himself unreal or something, but stops himself. He's done enough damage today.
As Jarvis turns the TV off, Loki chews on his lip and stares at Tony. "That's it?"

"What do you mean?" Had Loki liked the movie so much that he wants more?

"What happens to the boys that becomes jackasses?" Loki asks anxiously. "They still donkeys? And in cages? What 'bout Lampwick?" Huh, the movie had kind of skipped over that.

"I don't know." Tony admits, and Loki smacks his own thighs anxiously.

"An' what happens to Honest John 'n Gideon? What 'bout the guy who had the coach and Stromboli?"

"What about them?"

"They gots away, like the Warriors Three an' Odin dids. Didn't even gets beat up like Thor." Loki says quietly, dejectedly. "Didn't get in trouble. Shouldn't they? They weres bad."

Oh. Tony hadn't even thought of that, but in every other movie they've watched, the bad guys had faced some sort of consequence for their actions. And Loki's right. This movie doesn't provide any explanation of what happened to the villains or donkeys.

"Yes, they should get in trouble. What do you think should happen to them?" Tony asks, and he's asking about the 'Warriors Three' and Odin, but Loki apparently interprets the question to be about the fictional characters.

"Hulk smash puny bad warriors!" Hulk rumbles, but he doesn't shout it.

"The boys can be boys again, but they can be donkeys when they wants." Loki nods slightly. "Bein' a donkey wouldn't be bad, I don't thinks, 'specially if you can talk like some of 'em can. Like Donkey." Tony figures he's talking about the one in *Shrek* again.

"So what should happen to the villains?" Tony asks.

"Stromboli wouldn't like bein' in a cage. He'd be sorry if he was in a cage like he put Pinocchio ins."

"Going for the poetic justice approach?" Tony asks, smirking. Loki doesn't answer as Stitch spits out a figurine- one of the characters, the antagonist in fact, from Loki's Mickey Mouse figurine set (Tony thinks his name is Pete, but he's not sure). Like Stromboli, he's pretty fat. Loki holds the toy in a fist and tries to make a cage around it with his fingers.

Loki glares at the figure substituting for Stromboli and says "You can't even tel'port outs, nope nope nope. You're gonna stay in there for being bad."

"How about the coachman? Would you make him turn into a donkey? I mean, he was already a complete ass, but now he'd really be one."

Loki shrugs, snuggling up next to Hulk. Despite being only early afternoon, he actually looks really tired, which is rare since he somehow goes from energetic to asleep without really having a middle ground most of the time, except there's one now. Loki's clearly able to go without much sleep, and he's usually full of energy.

Then again, Tony has a feeling all the magic he'd used today had worn him out. He'd used way more than Tony expected him to, although most of it seemed accidental. And then there had been the whole flashback. Frankly, Tony's surprised Loki's still awake, all things considering.
"Can you..." Loki sighs sleepily as he speaks. "If you ever see 'em, will you make them sorry's?"

"The coachman and Stromboli?" Tony asks, about to say he doubts he ever will see them since they're fictional.

Loki shakes his head no, his speech getting even more muddled as his eyes start to droop closed. "Warriors Three. Likes you and Hulk-y did with Thor... Do that to them?"

"If I ever see them, they're going to be very sorry for how they treated you." Tony says as Bruce nods, eyes flashing green. "If we can beat up Thor, we can beat up his little gang of friends."

"Odin?" Loki's practically asleep by the time he's gotten the name out. Odin's really the one who should pay the name out. Odin's really the one who should pay the most, since he seems to be the instigator for making Loki's life a living hell. Equally unfortunately, he's the most powerful person in all of Asgard, or, if one believes Thor, all the 'Nine Realms'. Not exactly a smart guy to pick a fight with, because to be honest, if Thor really wanted to end them all, he could, easily... and Odin's supposedly even more powerful. Them beating up Thor had really been reliant on him not retaliating and smiting them all with a huge lightning bolt.

"We'll make him pay, somehow." Tony promises, though he has no idea how.

Loki falls asleep leaning up against Hulk, who carries Loki over to the Hulk-sized bed. After righting it (it had been upside down), Hulk lays Loki down, before laying down next to him.

When Bruce wakes up the next morning he blinks at the light amount of light. Once he's adjusted to the light, he realizes the ceiling looks... soft. Rubbing his eyes, he opens them yet again to see that it's still the case.

He's in the Hulk's floor, on a huge bed. Jarvis informs him he's been asleep for almost sixteen hours.

He remembers seeing Loki's mouth stitched shut, but then he'd Hulked out and doesn't remember what happened after. He supposes he fell asleep after transforming back.

However, he hears snickering, and rolls over to see Loki and Tony are in here too. Had they been here when Hulk was angry? That would be suicide.

On the floor, Bruce sees a drawing of Pinocchio with his donkey ears and tail next to Loki with his Stitch ears and blue lion tail (although he no longer has them).

Loki's drawing over Tony's face with marker, snickering like mad. He's added a crazy mustache, over Tony's real mustache, and has drawn stars all over Tony's forehead, in practically every color imaginable. On one cheek is something like the embroidered patch on one of Simba's paws, which Loki explains is Rafiki's painting of Simba.

Tony vows to get his revenge when he wakes up and notices. Jarvis, sounding very amused, says he's gotten several photos and video of this, and refuses to delete them when Tony tells him to (Bruce and Loki both protest at that idea).

After showering to get the ink off, Tony spends the day in his lab, working on the teleportation blocker. Loki and Bruce spend most of the day in there too. It helps that Loki's actually trying to teleport now. Meeting Kurt was definitely a huge help, Bruce thinks, as Loki attempts to teleport to the other side of the lab.

They find out, after Loki accidentally freezes part of the floor, that it's easier for him to teleport
 when he's sliding across ice. Bruce suspects this is related to the fact Loki teleports when he thinks he's flying.

However, Loki still needs a lot of practice, and he's only been able to teleport to places he can see. He's clearly capable of teleporting to places he can't see, though, since that's how he ended up on the Helicarrier in the first place, and there had been those times he'd teleported in his sleep. That still clearly terrifies him.

Loki makes Bruce watch *The Lion King* with him and Simba. Loki and the lion act out basically the entire movie, and Simba actually acts himself now. Loki uses his other Lion King figurines (though none of them come to life, although they move a bit occasionally) and Jarvis provides Scar's lines, while Loki plays various other characters.

Simba comments that Loki looks the most like 'Uncle Scar'. Both are lean with green eyes and dark hair (or a mane, in Scar's case). Loki seems to find the part near the end of Timon and Pumbaa doing the hula particularly hilarious, perhaps because he'd seen Lilo and Stitch do it. The god winds up making a hula skirt with his powers, and wears it happily. Tony points out that usually girls wear it, but Loki counters with the fact that Stitch, Timon and Pumbaa aren't girls.

Stitch even moves a couple times (which had happened before yesterday, just like with Simba) and even Loki's Elsa doll moves a bit. Loki seems disappointed that they don't seem as lively as his 'Monster Family' or, now, Simba. Bruce wonders if it'll stay like that or if Stitch will act alive more.

Bruce thinks, if they ever show Loki *Toy Story*, that Loki will bring all his toys to life. That would be really chaotic.

Around four in the afternoon, Jarvis informed Tony for, according to the AI, the fifth time, that he has some party for some charity Jarvis had donated to in Tony's name, to help make sure poor or homeless people get something to eat. Jarvis claims that Tony had ignored the first four reminders, while Tony denies he'd ever gotten them.

It's only then that Bruce realizes that Thanksgiving, which is on November 28th this year in 2013, is quickly approaching.

Bruce hasn't celebrated Thanksgiving in years. While he was on the run, he was never in the USA and thus never in a country that actually celebrates Thanksgiving. That, and he never really had enough money to buy a huge feast, or anyone to eat with for that matter. Even last Thanksgiving, after the Chitauri incident, he'd been back in more remote places in the world, although he wasn't exactly on the run anymore.

Bruce had suggested inviting some of the other Avengers, since it's not like any of them really have anywhere else to go, with the exception of perhaps Thor who has family in Asgard (and who doesn't even celebrate Thanksgiving). But Bruce wouldn't have thought of inviting him anyways.

Come to think of it, Bruce isn't not sure whether Natasha celebrates it either, since she grew up in Russia.

In the evening, Tony goes out to that Thanksgiving charity event (or a party for some charity event) with a bunch of other rich people, and Bruce is glad Tony hadn't gotten some insane idea to drag them along like he had that time they went to Stark Industries. Bruce really isn't a party person.

"Your turn." Bruce says, glancing at Loki. They're playing Scrabble again. Loki frowns at the
letters in front of him. He'd insisted on having random tiles in Scrabble like Bruce and Jarvis do, which Bruce finds slightly admirable, especially since this would be a hard game to play even with a translator like All-Tongue in his head, since Loki needs to produce English words with random letters from an alphabet that was completely unfamiliar two months ago.

Loki and Bruce are currently sitting on Bruce's bed- which is even larger than a king size bed, like all the beds in the guest rooms. Bruce still isn't really used to all the luxuries life at the tower provides. Heck, his bathtub is practically a small swimming pool, and the closet in his bedroom is bigger than some of the places he'd stayed at while on the run.

Bruce isn't entirely sure why they're playing games in his room instead of the living room, but they'd wound up in here.

Bruce's floor is scattered with rectangular wooden blocks. They'd broken out Jenga for the first time since that day Bruce had met Loki. That hadn't even been a full two months ago, yet it seems like he's known Loki for longer, and they're a lot closer than Bruce ever thought they'd be. Bruce had first seen proof of Loki's magic when it had kept a Jenga tower that really should've fallen over standing up and ignoring the laws of physics and gravity. Loki had totally panicked back then.

This time, however, Loki had smirked when the tower remained standing when it really shouldn't have, before bursting out laughing when it toppled as soon as Bruce touched it. His magic had clearly stopped holding it up as soon as it was Bruce's turn. The god had actually been rather devious, using this trick to win every single game, but Bruce hadn't cared. Seeing Loki laugh while using magic made Bruce's heart soar, because they really have been making progress.

They're playing Scrabble now. Loki frowns at the holographic board, and at his tiles. He asks Simba what he should do, but the lion isn't much help. Apparently, Simba can't read.

Loki slowly arranges his tiles to spell 'gzvrx'.

"Uh, that's not a word." Bruce points out.

"Is too!" Loki protests, crossing his arms and wiggling his bare toes. Simba echoes his statement. It's somehow weirder to see Simba talk than when he'd first seen Fenrir show up out of nowhere.

"It doesn't even have any vowels, although I admit your hand stunk if it was all consonants. Every word has at least one vowel." Bruce argues, and Loki rattles off all the vowels in a singsong voice, before saying that it's a word again.

"Oh really? Care to give a definition, then?" Bruce arches an eyebrow, and Loki giggles, saying Tony does that a lot. Bruce certainly can't argue with him there.

Loki appears thoughtful, and Jarvis somewhat ironically starts to provide the definition of the word definition, though Loki interrupts to say that he knows what it means.

"It's..." Loki starts, and Bruce thinks he's going to prove he knows what definition means though when he continues it's obvious he switched back to talking about the questionable word he put down. Despite there being words like Mjolnir and Bilgesnipe in Asgard, Bruce seriously doubts Gvaxrzk is a word. "It's a gzvrx."

Bruce rolls his eyes, although the fact Loki actually pronounced that makes Bruce wonder whether or not he's actually lying about this, and he asks Loki for a definition again.

"Gzvrx is a animal in Asgard Ass-Guard! It's gots big gold horns like," Loki's hands trace imaginary curved horns that would be coming out of his forehead, and for a brief second, long
golden curved horns are visible. "and it plays tricks when you're not looking. Like, it'll steal your stuff so you thinks you losted it but then it gives it backs 'xcept it looks different an' sometimes it gets broke."

Bruce briefly tells him that lost is one of those weird exceptions, like knew, saw or ate, that doesn't have the usual -ed ending for past tense. He also reminds him that you use an before words that start with a vowel, instead of a. Loki wrinkles his nose, clearly not liking how crazy English is as a language.

"I get twenty six points!" Loki exclaims excitedly, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction and grinning a bit too innocently at Bruce. "One for all the letters in your al'bet. A, B, C, D, E, F, G, 'bomination, blasphemy."

Bruce smiles at Loki's song. It starts to the tune of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, which Bruce had shared with Loki a while ago, since it's how he learned the alphabet as a child (thanks to Sesame Street). The second bit Bruce recognizes as the alphabet scene in The Hunchback of Notre Dame. He also notices with some surprise that it even rhymes and has the same number of syllables. Did Loki come up with that on the spot in a language he's still new at, or had he used All-Tongue?

"Okay, okay. Twenty-six points for you. Looks like you're winning." Bruce says before grinning. "Not for long, though." Smirking, he lays down his own nonsense word jubyaz. Okay, it's cheating, but the opportunity's too good to pass up.

Tony must be rubbing off on him, Bruce thinks. This seems like the sort of thing he'd do in retaliation.

"Let's see... twenty-seven points for me."

"That's not a word!" Loki says with a wild giggle, flicking his fingers before tilting his head with a questioning expression. "Is it?"

"Of course. It means payback."

"No it doesn't." Simba says suddenly.

"All-Tongue says you're lying." Loki says after a bit, staring at Bruce intently. "And Simba."

"Okay, okay." Bruce holds up his hands. "You got me. What does All-Tongue say about Gzvrx?"

"That it's a word." Loki says, although Bruce is almost certain he's lying, since he can't quite stop the grin that spreads across his face.

"Can Hulk come out?" Loki asks hopefully. Bruce sighs. He's not at all surprised Loki asked that-it's the fifth time tonight. But he's still not big on letting the Ot- letting Hulk out, he thinks, glancing at where the Hulk plush Tony and Loki got him is sitting on his bed (Beast and Shrek are now on Hulk's floor). Bruce still doesn't trust Hulk not to flip out about something and, while he has that Hulk-proof floor now, Loki would still be in danger if he was on the same floor.

"Not right now." Bruce says. He's still tired from last night, when Hulk had come out without Bruce wanting him to. At least he'd made it to the Hulk floor. Right now, Hulk seems annoyed in his brain. Yeah, definitely not letting him out when he's annoyed, although that only makes Hulk more annoyed. Bruce manages to force him down with some meditation.

Loki, sulking slightly, has wandered from their Scrabble game. He sulks slightly less once he's curiously looking at the snow globe sitting on Bruce's dresser, next to a clay pot he'd gotten as a
gift from a grateful couple in India for providing medical care for their baby while on the run.

The snow globe is something Tony had given him, and inside the little glass sphere is King Kong climbing the Empire State Building. Bruce is fairly certain Tony was making some comparison between Hulk and King Kong with that gift, where some people viewed King Kong as a monster and hunted him down, while others didn't see a monster at all.

"Bruce, look, a go-ril-la." Loki says, pointing at the small King Kong. "Hey, that tower... it's outside, right? I think it's outside the windows? Or is that a different one?"

"No, that's the same building. Nice spotting." Bruce says, glad Loki's distracted from asking about the Hulk. "It's called the Empire State Building. And the gorilla's King Kong." Bruce gestures to the snow globe and tells him to tip it over.

Loki does so and his eyes widen as the fake snow swirls around in the glass sphere. Apparently he hadn't noticed it resting at the bottom. Laughing, Loki shakes it up and holds it for Bruce to see. The god loses himself in staring at the swirling snow for a while, shaking the snow globe periodically.

"If that's that building, then he's gotta be real big, right?" Loki asks after a bit, presumably referring to King Kong. Bruce nods and confirms that King Kong is indeed huge.

"Bigger'n Hulk-y, right? Ands even bigger than Tony's Hulk suit? 'Cause that Empire building's huge. Hey, could Hulk-y climb that building? I wanna watch."

"How about we watch a movie, instead?" Bruce recommends, although they'd already watched The Lion King. Bruce just wants to distract the god from continuously asking about Hulk. "Tony recommends How to Train Your Dragon. Do you know about dragons?"

Loki nods, clapping his hands. "They can fly." He says enviously. "An' sometimes they breathes fire. I made the stupid bast-er thing catch fire yesterday but Tony didn't care."

"So do you want to watch it? Or we could watch King Kong, but that's not animated..."

"Tony's not here. We always watch movies with Tony." Loki says, although Tony had been working on the teleportation-blocker when they'd watched The Lion King earlier today.

"Uh, you could find something to read. Actually, I know the perfect book. Tony's got to have it."

Bruce hunts the shelves, which, like Tony's DVD collection, are surprisingly organized, until he finds the book he's looking for. Calling Loki over, he hands it to the god, who slowly sounds out the title. "Ha-rry Pot-ter and the... Sor-cer-ous Sss-tone."

"Sorcerer's Stone" Bruce corrects gently. "The original British version's called the Philosopher's Stone."

"What's brit-ish? And what's phil-oso-pher? Like Hakuna Matata's our problem free phil-oso-phy?" Loki seems to stop caring about receiving answers to his own questions as looks at the cover,
which shows Harry on his broom, trying to catch the Golden Snitch. "That boy's on a broom, Bruce!" Loki laughs, clearly finding the idea ridiculous, before he glances back at the cover. "He's gonna fall."

"No he won't." Bruce smiles slightly. "It's a flying broom." Loki giggles before giving him a dubious look that clearly says brooms don't fly. Bruce shakes his head. Honestly, Loki should be the least concerned with logic like that, since he could probably make a broom fly if he wanted to. He's made Toy Stark and Tink fly, after all, and Simba's gone airborne once or twice.

Loki gleefully points out the horse on the cover, and Bruce tells him it's a unicorn, and has to explain what a unicorn is. Loki asks if they can go to his own room, and, clutching Simba tighter than usual, closes his eyes and leaps forwards. Bruce blinks. Is he trying to teleport there? He's been practicing teleporting since Kurt's visit a few days ago, and Bruce is thrilled Loki no longer loathes every time he teleports. Granted, Loki still absolutely hates teleporting accidentally. Maybe he just feels like jumping, Bruce thinks, or he might even be trying to fly. Loki leaps two more times without anything magical happening, until Bruce stops him before he leaps into a wall.

During the very short elevator ride, Loki frowns, muttering about how 'it' won't do what he wants and won't listen. Apparently he was trying to teleport after all. Bruce tells him it's good he tried, and Loki smiles slightly. The way Loki talks about his powers make them sound like a disobedient child, Bruce thinks with a grin.

As they enter Loki's room through the usual means of walking, Jarvis turns on the holographic stars and the horses trotting along the walls, as well as the mural Loki had painted back in Malibu of yet more stars and horses, which now floats above Loki's headboard. The holograms provide some light, but not enough to read by. Loki protests when Bruce flicks on the light switch, as it dims the stars above them, so Bruce flicks it off again. Loki stands on his bed, reaching out to try and grab the stars. Loki's really tall, but the ceilings on this floor are at least twelve feet, if not more.

Jarvis solves the solution of not having enough light to read by making the holographic Tinker Bell appear to shine light on the book. Loki laughs and looks at Tink, which is a surprisingly accurate 3d model of the Disney version of the pixie. Jarvis probably could have gotten away with just having a floating ball of light, but he clearly went the extra mile. Jarvis makes Tink hover above Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone and chime as if to say 'read it'.

Loki, with Simba, Toy Stark and Stitch next to him, opens the book and flips to the first chapter, carefully reading aloud "The boy... who... lived." although he pronounces lived like how someone would say alive. Bruce gently corrects him. The god pauses with a confused expression, muttering that it would be a boring story if it was just about a dead boy, since he wouldn't do anything. Unless he was a ghost, Loki points out, contradicting his own point, and Bruce tells him it's not about a ghost. It's about magic. Loki looks at him skeptically, but Simba turns his head to the back cover and says "Loki, look."

Loki apparently hadn't known about book blurbs on back covers, but he reads this silently, eyes growing wide with excitement. Bruce is assuming it at least mentions Hogwarts and magic, and Loki announces "Hogwarts... I heard that before. Where?" He asks himself. "Oh yeah! Tony, he saids I won't get in trouble for doing stuff you learn at Hogwarts, nope nope nope. It says here it's a school of witch-craft and wi-zar-dry." Bruce doesn't remember Tony saying that, so perhaps it was from before he moved in.

"Witch, Wizard... It's magic? Like me?" Loki asks, looking at Bruce with awe. Bruce smiles and tells him to read the book and find out, since it would ruin it to just tell him. Loki nods, asking if
This is like when they work on English. Bruce hadn't even thought of that, had just thought that it'd be a good book to read, but Loki announces he's going to read it to Bruce. Bruce doesn't object.

Loki proceeds to read aloud slowly. Sometimes, he seems to be sounding out the words first, which leads to a fair number of mispronunciations, and sometimes he stays silent for a bit, apparently as he sorts out the words in his brain, perhaps with All-Tongue, and then he repeats what he read.

He reads about Vernon and Petunia being proud to be normal and completely doting on their son Dudley. The Dursleys want absolutely nothing to do with the Potters, despite Petunia and Lily being sisters. Most of the chapter is about the strange day where Mr. Dursley passed a stern cat sitting on a brick wall. They read about how owls were flying everywhere in broad daylight (although Vernon didn't notice during the morning since his desk faced away from the window) and how Vernon was annoyed to see people in cloaks.

When the book mentions Vernon working at a drill company named Grunnings, Bruce needs to explain to Loki both what a company is and what drills are. Bruce uses Stark Industries as an example of a company, although he gets some help from Jarvis while the concept.

They go on to read about how Dumbledore arrives at Privet Drive and talks to Professor McGonagall (whose name Loki seems to have trouble pronouncing, but he'd mispronounced Dumbledore at first too). He really loves that Professor McGonagall turns into a cat, and observes that she doesn't seem scared of it like the boys who turned into donkeys in Pinocchio. Bruce is glad to hear him give this example of good and bad sides to powers (although the boys weren't really magic themselves, it was more the island they were on). Loki continues to read, relaying how Dumbledore leaves baby Harry on the Dursley's doorstep after his parents were murdered, how Harry survived the Killing Curse when his parents didn't. At the very end of the chapter, it briefly mentions that Harry will spend the next few weeks being pinched and prodded by his cousin Dudley.

Bruce wonders how Loki will react to the Dursleys and their treatment of Harry, although Bruce is certainly going to make sure Loki knows it's wrong, just like how Asgard's treatment is wrong.

They seem to be getting closer to him actually believing that.
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

The Thanksgiving charity event Tony's at makes him start thinking of another charity. Pepper visits the tower. Stitch gets into trouble even as a plush backpack. Thor makes a very shocking discovery in Asgard.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Thor has been in Asgard since he last visited Tony Stark's house in the Midgardian location known as Malibu. The house is impressive by Midgardian standards but has nothing on Asgard's royal halls and palace.

His stay here has been mostly uneventful as he's attended to various duties as prince and spent time with his friends. It's like it always was, expect Loki is no longer there. Not that Thor ever paid much attention to him unless he was picking on the smaller boy who grew into the lean man he is now.

Thor is currently feasting with his friends the Warriors Three and Lady Sif. It's not an official feast, like they eat after gloriously victorious battles, but as Prince, Thor always eats well. His friends, especially Volstagg, are always happy to join him. They're laughing and joking around as usual.

As always, Volstagg puts away even more food than Thor to try to satiate his never-ending appetite.

It's a passing comment, bellowed from Volstagg as he pops a grape in his mouth, that makes Thor's mood drop. "At least I do not need to worry about the argr turning my food into bugs with his freakish seidr magic."

Fandral laughs, as Thor would have not long ago at the derogatory comment about magic, or Loki in general. He remembers food turning into something gross more than once, sometimes after tripping Loki or saying something against him. Loki had actually snickered mischievously as he watched Volstagg bite into a huge juicy bug so the guts spilled out, and the bug had refused to leave his mouth even though it was dead.

They hadn't let him get away with that.

Fandral is reminiscing aloud about how they'd "taught the freak a lesson for turning food into bugs." Thor can't really remember that punishment. They'd punished him so many times that all the beatings sort of blur together.

Sif points out. "You haven't had to worry about that for a while. Besides, he hid so much that he was practically gone for a couple years."

Volstagg nods. "Aye, he did hide a lot, but cowardice is to be expected of Frost Giants." It's true.
Loki had hidden a lot, and done everything possible to avoid them. Sometimes he'd even turned invisible, like that Violet girl. She had used that in an advantage when fighting that huge robot, and it didn't seem *quite* as cowardly that way. Loki had even teleported occasionally, but often didn't teleport far and seemed quite disoriented after, so they usually caught him and punished him for that too.

Still, Loki had needed to come out for food, since he couldn't ask the servants or slaves to deliver it to his room like Thor can at any time. (While Aesir and Jotuns cannot die from lack of nourishment, they still feel hunger pangs. Although Thor wonders if Volstagg would be able to stand more than a few hours without food).

When Loki was in mid-adolescence and Thor was on the cusp of manhood, for around a year, Thor had seen Loki so little that it was practically like he was gone. Whenever Thor tried to catch up to him, he always seemed to disappear somehow.

Granted, a year is hardly any time at all, considering they've been alive for over a thousand years. It hardly seems important. Then again, Thor thinks, it's only been around a year and a half since the Avengers formed, and Thor's banishment to Midgard had been only a year prior to that. So he guesses a lot can happen in only a year.

At first, Thor thought that Father had decided to trade Loki back with Jotunheim, or maybe killed him, but Loki had returned, screaming in rage at the Allfather. Loki is usually very quiet, and while he'd lost his temper in their youth occasionally, screaming and swinging his fists wildly (and been punished for it later) Thor had never seen him like that time. "*WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?! WHERE IS HE?*"

He'd disappeared again, and that's around when he changed. Maybe exactly then.

Loki had been different, once. Well, he'd always been different. He's a Jotun and can do magic, for starters. Thor has vague memories of when he was a small child and Father brought a blue baby back home. Loki had stayed blue for a bit, until he was old enough to toddle after Thor, babbling his name so it sounded more like "Fowr, fowr!"

Father had tried to make sure Loki was not part of the family, though, and Thor had already heard horror stories of Frost Giants, so when Loki followed him like a puppy, he pushed him away, scared and not liking the coldness of his skin.

Loki had caused all sorts of mischief and chaos when he was little, including a very memorable incident where he somehow managed to get into the weapons vault and knock over a large collection of weapons before apparently becoming intrigued with the Casket of Ancient Winters, which Father had told Thor never to touch.

Father had been very angry at Loki then, but he was angry at Loki most of the time. As Loki grew, he was quiet, kept to himself, and was mostly interested in books instead of battle. His eyes had been sharp and intelligent, even though they all told him he was as mindless as all Frost Giants.

But he's different now from what he used to be.

His eyes are glassy and dazed now, and have been for a long time. Since Loki was a mid-adolescent, Thor thinks. He's not entirely sure.

Loki’s like a little child now, yet another thing they've mocked him for, especially after he started crying more when they hit him, like a baby. Crying from pain is for weaklings, but Thor has no qualms about crying emotionally and is still very manly.
Loki's crying is different. Sure he'd cried when he was young, and the Warriors Three claim he cried when a servant tricked him into thinking he actually liked them, but for a while, Loki had barely made a sound when they hit him.

It's not only that. His speech had gotten stranger, too. He'd been a very smooth talker, a Silvertongue, before. He was adept at lying that there had been times Thor almost believed something he knew was a lie. Occasionally, he'd even managed to word an insult in a way that, by the time Thor had figured out what exactly the insult had meant, Loki had been gone.

Back when Thor found it funny to try to stuff Loki's head in chamber pots, Loki had once muttered under his breath something along the lines of how, if they shoved Thor in a chamber pot, he would make all the poop feel inadequate. Thor had heard, but didn't think much of it until days later, when it suddenly popped in his head that the smaller boy meant that as an insult rather than acknowledgement that his rank of prince puts him above practically everybody, that Loki was saying Thor was worse than the poop. Once he did realize this, he beat Loki up and used the same line on him, not wanting to admit he couldn't think of a better one.

Now, his speech is strange and it's obvious when he's lying. His body fidgets a lot more than it used to in general.

Going backwards and becoming stupider like that just isn't supposed to happen, and doesn't happen on Asgard, except in Loki's case.

Does it happen on Midgard?

Thor barely even notices the looks he's getting from Fandral and Volstagg when they see he's not laughing at the jibe about magic. He's not sure he should laugh. Both Father and Mother can wield magic. He'd told Tony that Father's magic is not the same as Loki's, but he knows it really is, no matter how much he tries to deny his Father doing something he'd been taught to hate by none other than Father himself.

Fandral makes another crack about magic, and before he can stop himself, Thor blurts out "Have care how you speak, Fandral. Father and Mother, your King and Queen, both wield magic."

That's probably not supposed to be known by anyone. Not that saying the wrong thing isn't exactly uncommon for him.

The Warriors Three and Sif gape at him, and Fandral laughs falsely. "Nice jest Thor. I almost fell for it." Thor doesn't know whether to try to pass it off as one or not, and in his hesitation, realization dawns on their faces.

"It is not a jest?" Volstagg asks, mouth hanging open in total shock. Crumbs of food fall into his beard.

"Nay. I do not jest." Thor admits solemnly. When he'd first seen Loki's magic as a small boy, Thor had been entranced with the beautiful green light around Loki's hands, but seeing Father punishing Loki for it after had changed his mind. Father would not have whipped Loki if what he'd done wasn't really bad, after all. Father had even told Thor later that a man using magic is cowardly and disgusting, that it makes the man argr.

It made perfect sense at the time. After all, Loki was already a Frost Giant monster so disliking him for another thing wasn't very hard.

Now, though, it doesn't make much sense at all.
After finding out that Father and Mother are both capable of wielding magic, Thor's found himself unsure of what to think. If magic truly is as bad as everyone says, then that would mean that Father is cowardly and disgusting.

The same would go for Mother (who has never said anything against magic and even tried to tell Thor it has its uses, though he hadn't believed her) to a lesser extent, although at least she would not be considered argr for using magic, since she's a woman.

Thor hates thinking of his parents this way, and doesn't want to admit that his father and king might be argr and a coward, like Father said about Loki.

Finally getting over his shock enough to speak, Volstagg says "But the Allfather is not argr."

Thor agrees Allfather is not cowardly or argr.

But it's either that Father is argr, or magic isn't shameful and disgusting in the first place.

Both ideas seem impossible to wrap his head around, since they go against everything Thor has ever known. But he'd rather think better of magic than think less of his parents.

Perhaps people had lied about magic. More specifically, perhaps Father had lied about magic.

Well, Father had lied, in a way, or at least withheld the truth. For most of his life, Thor had no idea Odin was magical.

Thor has rarely questioned the Allfather, but he finds himself unable to think of a good reason for why his father hates magic, since that's almost like hating himself.

Why had Father allowed them to mock and hurt Loki for his magic when he has magic himself? It would be like Thor hurting someone for having his same ability with thunder! Thor would never hurt someone else with his gift.

Even more confusing, why had the Allfather personally punished Loki for some instances of magic? The Allfather certainly doesn't punish himself for having magic, yet he had no qualms about whipping Loki for it.

Up until now, Thor's been trying to write it off being because Loki is a Frost Giant.

Father and Mother had even been the ones to change Loki's appearance from its natural blue form, not Loki himself as Thor had thought for the longest time.

Thor thinks back to the movie he'd watched when last visiting Tony Stark, about the family of Incredible superheroes. Their abilities had complemented each other, much like the Avengers, and it hadn't solely been Mr. Incredible's strength that won the day. In fact, if it had not been for the girl, Violet, and her magic, Mr. Incredible would have still been captured in the energy field.

The Frozone man, who had dark skin and sounded somewhat like the Furious Director Nick, had ice powers like the Jotnar. The Frost Giants use their powers in battle, of course, but it seemed different when Frozone did it.

It had seemed ridiculous at first, but the movie made magic, and ice, seem... not as bad as everyone says.

Thor dumps back his mug of mead and a servant rushes to refill it.
It hurts one's head, trying to make sense of things when one's whole world has been flipped around.

Some parties are lots of fun, but this really isn't one of those. Actually, this party is so bad that Tony's planning on just slipping out and going home.

This is one of those social-elite parties full of men in crisp suits and women wearing expensive dresses and jewelry. It's also a charity event, but Tony's willing to bet a couple of the people here have no idea what they're donating money to, if they're even donating at all. Tony actually knows what charity this is for, although at one time he wouldn't have even bothered to listen to Jarvis telling him about it, much less actually look it up himself.

Basically, this charity party is to help the poor or homeless get a thanksgiving dinner, a problem Tony's certainly never had firsthand experience with. Tony had donated a couple thousand out of his own pocket a while ago (and then promptly forgot about this event until Jarvis reminded him earlier today) and Stark Industries had made a generous donation as well. The money raised from everyone should help the less fortunate get a meal on the table for Thanksgiving and a roof over their heads if they're homeless. In the Big Apple alone, that's still a lot of people to cover, and realistically they won't get everyone.

Bruce had undoubtedly been one of those less-fortunate people while on the run, Tony knows. His Science Bro had technically been homeless most of the time and certainly hadn't celebrated Thanksgiving. Granted, none of the countries Bruce had been even celebrate Thanksgiving in the first place, but it's not like he would've had anyone to be with anyways. Kind of like Tony, himself.

Tony hadn't even thought about Thanksgiving until this charity gig he's leaving right now. Normally, Tony's alone on turkey day. Pepper and Rhodey have their own families to go to, after all, and while the two of them actually like Tony, he was never invited along with them. Apparently, their families don't want to put up with him and his rather infamous behavior. So he's never been too big on this holiday, and often wound up getting drunk after eating dinner alone (sometimes Dum-E would join him at the table despite not even having anything resembling a mouth or even a face).

But now, there are two other tower residents who don't have a family to spend the holiday with, either. They have each other, Tony reminds himself- okay Jarvis reminds him, but still. Loki and Bruce are kind of like his family, right?

So, he's at this stupid party for charity. It would probably help Tony's PR even more if he volunteered at a soup kitchen or something. Steve's certainly going to do something of the sort, because he's Captain Perfect. Actually, Tony can easily imagine Bruce volunteering like that. The guy had been a doctor on the run, even if he's technically never received official training, he's pretty dang good and a real doctor in Tony's book. So, yeah, Bruce would like helping people, considering he'd been a doctor.

Anyways, the reason this party sucks isn't because it's for charity. Tony's all for that, since he's a philanthropist and everything. The lameness comes from the actual atmosphere. For one thing, Tony made the mistake of wearing shoes someone had given him as a gift. He thinks it might have been Clint, or was it Steve or maybe some random brown-noser he's forgotten entirely about? Anyways, they're the wrong size and are making his feet ache like nobody's business with all this standing.

The drinks here are so terrible they're not even fit to water the plants, so there's no way Tony will drink enough of this stuff to get intoxicated enough to not taste it. At least the food is somewhat decent, although he's really craving a cheeseburger and some onion rings (especially the onion
rings, for some reason).

Despite all the formal parties Tony's attended over the years, it's still awkward trying to eat while standing and holding his plate (which has neither a cheeseburger nor onion rings on it, by the way) as he mingles with the other patrons.

The mingling is the worst part of this whole thing.

The company here is hopelessly boring. The only exceptions are Tony himself (of course) and Pepper, but she's at the other end of the room. Tony knows that everyone else here is only interested in him because of his fame, his basically limitless fortune, and the fact he's Iron Man.

Just one of those traits alone would give him a lot of willing partners even if he looked like a gargoyle. Combine all three of those together and add the fact that he's a killer in the looks department, and voila! He's got a plethora of people flinging themselves at the chance to get into his wallet or his pants (or, in some cases, both).

For once, he's not too enthusiastic about the prospect of sex. Then again, he never would have been enthusiastic about flirtation he's currently getting, from a woman old enough to be his mother. Even dead-drunk, there's no way in hell he'd sleep with her.

But he's already turned down others at this party.

Shocker, right? The paparazzi would probably go nuts if they found out the famous playboy Tony Stark isn't looking for company tonight.

Now, with Loki and Bruce in the tower, it'd be kinda weird bringing a random hookup home. Besides, the last thing he wants is some random one-night-stand being there if he has a nightmare, which happens more often than he'd like. Or having them asking questions when he leaves his room to comfort Loki after one of the god's nightmares, which still are almost a nightly occurrence.

Tony can totally picture Loki, upon finding Tony's bedroom door locked yet still hearing some... noises inside, would start knocking and singing *Do You Want to Build a Snowman?*

As soon as he gets the old lady to go away, there's another woman talking to him. He's certainly not complaining, but he's not planning on going anywhere with any of this.

He gives his media smile to this lady, a curly-haired ginger who's gorgeous despite looking, with that hair and her sparkling red, rather revealing dress, rather like Little Orphan Annie twenty or so years after that rich guy, Daddy What's-his-face, adopted her.

Loki might like the movie *Annie*, Tony finds himself thinking, and it's even relatable to Loki's own backstory. Although if they watch it, Tony's probably going to have all the songs stuck in his head and it won't be helped by Loki humming them at random times.

Judging from the ring on Annie's finger, she's married, but she's not actually flirting with him in the slightest. Maybe she lives up to the name Tony's dubbed her in his head, and is totally wholesome like the famous little orphan.

She starts telling him about how they saw him on *The Marla Simhan Show*. Either this lady is ignoring the fact that Tony really hated both that interview and the interviewer, and he'd definitely shown that towards the end of the interview, or she hadn't noticed. Perhaps she's too optimistic and thinking about the sun coming out.

When Annie inquires about how his leg healed, it's only due to years of press conferences and
business dealings that he manages to hide the fact his brain is currently screaming *oh shit*. He'd totally forgotten about that, and it's only been around three weeks since then. Legs aren't supposed to heal that fast.

He offers a vague answer of it not being as bad of an injury as it seemed at first. It's not exactly the best cover-up anyways since he wouldn't hire a doctor who'd make a mistake like that and the doctor would have to practically force Tony into a cast anyways (Bruce sort of had, actually, or at least forced him to take it easy on his leg) but Tony sticks with that excuse anyways.

He can't exactly say the Norse God that's been living with him completely healed his leg magically while re-enacting a scene from a Disney movie. Which is too bad, since it would be absolutely hilarious to see what the press did with that.

As funny as it would be to see the media's reaction, he wants to keep Loki away from the spotlight, or the public eye in general. The media would eat Loki alive if they found out about him and Loki really doesn't seem like someone who do well being hounded by paparazzi. Jarvis has been deleting photos and social media posts about Tony finding Loki after the clothes-shopping trip from the internet.

It's not just the media to be worried about, though. Over the years, since before he became Iron Man, Tony's made a lot of enemies. Most of those enemies would have no qualms about hurting Loki to get to him. Needless to say it would be best for everyone if that didn't happen, including whoever would think they could get away with hurting Loki.

A man- Annie's husband, judging by the way they link arms and the rings adorning their fingers—has joined them and Tony snaps out of his thoughts. The man gives Tony a false smile and says he's glad to hear the injury wasn't too bad before walking his wife to the dance floor, muttering loud enough for Tony to hear that Tony had most likely just faked the injury to get attention and sympathy during that interview.

If that remark is supposed to make Tony angry or upset, it has the opposite effect as Tony busts out laughing. Really, ninety percent of what he's done while drunk over the years would get him way more attention than faking a broken leg, and anyone with half a brain should know that wouldn't want to bother with a cast even when he does need it, let alone inconvenience himself with an unnecessary cast for just a bit of attention.

Tony makes his way across the room towards Pepper, trying to end interactions with various patrons as quickly as possible. Maybe Pepper will ditch this stupid event and go home with him. Loki likes Pepper, Tony finds himself thinking.

This is actually Tony's first night away from Loki since the god's arrival. He'd thought it would be a relief to get out of the tower until he'd realized this event was a total waste of time. Then again, formal parties were never really fun like the wild parties he used to go to, although he often got someone in his pants at these events anyways. Honestly, he enjoys his evenings with Bruce and Loki a lot more than this stupid party, except he could do without nights like last night with the turkey baster incident.

Tony finally reaches Pepper and invites her to his place (which at one point would have meant sex, but they both know it doesn't now, although the people who happen to hear probably think it does). Pepper accepts, and after Tony discards his half-finished glass of crummy alcohol on a passing server's tray, they head towards the door. One would think that an event full of rich people would at least have decent drinks.

As they wait for a cab (his chauffeur's off duty and the NYC traffic just sadly isn't worth taking
one of his own beauties out for a spin) Tony, who can be very charming and gentlemanly when
called for but usually doesn't bother, drapes his jacket around Pepper's shoulders to ward off the
chilly November evening air.

The taxi driver who picks them up is even chattier than most New York cabbies, and the way the
man rambles on and jumps topics abruptly almost reminds Tony of himself and Loki. Tony winds
up tuning him out, though, giving only the most basic, automatic sounds of assent when it seems
the driver is directly addressing him. He leaves the rest of the conversation to Pepper.

This charity party has gotten Tony thinking about other philanthropic acts. Why hasn't he donated
to help victims of child abuse, or domestic abuse in general? He's been living with Loki- who has
one of the worst abuse stories Tony's ever heard of- for almost two months. Shouldn't he have
thought of helping others like him sooner?

Hell, he should have thought about charities for abuse victims even before Loki came into his life.
It's not like he hadn't known abuse happened, and like pretty much everyone else thinks anyone
who beats a kid is pure scum. Howard, when he was actually around during Tony's childhood, was
usually drunk and certainly neglectful and verbally abusive, but at least he wasn't physically
abusive.

He wonders what Bruce and Loki are up to, and how Loki's taking his absence. Is the god carrying
Toy Stark around to make up for the lack of Tony himself being there, as he'd apparently done
when Tony was at work in Malibu? After last night's incident with the turkey baster, though, Loki
has seemed slightly more wary of him, preferring Hulk's company to his as they finished
Pinocchio, and even taking an impromptu nap after the movie, snuggled next to Hulk (Tony has
pictures of that).

During that nap, however, Loki had a nightmare and teleported to the kitchen in his sleep. Tony's
almost positive the nightmare had been about said turkey baster incident, judging from his
muttering in his sleep, the fact he'd teleported to where the incident had taken place, and the way
he had looked at Tony in terror when he first noticed Tony's presence. But Loki never actually said
what it was about.

That incident alone already made Tony feel like shit, but the fact Loki's now having nightmares
about him makes him feel even shittier.

Tony's definitely going to have figure out a way to make that up to Loki. Maybe he can make
Loki’s Iron Man suit actually fly or something. Loki would love that, although Loki couldn't fly it
outside because of pesky things like government regulated airspace and stuff. Plus he's not sure
how well Loki would be able to control the suit, but if they took it easy inside and Tony was flying
there with him...

Yeah, that could work.

Making Loki's suit fly is a good place to start, but he might need to do more than that.

Loki relaxes in the bath, slowly moving his hands back and forth and trying not to think about
anything, like Bruce has been teaching him with meditation. It's really hard, because he's always
thinking of something.

He tries to lose himself in the sensations around him. The water almost pushes against his limbs
yet flows around them all the same. Ducking under the surface, he hums slightly. Things always
sound different underwater, except in The Little Mermaid, where everyone's voices sounded
perfectly normal. But that's probably because they live underwater.

So much for clearing his head.

He's specifically trying not to think about the Dursleys in that book, who hate magic and are apparently as normal as possible. Which would mean that normal Midgardians, or Muggles, hate magic.

Loki knows all too well that being hated leads to getting hurt. So most of Midgard really isn't that different from Asgard after all.

It's a really depressing thought that he tries to block from his head.

Truthfully, Loki's not in the bath to get clean. He's mostly trying to be alone, and unlike in Asgard, baths on Midgard are taken in complete privacy, so he knows he doesn't have to worry about Bruce barging in on him.

Okay, he's not totally alone, but he doesn't mind his friends (who are also his pretend Monster Family) being here, or Simba. Simba's standing on the edge of the tub, since he can't get wet, although he bats at the water with his armored paw. Sleipnir and Jormungand are in the water with Loki, the latter wrapped around Loki's waist.

The bath is big enough that it probably could have qualified as a public bath in Asgard, but he has it all to himself, though he's sharing it with all his plastic toys. That's mostly just small figurines, but his Elsa and Anna dolls are in the water too. He knows they don't mind that he took their clothes off, because nobody bathes in clothes.

Despite what Tony and Bruce seem to think about privacy, it doesn't matter if Elsa and Anna see him naked, even if he has a part they don't- the part men use to pee and shove in women during sex. Apparently they're not actually peeing out their penises when doing sex, because he's pretty sure there's some kind of weird, white goopy stuff instead that evidently makes babies. Loki's not sure how that works, but maybe Tony can explain it later, since he seems to know a lot about sex.

It's not very deep- the water only comes up to about his chest when he stands. Sleipnir is bigger than normal, maybe because he had been too short to stand in the water before, but that shouldn't mattered. Regardless, he's almost the size of an adult horse now. Really, Sleipnir can be any size he wants, and he says he got bigger in Loki's head.

There are even steps in the bath that go high enough that he can sit down without his head being under the water, which he supposes is the point. After all, humans can't breathe in water, according to Tony and Jarvis, and it would be stupid to take a bath and feel like you can't breathe. Well, Loki wouldn't care, but humans die if they stop breathing for too long.

That's why Tony hates water, Loki's worked out. He was hurt with water so much that it must have felt like he was drowning, although Loki's not entirely sure what that feels like. Apparently it could've killed Tony though, which is a really scary thought.

He's going to have to make sure Tony never stops breathing.

He also needs to figure out a way for Tony to get some of Idunn's Apples of youth, so he doesn't die and leave Loki behind. Bruce would need some too, he decides, as will Pepper. Loki's not going to let anyone in his family die. Maybe the other Avengers besides Thor should get them too. Loki has absolutely no clue how he would be able to get even one apple, let alone six (and those will only last for the first few centuries, and then they'll need more).
He might need Thor's help, though he hates that idea of needing Thor for anything, although there's no guarantee Thor would help anyways.

"You're not gonna lets Tony die, right?" Loki asks Hel before immediately adding, determinedly. "I'm not gonna let him die. Or Bruce or Hulk-y or any of my family, my Ohana."

He means it, too.

He wonders when Tony will get back.

When he was sleeping yesterday after the movie about Pinocchio, Loki had a nightmare about Tony and the turkey baster incident from earlier that day. Only this time Tony was going to hurt him for breaking his alcohol, even though that had actually happened after Tony pointed the thing at him in real life.

It was still a really scary dream, and he'd actually woken up in the kitchen next to where he'd bashed the turkey baster with a frying pan and accidentally dented the floor. Tony had been there and at first he'd panicked, thinking he was still dreaming.

Still, it was only a dream, he reminds himself, grabbing Toy Stark and gazing at the toy, which isn't the real Tony, just like Nightmare-Tony hadn't really been Tony.

What's real is that Tony comforted him after that nightmare. Even though Loki couldn't bring himself to tell him it was about the turkey baster, Tony guessed so anyways and wasn't even mad.

The real Tony has never laid a finger on him, not even when he does magic or breaks Tony's things on accident, or breaks things with magic like when he scorched the wall in Tony's other house with a magic star-repulsor thing, or broke all Tony's alcohol yesterday.

In Asgard, he'd gotten punished for breaking things that seem less important than huge collections of favorite drinks or walls. Sometimes it was a vase that fell over or a plate that broke when someone tripped him, and he'd been punished even though it wouldn't have broken if he hadn't been tripped by one of the Warriors Three. Then, of course, there was the incident with the statue of Buri and Odin's horrible punishment.

Loki hastily tries to think of anything, and fiddles with the taps. One of them shoots out scalding hot water, and his hiss of pain turns into a low, keening whimper as his reddened, partially blistered skin transports him back.

The servants and slaves told him to iron the wrinkles out of a dress, going from the idea that he should earn his worthless hide and actually do something useful, adding contemptuously that he was already a huge burden. They told him under no uncertain circumstances not to screw it up like he so often does.

Loki tries to do it well, he really does, but he accidentally presses the red-hot slab of metal on it too long, which results in the smell of burnt fabric and a charred hole in the skirt.

The others shout at him, pinning his hand to the ironing slab for that, saying that he's going to get them punished with his incompetence.

The flashback thankfully ends, but there's still the lingering memory of pain and smell of his own burnt flesh. It had been even worse because his body, disguised or in its natural Jotun form, is much more suited for cold than heat. And that had been before the guards dragged him away to face even more punishment.
Loki notices the hand he'd stuck under the hot water is coated in frost, and that the water in the bath is getting colder until it starts to freeze, as if compensating for the scalding water and memory of the burns, although it melts back into water soon.

The servants and slaves had managed to escape punishment telling the guards he came in and ruined the dress on purpose, using his burnt hand as evidence. They lied, and he got punished for lying and gotten away with it, while he got punished for lying. It's not fair, he thinks. Although he actually had managed to lie his way out of things unpunished.

The Blue Fairy said lying is bad, but Tony said it's not if you're keeping yourself safe, like in Asgard. He used to be better at lying too. Once, he'd made a step disappear with his magic while running from a guard but managed to make the guard think the wood had been rotting.

He's not punished for breaking stuff here, which is still kind of confusing because breaking stuff that's not yours is bad and deserves punishment.

Despite the fact he'd deserve it, Loki has an illogical feeling of *certainty* that Tony wouldn't hurt him if he broke stuff on purpose. Tony had let him smash the stupid turkey baster and a lot of petri dishes, after all.

Loki had been warier around Tony after that whole incident, but he's pretty much forgiven Tony now since it had been an accident. Besides, Tony forgave *him* for breaking all his alcohol, and that had been an accident too.

Tony had promised, yet again, that he'd never hurt him (and Tony's kept his word so far). Tony had even apologized for pointing the turkey baster at Loki in the first place, and Loki's pretty sure the man doesn't say *sorry* often.

Loki splashes towards Sleipnir, reaching out to tag him for a game of chase. It feels like he's touching something, but Sleipnir's still intangible, so maybe the feeling's just in his head? Everyone said his friends were only in his head.

Loki had asked Sleipnir what his head was like, and was disheartened to learn that it's dark in his head, and oddly squishy, although that doesn't make sense, but that had been a while ago and maybe he's misremembering. He knows Sleipnir said the food is terrible there, when he gets it. Loki hadn't even known there was food in heads, and Sif said he was crazy when he accidentally asked aloud, during a meal, whether the food he was eating was any better.

Loki tried to eat better stuff for Sleipnir, but it never seemed to work.

"I'll feed you an apple later." Loki promises, but that hasn't worked any of the other times Sleipnir's shown up here. He can still pass his hand through Sleipnir, so it probably wouldn't work now, and Sleipnir seems to know so, too.

Fenrir pads over to the toilet and looks in (Loki had no clue what the toilet was when he first arrived on Midgard, since they're very different in Asgard, and Jarvis had needed to tell him).

Loki knows how gross having your head near a toilet (or chamber pot) is. Thor used to try to shove his head in them, but that was before Fenrir, he thinks.

It had started a long time ago, when Loki and Thor had been kids, Loki had gone to pee in the chamber pot in a closet under a set of stairs (he frequented that chamber pot because he could be alone, and he doesn't mind small dark spaces, except they make it hard to read), Thor happened to be taking care of his own smellier, browner business. It must have been an emergency for the
prince to go there, instead of a more luxurious chamber pot more fitting of his royal status.

Thor had been furious and tried to shove Loki's head in the chamber pot for the intrusion, saying he "might as well join the other shit." Unfortunately, Frigga hadn't heard that, because Thor would have gotten a lecture about language unbecoming of a prince and maybe even soap in his mouth.

In the stables later, after making sure he was alone (even checking for Huginn and Muninn, since Odin's ravens had gotten him in trouble before) Loki had purposely pooped in Thor's saddlebag that held his armor and training sword, which Thor had stupidly left in one of the stable's stalls when he took another horse out for a ride. The remaining horse in the (rather large) stall had followed suit and added a lot more of it.

He snickers at the memory of that and soon he's cackling. Watching Thor's horror and disgust when he found the 'presents' in his saddlebag, from his hiding place in the loft, had been hysterical. The horses were making enough noise with snorting and neighing that Thor never heard him laughing. The horses in Asgard were nice like that. Most animals were, except Huginn and Muninn, who bit him and told on him to the Allfather.

He never got in trouble for that, since Thor just assumed assumed all the poop had been from the horse. (Sadly, Thor hadn't had to clean it up, making the servants do it instead, and he hadn't even gotten a scolding about leaving his saddlebag in the middle of a stall). He wonders if Heimdall saw it. If he had, he apparently never said anything.

That memory is almost as good the dream he'd had yesterday, before the nightmare about Tony and the turkey baster. It was one of nice his dreams where he's a horse (he's dreamt about being one a lot when he's not having nightmares. He wishes he could have good dreams, dreams about being a horse, or flying in the stars or playing with his friends, all the time instead of his stupid nightmares about Asgard.

Jarvis said a while ago that dreams are actually much shorter than what it seems like when you're dreaming them, and that Loki's almost always asleep for longer than it would take to dream about Asgard. Furthermore, Jarvis has reported seeing him smile in his sleep. So he has to have other dreams, nice dreams, but most of the time he only remembers the nightmares that wake him up.

Anyways, as a horse in his dream last night, he'd bit, kicked, and even pooped on Thor and the Warriors Three, and they didn't even know it was him because he was a horse. One of the warriors might have even become Odin at one point, but that part of the dream is so fuzzy it's almost gone.

The best part was that he wasn't even hit or whipped in that dream, because they treat horses better than they'd treated him.

Now that he thinks about it, he's pretty sure he's had that dream before, and the pooping part was probably because of the pooping-in-Thor's-bag incident.

He starts playing his game where he and Elsa are superheroes like the Avengers, adding to the story he's been telling Jarvis over the past few weeks. He doesn't have toys for Frozone or Violet or any of Stitch's cousins, and he switches a couple times from pretending his Clint and Natasha toys are themselves to casting them as Ron and Kim.

As he runs his hand over the surface of the water, it leaves a trail of ice on the water behind it. Elsa runs across, like when she'd been fleeing from Arendelle after accidentally revealing her powers at her coronation, and his Loki toy slides across, bare feet turning slightly blue.

Loki laughs and flaps his hands. Frozone froze surfaces of water like that too, and Dash can run
across water without even freezing it.

Tony would say teleporting is even more awesome than that. Teleporting on accident, especially in his sleep, is still really scary, because he could end up somewhere really unpleasant again. He wants to be able to teleport away from those places, and he hadn't been able to in the petri dish cage.

Loki grabs Simba and holds him high above his head so he doesn't get wet. He then pushes himself through the water and imagines teleporting to the other end of the bathtub, and actually manages on the first try. It's easier when he's gliding through water or jumping than when he's standing still, though Kurt can do it standing still.

"Jarvis, I did it! I tel'ported!" It's not perfect, though. He doesn't end up quite where he wants, which is really frustrating and kind of scary. But it's at least something.

"Very good, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says, and Loki grins. He really loves this praise. He also loves the idea of helping Tony figure out how to stop that Doom guy, because it's almost like being a hero, himself.

"Did that help, Jarvis? You know, for the teleporting stopper field thing Tony's making?"

"Unfortunately, not, although it is not any fault of your own, Mr. Loki. Sir did not equip me with too many scanners or cameras in the bathrooms, and the cameras are only for dire emergencies." Jarvis replies apologetically.

Oh, so he hadn't gotten the... whatever he gets, to help against Doom?

"You still did quite well, Mr. Loki."

"Most Midgardians wouldn'ta said that. They'd hate me, just like Asgard!" Loki's smile falls as he remembers.

"What makes you say that?" Jarvis' tone is still polite, yet somehow a tad sharp at the same time.

"The Dursleys, they hate magic and it said they're perfectly normals." He slaps the water in annoyance, making it splash upwards. "So most've Midgard's like Ass-Guardin' Asgard!"

"They Dursleys are most certainly not normal, no matter what they may believe of themselves." Jarvis says, but that doesn't make any sense. The book said they were, and books don't lie. But Jarvis never lies either. "Remember what Professor McGonagall said about them?"

Loki tilts his head and worries his bottom lip with his teeth until he remembers. "Um, that they are's the worst sorts of muggle?" Simba, Sleipnir, and Hel all nod encouragingly even though the words came out stupidly, not that that's anything new.

Loki feels a bit better remembering that. The Dursleys being the worst sort of muggles means their hating magic is bad, right, just like Tony's been telling him. Just like the Duke hating Elsa and Frollo hating Esmeralda's teleporting go against the Quasiralda rule. Or maybe it should be the Quasmerelsa rule, so it has Quasimodo, Esmeralda and Elsa's names.

Loki imagines Esmeralda teleporting to join him. He sees his Esmeralda figurine disappear with a puff of pink smoke from where she was floating with Quasimodo and Phoebus in the other end of the bath, before almost immediately materializing in his hands. It's easier making Esmeralda teleport than actually teleporting himself, but like Kurt, Esmeralda can teleport really easily herself. Well, not his figurine, the real Esmeralda.
"They're the worst sort! The Dursleys are bad muggles. Muggle's a really funny word, I like it. Muggle muggle muggle. Nothing in All-Tongue for muggle, though? Or maybe that's just me?" After all, he is an idiot, with broken All-Tongue, a broken mouth, and probably a broken brain too.

"That's because *muggle* is a made-up word." Jarvis tells him. Oh, so it's not because of he's broken that All-Tongue didn't get that word. It's a made-up Midgard word, like *chainsaw*, *car* and *coffee*, Loki thinks as he makes a C with his hand. C is for *Contrition*, according to Quasimodo.

"Although I would not be surprised if there was a word with a similar meaning in your language." They certainly are words for people who have magic in Asgard, like *argr* or *ergi* (they go hand in hand and both mean being unmanly), and *seidr* is magic. Loki knows he's argr, which is a bad thing to be, but wouldn't Odin be argr too for having magic?

"Muggles don't have magic." Loki singsongs. It wasn't long ago he tried not to say the *m* word.

"Yes, although magic is still a hard concept for me to grasp, since I am incredibly logical." Jarvis replies. "Despite all odds, I have seen you break several laws of physics." Loki still doesn't like the way that sounds with the *laws*, even though he knows he won't get in trouble for breaking those rules.

"Like the conversation of mass?" Loki asks, naming something he'd heard Bruce and Tony talking about in the lab earlier today, when he was drawing. He's not entirely sure if Tony and Bruce knew he was listening then.

Jarvis says it's *conservation*, like to conserve something, not *conversation*.

Right. Loki knew that, honestly. Jarvis explains that the Law of Conservation of Mass means you can't make something weigh more or less when you change it. Loki points out that Tony said that he'd weighed less (but still a lot) as Mowgli, but Tony had been able to pick Loki up without a Man of Iron suit.

"Our current theory is that the energy around your hands abides by the conservation of energy." Jarvis says, although he adds that there is no logical explanation for when Loki makes Toy Stark and his Tink and Peter figurines fly, so that is breaking a law of physics, which is apparently supposed to be impossible.

"Bruce and Tony say that magic's doing stuff that seems impossible. Kim Possible. Kim Possible is im-possible!" Loki singsongs the last bit. Tony had mentioned someone named Arthur- or maybe it was Clark- saying that magic is just science nobody understands yet.

Way back, Tony says, people didn't know what stars were. Before coming to Midgard, Loki never knew stuff like how stars formed and that they can die, although the stars in Asgard talked to him sometimes, in their own twinkling language. Even though he knows stuff about stars now, they still seem sort of magical in their own way.

Loki starts thinking about the Dursleys again.

Tony and Bruce say it's wrong to hate people for having magic. Regardless of if it's wrong (and Loki's still wrapping his head around the idea) if most people hate it, that still doesn't bode well for Loki. Especially if Tony dies and he's left with either being with Muggles on Midgard or going back to Asgard.

Frowning, Loki looks at Elsa. The townspeople had feared her magic at first, but then grew to like it and accept her. But maybe that's not normal, and Elsa's just lucky? Kind of like how he's lucky
that Tony doesn't hate it when everyone in Asgard does. But Tony said Asgard was wrong to hate it and hurt him because they hate it.

He's thinking in circles, he thinks, tracing one in the water with his finger.

"So are most Midgardians the worst sort of Muggles like the Dursleys? Even if it means they don't follow the Quasmerelsa rule?"

Jarvis correctly guesses where Quasmerelsa came from, which makes Loki smile a bit. Jarvis is like a mind-reader, like 'Fessor X, and it doesn't matter if his mouth and All-Tongue are broken.

"Do they?" Loki asks again when Jarvis doesn't answer, and the voice in the walls almost seems like he's hesitating, which is really odd since Jarvis never hesitates.

"Truthfully, although I hate to say so, there are going to be people everywhere who hate those with powers like yours." Jarvis says.

"Like in Ass-guard." Loki sulks, although it really was way too good to be true that people wouldn't hate him in general.

"Yes, but there are also people who hate Sir, Dr. Banner, and the other Avengers. For starters, their opponents aren't particularly fond of them." Jarvis sounds like he's smirking, before continuing. "But some ordinary civilians

"Why?" Loki's brow furrows in confusion. Who doesn't like superheroes? The Avengers saved all of Midgard, and they fight those stupid Doom-bots. In Asgard, fighting glorious battles wins you respect and admiration.

Then again, Loki doesn't like Thor, and he's a hero. "Some people are stupid and hate my Hulk-y." Loki says aloud, frowning. That might be because Hulk wrecks stuff when he's angry, though. "And Dr. C didn't seem to like Tony either. But they're good guys, heroes."

Everyone in The Incredibles had to hide their powers too because of some rule made when that guy got mad at Mr. Incredible for saving him, and a lot of other people got mad too. Violet had to hide her powers but used them to defeat help defeat the Omnidroid with her family and Frozone.

"Yes, well you'll find that there are people who hate anything." Jarvis says.

Before Loki can really think about it, Stitch, who hasn't done much aside from spit toys out and gobble them up until now, spits out Bruce's King Kong snow globe. "Ooooh!" He coos, eyes wide at the snow globe in his two lower arms, which he just popped out of his body and which don't have straps like his upper arms.

While Loki would ordinarily be ecstatic that Stitch seems alive, he knows Stitch causes a lot of trouble and is worried he'll break the snow globe. It belongs to Bruce and they're not even supposed to have it.

"Stitch!" Loki says, half in worry and half in annoyance, as he climbs out of the bath. "Put it back!"

Stitch doesn't, and when Loki reaches for it, the blue alien backpack darts away, cackling and clearly enjoying the mischief. Loki loves watching the chaos Stitch (and Lilo) create on TV, but this affects him too. "You're gonna get us in troubles! Give it!"

People claim Loki caused a lot of mischief when he was really little, but he doesn't remember that at all and they certainly taught him not to.
"Bad Stitch, naughty! It's Bruce's!" Loki says when Stitch evades him again.

"Naga! Mine!" Stitch shouts, and starts to scurry towards the wall. Fenrir leaps at him and actually manages to knock him down, but Stitch wriggles free and blows a raspberry on his way out before slamming the door in Fenrir's face.

Fenrir growls at the door and then whines towards Loki apologetically, about not being able to stop Stitch. Loki runs a hand over him, murmuring it's okay, and is delighted to feel fur. For a bit, he buries his head against Fenrir's warm body until he remembers he's supposed to be chasing Stitch, who now has even more of a head start.

Simba, Sleipnir and Hel have joined Loki, and Fenrir is sadly intangible again. Loki pouts about that.

Loki is about to fling the door open and barge out when he gets a better idea. He should try to sneak up on Stitch and catch him by surprise. Jormungand, now wrapped loosely around Loki's waist, hisses in agreement.

"Jarvis? Where's Stitch?"

"He is in the living room, Mr. Loki." Loki groans, and Jarvis adds that Bruce is in his room meditating, although, as always, he calls Bruce Dr. Banner.

"I could employ some of my security measures, but since Stitch is still a toy and thus not real from a biological standpoint, I doubt tranquilizers would have an affect. Excuse me for a bit-" Whatever those are, they probably wouldn't affect the real Stitch either, Loki thinks after Jarvis cuts off, since Stitch is pretty indestructible.

There's a bit of a pause, and then Jarvis speaks up. "I have captured Stitch in a net, Mr. Loki, although I'd advise you hurry." Loki didn't even know Jarvis had nets, but that's awesome.

"You're the best, Jarvis!" Loki tells him as he dashes, with Simba and his friends/Monster Family, through his bedroom and down the hall towards the living room, only vaguely hearing Jarvis's comment about being naked.

When he reaches the living room, Loki sees an empty net laying on the floor. Stitch apparently managed to wriggle through the holes.

Figures. Gantu's green nets that he shoots from his blaster rarely capture Stitch for long either, and those nets don't even have holes. Plus the net on the floor was clearly made for something bigger than a plush backpack.

Stitch had to have escaped only just before Loki arrived in the room, and is currently climbing up the tall shelf (taller than Loki) with all of Tony's DVDs, against the wall by the huge TV screen. Loki dashes towards him, Fenrir right beside him with a growl rumbling in his throat, but Stitch is just out of reach sitting atop the shelf.

Loki rests his bare left foot on the bottom shelf and is about to climb up after Stitch, before he realizes that's probably not the best idea.

When Loki passes by the net on his way to get a chair to stand on, the net sparks slightly with electricity and he flinches away, giving it a wide berth. Jarvis says it's designed to do that, but wasn't supposed to do it then.

On his way back with a chair, Jarvis informs Loki that Stitch has moved to the kitchen and is of a
row of cabinets, which means he now has enough space to move out of Loki's reach, since unlike the rather skinny DVD shelf, the row of cabinets is a lot longer than Loki's arm-span.

Entering the kitchen, Loki wishes that the ceiling was low enough for all the cabinets to hang from it, instead of most of the cabinets which hang at Loki's eye level but have a lot of wall between them and the tall ceiling. Then again, at least Stitch isn't climbing on the ceiling, because there's no way Loki can get up there.

Loki glances at Simba, who nods, and throws the lion on top of the cabinets. Simba lands nimbly, crouching and flicking his tail as he stalks towards Stitch.

"My dad taught me how to pounce!" Simba says, which is something he said before he came alive. Stitch snickers, although to be honest, Stitch could probably easily beat Simba. "I'm gonna be King, so you have to do what I tell you. And Loki's a prince too, and he's your owner, so you have to do what he says."

"You're not my slaves." Loki mumbles, embarrassed. He doesn't like the way that sounds. He grabs an apple for Sleipnir, but his teeth go right through it and he moans sadly. It makes Loki's heart twist and he hugs his horse even if he can't really feel him.

On top of the cabinets, Stitch just tosses the snow globe and dodges, laughing, when Simba springs at him, before swiping at the lion with his fabric claws. Simba doesn't seem hurt, but Loki angrily throws his hands out, not even sure what he's trying to do. Ice shoots out, but it misses and freezes a patch of the wall behind the toys and Stitch swipes at Simba again.

Nobody hurts Simba! Loki still needs to find whoever ripped Simba's back when Loki was in the petri dish. Maybe it was the Fury man?

Loki flails his arms angrily and accidentally shoots a magic star-repulsor, like when he'd scorched Tony's wall in his other house, and it does the same thing here. Oops. Tony hadn't even been mad the first time, though.

Jormungand shifts around Loki's stomach, and Loki glances at him with a sudden idea. Jormungand was apparently thinking the same thing and grows longer, wrapping his tail in a sort of loop.

Stitch had used something called a 'lasso' against Gantu, and that's what Loki's going with now. He has no idea how to do the fancy twirling Stitch did, so instead just throws his snake at his alien. Jormungand lands looped loosely around Stitch but quickly tightens his coils, and it's not exactly a hug like he gives Loki.

Stitch trips when his legs are wrapped together and he falls off the cabinets. Jormungand stays half on, with Stitch hanging upside-down off the edge. Stitch growls, baring his teeth at Jormungand, who squeezes tighter and hisses angrily.

Maybe Stitch is reminded about when he was hung upside-down on the prison ship with only his head exposed, before he went to Earth. Loki knows how much it stinks to remember bad things and he feels sort of bad for attacking Stitch, although Stitch had attacked Simba.

Loki singsongs to Jormungand to let Stitch go (to the tune of Let It Go, of course). "I am not ssssure that'sss a good idea." Jormungand seems reluctant, but does so when Loki asks him to please do it.

Loki winds up having to pounce on Stitch when he lands, since the alien backpack seems ready to
bolt again. He ends up on top of Stitch, pinning him down until Stitch wheezes pitifully, like when Jumba was stepping on him after handcuffing him and smashing him into a tree.

Loki quickly gets off, feeling horrible, and Stitch immediately scampers away, chuckling.

Loki’s eyes widen as he realizes he’s been conned, and he lunges after Stitch, missing and landing next to the dent from when he’d smashed the turkey baster with the frying pan yesterday.

He chases Stitch back to his bedroom and then his bathroom, where he wrestles with Stitch as Fenrir and Hel try to get in on the act. Stitch and Loki roll right through them, but it feels like he bumped into them.

Jormungand wraps himself around Stitch again, pointing out in a somewhat superior tone that _he_ was right about whether or not to let Stitch go, and that Loki really should have listened to him. As Loki tugs the snow globe from Stitch’s grasp (Stitch is still a backpack, so he’s not super-strong like the actual alien Stitch) something on the bottom pops off.

It turns Loki had pulled a plug that pops out, making water drain out of the globe from the hole the plug had covered, along with the white stuff, which is sticking to Loki’s stomach.

Panicked, Loki fumbles with the globe it slips from his grip, falling to the hard tile floor.

Trembling, Loki kneels on the ground, rocking and clutches the snow globe to his chest. Jarvis, Simba, and his Monster Family manage to calm him down eventually. Simba snuggles up to him, as well as Fenrir and Sleipnir, and he curls up against the large wolf, loving the feeling of his fur, although when he leans into the wolf, he just goes through him.

Jormungand, actually tangible since he’s the sort-of-necklace, wraps the part of his body not securing Stitch around Loki in a snake hug.

Once he’s calmer, Loki turns to Stitch, who once again seems like a lifeless backpack with only two arms. “Your badness level just went way up,” Loki tells him seriously. Maybe he should represent it in crayon drawings, like Lilo does.

Stitch doesn’t answer now, and Loki puts Stitch on backwards, so Stitch sits against his chest instead of his back, where he, hopefully, can’t cause any more trouble. That done, he focuses on the snow globe.

Somehow it survived the fall unscathed, thank the Norns. But it’s still empty of water or that weird, white powder that can’t be snow, since it’s not cold and doesn’t melt. The fake snow tastes horrible, he discovers when he licks a stray speck that’s stuck to his finger, from when he’d unsuccessfully tried to wipe the stuff from his stomach.

There’s a knock on the bathroom door, and Bruce’s voice drifts through the cracks. "Loki? Are you all right? What was all the commotion out there?"

"I’m fine!" Loki calls, sounding more fine than he feels. "It was nothing! Nothing nothing nooooo-thing. I was playing!" It’s a lie, and a pretty bad one. They used to come out better, but so did everything else he said.

Bruce clearly doesn’t believe it. "It didn’t sound like nothing, and you don’t sound fine." Gently, he adds "You can tell me anything, you know that?"

Loki shrugs, forgetting Bruce can’t see him, but apparently he gets it anyways. "Can I come in?"
"No!" Loki practically screams, turning away from the door and hiding the snow globe just in case.

He wasn't even supposed to have the snow globe in the first place, even though that was Stitch's fault. But the water and fake snow coming out his all his fault, so he's the one who broke it.

Loki scowls, berating himself internally for being an idiot. Not that that's anything new, according to the Asgardians, and he can practically hear a chorus of agreement from various Asgardians in his head.

He can make snow...

It's not like he can screw it up more, can he?

He slowly sticks the middle finger of his right hand in the hole in the base of the snow globe, tongue sticking out of the corner of his mouth in concentration. He needs to make just the right amount. Too much, and nobody will be able to see King Kong through it all. If he makes way too much, the globe might even explode.

He starts to wonder if maybe he shouldn't try this, but he glances at Elsa. She would. After grabbing her for good luck, Loki takes a deep breath and wiggles the finger in the snow globe tentatively, shooting out few snowflakes. Another wiggle, a bit less cautious, and he shoots out a tiny flurry.

The snow swirls on its own, without water, and Loki gives a very slight smile. At least it's not as bad as it was before. Glancing at Elsa, she moves slightly and nods approvingly, letting go a couple snowflakes of her own, but Loki knows that's only an illusion.

At least she doesn't make trouble, like Stitch.

As Loki goes to pull his finger out, he discovers it's stuck. Great. Why does he screw up everything?

Frantic tugging does nothing, and he stops when he's worried he'll break the globe entirely. He tries rubbing soap on his finger, but that doesn't work either.

After thinking for a bit, he realizes he's used his magic to change his clothes and get his Iron Man suit off him before, so maybe he can do that now?

It turns out he can't, at least not right now. Letting out a frustrated groan, Loki flops over, and the momentum might have broken the globe if Jormungand hadn't moved to block it. Loki slaps himself on the cheek for being an idiot, because he almost just smashed it. Stupid stupid stupid!

He tries to will the snow globe off his finger with his magic a couple more times but gets the same result of absolutely nothing aside from an illusion of a snow globe popping up for a second or two, but that's utterly useless.

Bruce could almost certainly help, since he's a doctor, but then he'd find out that Loki had his snow globe and spilled the stuff out and had to replace it with his own snow.

Well, no matter what, Bruce will notice the replacement snow, so it's not like he can get out of that. As for Bruce finding out... maybe that wouldn't be too bad. He had just said Loki could tell him anything. Loki's honestly not sure if Bruce will get angry, but if he does, he'll just turn into Hulk. Loki's not worried about Hulk hurting him, even though Bruce seems to worry about that sometimes.
Besides, Loki thinks, Bruce is hardly one to be judgmental about wrecking things, since Hulk's wrecked even more than he had (and Loki hadn't even really wrecked the snow globe).

Pepper notices that Tony's uncharacteristically quiet during the cab ride, which means his mind's probably busy with something.

They wind up making a trip to the Disney Store, and Tony would have bought out the entire store if Pepper hadn't reminded him they're limited to the backseat of cabs for what they bring back to the tower, and no he cannot call his chauffeur because he needs rest.

The genius is clearly trying to get on Loki's good side, and Pepper wonders what happened as Tony settles on an enormous Baloo plush that's over four feet tall and technically not even for sale, meant for display. Being Tony Stark, however, means he does stuff others wouldn't get away with. Tony also grabs smaller plush versions of Sven, Jiminy Cricket, Pinocchio and Bambi, as well as an action figure set from *The Incredibles*.

Pepper just rolls her eyes and tells Tony he deserves it and no, he cannot hire one of the store employees as a sherpa, when he complains about having to lug everything, especially Baloo, back to the taxi. On the way back, the huge toy sits in the passenger seat in front.

Once they reach the tower, Tony tips the driver handsomely for the wait while they were at the store and tells him to keep his mouth shut about the toys. The cab pulls away with tires screeching almost as soon as Tony steps out, as if to ensure Tony won't have time to decide that three hundred bucks was too much of a tip.

Tony lets them into the tower and they head across the lobby- which is empty at this time in the evening- towards his private elevator. "Good evening sir, Miss Potts." Of course they're greeted by Jarvis. "Ah, shameless bribery for forgiveness is always a good option." The AI says dryly. Pepper hides a smile at that. Tony's done the same thing with her countless times, although it usually didn't get him out of whatever hole he'd dug himself into.

Pepper demands Tony tell her what happens, and the billionaire says he pointed a turkey baster at Loki and caused a major panic attack. He sounds extremely guilty about it, so Pepper doesn't feel the need to rip into him as Tony props Baloo on a box. The box in question is really more of a large crate, Pepper thinks, the type of thing you'd expect to see in adventure movies. It looks like it weighs thirty pounds.

"It contains replacement alcohol, including several bottles of that French scotch you said was so good you might marry it." Jarvis explains at Tony's questioning look at the crate.

"I could kiss you, Jarvis." Tony smirks and puckers up before continuing in a mock-simpering tone "Now be a dear and send Dum-E up, will ya?"

Jarvis gives a dry reply and Pepper asks what Jarvis meant by a replacement alcohol.

"Yesterday, during that flashback, Loki kinda blew up the penthouse bar's stash." He's surprisingly unconcerned when he says it, and Pepper knows Tony takes his alcohol seriously and would ordinarily hold a huge grudge and get revenge on anyone who smashed an entire floor's worth, especially since the penthouse is one of the best-stocked areas in the whole tower.

At least he'd seemed to focus more on Loki than his alcohol, as he should.

Tony pulls off his dress shoes, rubbing his feet and grumbling about aches before eyeing Pepper's six-inch stiletto heels. "C'mon Pep, join the party. We can give each other foot massages." He
wiggles his eyebrows and his socked foot at the same time.

He was never really into massages when they were dating, always wanting to go straight to the bedroom, Pepper thinks as she removes her shoes, because honestly they do hurt after a while. "I knew you wanted to get out of those." Tony crows, grabbing a shoe and examining it at every angle as Pepper massages her own foot. "How do you even walk in these monstrosities?! Why in the world do women choose to wear shoes like these? Seriously, these are like torture devices for feet." Pepper's very used to Tony's random ramblings, of course, and just rolls with it.

"I'm going to get you something better for Christmas." Tony promises, pointing at her with the long, thin heel of the shoe.

"You're the one who got me these." Pepper shakes her head with an exasperated smile.

"No I wasn't. I wouldn't buy these. They're hideous." Tony freezes with wide eyes before flashing Pepper a smile. "I don't even have to worry about paying for that comment in some subtle way later anymore. But seriously, I bought these?" He asks it disbelievingly. "Jarvis, did I buy these?"

"You did indeed, sir, and I recall a five minute monologue about how awesome they were and how Miss Potts would love them so much that the only way she would ever part with them would be if they were pried off her feet." Jarvis replies and Pepper swears the Jarvis is laughing, even though AI's aren't supposed to have a sense of humor.

Dum-E arrives from the elevator anyways and starts to push the crate back in the elevator, under strict orders from Tony not to even bump the crate against anything. Pepper winds up helping the crate avoid the side of the elevator's doorway.

As Tony follows them into the elevator, which is easily large enough for them, Dum-E and the crate, the genius continues to ramble about everything from shoes to how he hopes Bruce will "have mercy' because the dinners he cooks don't taste very good, and pizza is so much better anyways."

"Hey, Pep, what do you think would be the best use of money to help abused kids?" Tony switches topics abruptly, which again is nothing new. "I think Stark Industries should donate for that cause." Tony's now flicking over the holographic screen of his phone. Pepper smiles slightly. That's a great idea, something she really should have thought of earlier, she berates herself. She's betting Loki's the inspiration for this, but it shouldn't have been him that was the kick to get them started on this cause. They should have been helping abuse victims years ago.

Through the elevator ride, the three of them- her, Tony and Jarvis- debate about how they could work to get more cases of abuse discovered sooner, maybe fund for even better training about recognizing abuse for teachers and childcare employees. Or should they work on helping abused kids (or adults) cope with their pasts?

Both, Tony decides, asking aloud, rhetorically "Since when have I limited myself to Option A or B when I can shoot for Options A, B, C and D?" Pepper can certainly attest that Tony goes all-out with a lot of things.

Tony strips off his dress shirt and pants (he's wearing shorts and a t-shirt underneath) and tosses them off to the side as he strolls in the penthouse, before supervising Dum-E dragging the crate in. Pepper thinks that it's surprisingly empty and quiet here. She would've thought that Loki would be running up to Tony by now.

"Where the hell is everyone?" Tony mirrors Pepper's thoughts in a slightly more colorful way,
before suddenly asking if Loki and Bruce are watching *How To Train Your Dragon* in the theater. Pepper is the one who had introduced Tony to that movie. She wonders how Loki would react to the whole viking aspect, which seems similar to Asgard, and the whole idea of how the vikings hunt dragons at first, like how Asgardians hate and wage war with Jotuns for some reason Pepper can't possibly understand.

"They are in Mr. Loki's bedroom, or more specifically, Dr. Banner is in his bedroom while Mr. Loki is in his bathroom. From that information, do I really need to inform you that they are not watching a movie?" Tony grumbles under his breath but says they should deposit the toys somewhere.

They head towards Loki's bedroom, Tony making sure Dum-E follows so he stays out of trouble. Dum-E does so quite cheerfully, probably excited to see Loki. Only Tony's robots could actually get excited, Pepper thinks as she watches the bot fondly.

Loki's room, which has a fantastic skyline view of New York City at nighttime, is dim, lit by only the light from the city outside, the holographic stars hovering in midair above them and what appears to be a holographic Tinker Bell. Dum-E immediately starts to try and grab the holographic Tinker Bell, but the pixie evades his claw, chiming, finally resting on Dum-E's arm. Pepper is certain Tink is controlled by Jarvis, but she smiles all the same as the AI makes the fairy appear to land on her finger, though she obviously doesn't feel anything. Tink had been one of her favorite characters growing up, because she had a fiery personality too (and who doesn't love fairies?)

Bruce is standing outside the bathroom door, looking conflicted about something.

"Planning on barging in and taking a peek, doc?" Tony asks, smirking. "It's always the quiet ones. Well, there's me, and I'm not quiet."

"Nobody ever said you were." Bruce says dryly, raising his brows at the toys and smirking a bit. "I'm not sure that's going to work if you're trying to make up for last night."

"Of course it will." Tony says, setting the bag down next to Baloo. "So, have you been waiting for me? I mean, I knew you'd pine for me during my absence, but even I wasn't expecting you to do nothing else." The billionaire over-dramatically clutches his heart and pretends to be touched.

Bruce says they played games (adding that Loki made the tower not fall in Jenga. He'd done that at the SI daycare when building block towers with the kids, Pepper remembers) and starts to say something else about reading.

Before he can finish, the bathroom door swings open and Loki wanders from within, completely naked and rather damp-looking. He was clearly taking a bath or shower, and doesn't have a smidgen of modesty, since he doesn't even have a towel wrapped around his waist or anything. His Stitch backpack is on his chest, covering his right hand as his left arm hugs Simba. There are odd white flakes all over Loki's stomach, but they don't look like dandruff or anything.

Dum-E lets out an excited squealing sound and Loki smiles, though it's with much less enthusiasm than usual as the robot rolls towards him, slowed down by the shaggy green carpet.

Tony clears his throat pointedly. "So what's with the sudden shower at this time?"

Loki just looks at Bruce, taking a deep breath and clutching Simba tighter. It almost looks like Simba nods slightly, but that's crazy. Pepper must be seeing things in the sort of green light.

Loki slowly brings out his right hand to reveal a snow globe stuck on the end of the middle finger
on his right hand, and he stares carefully at Bruce.

Inside the globe, Pepper sees, is a plastic King Kong climbing a tiny Empire State Building. The way the snow swirls around in the glass sphere is unlike how snow swirls in a normal snow globe or during a winter snowfall.

For starters, the snow really should have settled at the bottom of the globe by now, except it doesn't. But, in addition to defying gravity, there's something just... magical about the way this snow moves, though Pepper can't place a finger on what it is.

"That's my snow globe." Bruce doesn't sound angry. Loki nods guiltily. "How did you end up with this? Wasn't it in my room?" The doctor asks it without any annoyance or accusation, merely curiously.

"Stitch spit it out. I didn't evens ask him for it, honest!" Loki says as he glares down at Stitch. "Didn't wanna give it back either when I told him it's yours, and it won't come off!"

"Why were you giving it the one-finger salute?" Tony asks, and Loki shoots him a puzzled look, and bows with his left arm across his chest, hand in a fist.

There's obviously a cultural divide here, which is understandable. Pepper doubts Loki has any clue that sticking out your middle finger is offensive. He's from a different planet, or realm or something, and not even all cultures on Earth have the same gesture equivalents of swear words.

"Well, I'm glad you came to me." Bruce adjusts his glasses and carefully takes Loki's right hand to look at the finger, though he glances at the globe and appears slightly puzzled. "Where did the water go?"

Loki chews his lip, left hand twirling his hair, and mumbles. "It got out. So'd the fake snow. But me an' Elsa, we kinda fixed it... 'xcept it's not the same!"

Bruce asks when this happened, still completely calm. Loki doesn't answer, rocking anxiously. Loki's Stitch backpack opens wide to spit a naked Elsa doll out before appearing to hug Loki from his place on Loki's chest. Loki looks down at him, puts Elsa in his mouth, and asks for her clothes too. She pops out in the ice dress from the movie, and Loki tells Stitch something about his badness level going down a bit and gives him a slight hug.

Bruce pulls slightly at the globe, and surprisingly, Loki doesn't even react as his finger's probably pulled too. Most people would probably cringe or at least tense up, and considering Loki's past of abuse, it's odd he doesn't, instead only saying that soap didn't help.

Tony points out Baloo, and Loki clearly hadn't noticed the huge bear until now. He shouts Baloo's name happily and heads towards him, as if forgetting that Bruce is holding the snow globe his hand's stuck to. Bruce follows him as Loki collapses on three-fours (his left hand and both knees, while his right arm still extended up towards Bruce).

As he crawls towards Baloo, he looks to be getting smaller. At first, Pepper decides it's a trick on her eyes, but there's no denying it when he ends up at least a foot and a half, maybe two feet shorter and with the appearance of a boy around ten.

With this, his finger shrinks as well and slides out of the hole in the snow globe's base easily. Loki blinks in surprise, looking at his freed hand.

"Am I Mowgli 'gain?" He asks, crawling onto the Baloo toy like Mowgli sitting on Baloo in the river. Baloo is basically as big as him now, and he sighs contentedly, hugging his bear and
humming *The Bare Necessities*. Pepper isn't sure if it's weirder having a naked boy or a naked manchild in the room.

Loki -or is it Mowgli?- asks Stitch for "the broke bit" and hands what's apparently the plug to the bottom of the snow globe to Bruce. "You hate it, don't you?" He asks mournfully. "It was special, but now it's not."

"This is better than before." Bruce smiles a bit at Loki, who looks shocked but extremely relieved. "Actually it's more special now. Before, it was just like thousands, maybe tens or hundreds of thousands just like it. This was just an ordinary store thing, not something custom, right?" Tony confirms this, apparently he was the one to buy it for Bruce, and Loki seems surprised to learn that there are probably thousands of identical King Kong snow globes.

"So you aren'ts mad?" Loki asks. "What if it broked?"

"I try to avoid getting angry, remember?" Bruce says with a sardonic smile. "Besides, even if you broke it, Tony could've easily gotten me another one." Bruce fixes Loki with a slightly more serious look. "Although you should ask before borrowing other people's stuff."

"Sorry, Bruce. Sorry sorry sorries sorries." Loki says, sincerely, before informing them again that he hadn't even asked Stitch for the snow globe. Then, Loki grins slightly. "Trouble's not as bad here, 'cause you're not gonna beat me. They woulda there."

"Which they shouldn't have done. Especially when you were a child." Tony says, for probably the millionth time.

"How about you put some clothes on?" Bruce suggests to the god with a sigh, and Dum-E presses some garments against Loki's bare chest. Tony tells Jarvis to order child-sized clothes in case Loki keeps doing this, until Bruce points out that if Loki can shrink, clothes probably can too. "You should probably wash whatever that white stuff is off your body. What is that? Snow?"

Loki shakes his head.

"Seriously, Bambi-" Tony pauses to hold up the Bambi toy he'd just bought with a smirk, so everyone notices the connection with Loki's nickname, and tosses it to Loki. "If it's not snow, what is it? Were you jacking off?" Tony wiggles his brows, and Pepper elbows him in the ribs hard enough to make him wince and rub the spot.

"Not reals." Loki mutters randomly before asking, with the air of suddenly remembering something. "Tony? If the man isn't peeing, why's he stick *that* part in?" As an afterthought, he adds, while pointing to the relevant body part, "You know, his penis, when he's doing sex. Why's the white baby goop come out there? It makes babies, right?"

Pepper might have turned red if she hadn't spent years hearing all sorts of perverted remarks from Tony. Bruce buries his head in his hands at the whole situation, although there's a smile playing around his lips and a couple snorts.

Tony is shaking helplessly with laughter, clenching his sides. "W...white b-baby go-oo-oop!" He manages to gasp between laughs. Loki just stares up at Tony, clearly not seeing anything funny about this and waiting for an answer.

Pepper's probably turning red anyways as she goes to glares murderously at Tony. Has he introduced Loki to porn or something? The comment about jacking off was so Tony, but he shouldn't he saying perverted stuff to Loki. Looking at this child form, she forgets for a second that
Loki's an adult.

Still, even though Loki's technically an adult, he seems so innocent, almost like a little kid. Pepper can't imagine Loki masturbating in the same way she can't imagine kids masturbating since they don't.

_That_ thought sounds a lot dirtier than she'd intended. She's really glad Tony will never know she thought that, because he'd never let her hear the end of it. Still, Loki's question about sex made it seem like he even knows the term _jacking off_, since it was at least sort of related to what Tony had said.

Tony quickly holds up his hands in a sign of peace. "Pep, I swear I haven't been corrupting him, so you can stop plotting how you're gonna kill me. You know, it's a really good thing your heels are back in the living room, because I don't feel like being stabbed by stilettos."

"Don't kill Tony!" Loki cries desperately, flinging himself in front of Tony protectively and completely flashing Pepper in the process. Now that he looks like a prepubescent boy, shielding Tony with his body is somewhat pointless.

"I won't let you! Nobody's gonna kill my Tony!" This is said with surprising force, and green energy starts to form around Loki's hands as he glares at Pepper.

"It's just an expression, she's not actually going to kill him." Bruce soothes, but Loki looks uncertain for a bit before he nods, green energy fading and challenging demeanor abruptly gone.

Tony breaks the silence, of course. "Yeah, the 'white baby goop' isn't pee, it's sperm, but you got the part about it forming babies partially right. Bruce, you wanna explain it?" Tony grins at Bruce, who hasn't lifted his face from his hands but shakes his head. "No? Um, you know women have eggs, right?"

Loki lets out a small giggle at that. "They're not birds! But they're insides, right? The eggs?"

Pepper has to remind herself that Loki knows firsthand how dark the world can be, that he's basically lived through hell for most of his life and can probably stand much more sexual information than a little kid could.

He clearly knows some stuff already. But how exactly does he know intimate details about sex and what goes where, yet not even know what sperm is? Maybe they don't totally grasp the science of the Birds and Bees in Asgard?

Some sicko could probably have taken advantage of Loki, and Pepper tries not to wonder if someone already has, because it makes her want to throw up. Is child rape a thing in Asgard? Considering they still have slavery and seem very Middle Ages in a lot of ways, she wouldn't exactly be surprised if that's the case. Her stomach churns and she desperately tries to think of something else.

Tony opens his mouth to answer but Loki interrupts.

"Wait, we're not s'posed to talk about this with a lady here, nope nope nope." Loki glances apologetically at Pepper, and gives her a little wave. "Can't when Lady Pepper's heres... 'xcept Lady Frigga told me a little about it and Sif could make sex jokes like Fandral sometimes, so maybe it doesn't apply to all ladies?" Loki appears confused.

"Trust me, I've heard way worse from Tony." Pepper assures him. "Now, you really should put some clothes on."
Loki retreats to the bathroom with the clothes Dum-E gave him. There's some splashing, not much time after that before he reemerges, back in his normal, tall, adult body and wearing Iron Man pajamas. Somehow, he looks completely dry even though there was splashing less than a minute ago, and Pepper wishes she could run a comb or brush through Loki's long, messy black locks, and she reaches into her purse.

"Whoa, that was quick. What'd you do, magic your clothes on and spell yourself dry?" Tony asks, and while that wouldn't be meant seriously by most people, Pepper's pretty sure it's actually a possibility in this situation.

Loki at least doesn't flinch at the reference to magic or spells.

He's flanked by three curious figures- a gray horse with way too many legs (eight, Pepper counts once the legs stop moving), a girl who looks like some sort of zombie on half her body, and a large wolf. Wrapped around his waist is the snake necklace, although it's not really a necklace anymore.

Pepper realizes the three charms dangling from the snake look a lot like the other three figures accompanying Loki.

"Who are you?" Pepper asks the girl, smiling politely, although the dead side of her body is pretty unsettling. Tony hadn't said anything about having some... odd guests.

"I'm Sleipnir!" The eight-legged horse announces, prancing around a bit.

"How are you bigger now?" The billionaire asks, pointing at Sleipnir. Then his eyes fall to Jormungand, and he shakes his head. "Never mind." Loki giggles.

Pepper knows the snake, which suddenly moves and hisses that his name is Jormungand, can change sizes.

The girl introduces herself as Hel, and adds that the wolf is named Fenrir.

"I can feel Fenrir's fur now, 'xcept I can still go through him." Loki runs a hand over the huge wolf's back and kneels next to him. Tony pokes Fenrir curiously, and Loki grabs Tony's hand, making him pet the wolf the right way. Fenrir soaks it up, more like a puppy dog than a wolf.

"I can move more now, and talk, instead of just turning my head and saying the same stuff." Simba speaks up, suddenly seeming to come alive and taking Pepper by surprise. It's like stepping into *Toy Story*, she thinks, and Tony mutters that he'd forgotten to mention this development. "I'm like Hobbes now, but to everyone."

"No, I'm Hobbes!" Sleipnir exclaims, almost jealously. Simba shoots back that he's closer to Hobbes because he's a big cat, like tigers (though his tone clearly shows he thinks lions are superior to both tigers and horses). Eventually, Sleipnir and Simba start talking over each other and Hel tries to break up the fight.

If they're imaginary, how could Loki control all of them simultaneously?

It doesn't look like he's controlling any of them, actually. The god just watches them fight, seeming confused, annoyed and a tad amused all at the same time. He turns away, looking at the rest of the toys Tony bought as bribes. He stares confusedly at Pinocchio, muttering that he's supposed to have a little wooden head before humming something.

Pinocchio suddenly turns to a wooden puppet instead of a plush doll, and Pepper wonders if Loki will bring him to life like Simba (which is a really weird thought). Tony and Bruce are obviously
wondering the same thing.

It would make sense, though. That's what the whole movie is about. Tony actually asks if he's going to bring him to life, but Loki shakes his head no, eyes straying down to Stitch for a bit.

"Maybe he'll be a real boy someday." Loki murmurs, shaking Pinocchio slightly so his arms and legs flop around as if dancing. He'd seen the end of the movie, right? Tony and Bruce look equally confused. There's no way he can bring a toy completely to life, right?

Loki, however, has now turned his attention to the new set of *Incredibles* figures, exclaiming delightedly that he has Violet and Frozone now to team up with him and Elsa as he rips open the box and starts playing with them.

Pepper gets close enough to pull the hairbrush she'd taken from her purse through Loki's hair. It catches on tangles once and Loki lets out a startled gasp, but after that, the brush runs smoothly through his locks. Actually, Loki's hair suddenly looks mostly combed, as if by magic, so Pepper just combs it back so it's not hanging in curtains around his face.

Satisfied, she steps back. "There. You look really handsome now. I think you might even give Tony a run for his money." Tony, of course, scoffs at the idea, saying that nobody's even close to as attractive than he is. Honestly, though, Loki does have a handsome face, although it's sort of wasted on him since he doesn't seem to care about non-platonic relationships.

Suddenly struck with an idea, Pepper hunts for some blank paper amid the chaos of books and paper on Loki's desk, and in doing so, spots a drawing of what she guesses is Loki in his Jotun form, next to a Jotun version of Elsa and some other blue man.

She studies it with a smile. For one thing, Loki's drawing skills are miles better than some of the drawings tacked on the walls of Loki's room, probably some of his earlier ones.

The fact he drew his Jotun form seems like a huge plus. When Loki showed his Jotun form on Halloween almost a month ago, he clearly hadn't liked it at all and probably never would have drawn it. That had been before the saw *Frozen*, though, and while there's nothing in the movie about Elsa being a Jotun, the whole ice powers aspect had clearly convinced Loki that she is, and it's obvious how much Loki adores Elsa (there are several drawings of her on the walls).

"Hey, that's Kurt! This should go on the wall, Snoopy." Tony exclaims, pointing at the other blue man in Loki's drawing as he looks at it from over Pepper's shoulder.

To her, he explains "Yesterday, we had a new sort of therapist come over- a telepathic mutant- and he happened Kurt, another mutant who's blue and can teleport." Muttering, he adds "It went way better than the sessions with the other therapists."

"Oh, yeah!" Loki exclaims. "Tony, guess what?! I teleported in the bath whens you were gone, and Esmeralda did too, 'xcept that was really me too. But Jarvis said there aren't good... scannering things in the any of baths so he didn't really get the stuffs to help beat that Doom guy."

From years of experience with Tony, Pepper's good at working out the meanings of ramblings, but if she hadn't already heard that Loki can teleport, it would have taken a bit to accept that knowledge.

Evidently, from Tony's excited nodding and the boatload of questions he hurls at the god- Did Loki see something different when he teleported? Did it feel like he went somewhere else briefly before ending up where he intended to teleport? - Tony's studying Loki's teleportation to try to incapacitate
Doctor Doom, who can teleport as well but almost never shows up when he sends his robots.

"Wanna see?" Loki asks, and after a bit, Pepper realizes he's asking her. She now knows that Tony hasn't forced Loki to teleport to study it, and that they're still going at Loki's pace, not Tony's. Which is good, because if Tony had forced Loki to do something he wasn't comfortable with, Pepper would be having a long talk (read, lecture with lots of shouting on her part) with him.

"I'd love to." Pepper says, just as she finds the scissors amid the clutter on the desk. She holds them as she turns around to watch Loki but ends up asking Jarvis where the blank paper. It turns out it's actually stacked neatly in one of the desk drawers, unlike the chaos of the rest of the room, and Pepper can't believe she hadn't checked there.

Loki closes his eyes and scrunches his face in concentration. Nothing happens, and he seems very annoyed about that. But isn't it sort of good that he's annoyed about not using magic? At least it seems like progress.

"You'll get it." Pepper tells him reassuringly, although she honestly has no clue if he will. She folds the paper she'd found and, making sure Loki's watching, snips out parts of it with the scissors. Loki just stares at her in confused bemusement, clearly thinking she's out of her mind for cutting paper randomly but humoring her all the same. He even tells her "Good job," in the sort of tone people use with small children when she holds up the finished, unfolded product, although admittedly it doesn't look like much.

His expression turns to utter glee when Pepper unfolds the paper to reveal the snowflake she'd made with scissors. Loki eagerly grabs another piece of paper before switching to intense concentration when folding it, as he tries to line it up exactly right before snipping away.

The snowflake Loki reveals upon unfolding the paper is absolutely stunning, especially considering this is evidently his first time doing this. Despite Pepper saying it's beautiful, Loki just studies it critically for a bit, shakes it so it flaps slightly. Thanks to his magic, the paper glitters like real snow, although when Pepper pokes it she finds it's still just paper.

She and Loki spend a good twenty minutes making paper snowflakes. Bruce and Tony even get in on the snowflake-making for a bit. Loki tries to get Dum-E to do one, but Tony nixes that, saying Dum-E's not allowed to have pointy objects like scissors, so Loki drapes one of the snowflakes over the robot's claw instead. Dum-E clenches it too tightly, crumpling it, but holds it up as proudly as if it's an Olympic Medal.

"Hey, you're reading Harry Potter?" Tony asks, picking up a book from Loki's nightstand. "Without me?" This is said in a hurt voice that's supposed to be joking, but Pepper can sense he's actually a tad annoyed about it, though he hides it well. Pepper can kind of understand why he might be upset. Tony seems to honestly like watching movies with Loki, and this book seems almost as relevant to Loki's life as Elsa's story in Frozen had been.

Harry being mistreated by the Dursleys for being magical is a lot like Loki's situation in Asgard, only Loki's was a lot worse. Would that be too close for comfort for Loki, though? Pepper glances at Loki, who's cutting another snowflake that he announced was going to be Elsa's snowflake.

"When did you even start reading it?" Is Tony's next question, and Bruce says they read the Chapter One earlier tonight. Oh, so they hadn't really gotten to the Dursleys.

"You know the Dursleys hating magic is dumb, right?"

"Jarvis said so." Loki says. "But lots of Midgardians do."
True, there are a lot of people here on Earth who don't like enhanced individuals, including the Avengers. While Tony (without his suit), Clint Barton and Natasha Romanoff technically aren't 'enhanced', there are citizens who hate them too. Probably some of it's fear, and admittedly they have somewhat dark pasts.

Pepper doubts they've really told Loki how, here on Earth, people could view Loki's powers negatively. They almost certainly haven't brought up the medieval witch hunts and burnings or Salem witch trials. After all, they've been trying to convince him that his magic isn't bad.

Yet Loki obviously knows that there are people who hate him and his magic (they wouldn't need to convince him it's not bad if he hadn't spent his whole life being told it was in Asgard).

"The bee man just left him." Loki's frowning now and cuts a bit off his paper with much more force than necessary. The scissors actually break, which Pepper didn't think was really possible to do accidentally, but she reminds herself that Loki has superhuman, almost godlike, strength.

The god flinches and quickly hides the broken scissors. He glances at Tony with wide eyes, obviously realizing they'd just seen him do that and hide the evidence. Tony just waves a hand in a way that says it doesn't matter at all, and after a bit, Loki visibly sags in relief.

Pepper hands Loki her scissors, and he starts cutting with extreme caution, clearly trying his hardest not to break these scissors too.

"What bee man?" Tony voices Pepper's first thought about Loki's comment. Pepper has a feeling she's missing some major context clues. He's probably talking about a movie, but the only Disney movie Pepper can think of that has bees of any kind is *Winnie-the-Pooh*. That doesn't even really fit though, and what in the world is a bee MAN?

Perhaps this is just one of Loki's odder mutterings and she's looking too deeply.

"The bee man." Loki says as if they're stupid for not knowing. "His name means bee but it's different... I think it's Dumblybee? Dumblydores? I forget." Loki pouts, and all three of them ask, coincidently at the same time and Tony grinning like an idiot, if he means Dumbledore.

Pepper vaguely recalls hearing somewhere that Dumbledore meaning bumblebee.

Loki nods with far less enthusiasm than usual. "Yeah, him, Dum-ble-dore Dumbledore. He's gots a silly name, but he's real old and grey like Odin, and magic too. You know Odin lied 'bout that, 'cause he has it and didn't say so ever and sometimes he whipped me." Pepper, Bruce and Tony all scowl at that, but Loki doesn't seem to notice and just keeps talking.

"Dumbledore, he just put Harry on the Dursleys' door and tel'ported away, even though Pr'fessor M...M'gonogle-something said no." Loki frowns, and Jarvis supplies Professor McGonagall, although it had still been clear who Loki meant even if his pronunciation was a bit off.

"Those pr'fessors have hard surnames, like 'Fessor X. And Dr. C, but she's a doctor." Nodding, Loki goes returns from the little side comment. McGonagall is the lady 'fessor. I like her, I think. She turned into a cat! Mrrroww!" Loki's cat noise is surprisingly realistic and accompanied by clawing motions with his hands. "Not a mewing cat, she's real quiet-likes and she stared at Vernon Dursley. I wish I could turn into a cat, 'stead of just growing ears and a tail."" 

Wait, what? Tony and Bruce don't look confused or surprised at all, and they confirm through a glance that Loki had actually grown a tail of some sort (and maybe done something with his ears?). Tony's currently saying he probably could turn into a cat, something that sounds crazy under any other circumstances.
"M'Gonagall told Dumbledore not to put Harry with the Dursleys!" Extremely upset and annoyed, Loki smacks his thigh hard enough to make Pepper wince and exclaims. "Harry was just a baby and he was 'bandoned there alone!"

"Yeah, it wasn't one of Dumbledore's best moments." Tony says. "And what have we said about hitting yourself?"

"Not to?" Loki says softly.

"Yes, please don't hit yourself." Pepper hates watching Loki do that.

"About Dumbledore leaving Harry, abandoning a baby is wrong." Tony says. "Harry could have crawled away and gotten hurt, and anyone could have found him and done whatever they wanted with him. Leaving him with shitty excuses for humans like the Dursleys is wrong on Dumbledore's part, too. I mean, locking a kid in a cupboard is just not okay."

Jumping up and down wildly and flailing his arms as if he wants to hit something, and then falls to the ground, curling in a ball. In a small voice, he says "I was a-bandoned too. The Allfather, Odin, found me all 'lone as a baby back there... in Jotunheim. He tooked me as a barter chip, like for trading 'cause I'm a prince there. That's why they didn't kill me in Ass-Guard when they kill lots of other Jotuns, likes the ones that came during Thor's coronation."

Pepper's heart has already broken at several things Loki's said, and even when she's heard this information about barter chips from Thor, it still breaks her heart. The way Loki talks about himself as nothing more than a tool, as means to an end, is just so wrong.

"Sometimes, I wish he didn't took me." Loki mumbles, and nobody bothers correcting his grammar, all too shocked by this admittance.

"Um, wouldn't you have died there?" Tony asks slowly.

"Fandral said they woulda raped me and eaten me, 'cause that's what they all do in the stories." Loki crumples his snowflake and throws it angrily away. "Say they're all savage monsters, but you're not like that." It takes Pepper a bit to realize Loki's switched to talking to his Elsa doll.

"I seriously doubt they would have done that." Bruce says. "If they did, they would have all killed each other off and gone extinct."

Loki doesn't answer. When he speaks again, Pepper isn't sure if he's talking to them, to Elsa, or to Simba and his friends.

"Heimdall, he saids the Jotuns didn't even want me when Thor and Sif 'n the Warriors Three brought me to Jotunheim, 'xcept I don't remember going there." His voice is choked as if he's about to cry. "Said that the Jotuns said they left me on purpose when I was a baby, cause I'm weak there too. Jotun runt!"

Pepper frowns at all of that as she wraps Loki in a hug, trying to be comforting while raging internally at all of Asgard, especially Odin.

"It's so wrong, but it also doesn't make sense. If Odin found Loki abandoned as a baby, why on earth would he think Loki would make a good bargaining chip? Most abandoned babies aren't wanted by whoever abandoned them, unless they're hidden for their safety in a time of crisis like war, and then their parents die.

Perhaps Odin had originally thought Loki had been hidden for his safety. Pepper can't think of why
someone like Odin would take Loki as a charity case, especially given how he'd treated him.

"You're so much more than that, and they don't deserve you up there." Pepper tells him firmly, and at Loki's immediate flinch, she realizes he interpreted the them not deserving him in a bad way.

"I meant that that in a good way. You're too good for them, and they don't deserve someone as amazing as you." A little ego stroking certainly wouldn't hurt, because unlike Tony, Loki pretty much has no self esteem.

While she's really glad Odin hadn't left Loki to die, in some ways that probably would have been kinder than making him suffer through all the abuse he somehow survived from. Loki's a lot tougher than he looks, Pepper reminds herself.

"Family shouldn't do that! What about Ohana?" Loki asks.

"Well, some families just plain suck." Tony answers rather bitterly, although Pepper knows his home life was kind of bad growing up (although it's a walk in the park next to Loki's. Despite people saying Tony's a narcissist, he's got to realize that).

"You would've loved me, right?" Loki asks, and Pepper answers that yes, of course she would, before she realizes Loki's actually addressing Elsa again. Pepper braces herself for the doll to suddenly come to life like Simba. She does, but doesn't do anything extreme. All Elsa does is give a regal sort of nod with very sad eyes, like she knows what's going on. "'Cause you're my Jotun sister even if they all 'bandoned me. We can make ice here with my Tony and my Bruce an' my Hulk-y 'n Jarvis 'n Pepper 'n Dum-E and they won't hurts us."

Technically, Frozen never said anything about Elsa being a Jotun, but it probably helps that Loki views her as one. Frozen's coming out in a few days, and Pepper wonders if the general public will be as obsessed with it as Loki is.

"You're not gonna leave me, right?" Loki turns to Tony. "Never!"

"Never." Tony agrees.

When Pepper first met Loki the day he landed on Tony's tower, she had some doubts about if Tony would grow bored of Loki. But it's not like they could have just cast an alien god from another realm and basically no knowledge of Earth out on the streets, or dumped him in a homeless shelter.

Things have clearly worked out.

"You'll always come back." Loki says. "You gotta eat an apple, and thens you're not gonna die so early."

And then, abruptly, it seems like that conversation's over as Loki starts making another paper snowflake. Tony leaves the room, muttering that he really needs a good drink, but he never answered the thing about apples.

Pepper suggests they hang the five paper snowflakes they'd made from the ceiling (they'll have to hang them low enough to avoid the holographic stars spanned out across the top of the room, she notes). Loki laughs in assent and gazes up at his stars, although Pepper's no longer sure if he's trying to pick where to hang them or if he's become distracted by the stars above.

He's bouncing on his toes and flicking his fingers, Elsa in one hand and Simba in the other. Small flurries of snow shoot out from his fingertips, somehow swirling up to fall above their heads, and Loki catches a flake on his tongue, saying it tastes better than King Kong's fake snow.
They start doing a bit of origami with origami paper Tony swears he doesn't remember buying it, and Loki had apparently never known it existed, that had been buried under the stack of drawing paper.

Pepper needs to ask Jarvis for directions on how to fold a simple frog. Loki folds along with her as they follow the AI's instructions and seems astounded when their papers take the shape of frogs that can jump.

But Loki forgets his frog entirely, letting it fall to the grass-like rug, when Bruce presents his creation and hands it to Loki.

The man is astonishingly good at origami, and had folded a horse for Loki without help from Jarvis, and Pepper's not sure whether he had the instructions memorized or actually figured it out from scratch, since he is a genius.

The paper horse makes Loki grin so wide it looks like his face might crack. He holds it lovingly, examining every inch before galloping it around the air, humming something Pepper vaguely recognizes. The god then begs Bruce to teach him how to make it.

Bruce complies, but it's clearly more complicated than the frogs Pepper and Loki made. Loki gets rather frustrated and winds up crumpling and hurling several failed attempts across the room.

Tony returns with three wine glasses. Pepper accepts one, since she hadn't had anything alcoholic at the charity event they'd come from, but Bruce declines the other, and Tony rolls his eyes, saying he's going to get Bruce to relax sometime. Bruce says he doesn't like not being in total control of himself, and Loki agrees, though he's probably just echoing Bruce. Although he does shoot the glass a disgusted look that Bruce hadn't, so maybe there's something else to it.

"Hey, uh, Snoopy?" Tony ventures with much more than most of his interactions, which means he's probably treading a possibly panic-inducing topic for Loki. "Uh... in the kitchen, I noticed a bit of ice and a charred mark on the wall." Hastily, he adds "I'm not mad, just curious."

"Stitch wouldn't give the snow globe back." Is all Loki offers, despite Tony trying to pry the whole story out of him. Tony mutters that he'll just get Jarvis to show him later, but Jarvis says that would be like showing pornography and he needs to blur out certain parts, because Loki was naked then. Granted, they'd all seen Loki naked when he came from the bathroom.

"Why aren't you mad?" Loki asks, as if it's weird he's not.

"Because I know it was an accident, and I have enough money to pay for pretty much anything. So no harm done." Tony grins at Loki and glances at Bruce before deciding not to say something, most likely about Hulk.

Bruce fills it his own self-deprecating comment, though, and Tony frowns at him.

"I'm not mad about yesterday." Tony reassures him, and Loki nods slightly.

Without any warning and quick as a viper, the god grabs both Tony's glass and the spare glass of wine. He dumps the contents on Tony's lap and smashes the glasses against the footboard of his bed.

"Loki! What was that for?" Tony demands, jumping up and wiping at his pants. His voice isn't actually angry, but it's certainly not calm and uncaring either. "That's not like the petri dishes and the turkey baster!"
Loki flinches, and Tony mutters obscenities under his breath.

"Okay, okay, let's calm down a sec." Tony grabs Loki's wrists gently as Loki reaches for the remaining glass of wine, which Pepper's barely touched. Loki jerks his wrists free effortlessly and glares at Tony almost challenging him.

Pepper's in shock, because this is a side of Loki she hasn't really seen. Loki's always been overly cautious about people's reactions, and had even just needed clarification that Tony wasn't mad about breaking his alcohol.

She's almost never seen him angry. Panicked, certainly. Annoyed, yes, on the plane when Fury called.

"You're not gonna beat me, nope nope nope!" Loki actually sounds confident about this fact, although he might not feel as confident as he sounds. "You can't, you promised an' you promised you're not gonna 'bandon me neither. Gots to still love me, 'cause we're family. Good family, Ohana, not like how some families just plain suck."

Loki's testing Tony, Pepper realizes. He's acting out on purpose, to make sure Tony won't do anything.

"No. I'm not going to do any of those things." Tony replies wearily, rubbing his face. "Is that what this was all about? You're making sure?"

Slowly, as if he hadn't known the real reason himself, Loki nods.

"Should I make you clean this up?" Tony asks Loki rhetorically and glances, unsure, at Pepper and Bruce, who nod a bit. It's common sense. If you make the mess, you clean it up (although that doesn't seem to apply to Tony). "Yeah, okay, I'm gonna ask you to clean this up."

Loki looks like he's about to get to it, but then he hesitates and glares defiantly at them. "No." He's clearly testing them again, and even stamps his foot, almost like a petulant toddler.

Tony looks at Pepper helplessly, obviously unsure of how to handle this. Forcing Loki to do it might not have the best consequences, giving his past. Tony even mutters something about slaves.

Dum-E's already trying to pick up the broken glass, and to everyone's surprise and relief, Loki, seemingly back to normal and chattering about stars, bends down to help the robot (and is told by Bruce and Pepper not to pick up broken glass with his bare hands).

The week since Thor accidentally revealed his parents abilities of magic has been interesting.

The news has clearly spread, and Thor wonders if it was Fandral letting it slip to one of his many lovers.

Father had screamed at Thor in rage, even angrier than when Thor tried to destroy Jotunheim after the Jotuns invaded during his coronation. He'd even slapped Thor, something Thor can never remember him doing.

This was but a brief bite of what it was like for Loki.

Thor had thought Father would banish him to Midgard again, not that he'd really mind, but he hadn't. So Thor's stayed in Asgard, where it appears as if some people are wondering why they should bow to Odin, when he's everything they hate.
Going to Midgard seems like a good idea, and it's not cowardly fleeing, he thinks as he heads towards Heimdall's dome. He has a good reason to go to Midgard.

The Midgardian Day of Giving Thanks is coming up (he thinks) and he's going to be spending it with his beloved Lady Jane. The Midgardian Day of Giving Thanks is basically a large feast with family and friends, like they have often in Asgard, only with some Midgardian fowl called a turkey being the main course, rather than something like boar or bilgesnipe.

Thor finds it rather amusing that the Midgardians eat mere birds, when it takes countless boars to feed everyone in an Asgardian feast. Sometimes Thor goes through more than one boar himself, and Volstagg's been known to eat three or four in one sitting.

Rather than celebrating a gloriously victorious battle, however, it's merely to spend time with loved ones and reflect on what you are thankful for in life. Such a trivial thing wouldn't merit a feast or holiday here, but Midgard is quite charming in what it considers important sometimes. Sure there are glorious battles with his fellow Avengers, which often finish with eating at one of Tony Stark's homes, but Midgardians also take time to celebrate the little things in life.

Despite the oddity, Thor finds himself rather looking forward to it. The holiday had been a new concept to him last year, and Jane had explained that only the part of Midgard known as the United States really celebrates it.

Striding into Heimdall's golden dome, Thor greets Heimdall. The gatekeeper bows his head, and the greeting is returned with the ubiquitous "My Prince." The yellow eyes meet his and Heimdall studies him for a bit.

"You're going to Midgard." Heimdall says it as a statement, not a question, and Thor confirms it.

"Aye. For the Midgardian Day of Giving Thanks. Although I am not sure when I will return."

"I'm afraid you missed it, my prince. That was two days ago." Heimdall replies, and Thor frowns. Had he really lost track of time that much? What will his beloved Jane say? Surely she was disappointed he did not show up.

Heimdall is studying Thor with unwavering yellow eyes that, as always, seem like they're able to see everything about him, even though the gatekeeper can not actually look into people's heads. Heimdall surely knows about the recent development of Thor revealing his parents' magic and the news spreading like fire through Asgard, but he does not comment on it.

"If you are still going to Midgard for a while, there is something that might interest the Man of Iron, as well as some others." The watchman says instead after studying him. "I trust you will do what is right with what you learn." Thor isn't sure, but it almost seems like there's a silent as you have done now, added on the end of that.

Does Heimdall approve of Asgard knowing of Odin's magic?

No, that's absurd.

"Is it the Chitauri? Are they preparing to stage an invasion on Midgard again?" Thor asks with narrowed eyes. The cowards have been hiding since their defeat, once again out of Heimdall's sight (nobody in Asgard had known of the Chitauri's existence until their attack on Midgard).

But perhaps Heimdall caught of glimpse of them as they moved closer to Midgard?

It's still unclear who exactly was leading the Chitauri, but it's obvious they were not leading
themselves. They acted like a collective unit with a shared consciousness rather than individuals, which makes them really good for following orders, but not giving them.

While Thor has no doubt that he and his fellow Avengers would be able to defeat the Chitauri a second time, it would be best for Midgard if they avoided that situation, and Midgard is under Thor's official protection.

"Nay, it is not the Chitauri, for they continue to evade my sight." Heimdall answers after the slightest pause, with something in his tone that Thor can't identify.

"Then what is this news which I should deliver to the Man of Iron?" Thor questions.

Rather than answering, Heimdall strides over to where a basket is sitting so unobtrusively to the side that Thor hadn't even noticed it until now. He recognizes it almost immediately as the gift basket that Thor had delivered to Heimdall for Tony. All of the fruit and other food is now gone, evidently eaten by Heimdall, but the 'spa vouchers' still remain, as does a bottle of some sort of Tony's alcohol.

"I see you have made use of some of the Man of Iron's gifts." Thor observes, but Heimdall doesn't answer, nor does he say anything when Thor asks if he's planning on using the spa voucher anytime soon.

Instead, Heimdall retrieves a piece of paper and hands it to Thor. Unfolding it, he sees it's the message in Stark's handwriting reading *For not being as much of an ass as everyone else in Asgard.*

"Ah. You want me to demand that the Man of Iron not insult our realm like this?"

Heimdall just motions for him to turn to the other side.

Doing so, Thor sees it's a map, presumably drawn by Heimdall. Though he's not sure what it is a map of.

"There are more secrets hidden in these halls." Heimdall says. "But nobody would have cared before." Gesturing at the map, he tells Thor to look under it.

Thor frowns. All that's under the map is the floor. Or does he mean look under the floor? But that's just the Bifrost, and the map looks nothing like that.

There are dungeons under the palace, though. Dungeons with a lot of small, square cells like on the map...

An hour later, Thor stands outside the entrance to the dungeons. He's rarely gone down here, as there's no need to, but he'd bullied Loki in and shut the door once.

He sets off down the steps to the dungeons, going down a lot of stairs. When he reaches the bottom of the stairs, he walks the corridors of cells, boots echoing loudly against the floor.

A guard asks if there's anything he can help with, but Thor shakes his head. Heimdall said he should do this himself, which is starting to make him suspicious. Has a Midgardian been kidnapped?

Asgard doesn't do that, though.

The cells are all brightly lit, with yellowish transparent shields keeping the prisoners in their cells.
Still, they're rather luxurious compared to prisons on some other realms. Some prisoners jeer at him, some beg to be let out, but Thor ignores them.

He casts a glance the map, which leads him past the brightly lit cells and down another spiral stone staircase.

The atmosphere changes on his way down.

The air is dank and cold, and Thor pulls his cloak around him, holding the crystal up to see better as he descends down the spiral, stone stairs that seem to have no end. The air gets colder and colder, the farther down he goes, and he starts to notice a very unpleasant smell of just... filth. There's no other way to describe it.

The walls of the dungeon seem to close in on him, but Thor does not allow himself to be intimidated. He digs in his pocket for the glowing red crystal that Mother had given him when he was a boy. The crystal is warm to the touch with mesmerizing shapes seeming to form deep within its depths.

It's something that's fairly common in Asgard, but seems an awful lot like magic, now that he thinks about it, though at the time he thought all magic was represented by green light like Loki’s. He has to hold the crystal high to see anything.

After what seems like an endless amount of stairs that must takes him Allfather knows how far below the palace, Thor reaches another corridor, much darker than the last. Without the crystal, Thor would not be able to see anything. The smell is indescribable, and every so often a moan comes from one of the cells.

Glancing at the map, Thor sees he's meant to go to the end.

He heads down the hall, trying to ignore the pitiful moans of the prisoners as they stare vacantly at the light in his hand. How does the Allfather allow such horrid conditions, even for the worst criminals?

At the end of the hall, Thor peers into a cell that's absolutely covered in filth and, oh Allfather, the feces is everywhere. As in Thor cannot find a single place that's not covered in shit.

As the light from the crystal reaches the farthest corners of the cell, and he sees a horse that looks positively emaciated.

He can't tell what color it is, since it's caked in filth, but he does notice it has twice the normal number of legs.

Chapter End Notes

Yep, I've been misleading you the whole time with Sleipnir.
Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

What does Thor do when he discovers Sleipnir is real?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Even in the dim light provided by his maybe-magical crystal, Thor can clearly see the horse's ribs jutting out, and its leg bones (Thor doesn't know the name) also stick out of very noticeably from the rest of its thin body.

The sight disgusts and horrifies him, because unlike on Midgard, the horse cannot even die of hunger, yet undoubtedly feels the pain just as strongly. The horse is rather smaller than the horses in the stables, and Thor wonders if it's because the horse is younger, or if its growth has been stunted due to starvation. Well, it's obviously starving even if its growth hasn't been permanently stunted.

As if the obvious lack of food is not enough, then there's the fact this horse has been locked away in the dark among its own filth for Allfather knows how long.

It's incredibly cruel, and Thor can't think of what the horse would have done to deserve this. No, he corrects himself, there is nothing anyone could do that would make them undeserving of something as basic as nourishment, even if it is not technically necessary for survival here. Nobody deserves to be locked in the dark practically swimming in their own filth, either.

Thor never would have wished this fate on Loki. No matter how horribly he treated him in other ways, at least they'd never done this. Even when he locked Loki in entrance to the dungeons once for fun, he hadn't even been there for an hour. The poor wretches down here have obviously been down here for much, much longer.

Thor would not even wish this on the Frost Giants he's killed, who- in Thor's mind- had been nameless, savage beasts. Surely this fate is worse than death.

As horrible as this poor horse's situation is, Thor wonders why Heimdall thinks the Man of Iron would want to know about this.

Thor frowns. Some part of him is telling him he's seen this horse somewhere before, but unsure of where. Certainly not the stables. Almost immediately upon returning to thinking about Tony Stark, the answer hits Thor like a blow from Mjolnir.

He'd seen this horse the last time he'd visited Tony Stark. Or, rather, he'd seen what had most likely been an illusion, when Loki fled after talking about that female Jotun, Elsa, and how her sister Anna still loved her despite that. How everyone treated her as a monster. It had been rather familiar, to say the least.

The illusion of the horse at Stark's mansion had been of a colt, smaller than the horse in front of him. It hadn't looked starved, either, but the eight legs are a rather big giveaway that it was an
illusion of *this* horse.

His mane is long and matted, clearly not having been trimmed or cared for in some time, and it looks to be the exact shade of Loki's hair.

This is one of Loki's... friends, is it not? The friends Thor and the others had mocked Loki about, had said were not real. Had hit him- no, had full out *beat* him- for talking to, since he looked like even more of a weird freak when talking to air.

They were wrong. Very wrong, and all this time, the horse had been here, without even Loki to talk to anymore, most likely.

If Thor had known... well, he certainly wouldn't have let the horse stay down here. What had the horse's name been, again? Bruce had mentioned it, and Loki had sometimes dropped names when seeming to talk to thin air.

"...Sleipnir?" Yes, that was it.

Sleipnir hadn't even seemed to notice Thor up until now, glassy eyed just like Loki and seeming lost in his own little world. Thor can't blame him. If he was stuck down here in the disgusting filth and darkness, he would try to imagine himself somewhere else, too.

Was Sleipnir talking to Loki just now, Thor wonders? He once again remembers, very guiltily now, mocking Loki for it and even beating him up and telling him to stop being even more of a freak. Odin had been absolutely livid when he'd heard Loki doing it. It seemed like Loki stopped, but sometimes he'd blurt out something he probably only wanted to say in his head. Gradually, even that had ceased.

It seems Loki and his friends finally started talking again on Midgard, if Thor's last visit was any indication.

Sleipnir now regards him with eyes more intelligent than any steed Thor's seen, and the horses in Asgard are smarter than those on Midgard. The way Sleipnir is looking at him, it's obvious he somehow knows what Thor's done to Loki. In fact, the horse practically projects his thoughts so Thor hears them in his head, or at least the meaning.

> Go away. Loki doesn't like you in his head. You make the... flash-backs and bad dreams come. The tone of the voice in Thor's head sounds scared, exhausted, and maybe a little childish. It's as if he's actually hearing what Sleipnir's voice would sound like. Perhaps this is what Loki heard in his head when they said he was talking to nobody. There's a pause, and then *We don't need you.*

Thor frowns in confusion. *Loki's head? That makes no sense.* He's also confused that the words aren't actually spoken, but rather enter his head. At Tony Stark's mansion, Sleipnir had sung a tune out loud, some tune Thor vaguely recognized but has no idea where he heard it. Why would he speak aloud there, but not here?

"This is not Loki's head." Thor says, and Sleipnir cocks his head to the side in a manner almost like Loki, clearly skeptical. Thor and, well, everyone but Loki, had said Sleipnir was all in Loki's head. That he wasn't really real. If that's all he heard, would he really think it true?

Sleipnir still seems confused, though, his expression clearly saying what's running through Thor's head, about how everyone said he was in Loki's head.

"This is a dungeon in Asgard." Thor elaborates, hating having to admit this.
You lied. Sleipnir's eyes seem to accuse, though it still seems like he hasn't totally wrapped his head around the implications yet.

Thor lowers his gaze. "If I had known that you were down here, I would not have allowed it. I would... not have said what I did about you. You heard that, did you not?" Sleipnir just gives him a very unimpressed look at the apology.

Not that Thor thought he should be forgiven that easily.

Why is Sleipnir even down here? What could he have possibly done? How is he even down here? Clearly, he's not imaginary, but where in the Nine Realms did he come from?

Surely Father must know about this, being the Allfather. Actually, now that Thor thinks about it, Father is most likely the one who is responsible for Sleipnir being down here. Thor's hands clench and he actually growls. How could Father allow this?

Thor hadn't known about this when he told Loki on numerous times that Sleipnir wasn't real, that him and the others were just in Loki's stupid, crazy brain. He wonders if Mother had known, but he can't imagine her ever letting this happen. He doesn't want to imagine Father letting this happen, but he has to have known.

So Father has to know, and he had still lied to Loki and said they weren't real. He'd been absolutely livid whenever Loki talked about his friends, whereas Thor and his friends just thought it was weird. Father had also lied by not telling them he, too, has magic. Yet he'd sewn Loki's lips shut when Loki lied about a statue of Buri being broken. He sometimes whipped him for other lies and almost always wound up screaming in Loki's face.

Thor actually feels rather ashamed of Odin, something he never thought he'd feel about his father. It's wrong to lie about this, but it's even more wrong to punish Loki for lying only to lie himself.

Dr. Banner had said that Loki had to make up his own "Monster Family" because Thor and his family hadn't acted like they were supposed to when they took Loki in. Father had never intended for Loki to be part of the family and made that clear at every opportunity. Mother had probably been the nicest to Loki out of anyone in Asgard, not that there's much competition at all, considering how he was treated. Well, Mother is the nicest after Heimdall, who had saved Loki when Thor and the Warriors Three dragged him to Jotunheim after the Jotuns invaded during Thor's coronation.

Father made sure Loki kept his distance from the royal family. Thor never made him feel anything close to welcome, either. Not even when Loki was a baby, when Thor hadn't been able to see past his blue skin.

Is Sleipnir actually Loki's family? Thor doesn't really have a way to find out right now. Sleipnir doesn't provide any useful answers, honestly not seeming to know.

When he lowers the light crystal a bit, Thor notices a latch on the door and unlocks it. The metal screeches in protest, and the bolt clearly hasn't been touched in a long time. The sound almost makes Thor jump, and Sleipnir definitely does jump, as well as some of the other prisoners.

"Where are the others? There are more of you... more friends of Loki, correct?" Thor asks. There had been others, he remembers. A very large wolf had also made an appearance on his last visit to Tony Stark's mansion, and he's pretty sure the snake around Loki's neck was yet another friend, even if it sometimes looks rather fake. There was something about a girl, too, he thinks.
They're not here. Sleipnir's gaze says, though he seems a little uncertain.

Thor takes some time to look for them in the other cells. The cells are really more like cages, where other poor wretches waste away. None of them seem like Loki's other friends (three of which are animals, Thor's pretty sure) but one prisoner near him has a shaved head, marking his status as a slave.

Slavery is another thing Midgard and Asgard differ on nowadays, though Thor knows the Midgardians used to have slaves as well. Certainly in Thor's lifetime. Maybe if Midgardians lived as long as Thor does, slavery would still be common there.

They've shifted their views, though, and Asgard has remained the same. And most Asgardians consider themselves more advanced than 'mere mortals'. Thor had heard that slaves were punished in the dungeon, but he thought it was more like the upper, rather more pleasant floors of the dungeons. Not this.

Even the criminals and slaves down here, in the other cages, don't deserve this, and Sleipnir probably hasn't even done anything. Aside from simply exist. Did Odin consider him a monster?

When he returns to Sleipnir's cage, there's a sound of something moving, and Thor notices that Sleipnir has backed up to huddle in the corner of his cell, eight legs trembling fiercely. He blinks and realizes he is the cause of this.

One thing is for sure. Thor cannot leave him down here. He slowly pulls the door open, which leads to even more of the sound of metal screeching.

"I mean you no harm." Thor tells the horse, who clearly does not believe him. "I'm going to get you out of here, I swear on Mjolnir." Oaths are not taken lightly on Asgard. "I will take you to Loki, where you'll be happy and fed more than here."

Thor is hoping Sleipnir will approach him so he won't have to actually step inside the filth, but it's clear Sleipnir's not convinced. Then again if he's seen what Thor's done to Loki, it would make sense if he didn't totally trust Thor.

Well, whether he has the horse's trust or not, Thor's going to get him out of here. Taking a deep breath and holding it, he slowly steps in. He knows what squishes under his boot, but he'd really rather not think about it.

Slowly, he makes his way up to the horse and reaches out. Sleipnir flinches visibly but doesn't have anywhere near the energy to fight him. He's not even standing, and when Thor tries to pick him up, he offers no assistance. Whether that's out of stubbornness or if he's too exhausted to stand anymore is a mystery to Thor.

Thor has to stoop down a little to put his arms under Sleipnir's body and make sure he won't collapse. Sleipnir's legs are just a hair longer than Thor's own are. The thunderer finds himself wishing Sleipnir was more of the size that he'd appeared to be at Tony's mansion, when he'd seemed to be a young colt. Actually, it would be nice if he were even smaller than that. He mutters this more or less to himself. Loki can change himself, he'd even become Tony once.

Sometimes, he'd changed his appearance in Asgard, too. Once he'd gotten weirder, it had been pretty easy to tell it was him even when he was in a different body, like it had been easy to tell when he was in Tony's body during the last visit.

Sleipnir may not weigh much (and even if he did, Thor's really strong), but he's still big and
unwieldy, so it's not like Thor can just scoop him into his arms. He has to act as a crutch for Sleipnir, since the horse's eight legs would probably give out otherwise.

It's slow, but he manages to walk Sleipnir to the doorway of the cell. At this rate, it will take hours to get Sleipnir out of to Heimdall's dome. The horse is obviously very tense and doesn't like Thor touching him, but clearly doesn't have the energy to fight.

As Thor practically drags the exhausted horse out of his cell, taking great care not to bump him against the bars, Sleipnir lets out a sort of huff, and slowly starts to shrink, until he's even smaller than he'd appeared at Tony Stark's mansion. The smaller size just makes him seem even more frail than his larger, equally emaciated form.

Apparently, Sleipnir has at least some magic, just like Loki, even though Thor only saw shimmering instead of green energy when Sleipnir transformed. Well, that had been the case with Loki too, he thinks.

Perhaps that is how they communicated- through magic. Thor has no idea how that would work- would they need to be related for that to work? Are they related? Do they share the same magic? Despite living with Loki for over a thousand years, Thor knows very little of magic.

"You have magic." Thor finds himself saying to Sleipnir, who probably thinks Thor will hate him for it. Thor doesn't, though, and he keeps talking in a low voice. "Both my parents do as well, but they did not tell me until recently." Both his parents having it is now common knowledge in Asgard, though Thor doubts the news had travelled this far. But maybe Sleipnir had already heard from Loki? After a bit, he adds "I swear I will not hurt you for your seidr."

He pulls off his cape- the bottom of which is now absolutely repulsive after what it's been drug through in the cell, and wraps the red fabric around the now-tiny colt like blankets around a newborn babe before cradling the bundled horse against his chest. Sleipnir's eight legs, now folded up against his body, feel weird against Thor's arms and chest. Like he's really holding two young horses instead of one.

Thor shuts the cell door to another screech of protesting metal, but they're so far down that there's no way the guards in the upper dungeons will hear it.

Perhaps it's just because Thor's body is warmer than the cold air in the lower dungeons, but Sleipnir actually seems to snuggle up against Thor's chest through the bundle of cape instinctively. Thor at least hopes he's providing some warmth through his body heat to the poor horse.

With a small Sleipnir cradled to his chest, Thor walks back down the hallway.

It's only after taking about three steps up the staircase that Thor realizes that just walking out may not be the best way to get out of here. Even though he's Prince, he doesn't think just walking out past the guards with a prisoner he just freed would go over well at all. Ultimately, the guards report to Odin. If Odin finds out about this, he'll probably try and stop Thor from bringing Sleipnir to Midgard.

If only there were a way to avoid the guards...

There's another staircase going down from this hallway of the dungeons, spiraling below the stairs Thor had taken down here. He rearranges Sleipnir slightly in his arms until he can hold up the crystal and consult the map Heimdall had given him.

The map labels the stairs going down as an exit, but there's no map for what's at the bottom. It
seems Heimdall ran out of space to draw on the fruit basket's tag and that was probably the only paper he had. If it hadn't been for the pen in the basket, Heimdall would not have had anything to draw with, either.

Thor tucks the map in his pocket and holds his glowing crystal high as he descends even further. He was already really far below the palace, but this staircase isn't actually that long. Sleipnir stares at the crystal the whole time.

This dungeon Sleipnir was just freed from is horrible enough, and Thor is somewhat reluctant to learn what's below it. From the rate things seem to be degrading, it's probably comprised of torture chambers or something.

Thankfully, he finds it to be simply an empty hallway without even any cells, though there are barrels stacked against the wall. It seems rather deep for mead storage, but he's not sure if that's what's in the barrels.

The crystal's light doesn't reach the end of the corridor, and when Thor reaches an intersection with another corridor, he keeps going straight.

He might be imagining it, but his crystal seems to get steadily brighter as the minutes tick by and eventually he finds a staircase going up. It's a good thing Sleipnir's smaller, because it would have been a tight fit otherwise.

As Thor climbs another flight of seemingly endless stone stairs like the one he'd descended earlier, Sleipnir's reek becomes even more noticeable now that he's not surrounded by excrement. He smells like he hasn't had a bath in ages, not that Thor's at all surprised, given the conditions he'd been in.

Finally, Thor arrives back in the palace halls, and squints at the almost blinding light. He hadn't been down there for even anywhere near an hour. How much worse must it be for Sleipnir, who was down there for Allfather knows how long?

Thor really hopes he won't run into the Allfather right now. Or the Warriors Three, or Sif. As he walks, he realizes he's literally tracking shit through the halls with his boots, even after climbing all those stairs. Oops.

Tony would probably say that's fitting, he thinks.

Thor gets several odd looks for carrying his bundled cape, although he's draped a bit of the red cloth over Sleipnir's head, both to hide him from the view of others and to block out some of the light, which had clearly bothered him even more than the crystal's light.

He decides if anyone asks, he'll say he was out hunting. Or that a new foal was born, or something. So he doesn't have a great lie, but thankfully he only passes servants, slaves and guards, and it's not their place to ask questions of their prince.

Thank the norns he doesn't run into Odin on his way to Heimdall's dome.

Once he arrives, Heimdall eyes the cape and gives Thor an approving look. Clearly, this is what the gatekeeper meant by saying he hoped Thor would do the right thing. It is the right thing.

Thor frowns. "How could Father have allowed this?"

Heimdall doesn't answer, but maybe he's not allowed to. Or, like Thor, he has no idea why Odin had done this.
"Is he Loki’s?" Thor asks next, wondering if Heimdall will be able to answer that.

"Aye, Loki birthed him." Heimdall says, and if Thor had known that earlier, he definitely would have bullied Loki for that, too, for being argr. Although he's not even sure how that works. Had Loki gotten pregnant as a man or something?

It does explain Sleipnir's magic. Although, Thor has to wonder why he doesn't have magic, if both Mother and Father do. Maybe if he had, he would have been nicer to Loki, although not having it is no excuse for what he did.

He's planning on asking Heimdall about Loki's other friends (or Monster Family, as Banner had called them) but Heimdall interrupts. "The Allfather approaches, my leige. You must leave."

Heimdall lowers his sword in his platform and Yggdrasil appears. Before he's whisked away, Thor asks him "You will not tell the Allfather of this, correct?"

"I will not be here. I have a nice spa trip to enjoy, do I not?" Heimdall replies with a ghost of a smile before Thor's whisked off to Midgard.

The light where he ends up, beating down from the sun, is even more blinding than the light in the palace. Thor's in a small town that he'd recognize anywhere.

Puente Antiguo, where he was banished around two and a half years ago, and where he first met his beloved Jane Foster.

Chapter End Notes

Since this chapter was really short, I'm going to post next chapter right now, too.
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

Clint's Thanksgiving is ruined.

Tony hosts his first anti-abuse charity event at the Bronx Zoo, and Loki of course loves the animals.

Chapter Notes

The first scene in this is sort of like a flashback, since it takes place before Thor discovers Sleipnir in the dungeons.

The rest of this is what Tony and the others are up to the same day that Thor finds and rescues Sleipnir (which is November 30, 2013) so there's not a whole lot of Sleipnir in this chapter. Hopefully you don't hate me for postponing when they find out about Sleipnir, but this is an idea I almost included in several earlier chapters but never got it how I wanted until now. I feel that idea wouldn't work after they found out about Sleipnir. I think this chapter is fun anyways, even if it is sort of going off on a tangent.

Also, keep in mind this is like a year and a half before Age of Ultron theoretically would take place, so Clint's kids are younger. I think they were 10 and 7 in the movie, so they're going to be just over 9 and almost 6.

Credit for a lot of Tony's charity speech goes to Nessaiya over on Fanfiction.Net, since she helped me with it when I sent her my train wreck of a speech draft.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clint grins widely as he lands the Quinjet in the grass. It's really, really good to be home. He's cutting it close, but at least he'll be home in time for Thanksgiving dinner. It would be a shame if he wasn't with his family for the holiday, but that is a possibility as an agent and Avenger.

He sighs and smiles at Natasha.

Natasha, being a close friend of Clint and his family, has accepted his invitation to join them for Thanksgiving dinner. Years ago, Clint had been worried that Natasha and Laura wouldn't get along when he introduced them and shared his secret family with Natasha. That hadn't been an issue in the slightest. Laura and Nat sometimes seem to get along too well and gang up on Clint, and Clint often feels like they're telling each other stuff about him behind his back, although he has no idea how, since he's pretty sure they don't have a texting thread or anything.

The kids call her Aunt Nat (or Auntie Nat, in Lila's case) and Clint and Laura have decided that, if they have another girl, they'll name her after Natasha. She's actually very good with kids, or at least Clint's kids, for someone who has little experience with them.
Clint and Natasha head through the chilly November air towards Clint's farmhouse. Clint opens the front door to hear a loud, high-pitched voice shout "Mooooommmmy! Cooper hit me with his lightsaber!"

"No I didn't! Besides, Lila shot me first!" Cooper's voice protests just as loudly, accidentally disproving his innocence with the word *first*. "In the eye!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"IT'S HIS FAULT!" Lila's voice has somehow gotten even louder. "He told me to so he could block it!"

Clint finds his bickering kids in the kitchen, complaining to Laura, who's obviously trying to cook. Cooper's dressed as Darth Vader, minus the helmet, and is holding a lightsaber in one hand and the suction cup arrow that he claims hit him in the eye.

Lila is holding the toy bow the arrow belongs to and wearing a curly red wig and a light blue dress. It's her Halloween costume from a month ago- Merida from *Brave*- who is Lila's favorite princess. Clint likes to think it's because Merida is a great archer (though she has nothing on him, of course) but at one point Lila said it was because she had red hair like Auntie Nat, which is so not fair. Over her costume, she's wearing Buzz Lightyear wings.

"Honey, I'm home!" Clint announces dryly, and his family looks up in surprise. Obviously, neither his wife nor kids heard him and Natasha enter- the kids were too busy whining and Laura was apparently trying to deal with them and watch over Thanksgiving dinner at the same time.

"Daddy!" Both kids plow into him before he can get to Laura. Cooper practically headbutts him in the stomach with surprising force for a nine-year-old.

"Oof. Hey, guys!" Clint hugs his kids tightly before leaning back to look at them seriously. "What's this I hear about shooting each other in the face?"

"She started it!" Cooper points at Lila with the suction cup arrow.

"I don't care who started it. Don't shoot each other in the face."

"He told me to!"

"Don't do it even if someone says to. It won't end well. Now, leave your mother alone." Both kids nod, chastised. Clint moves forwards to where Laura is pulling a turkey out of the oven. Once she sets it down, he turns her around and kisses her.

This earns a disgusted "Eew!" from Cooper and he quickly runs out of the room, only to say in surprise "Aunt Nat's here too?"

"Auntie Nat!" Lila squeals and runs to where Nat had appeared from the living room. Natasha bends down, scooping Lila up. Lila shrieks with laughter and almost jabs Natasha with the toy bow she's holding, but Natasha dodges, of course. Lila's excitedly talking Natasha's ear off, pointing out how her Merida wig is red like Natasha's hair.

"This looks wonderful." Clint says to Laura, looking at all the food.

Dinner *is* wonderful. Sometimes Clint wishes it could be like this all the time, no missions or
battles. He did manage to get this upcoming week off, by some miracle, and he's planning on spending it with his family.

His wife and kids tell him what's been going on in their lives, although he calls them regularly. Cooper and Lila are both doing well in school, although Cooper apparently needs to work harder in math. Cooper hastily tries to change the subject by saying they're learning about the human body in science. Clint knows a lot about the human body, and where to put an arrow to kill someone, maim them, and so on.

At one point during the meal, Lila asks if they can see Frozen sometime. It only came out yesterday, although Loki had seen it well before and definitely liked it, and it seems like the rest of the world is going completely nuts over it too.

Clint grins. It was going to be a surprise, but... "I already bought tickets so we can all go on Saturday." There's no way Clint's going to a movie theater tomorrow on Black Friday. Lila shrieks before chattering excitedly to Natasha about all the stuff she'd seen in the trailers on TV, barely remembering to eat.

Cooper doesn't seem quite as excited, since he says princess movies are for girls, but he does admit that the snowman seems funny. Also, while Cooper will vehemently deny it if anybody asks him, Clint knows his son still secretly likes a lot of the Disney Princess movies, especially Tangled.

Clint manages to get some alone time with Laura after dinner, even though they're stuck doing the dishes while they talk, since there's no way everything's fitting in the dishwasher. He can tell she's been worried about him. She always is. His job is almost more stressful for her, since Clint's very frequently in danger.

"How are you planning on spending your week off?" Laura asks as Clint hands her a freshly-washed dish to dry. The kids go back to school next week, but Clint has the week off and will at least see them in the mornings and after school.

"Catching up on all the Netflix I've missed." Clint grins. "Why?"

Laura playfully swats him with the dishcloth. "You'd better do something other than laze around on your butt." She clearly knows he hadn't meant it.

"Yes ma'am." Clint jokingly salutes her. "Actually, I was planning on putting hardwood floors in the sunroom." It's something he's been meaning to do for a while but never had the time.

Once they're done, they join Natasha, Cooper and Lila in the living room. Lila is reading a book aloud to Natasha, snuggled up right next to her, while Cooper builds the Lego Millennium Falcon he'd gotten for ninth birthday not long ago.

Once the kids have been put to bed, Clint goes to pour three more glasses of wine, but Natasha announces she's leaving, so he the glass that was going to be for her back. As he pours the wine, he sees Lila lighting candles to create a nice, peaceful atmosphere.

Less then a minute later- they've barely settled on the couch with their wine glasses- there's a loud thump from the on the other side of the outside wall, causing the candle on the shelf on that wall to teeter dangerously, though it thankfully doesn't set anything on fire.

Clint bolts up and peers out the window. It's dark outside, dark enough that even Clint- who has the codename Hawkeye for a reason- can't really see muchwithout a flashlight or night vision goggles, but he catches the faintest sign of movement from outside the darkened window.
This isn't good.

He sprints towards the door, hoping the thud against the house hadn't woken the kids, and grabs his bow. As he slings his quiver over his back, there's a knock at the door.

"Who is it?" His eyes narrow in suspicion as he knocks an arrow.

"It's me." Natasha opens the door and walks in, trusting Clint won't shoot her. "I just took care of four guys who certainly didn't expect me to be here. Otherwise they would've called in more numbers."

"You mean we were attacked?" Laura asks faintly as Clint's heart hammers in his chest. This is his worst fear- an enemy finding out about his family. There's a reason he keeps his family so secret that they're not even on S.H.I.E.L.D's files (if they were, Tony would've found out about them long ago from hacking into them, Clint is sure).

"How did they find us?" Clint asks, voice not betraying his fear, as he follows Natasha outside, and the two of them proceed to tie up the goons and relieve them of their weapons.

A few minutes after dumping the trussed-up people unceremoniously in the barn (Clint might've been a bit rougher than he had to be, since these people had threatened his family) they find their answer.

"With this." Natasha holds up a tracking device that was hidden on the bottom of the Quinjet. Clint had disabled the built-in tracking on the Quinjet with Fury's permission, as he always does when he uses on to visit his family, so agents won't wonder why a Quinjet frequents a random farmhouse that isn't a S.H.I.E.L.D safehouse.

"How did that get there?" Clint frowns "The Quinjet was in the Helicarrier before we flew it." They hadn't encountered anybody on their flight. Surely someone at S.H.I.E.L.D would've noticed if it had been slipped on from a prior mission or something. Had someone at S.H.I.E.L.D planted it? But that doesn't make any sense

Clint shakes his head. He'll think about that later.

Right now, they have to leave. There could be more people coming. The people that are now tied up in Clint's barn could have shared this location with any number of people that Clint wouldn't want meeting his wife and kids.

Bruce watches with slight dismay and apprehension as a Stark Industries helicopter lands on the balcony of Stark Tower and Tony gestures at it, proclaiming "Here's our ride."

"You didn't tell me we were going to travel like this." Bruce says, with his hands in the pockets of the coat Tony had insisted on buying for him when he saw the shabbiness of Bruce's old one. Tony's dressed in a crisp business suit- which makes Bruce look even more rumpled than usual in comparison- and holding a bag of spare clothes.

"Well, someone here doesn't really like cars." Tony glances at Loki, who looks rather insane wearing only a t-shirt with the Charlie Brown zig-zag stripe, his starry long coat which is very lightweight for a coat, sweatpants and flip-flops. "Plus, traffic sucks. And this is still flying, which is always awesome, even if it's not as great as my suits."

"Well, the other guy-"
"Hulk-y, not other guy!" Loki interrupts, green eyes boring into Bruce rather more intently than usual, as if he's trying to look inside Bruce to see the oth- Hulk.

"Right. Um, Hulk... doesn't really like confined spaces." Bruce finishes, fiddling with his glasses as Loki's eyes become slightly more glazed again. The Helicopter is definitely going to be cramped, even though Bruce himself isn't particularly big.

"You've handled windowless rooms in the Helicarrier." The genius billionaire points out. "And this has windows you can look out while flying over the city. The big green guy's gotta like that, right?"

"Hulk-y, we're going to the zoo!" Loki jumps and flicks his fingers.

"Uh, I don't think the Hulk's going to come out." Bruce shifts uneasily. At least, he hopes he won't come out.

The Hulk actually responds to that, rumbling quite loudly, but almost... happily?... in Bruce's mind "ZOO. HULK SEE ANIMALS."

Bruce smiles tightly and asks mentally "You want to see animals?" That's surprising, but so is his other form settling down to watch movies with Loki curled up next to him -Tony had shown Bruce pictures of the time they'd watched Pinocchio-, building sandcastles with Loki in Malibu, and hugging his Hulk plush in the "cool-off floor", sometimes also called the "chill floor" (both are Tony's names).

'Angry' clearly isn't the Hulk's only setting.

The reason they're going to the Bronx Zoo is some PR event for Stark Industries that Tony set up shortly after that night he was out and returned with Pepper. It's also a kick-starter for Tony's new anti-abuse charity, and children with less-than-ideal pasts have been invited to spend the day at the zoo. As a child, Bruce could have fit that description, and he's really proud of Tony for doing this.

The zoo seems like a great idea for Loki as well. After all, Loki obviously loves animals, judging by some of his book preferences and ever-growing army of origami animals that he's been making since they started with Pepper a little over a week ago.

Bruce just hadn't expected he'd come along, too.

He hadn't been planning to, but Tony had claimed that Bruce needed to get out of the tower, and hadn't even listened to Bruce's arguments, practically dragging him to the balcony where the helicopter just landed. Besides, Tony had said, someone should stick with Loki when Tony's giving a speech or dealing with the press, and Bruce found he really couldn't argue with that.

Bruce mentally asks the Other Guy if he's going to be okay with the helicopter, and gets a somewhat-affirmative grunt in reply. Which is odd because normally the Other Guy isn't very good with tight spaces or flying, let alone both combined.

He's also kind of worried about being around so many kids. Kids are loud and unpredictable. What if they provoke an incident?

"STUPID BANNER." Hulk says in Bruce's mind. "Hulk no hurt children. Hulk NOT MONSTER."

Bruce honestly doesn't know if this makes him feel better or worse, but Loki's holding onto Bruce as if he might suddenly decide to bail on them, which admittedly he'd been considering.

They crowd into the back of the helicopter, and the word 'crowd' is very apt, Bruce thinks wryly
and rather uncomfortably. The zoo will undoubtedly be crowded too. Bruce doesn't like crowds, but he can adapt to them. He had been force to adapt some of the time when on the run- although he usually aimed for remote, desolate places, he couldn't always avoid crowds. There are certainly crowds in New York City, too. Since moving into Stark Tower with Tony and Loki, though, Bruce hasn't really had to deal with crowds at all, which is really nice.

Pepper is already in the back of the helicopter, and Loki and Tony both grin when they see her, although Bruce is certain Tony already knew that she'd be there. "Pepper, we're gonna see animals!" Loki's voice rises to be heard as the helicopter's propellor starts chopping the air.

Pepper's reply is drowned out by Loki's surprised, excited shriek when the helicopter lifts off the ground. Loki practically crawls over Tony to press his face against the window, holding Simba up. Stitch and Lilo both look up from Loki's back. Loki and the three toys all gasp at the view of flying over the city- even Stark Tower doesn't provide a view quite like this. Jormungand looks up but doesn't seem as excited about the aerial view of New York City.

Tony and Pepper both try and point out famous landmarks. The Empire State Building is very close to Stark Tower and the top is visible from the penthouse but from the helicopter they can see the whole thing instead of just the top bit visible from the penthouse. The Statue of Liberty is technically visible, but it's a ways off and it's hard to make out many details except the arm sticking up, and they can't even tell she's holding a torch.

"There is green here." Loki not looking at Lady Liberty, but staring down at Central Park, which despite being pretty close to the tower, is largely obscured from the tower's view by other buildings. "I thought it was just the weird hard stuff."

"You mean concrete?" Tony asks after a bit, sounding confused.

"I don't like it at all." Loki states matter-of-factly before adding, as if he'd just thought of the best idea in the world, "We should live in a forest!"

"Sorry, but that's not gonna happen." Tony says, not exactly apologetically. Tony may be the big name in clean energy with the arc reactor powering Stark Tower, and he has a gorgeous lawn in Malibu, but he really doesn't seem like one to go out and enjoy nature, let alone live in it.

Loki goes to stand up before seeming to realize that there's not room to do so, especially since he's so tall. He shimmers and starts to shrink. A few seconds later, Bruce is looking at a skinny, pale boy that appears to be ten or eleven in human years. Loki now has short black hair rather than his shoulder-length locks, but the same pale skin and glazed green eyes.

The short hair makes him look really different. The only time Bruce has seen Loki with short hair is when he morphed into Tony, and that obviously doesn't count.

"More room now!" Loki claps his hands and clammers onto Tony's lap to see out the window. Loki certainly takes up less space in the helicopter this way.

Bruce blinks and glances at Tony, who's glancing at him in return before they both look at Loki again. Tony had shown Bruce a recording from before Bruce moved into the tower, in which what they suspected was an illusion of Loki as a child had shown up during one of Loki's nightmares.

However, that illusion's eyes weren't nearly as glazes as Loki's are now, and there's just something about the way Loki moves that that illusion didn't seem to have.

"Is this what you looked like as a kid?" Pepper gushes over Loki's cuteness, while Tony subtly
checks his phone, probably looking at the footage of that child illusion.

"I'm not Mowgli?" Loki asks as if he already knows the answer, staring at his hands.

"No. You're definitely you, but smaller." Tony snaps a picture on his phone and shows it to the mini Loki on his lap. "You know, I saw an illusion of you when you were around this size once, but it didn't quite seem like you."

Tony looks like he's wondering if he should have brought that up. Loki stares out the window, though he doesn't seem quite as enthusiastic about it. "Different hands." He mutters, flapping them slightly. "Different."

"You're adorable." Pepper tells Loki, gently holding one of his small hands. Loki's other arm is wrapped tightly around Simba as he looks at her dubiously.

Tony turns Loki around on his lap so they're looking at each other, Loki swings his legs, which are just a bit too short to reach to floor, out to the sides.

"You know, you look like Harry Potter. Not Daniel Radcliffe's Harry in the movies, but the books say he's skinny with black hair and green eyes." This has the effect of Loki smiling slightly. As both Bruce and Tony had hoped, Loki really likes Harry Potter himself, even if he the Dursleys scared Loki away from the book for a bit. There's a lot of reasons for Loki to connect to Harry, after all.

"I don't gots a scar or glasses." Loki says quietly, reaching for Tony's sunglasses. "Glasses, right? Like Harry's? How come they're black? That's silly, 'cause you can't see through 'em, nope nope nope, 'xcept if your Heimdall, maybe."

Tony puts the sunglasses over Loki's eyes, so he can see that people can, in fact, see with sunglasses on. They look huge on his smaller face. Loki takes them off and turns them around, seeming amazed that they're so much darker on one side than the other, before Tony takes them back. The now-small god then insists on trying on Bruce's glasses, laughingly proclaiming he's Harry Potter, even though Harry's glasses have round lenses and Bruce's are more rectangular, with less obvious frames.

Bruce takes them back before Loki can change them with his magic.

After a minute or two, Tony blurts out "Bambi, how are you this small and so skinny, yet you're still making me lose feeling in my legs. Seriously, you're way heavier than you look." Besides, he looks just a bit too big to be sitting on Tony's lap.

Loki frowns slightly and shrinks down even more, going from looking like he's ten or eleven to looking like he's five or six. Simba, Stitch and Lilo look really big next to Loki now.

"Huh. I'm pretty sure you'd weigh more than this, even when you're this tiny." Tony picks Loki up off his lap slightly.

Loki's clothes actually shrink with him this time- otherwise, he'd be practically swimming in them, although his flip flops remain sized for adult feet and are now rather useless. Of course Loki doesn't seem to mind that at all that he has to go barefoot.

Pepper gushes over how Loki's even more adorable than minutes ago when he looked like an older kid. Loki still doesn't look like he believes her, but he smiles slightly. He really is a cute kid, Bruce has to admit. Loki has now squeezed between Tony and the window, resting his head back against Tony's chest, where it just so happens to be right over Tony's arc reactor.
"How was your Thanksgiving?" Pepper asks. She'd visited them in the tower but hadn't actually stayed for dinner.

"We saw Snoopy! He was really big and flying!" Loki exclaims, wriggling excitedly. They'd been able to watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade from the roof of the tower and Loki had loved the whole thing, but especially the Snoopy float. "An' we watched him on the screen eating turkey and we ate turkey. And Jelly Beans, but you Midgardians don't even hunt them, that's what Tony says." Loki barely pauses for breath as he chatters on. "The turkeys just grow up and you kill them but they aren't wild so it's not a valiant hunt, nope nope nope! Thor would probably laugh at you guys for that. He doesn't hunt everything he eats buts he eats what he hunts."

"Thor can laugh all he wants. Besides, the pilgrims probably hunted their own turkeys for a while." Tony says.

"Dids you know Steve eats lots 'n lots 'n lots of turkey. Lots of every food, really. Almost more'n Volstagg." Loki looks rather surprised to her Volstagg's name come out of his mouth.

"So you guys did have Steve over for Thanksgiving?" Pepper asks, smiling.

"Wouldn't have been my first choice." Tony mumbles under his breath. "The rest of the Avengers bailed out on me."

"I guess I'm not an Avenger anymore." Bruce says dryly.

"You live with me. You were going to be there regardless. It's Legolas and Spider-Spy who ditched us." Tony fake-sulks like a petulant child, and Pepper rolls her eyes. Loki giggles.

"Well, Steve doesn't have any family, so I bet he was very grateful you invited him." Pepper says. Steve actually had acted quite thankful and courteous, and the super-soldier and billionaire engineer actually hadn't seemed to get on each others' nerves much that evening.

"I would love to see Howard's face if he knew Captain America actually bothers hanging out with me." Tony says more or less to himself with a touch of bitterness in his tone. "I think he might die again out of shock."

It had been the first Thanksgiving Bruce had since he'd been on the run. Well, last year he hadn't been on the run, but he'd been once again working as a doctor in remote corners of the globe. It had been a nice evening, but in some ways it was a very unconventional Thanksgiving. Sure, they had the turkey and the football game was playing in the background. Bruce honestly hadn't known they had Thanksgiving football back before Steve went in the ice, but apparently it started in the twenties.

After watching *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* (and rewatching the Halloween one despite it being out of season), Loki had seemed to really want Jelly Beans, so they actually had Jelly Beans on the table along with more normal courses, which had been catered in. Loki also had insisted on wearing Tony's Hulk costume from Halloween (which had become large enough to fit Loki thanks to his magic).

It's clear Loki vastly prefers Halloween as a holiday, which is somewhat surprising considering Thor's first visit was on Halloween. Somehow, that hadn't seemed to ruin Loki's impression of Halloween, which is good.

Nothing too strange happened during their Thanksgiving meal. Loki hadn't brought the turkey or silverware to life or anything. Given several of his toys have come alive- and that Stitch and Lilo
seem to be magnets for trouble— that was a huge relief, especially since he could've gotten the idea of living silverware from *Beauty and the Beast*. Not even Mrs. Potts and Chip became animated.

(However, on a different night, the spaghetti they made somehow turned into live worms. Loki had seemed to think that was hysterical once he'd realized nobody was angry about it, although he claims it was an accident anyways).

Tony, Bruce and Loki give Pepper a brief rundown of their evening, Loki adding somewhat irrelevant remarks sometimes, although some of what he said actually is relevant, but sounds random until Bruce or Tony explain it.

"Steve... drawed pictures." Loki says, and Bruce tells him that it's *drew*. "Steve's *really* good at drawing. He drew Mickey makin' stars move with magic, I think. And Jasmine petting horses on Magic Carpet with Aladdin under Mickey's stars."

During their feast, Steve, Tony, Bruce and Loki had wound up talking about Disney movies Steve had seen back in the day, and it turns out he had seen *Pinocchio* when it came out (Bruce doesn't think Loki really understood what they meant). After the meal, they ended up watching another old Disney thing that Steve apparently saw- the *Sorcerer's Apprentice* clip in *Fantasia*, where Mickey borrows the sorcerer's hat and brings brooms to life. Loki had loved the part where Mickey stood on a cliff and controlled the stars, which ended up being a dream as he woke up and found out the brooms had flooded the place.

The image Steve chose to draw, which was exactly what Loki told Pepper, had depictions of the characters that looked like they were right out of their respective movies (albeit combined into one scene in Steve's version). It was a great choice for Loki, since it featured people flying, stars, horses *and* a positive depiction of magic.

Tony had acted rather jealous when Loki declared the drawing was the best thing ever.

"I see you have Lilo now." Pepper glances at the doll that's basically the same size as the Stitch backpack, and then at Tony. "We didn't buy her with Pinocchio and the others, did we?"

Tony shakes his head. Stitch had simply spit Lilo out one day and Bruce, Tony and Jarvis still aren't sure where she came from. Their current theory is that Loki made her unknowingly with his magic, which is also what seems to bring his toys to life.

Stitch and Lilo cause a surprising amount of trouble when they come to life, considering they're both just plush. The two of them cause even more than Simba, despite being alive less often than Loki's beloved lion toy. Bruce supposes that's to be expected, considering that Lilo and Stitch are... well, Lilo and Stitch, and they cause mayhem in the movie and show, too. Especially Stitch. Five days ago, before Lilo mysteriously appeared, Stitch spat out a chainsaw, and had actually chopped up a workbench in the lab. Bruce isn't sure if hiding the chainsaw would really do anything if the alien could just spit it out again. Stitch has somewhat mellowed out with Lilo around, though.

Loki nods and grins back at Lilo, who's being hugged by one of Stitch's extra arms. Lilo, in turn, grins at Pepper. "Lilo without her Stitch... is likes Timon without Pumbaa, Calvin without Hobbes, Linus with no blanket. It doesn't work, nope nope nope."

"Like Loki without Simba." Bruce adds. Loki laughs and hugs Simba tightly as if to prove it, while Lilo and Stitch hug each other on Loki's back, Stitch using his two lower arms that aren't attached to the straps.

Lilo, true to character as a fan of all things weird, likes all of Loki's friends, but had taken an
especially huge shine to Hel, an alien ruler of the dead, who claims to rule Helheim. Bruce checked the myths— they don't mention her, but Helheim has Hel in it, although she could be named after Helheim rather than the place being named after her for all Bruce knows.

Stitch and Fenrir get along well, but the blue alien backpack and Jormungand seem to have a grudge against each other. Loki said it's because Jormungand beat Stitch and Stitch doesn't like it, but Bruce doesn't remember that.

"Christmas is right around the corner now." Pepper drags Bruce from his thoughts.

"Kriss-mas?" Of course Loki has no idea what that is.

"The next big holiday." Tony answers. "You're gonna love it, Snoopy. You give and get gifts, you decorate trees with lots of little lights, and if the weather works out, there's even snow." Loki's confusion has partially given way to excitement, but he still looks like he doesn't really know what Tony's talking about.

Tony keeps talking after a brief pause. "There's a whole religious part to it too, but I'm an atheist, so... yeah, we're not exactly gonna do that. And you're practically from Norse mythology so that wouldn't work anyways."

"We're getting close." Tony reassures Loki a few minutes later. The god has started squirming around again, part in an effort to see out the window now that he's much smaller, and partly due to restless excitement which makes him even more energetic than usual.

"We're gonna go see an-i-mals! At... the... zoooooooooooooooooo!" Loki chants, muffled slightly with his face pressed against the window. "Z-O-O! Z-O-O! Zoo zoo zoo zoo zoo."

"Speaking of which," Bruce gives Loki a pointed look. "What are the rules, again, Loki?"

"No letting snakes out like Harry." Loki reluctantly recites after a bit, pouting. "Harry went to a zoo and talked to a snake and then the glass went 'way." Loki tells Pepper. "And then he got locked up. Sleipnir hates that part and weird letters are coming now."

Surprisingly, Loki hadn't given up on reading the Harry Potter series, like Tony and Bruce thought he would that day a week ago when Bruce and Loki read the first chapter when Tony was at some party, and Loki assumed that the Dursleys' hatred of magic was normal.

Tony had been adamant that Loki would love it overall despite his initial freak-out, but let continuing it be Loki's decision.

A few night ago, Loki had started reading it again, only this time, he'd gotten Tony to read it aloud to him. Bruce never thought he'd see Tony laying on Loki's bed, making different voices for the characters, but then again he used to never think he'd see the somewhat obnoxious billionaire murmur comforting nothings into someone's ear while hugging them like he does all the time with the god.

"Harry talked to a snake, like my Jormungand."

Jormungand, who has grown to be larger than a necklace and is simply draped around Loki's shoulders, raises his head and hisses what the snake that Harry talked to in the book said. "Brazil, here I come. Thankssssss, amigo."

Loki laughs delightedly, flicking his fingers. "All-Speak says that amigo, that it means friend. Harry's got a snake friend just like me, but Odin gots mad like Uncle Vernon when I talked to my
Jormungand." Loki wraps his hand around Jormungand as if to ensure he's still there.

Bruce is starting to wonder if Loki derailed the conversation on purpose in the hopes Bruce and Tony will forget about the rules.

"Not just snakes. No letting any animals out of their cages." Bruce says seriously, and Loki looks rather disappointed to be on this topic again, so maybe his theory has some merit.

They'd talked about this extensively before, but it's good to go over it, especially right before they arrive.

"But Harry's snake, the Braz'liian Bo...boa ...Constri-tor said that he wanted to get out. Like how I wanted to get out of the petri dish." Loki protests.

Bruce and the.. Hulk can certainly relate to wanting to get out of a cage, but Bruce just shakes his head firmly.

"No going into any animal exhibits either." Tony adds, and Bruce could totally see Loki wandering into the lion's exhibit if they let him. That wouldn't end too well.

"What if I do?" Loki asks, more like he's honestly curious, though there might be just a hint of a challenge in his tone. This past week, Bruce has noticed that Loki's gotten just a tad more rebellious after he realized that smashing wine glasses on purpose didn't get him a beating. He's started poking around the lab more (and thus breaking Tony's rule of don't touch anything) but he at least listens to Tony when he says not to touch something dangerous. Which is a lot of the stuff in Tony's lab, actually.

"Then we leave immediately and won't see any more animals." It's not exactly a punishment, since anyone who falls into an animal cage probably doesn't stick around the zoo after the incident. "Same goes for if you let the animals out."

"You're not gonna lock me up like Harry?" Although it sounds like a question, Bruce really hopes Loki knows the answer.

"Of course not! Remember I said that Vernon and Petunia locking Harry in the cupboard was horrible?" Tony sounds like he wishes he didn't have to say this. They'd talked about the cupboard, and Sleipnir seemed to especially hate the idea, saying he doesn't like the dark. "But you shouldn't get near these animals. Real lions aren't exactly going to say Hakuna Matata. They'll probably try to eat you."

"Simba wouldn't." Loki protests at the same time Simba says "I wouldn't."

"Simba's different." Bruce tells him. He's still a toy even when he's seemingly alive.

"The rules apply to everybody, though, not just you. They don't want anybody letting animals out." Pepper says, and Loki seems slightly less annoyed to hear that it's not a rule only he has to follow. How many of those had there been in Asgard?

"So you're not gonna do any of that, right, buddy?" Tony asks, grinning.

Not seeming happy about the rules but reluctantly accepting them, Loki sighs, and says as if trying to sound formal, "You have my word. I swear it." It reminds Bruce of Thor.

Loki sticks his pinky out at Tony and grins "Pinky promise!"
Finally, the helicopter starts to descend. Loki's practically vibrating with excitement when the helicopter lands, bouncing on Tony's lap. Thankfully, he's not as heavy as before. Tony can lift him almost two easily. Surely a kid that age- which is maybe five or six? Tony's not good with ages- should weigh more. Loki especially should weigh more since he usually weighs more than he looks, but maybe magic made him lighter?

Reporters and paparazzi stand a short distance away by a sign that reads 'Fordham Road Gate'. Around half of them hold cameras, some of which are flashing as they take pictures while others are taking videos. The people not holding cameras hold mics or something to jot notes on, and they probably would get closer if they were able to.

However, Tony had hired a large team of security guards, most of whom work security jobs at his company, to make sure the press keep their distance while he's trying to enjoy the trip with Loki. The security team is also supposed to ensure kids (or Loki) don't decide to go in some of the more open zoo enclosures that aren't blocked by glass, although Loki could teleport through glass. Tony really hopes he won't. Since most of them are SI employees, they're getting paid extra for working when they could've just come as guests and enjoyed the zoo themselves.

Just like that time they'd been caught by camera-wielding paparazzi while pulling out of the tower's garage for the first appointment with Dr. Carlisle, Loki ducks and tries to hide from the cameras with his eyes screwed shut, obviously hating all the flashing.

Stitch starts growling and thrashing on Loki's back, and Loki's Lilo doll shouts "No! Don't crowd him!" like she had in the movie when tourists on the beach were taking pictures of Stitch dressed as Elvis. At least the alien backpack doesn't go on a destructive rampage and break all the cameras like he had in that scene, although that might only be because they haven't left the helicopter and a Stitch backpack can't break out of a helicopter like his cartoon counterpart could.

Even with the press a reasonable distance away thanks to the barrier of security, Tony doesn't want a million pictures of Loki, nor does he want a million questions about who Loki is. Not to mention, he knows bringing Loki out into that would make him panic even more, and Stitch would probably freak out as well.

What will people think if they see Loki's toys moving here, Tony wonders? They'll probably think that they're robots (especially if they notice who Loki's with). Maybe Loki's toys will be still around other people, like in Toy Story?

Tony rocks Loki's small body on his lap and murmurs. "Bambi, it's okay. They're just cameras, just bright lights." Wait a second... maybe he thinks it's lightning? Tony realizes as he makes shushing sounds. "It's not lightning, since there's no thunder." It dawns on Tony that Loki probably doesn't like the din of shouting reporters, either. The shouts are muffled by the helicopter door but not totally blocked out now that the helicopter's propellors have stopped chopping the air.

"Shh. I'm going to lure them away with Pepper, and they won't bother you when you get out. Trust me, just wait with Bruce for a bit, and I'll see you soon. Can you do that for me, Snoopy?"

He gets a shaky nod in reply. For another minute, Tony continues to comfort Loki, before exiting the copter with Pepper, quickly shutting the door to shield Loki and Bruce from prying eyes.

Tony strolls easily through the sea of flashing cameras and mics pressed in his face by loud reporters. He's used to this sort of thing. The security guards clear a path through the throng of reporters, who follow Tony away from the helicopter and into the zoo. Just as he planned.

This is actually the first time Tony's been to a zoo, ever. It's not like Howard would have even
considered taking him (and if he had thought of it, he would've decided it was a waste of time), and Tony just never felt the need to go as an adult. The Bronx Zoo is farther away from Stark Tower than the Central Park Zoo, but better since it's larger and has more animals, including lions. Tony can't wait to see Loki's reaction to them.

Even though they said they wouldn't be answering questions, some of the reporters and paparazzi shout questions at Tony and Pepper anyways. They ignore them aside from reiterating that they're not answering any questions as the security team tries to clear space for them through the crowd of people waiting to hear the opening speech.

Tony reaches the podium, set up in a relatively open area near the restaurant and gift shops as other zoo patrons start to arrive. Pepper shoots him a smile as he stands in front of the growing crowd of people. Pepper seems really proud that Tony came up with this charity.

Tony doesn't even have to try to get the attention of everybody there, even the little kids. It's one of his many talents.

"Well, you all know who I am, even though I didn't swoop down in my Iron Man suit." Tony says, which gets him some laughter from the adults and a lot of disappointed moans from the kids, who clearly wanted to see him suited up. "Trust me, I know it would've been awesome, but that's not what I'm here for today."

In a more serious tone, he continues. "I'm here to talk to you about something important."

The journalists obviously don't really know what to make out of this. A serious Tony Stark is a rare sight. In the past, Tony Stark had been serious at the press conference after his stint in Afghanistan, when he shut down the biggest and most prestigious part of his own company. A serious Tony means everyone has two options- either agree with what he's doing, or stay out of his way. When he's serious, nobody can change his mind, no matter how hard they try.

And there have been many who tried.

Tony pauses a bit to sweep his gaze over the crowd, his hands grabbing the podium as he looks at the people in front of him. He actually wrote a speech this time... okay, Jarvis wrote most of it, but Tony did more than he usually does for these sorts of events because he actually showed up, for one, and he did help with the speech. He bends the note cards in his hands and meets Pepper's eyes. She sends him one of those tiny smiles that tell him that she's really proud of him. He's gotten those smiles from her more often lately, and he has a hunch that it has to do with how he's been since Loki came into his life. He's less of an asshole to Loki than anyone else, in part because he somehow knew, even when they first met, that Loki wouldn't react well to his usual jabs, insults, and snarky comments. He no longer skips meals and locks himself in his lab for days on end, which is part of why he and Pepper broke up.

The moment he opens his mouth again he knows he's going to wing this thing, as always. He sets down his notes.

"Every year, between 500 million and 1.5 billion children worldwide endure some form of violence. Estimates of child maltreatment indicate that nearly a quarter of adults worldwide suffered physical abuse as a child, one third experienced emotional abuse and one sixth experienced physical neglect."

Eidetic memory is really nice sometimes. It sure helps being able to glance at something once and recite it afterwards number by number.
He just wishes he'd never had to see these facts as he trains his eyes on the audience.

"Every ten minutes, somewhere in the world, an adolescent girl dies as a result of violence."

Some people gasp, the cameras are trained on him. The reporters are quiet, they let him talk, there's no Christine Everhart interrupting in the middle like that time years ago, when he announced to the world during a press conference "I am Iron Man."

Like that speech, this thing will go surely viral, even if the headline or video title makes this out to just be a publicity stunt by reading 'Eccentric billionaire Tony Stark randomly decides to help abuse victims in hopes it will boost PR' or something. Whatever, they can see an uncaring self-centered ass if they want to.

Of course, none of these people know of Tony's inspiration for this charity. Not that he should have needed Loki as inspiration, he should've been helping abused kids years ago instead of building things that went boom.

Tony knows he can't magically fix this problem. But even if he can raise that number to happening every eleven minutes, or even fifteen, it will be worth it.

"Children with disabilities are 3.7 times more likely than typical children to be victims of any sort of violence. They are more likely to be victims of physical or even sexual abuse. In almost 40 percent of the cases, the parent or caregiver of the child is the abuser. In fact, 90 percent of alleged abusers were in some way related to the child." It makes a horrible sort of sense, as those people spend the most time around children.

He can see some of the SI employees in the crowd pulling their kids closer as if to prove they don't fall into that category. He sees the caregivers of the kids from foster homes or orphanages move closer to their charges, glancing down at certain ones. He can hear some of the kids complaining, probably asking when the man up there will be done so they can finally go look at all the animals. He wants to laugh but somehow can't. There are still some things he has to say.

"Childhood should be full of giggles and puppies, but sadly, life sucks sometimes." He pauses so that truth can sink in. Life does suck sometimes and it unfairly beats some people down. "Most of you should've already heard what kind of charity this is for, if you got the memo. Or if you listened to any of what I've just said. Anyways, it's a new charity, but it shares many of the same goals as I.S.P.C.A.N., which stands for The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect."

There's a divide where most of the SI employees look like they have no idea what I.S.P.C.A.N is while a lot of the foster parents or caregivers seem to have heard of it. The kids just look bored.

"This charity is going to try to find children who aren't being treated properly. Neglect is the most common form of maltreatment, but it rarely ends there. We want to help parents and caregivers to leave the vicious circle, as many abusers were once victims themselves. If necessary, removing children from the hostile environment is the first step, but there is so much more that can be done."

It is a vicious circle, indeed, and somehow it needs to be broken. Of course, not every abuse victim becomes an abuser by any stretch, but many abusers were abused. Once more, Tony relies on numbers and facts to make clear that this is not just a whim of a guy who grew up with the world served to him on a silver platter by a butler in a mansion. That this isn't just for PR and he actually cares about this.

"Children who experience child abuse and neglect are 59% more likely to be arrested as a juvenile,
28% more likely to be arrested as an adult, and 30% more likely to commit a violence crime. 14% of all men and 36% of all women in prison were abused as children. About 80% of 21-year-olds who were abused as children met criteria for at least one psychological disorder.

So far, Loki's only crime has been shoplifting Simba, but he was panicked about being lost in a huge city in an entirely new world, and seemed not to understand he was in a store, so Tony's letting that slide. (Thankfully the cashier hadn't called the police and had been quite good about the whole incident, although Jarvis had subtly removed a social media post about Tony showing up with a man that was posted later that day.

Fury treated trespassing (aka teleporting) onto the Helicarrier like a crime, but Tony's not counting that either. There was still no reason to lock Loki up and interrogate him like a criminal.

Tony realizes these thoughts made him pause for a second or two- his mind often operates at a million miles an hour- and he continues his speech.

"The attempt to find children a permanent loving family is only the start. Caregivers often report that their children have high levels of PTSD symptoms, as well as other problems like nightmares, feeling scared, worried or anxious, having trouble concentrating in school, feeling lonely, not wanting to play, and having intrusive thoughts. These can also lead to behavior problems. In short, without intervention, child abuse causes lifelong issues."

As much as he may not want to admit it, some of Tony's issues are probably caused by Howard.

The audience is still silent, so he tells them what exactly will be done with all the money he will spend on this charity. A lot of it's coming from his own pocket.

"We will help to develop the network of Childrens' Advocacy Centers in our country. When police or child protective services believe a child is being abused, the child is brought to the CAC—a safe, child-focused environment—by a caregiver or other 'safe' adult. At the CAC, the child tells their story to a trained interviewer who knows the right questions to ask."

Some people are already nodding in approval. "Then, based on the interview, a multidisciplinary team that includes medical professionals, law enforcement, mental health providers, prosecution, child protective services, victim advocates, and other professionals make decisions together about how to help the child. Finally, they offer a wide range of services like therapy, medical exams, courtroom preparation, victim advocacy, case management, and more."

While researching, Jarvis had discovered something called Das Kleine hinterm Komma, German for 'Cents behind the comma.' where employees can donate the cents behind the dollar amount of their paycheck. So at most, they'd donate ninety-nine cents each payday, and they could vote on what charity to give the money to or whether they want to build something with it.

It sounds like an awesome system, since each employee donates very little. In a giant company like Stark Industries, it really adds up, even if only a quarter of the employees decide to participate.

Tony starts to describe this method of donations to the crowd, only to realize that the kids look about ready to die of boredom, and decides he'll just make sure an email's sent out. This way, even the people who aren't here can hear about that.

That's more or less all he wanted to say, he knows that Pepper prepared a ridiculously long brochure for particularly inquisitive or nosy press, so they'll probably find more information than they would ever want about all this. They had made it clear beforehand that Tony won't answer any questions. He doesn't really want to explain why he's suddenly branching out into child support...
and anti-abuse campaigns.

Besides, he has a feeling that he already has been talking too long. Some of the kids are straying away from their parents to look at the gift shop in the plaza, to the dismay of their parents. Tony quickly trains his eye on the kids who had been rescued from bad home situations and their caregivers. Mostly, he can't actually tell who's who, unless he happens to recognize the parents, but some he can tell.

One little boy has a bandaged jaw and both his arms are in casts. It could have been an accident from a really bad fall on the playground or down the stairs, except the boy has the wary, guarded look Tony recognizes from Loki, the look Tony wore whenever his own father was actually around in his childhood. He must have only been recently removed from the "care" of his parents or whoever was his guardian. Theoretically, he could've been raised by his grandparents or or taken from a bad foster home or something, Tony has no idea.

Tony recalls his own time with a broken leg and how Loki had healed it. Except, even if Loki healed this boy's broken arms, how the hell would they explain that?

There's a tween girl who doesn't have any injuries Tony can see, but whose eyes constantly flick around, looking for danger.

"I know some of you have faced dangers or horrors that you never should have had to face. I may not know what exactly some of you went through, but it is not your fault, and it does not make you weak. You are much stronger than you probably realize and the people taking care of you now are doing an amazing job." If they weren't, Tony's charity would go about fixing that.

The boy with the broken jaw and the wary teenage girl watch Tony in awe as if they never expected a superhero to call them strong. They probably didn't expect anyone to call them strong. Tony smiles slightly at them and scans the crowd for Loki and Bruce, but he doesn't see them anywhere.

"Just because you come from a bad situation doesn't make you weak." Tony repeats firmly for all the kids in the audience who came from abusive pasts. The next part is inspired by all the times Loki's connected to a fictional character, and he starts with one of the recent additions to Loki's list, which some of the older kids might like more. "Look at Harry Potter. He spent most of his childhood with the Dursleys, who are horrible people that locked him in the cupboard under the stairs, and he turned out to be an awesome wizard."

Looking at the little girl in the front clutching an Elsa doll, he adds "For you princess-inclined people, Elsa-" He can practically hear Loki's voice in his mind, correcting him that Elsa's technically a queen, and decides maybe he shouldn't mention Elsa anyways. Frozen was just released to theaters on the day before Thanksgiving, after all, so most people probably haven't seen it, since that was only three days ago. "- no, scratch that. Uh, Rapunzel was kidnapped and raised to think the world was a horrible place. Quasimodo was similarly isolated and led to believe not only that the world was dangerous, but that he was a monster as well. But the real monster wasn't Quasimodo, it was Frollo, the one who hurt him and lied to him."

"Batman wasn't abused, but he watched his parents' murder. He grew up to be a ba-" Tony has to stop himself from saying badass in front of the kids since some of them are toddlers. "-billionaire who fights crime with his own technology. He's got nothing on me, of course." There's a bit more laughter from some of the adults and teenagers. Tony even has the same situation of losing both his parents at the same time, like the Dark Knight, only Tony was older than Bruce Wayne when it happened to him.
"But I'm not going to take up more of your time with talk about the billionaire with the billowing, black bat cape, or reveal more Disney knowledge than most people would think I have. We're in a Zoo, after all, so go check out the monkeys, giraffes and whatever other animals they have here. So knock yourselves out. Not literally. Don't knock each other out, either. No boxing matches." He stares significantly at two brothers who are swinging madly at each other to combat the boredom of standing there listening, while their parents hold them apart. The parents look embarrassed that Tony called them out on that.

Kids that had been tugging on their parents are finally able to dart off. Over the commotion, Tony leans to the mic and adds, with a significant glance at the reporters "Once again, I will not be taking any questions or conducting any interviews. In fact, this press conference is now over, so scram. I don't want to see any reporters here."

In other words, Pepper had said he shouldn't just tell them explicitly to leave him and everyone else the hell alone, although he really would've liked to say that. Then again, there are little kids here, so cursing in front of them probably isn't a great idea.

He spots Pepper in the crowd, and she gives him another smile, which he returns. He saunters down from the podium as the press and paparazzi reluctantly shuffle out, escorted by the security guards. No doubt they wanted to stick around and try to film Tony.

Tony finds he's received a snarky text from Jarvis, reading 'I see my time is valuable enough to spend carefully writing speeches that you then decide to improvise.'

"You should know that I never follow the cards." Tony simply speaks into his phone, since there's no point texting when Jarvis will get it either way. "Besides, I used the statistics, didn't I?"

"Yes, I suppose you did, sir." Jarvis also speaks out of the phone rather than texting.

As he's having this exchange with Jarvis, Tony takes a quick trip back to the helicopter to grab his casual clothes. Who wants to go around a zoo in a suit? Also, it's a bit of a disguise. Ordinarily, Tony would want to be the center of attention, but he's here to spend the day with Loki.

The other people here might not recognize him now that he's swapped his shades, and donned jeans, a baseball cap and an entirely different coat. Since it's cold, he could even wear a muffler to cover his goatee without looking like a bank robber, but he decides not to.

It's not a great disguise and rather cliché, most people probably wouldn't expect Tony to stick around a zoo anyways. Tony meets back up with Pepper, who's wearing a winter hat that covers her bun, not as a disguise but simply because it's cold. It makes her slightly less recognizable, though.

Now to find Loki and Bruce. Tony gets Jarvis to track down Simba's suit, and heads off with Pepper to meet them. Like Loki, it's Tony's first trip to a zoo, too.

"You're so cute! Why don't you fly?" Loki coos at the birds in the pond and on the rocks below him. They're flapping their wings but barely fly, and most aren't even bothering flapping, just waddling or swimming towards him. Loki had made an origami bird rather like these ones a few days ago. It was really easy, less than ten folds, and he'd made it fly once.

These birds almost look like they're wearing suits like the one Tony's wearing- the black and white, cloth kind, not Man of Iron suits. Loki smiles at the silly mental image of the rather chubby birds all red and gold with arc reactors in their chests.

Right now, Loki and Bruce are in a building which had a sign outside reading "Aquatic Bird House"
and Sea Bird Aviary". Loki even knew the words bird and sea without All-Tongue. There isn't a sea in here, but these weird black-and-white birds are swimming in a pond. He doesn't recognize these birds- the animal book he read didn't have much on birds.

"See? This place isn't so bad." Bruce says, although it sort of sounds like he's telling himself as well as Loki. "It's not like they're locked in dirty cages."

This place is indeed much nicer than the petri dish Loki was stuck in. There's water, and leaves and trees. Maybe the animals don't need to be let out. Admittedly, the pond in here isn't as great as the river they'd passed almost as soon as they got out of the flying thing. Loki had wanted to go in it, but Bruce made another rule that he can't. The rule hadn't seemed quite as annoying after Bruce pointed out that he can go swimming anytime in the tower and that they're here to see animals anyways. Loki can't go in the pond that's in here, either, since these birds are here, but he had run his hand through the water in a fountain outside this bird building.

He's really glad he and Bruce are alone right now, although he wishes Tony and Pepper were here too, he thinks as he clutches Toy Stark. He'd seen a pretty big crowd a fair distance off outside, when they were walking here, so they might not be alone for long, although Tony was talking to them.

He'd heard him, dimly, when he had stopped to look at Bison with Bruce before they came in here. Loki's seen Bison before, in the movie with Spirit the horse and as a picture in the animal book, but he had never seen them in real life until a couple minutes ago. They're really big and strong looking, but look so soft as well.

Tony had been talking to a crowd about numbers and people getting hurt and crimes. All the flashing camera things that Stitch ate in his movie were pointed at Tony, thankfully. Loki hates those, they make him think of lightning, and Tony somehow knew that, when Loki hid from them in the flying thing. It's really nice of Tony to take the flashing in his eyes so Loki doesn't have to.

Loki and Bruce went in this bird building instead of going into the crowd. Bruce seemed to understand without asking that Loki really doesn't like crowds- after all, in Asgard, being surrounded by more people who didn't like him never boded well, and it's not like he could really hide in a crowd if everyone hated him. As they were going into this building, Loki had heard Tony mention Harry Potter, Rapunzel and Quasimodo and say the same stuff he always says- that the Dursleys and Frollo are the bad guys, and Harry's magic is awesome.

Loki really loves hearing that, but he wonders why Tony was telling all those people in the distance. Also, who's the Man of Bats and does Tony actually know him? Tony made it sound like Man of Bats is kind of like Tony himself, and Man of Iron. Tony's definitely right when he proclaimed himself more awesome, though. Loki can know that without even knowing who the Man of Bats is.

"...can't fly." Bruce says, snapping Loki out of remembering what they'd heard Tony talk about when walking outside and looking at the Bison. He says a word that sounds like 'Pain-Gwin', whatever that is. All-Tongue translates the pain part. Loki knows pain, and he really doesn't like the sound of that.

Seeing his look of confusion, Bruce says "That's the name of the birds" and then says that word, Pain-Gwin, again. They certainly don't have these 'Pain-Gwins' on Asgard, and they hadn't been in that book on animals. Clearly that huge animal book still didn't have every Midgardian animal in it, since it skipped all the birds.

Loki had really liked these birds, but if they have pain in their name, maybe they cause pain?
Maybe the birds want to stab him with their beaks. He doesn't even feel the urge to join them anymore, although Tony and Bruce said he can't visit animals anyways. There's not even glass, like there apparently was in front of the snake Harry talked to, so there's nothing stopping them from getting at him.

"They're not going to hurt you." Bruce says as Loki hastily steps away. There's no glass, and there's glass in front of the other pain-gwins he'd looked at before these. Those ones didn't have white stomachs like these do, so it didn't look like they were wearing suits, and those ones flew, so maybe Bruce is lying about these ones flying. Maybe someone else let these pain-gwins out.

"But pain!" Loki protests, unable to fully get what he wants to say out, shaking his head anxiously. "Pain, pain, pain painpainpain!"

"Are you hurt?" Bruce is giving him a concerned look. "Did you, uh, step on something sharp? That's what shoes are for, you know, although we don't have any in your size right now."

"No! Pain! In their names! PAIN-gwins."

"No, it's penguins." Bruce corrects with a gentle smile. "P-E-N-G-U-I-N-S. Penguins. There's nothing about pain in there, and they won't hurt you. They can't fly, so there's no way they could even to get to you."

Oh. It's nice that they don't have pain in their names. Loki thinks he likes them again.

"But they gots wings, Bruce. Wings make you fly!" Loki very briefly tears his eyes away from the birds to look at Bruce skeptically, wondering if Bruce is jesting. Everyone knows wings make things fly, although some of the birds are swimming.

Dreamily, he adds "I wish I had wings." He throws his arms wide (though they don't reach as far as usual), wishing he had wings. He doesn't want wings like a bird, because then he wouldn't have any arms. He wants wings on his back, like Tink. Sadly, wings don't grow out of his back like when Loki gave himself a tail after 'Fessor X and Charles left.

"They can't fly with their wings." Bruce says.

Why? Are these broken penguins that can't fly?

"Those ones fly." Loki points to the other penguins, the flying ones that are behind glass.

"Those are puffins. They're different animals. Puffins can fly, but penguins can't." Bruce tells him.

The penguins no doubt want to fly as well, Loki thinks as all the penguins look at him. It must be really upsetting, to have wings and not be able to fly, and Loki's still not entirely sure if Bruce is jesting with him about them being unable to fly or not.

Loki jumps up and down, flapping his arms, laughing. Maybe the penguins will get the hint that that's what they're supposed to do. Bruce is saying something about flippers, but Loki doesn't really hear it.

The penguins slowly float up and start flapping their wings wildly as they go higher, beaks opening and closing. They make a honking sound that's really funny, like they're happy that they're flying like the puffins.

Loki laughs and jumps faster, higher, but he still doesn't join them in the air. After a bit, he turns to Bruce. "You lied. Penguins fly."
"You did that." Bruce says gently.

"Like with Toy Stark and Peter an' Tinker Bell and my origami?" Loki glances down at his hands, which, being smaller than even when he's Mowgli or when he had a slightly bigger child body today, make it slightly harder to hold onto Simba and Toy Stark. There's green magic around his hands and Toy Stark starts floating too, even though he's not in his Man of Iron form.

Oh. So it is him. Why is it that he can make his toys, origami and, apparently, penguins fly, but can't fly himself? It's really not fair, although his Man of Iron suit is going to fly soon. He grins, imagining what it will be like.

"Loki, I don't think the penguins like floating." Bruce says, watching the penguins rise higher in the air. Loki stares at him. Who wouldn't like flying?!

"They're used to swimming. Their wings evolved into flippers." Bruce says, looking at a little sign Loki hadn't noticed before. It has a picture of the penguins and some text, which turns out to be information on them.

Bruce reads aloud. "These, uh, _magellanic penguins_, live in South America." He pauses and looks at Loki, smiling. "You know, some penguins live in arctic regions, with a lot of ice, although it's slowly melting because of global warming."

Before Loki can figure out what that means, or how to return the penguins to the ground, two boys come up, and Loki quickly hides his hands behind his back so they won't see the magic around them. The older boy is blonde, and the younger one has black hair, which makes Loki think of himself and Thor.

"Mommy, look!" The black-haired boy, who's smaller than Loki, shouts as he grabs the older boy's hand and they run hand in hand over to a woman who must be their mother. Maybe the boys are brothers, then. "They're flying!"

The woman smiles down at her sons like a mother should. The penguins are slowly returning to the ground, and by the time the boys pull her over to look, they're back on the ground. Loki checks his hands. No more magic tendrils around them.

"Lucas, penguins can't fly." The mother looks from the penguins, which are back to waddling and swimming, to the sign Bruce and Loki read. "Look, it says so right here. Penguins can't fly."

"But they flew!" The black-haired boy, Lucas apparently, protests. Dr. C had called Loki 'Lucas' the first time she saw her, Loki remembers. She hadn't even gotten his name right!

"We saw them!" The older boy nods, still holding Lucas' hand. "We know we're right." He says quietly to Lucas, and the boys smile at each other. Loki watches them, a tad jealous. Why couldn't Thor have been like that? Why couldn't he be nice like this boy? Why couldn't he be nice like Anna was to Elsa?

What if these people figure out the penguins were only flying because of his magic? They might be like Ass-Guardians (as Tony calls them) or the Dursleys.

Loki darts away but stops to look at pink birds with really long necks and only one leg that looks like a really long, skinny stick.

These _Flamingos_, as the sign proclaims them, are pretty funny. They don't look like they're on fire, though. Fire isn't pink, so how are they flaming? Loki wonders who names Midgardian birds, because they're really not doing a good job. Like how penguins don't have anything to do with pain,
or pens, since it's spelled with *pen* in it.

According to the sign, these flaming-os really have two legs, but one's folded up under their body. Loki balances on one leg like them for a bit, staring at the nearest flamingo.

"Hi!" He chirps, grinning at the bird. The flamingo looks back at him, cocking his head to the side like he's a mirror image of Loki. He seems very relaxed, a lot nicer than Huginn and Muninn. He's a much prettier bird, too. Odin's ravens are mean *and* ugly.

Loki laughs. "Your neck's like a snake. Like my Jormungand."

The flamingo bends his neck, and Loki knows he's agreeing. Jormungand curls up on Loki's shoulder and rears part of his body up like he's a neck on Loki's shoulders, and Loki holds Simba up on top so they make a ducks his own head, tucking Toy Stark and the toy Dum-E that Tony made under his chin.

Jormungand's the neck, Loki's the body balancing on one leg, and Simba's the head, though he's a bigger head than the flamingo. The flamingo seems to find that funny, and Loki hears a laugh behind him.

"Okay, even I have to admit this is like the most adorable thing ever." Loki hears Tony's voice and tries to look out of the corner of his eyes. Tony's wearing different clothes, even different dark glasses, than he'd been wearing in the flying thing. He's also holding his phone, and Loki can see through the hologram that he and the flamingo are on the screen.

"Hey Snoopy. Don't mind me, I'm just taking your picture." Tony grins.

"Not Snoopy now! Me an' Jormungand and Simba are a flaming-o!" How can Tony not see it?

Tony looks between him and the flamingo, smirking. "Right. So, so should I give you a new, flamingo-y nickname. What kind of flamingo names are there, anyways? Pencil-Legs? I mean, your legs are short now, but normally you have the longest legs I've ever seen on a guy who's not in the NBA."

Loki has no idea what that last part means as he abandons his one-legged stance and launches himself at Tony, wrapping his arms around Tony's legs, standing on his toes on the tops of Tony's shoes. It's kind of weird, having to look up to see Tony's face, but he has to do that as Mowgli too. He just has to look up even more now, since he's even shorter than when he's Mowgli.

Tony quirks an eyebrow. "You know I can't really move when you're holding my legs like this, although at least you're light enough that you're not crushing my feet."

"You could waddle like a penguin." Bruce suggests. Loki giggles, squatting down and trying to walk like a penguin, although Tony doesn't. Tony's not even wearing the black-and-white suit that looks kind of like the penguins.

"Tony, guess what?" Tony squats down so Loki can whisper in his ear. "I made the pen-guins fly."

Tony laughs "You did?! That's hilarious. You know penguins can't fly normally, right?"

Loki nods, grin fading into a slight frown. "Can't make me fly, though."

"Maybe you will fly sometime." Tony winks at Loki, and Loki giggles.
In between trying to teleport to help Tony figure out a way to beat that Doom guy and making Origami (Tony's even better than Bruce at figuring out how to fold stuff without Jarvis' help) Loki and Tony have been working on making both Loki and Simba's Man of Iron suits able to fly. Loki had watched, fascinated, as Tony started a couple days ago. There was even some circuit stuff involved, like in the book Loki read in Tony's other house. The circuits connected the boots to the arc reactor and back again.

Tony's been letting Loki help and at one point even said he's even more help than Dum-E, who hands them tools when they're working (usually the wrong ones, according to Tony). Tony made a couple somewhat rude remarks to Dum-E, but hadn't said anything mean to Loki. It's a really nice change from being constantly belittled and told he's worthless when he had to help the servants and slaves, even though he'd deserved it.

Tony had said to keep the flying boots a secret from Pepper, though. Yesterday, he'd said something along the lines of "She's no fun and will make us stop, saying that you'll kill yourself or something. Even though it's flying armor, which protects people, sheesh. Besides, you're like the most durable guy I know, aside from maybe Cap and Hulk."

Loki starts humming so his mouth won't blurt anything out like it often does and reveal their secret to Pepper. He realizes a little late that he's humming that You can fly song from Peter Pan, but Pepper doesn't comment.

Tony smirks at him, clearly noticing what Loki's humming, before abruptly saying that he wishes he could have seen the penguins fly. Tony would really hate being a penguin, Loki thinks, since it seems to mean no flying and lots of swimming, and Loki's learned that Tony doesn't like swimming.

"I've taken the liberty of looping back old video feed of the penguins to replace the video of that incident." Jarvis' voice comes out of Tony's pocket. "I've sent the real video to your phone, sir."

"Great. Thanks J."

"My pleasure, sir. By the way, Mr. Loki, I am quite fond of the picture Sir just took of you." Jarvis' voice becomes slightly reprimanding. "Although he really should have asked for your permission before taking it."

"I'm pretty sure if you're in a public place, people can take pictures of you. Isn't that what the press does?" Tony replies. "You don't mind if I take pictures of you, right, Loki?"

Doesn't Jarvis do that all the time? Although they're moving pictures- videos. Loki's seen some of the videos from Jarvis' cameras. He shakes his head, not minding if Tony takes pictures, and grins up at Pepper, who's taller than Tony. "Pepper, look at the flaming-os!"

"I see them, Loki." Pepper grins. "By the way, it's pronounced fla-min-go, not flaming-o. Flamingo. They're very pretty, aren't they?"

"Yeah, they're real pretties, like you. And they really got two legs, but stand on one. He said it feels nice," Loki points at the flamingo he'd been looking at earlier. The flamingo hadn't actually said it aloud, hadn't even said it with his eyes like Fenrir, but Loki thinks that's what he said.

The flamingos actually make him think of Pepper, actually. They're tall, pretty, and graceful. He'll have to remember to ask Jarvis how to make them out of origami later, and give one to Pepper since she gave him her origami frog and paper snowflakes they made that one night. He doesn't have pink paper, but maybe he can change the color of another sheet with his magic...
"You think I'm pretty?" Pepper asks, giving Loki another smile.

"So what? I always thought you were smoking hot, still do." Tony tells Pepper, before hastily adding. "But you're brilliant, too, of course. Why else would I choose you as my CEO? So Snoopy- or Pencil-Legs- Bruce, did you guys hear any of my awesome speech?"

"Some." Bruce says. "You're doing a really great thing, by the way."

"I heard you talk 'bout how Harry an' Rapunzel and Quasimodo had bad homes." Loki bounces slightly. "Who's the Man of Bats?"

"Yeah, that was kinda for you, buddy. Well, for some of the kids, too," Tony grins. "Batman is a fictional superhero. You saw a guy dressed as him on Halloween, remember? Long black cape, pointy-eared hood covering half his face, bat-shaped symbol thingy on his chest." Oh, yeah, Loki remembers seeing him. Edna would tell him no capes, and Thor doesn't follow that rule either. He'll probably still wear a cape, even after watching what happened to all those caped people in The Incredibles.

Loki practically skips as they leave the bird house and go back outside. He loves being outside, and this is the first time he has been since they left Tony's other house and went back to the tower, which was over a week ago. He really misses that house, with the big yard and the ocean and beach and his Willow-Willowy tree.

Honestly, he'd been starting to feel just a little bit like Rapunzel or Quasimodo, stuck in a tower, but he shouldn't be greedy. He's really lucky that he's not being beaten, and that Tony, Bruce and Jarvis are his family. They can't be faking like Mother Gothel to use him for his healing powers, though, because they hadn't even known of them until Loki healed Tony's leg when it was broken in that weird, hard green thing. Plus they've touched his Jotun skin. Sure Mother Gothel and Frollo acted nice at first, but they weren't. Tony's different. This place is awesome, and Mother Gothel or Frollo certainly wouldn't have taken Rapunzel or Quasimodo here. Mother Gothel didn't really comfort Rapunzel like Tony comforts Loki, either.

There's another bird house, called Birds of Prey, right next to the sea bird one. In this one, there's something called a Bald Eagle, which Tony says would be Steve's favorite animal for some reason. That bird was in Spirit too, like the bison. The Bald Eagle poops while they're there, and Tony takes a really funny picture of exactly when that happens, claiming he has to send it to Steve.

There's also a white bird that's sleeping. The girl in front of Loki points at it and says "Look, Dad. It's Hedwig! She's beautiful." but the sign says it's called a Snowy Owl and that owls are nocturnal, which means they sleep during the day. Loki frowns, confused why the girl called the owl "Hedwig."

Tony grins, telling Loki he'll get the reference once Harry goes diagonally.

Sometimes Tony makes no sense. Right now, Harry has been getting odd letters and Uncle Vernon, fed up with it, is trying to flee. It said Harry was stuck in a car for hours, which must be terrible.

Loki gets Tony to snap a couple pictures of the snowy owl, and Tony tries to show Loki how to take pictures, but looking at the animals on the screen is weird.

Bruce volunteers to be the photographer. That's a word they don't have in Asgard, but Loki knows it means someone who takes pictures, like Lilo does to tourists.

Loki's kind of surprised they'd name an owl after snow, even if it is white like snow. In Asgard,
they never would have named something snowy, because snow is just in the wasteland of Jotunheim... and Midgard apparently. They never would've said something with the word snowy in its name was beautiful, either, but Elsa's snow was beautiful, especially her ice castle.

"She's boring." The girl sighs.

Since the owl is sleeping, she's admittedly not quite as fun as the flamingos. But waking her up would be rude, and apparently owls sleep during the day, according to the sign.

Once the girl and her dad move on, though, the owl opens one eye and winks at Loki. He giggles and winks back, and the owl goes back to sleep. Harry's snake had somehow winked in the book, even though snakes don't have eyelids.

Sadly, this bird house doesn't have hawks. Jarvis told Loki a bit about hawks, like that they have very good eyesight and that's why Clint's called Hawkeye, but Loki hasn't actually read anything about any of these birds.

Once they're outside again, as Loki gallops alongside Tony, looking for the next animal, he notices there are a lot of kids here. A lot of them are holding onto adults' hands.

Tony mentions that there's a sea lion pond ahead, and Loki rushes forward eagerly. Lions! What's the sea part, though? Maybe they're like Ariel where their bottom half is a fin, only their top half would have to be a lion instead of a human. That would be really awesome. Or did he mean the letter C?

"C'mon Simba! We're gonna see sea lions!" Loki shouts, running for the pond, which isn't very far away. Simba can't swim, because then his electronics would stop working. Simba doesn't answer or move, which used to be the case all the time unless someone squeezed his ear, although since they watched Pinocchio, he's started to come alive more. Loki wonders why he's not now.

Loki stares into the pond, looking for the lions. But there aren't any lions anywhere. There are just some wet, dark creatures with four flippers, which look absolutely nothing like lions. Some of them are wriggling in a sort of walk on their flippers, while some swim. If they were a brighter color, they could almost be one of Jumba's experiments, since they look pretty weird, Loki thinks.

The ones on land stop and clap their front flippers at Loki, making a barking sound. Loki claps his hands in response and barks back.

"Geez, Snoopy, are you trying to ditch us?" Tony asks, coming up beside Loki, followed by Pepper and Bruce. All of them are breathing just a bit heavier than usual. "I knew you could be fast when you wanted to, but your legs are a lot shorter than mine are now. It's so not fair that you still can outrun me with your superpowers." Tony grumbles the last bit.

Loki laughs. That makes it sound like he's Dash. He has the powers of Dash, Violet, Frozone and Elsa. He wishes he could literally roll into a ball like Stitch.

Tony reaches out and grabs Loki's hand, the one not holding Simba. Tony's hand is a lot bigger than his own now, which makes it seem extra safe. It's also somewhat cold, not that Loki minds the cold- he actually likes it.

"You don't want to get lost, right?" Pepper's looking at him, not the... things. Loki nods. "We don't want you to get lost, either."

Nobody in Asgard would've said that, Loki thinks, as Tony adds "Even if I could track Simba's suit, it'd be better if we stuck together. So no more running off without us, okay? Just keep holding
my hand." Loki doesn't mind holding Tony's hand, because it means his Tony's close and he's safe, even if there are a lot of other people here who might be magic-hating Muggles.

"Where are the sea lions?" Loki asks. Maybe he went to the wrong place? These things are nice, but he wants to see lions!

"These are sea lions." Pepper tells him.

Loki laughs. Surely she's jesting! These aren't lions.

"Or they could be seals. You never know." Tony whispers conspiratorially. "Maybe they're trying to trick us."

Tony right about them trying to trick them into thinking they're lions, which they're clearly not.

"I'm pretty sure there's a difference between seals and sea lions, Tony." Bruce rolls his eyes. "Have you read about sea lions, Loki?"

One of the books mentioned them, but it didn't have a picture.

He spots one of those signs a little bit away, and goes to it, still holding Tony's hand. Loki reads the sign, which has a picture of these creatures, and learns that these things really are sea lions (and that they're different from seals because they walk on their flippers while seals walk on their bellies).

Feeling rather let down after getting his hopes up- they were supposed to be lions!- Loki sulks and pulls Tony away from the sea "lions." Whoever named them that is even dumber than whoever named flamingos that have nothing to do with flames.

"You know," Tony says. "They do have lions here."

"They don't count." Loki throws a scornful look back at the 'sea lions', which have stopped barking and clapping.

"I meant real lions, like Simba." Tony grins, as Loki gasps, staring at him and almost wondering if this is a jest. Tony doesn't seem to be lying, though, and Pepper and Bruce both nod.

Loki laughs and starts to run off, still holding Tony's hand, but Tony's words stop him. "Whoa, Snoopy, slow down, buddy! You practically pulled me over." Loki looks up, but Tony isn't angry, he's smirking. "Also, you're going the wrong way."

To prevent Loki from potentially running off despite the reminder and putting Tony in the embarrassing situation of being literally dragged around someone who looks like a six-year-old but is actually an alien god manchild with superhuman speed and strength, Tony scoops Loki up in his arms. Thankfully, he's light enough to carry now.

On a whim, Tony swings Loki around so he shrieks with laughter, still giggling as Tony puts him on his shoulders, like some other adults are doing with kids. Somehow, rather than sitting on Tony's shoulders, Loki ends up crouched on them, toes curling like a monkey as small hands clutch at Tony's face for balance.

"Aack! Loki, no, don't- Ah!" Tony yelps and pulls a hand with fingers worryingly close to poking under his shades away. Almost as soon as that's done, he has to move another hand that somehow ended up with a finger in his mouth, which is just disgusting since it comes out covered in saliva.
Loki seems to it's gross too, and Pepper catches Loki wiping that finger on the brim of Tony's baseball hat.

"Sorry." Loki mumbles.

Once his face is no longer being invaded by small hands, Tony notices a weight on his baseball hat. Probably Simba, he thinks. "Do you want to get off?" He asks the boy on his shoulders. "Because I kind of want you to get off."

Loki's only response to this is to cling tighter to Tony. Tony sighs, knowing there's no way he'll be able to pry Loki off him. Why did he think this was a good idea?

"You shouldn't even be scared of this height, Snoopy. This is how tall you are normally, right?" Tony asks as he tries to maneuver Loki in a sitting position instead of crouching on his shoulders. At least he succeeds at that.

Loki leans over Tony's head to try and peer at him upside-down. "Little taller now, I think. I'm not scared!" He wriggles on Tony's shoulders and chants "Lions! Lions!"

"Okay, we're going. Now keep your fingers out of my mouth, or I might accidentally bite them off." Tony mutters. It's a hollow threat and even Loki seems to realize that, albeit only after a couple seconds where where he goes completely still, body tensed as if in anticipation of Tony suddenly gnashing out. However, he's already relaxed by the time Tony tells him explicitly that he didn't mean it. Tony doesn't think he could bite off a human's finger, much less a super-durable guy like Loki. Wow, that just got weird.

For a brief interval, Loki's actually pretty still. Then his bare feet swinging out and repeatedly kicking Tony in the chest until he grabs them and holds them over his arc reactor. Loki could probably overpower him- although he's theoretically weaker in this child body than he is in his adult body- but he doesn't.

Instead, Loki starts squirming around on Tony's shoulders, bounces while shouting "Lions!" in rhythm. He seems so restless, yet he clings to Tony whenever he tries to put him down.

"You're seriously going to have to stop doing this." Tony says. Loki doesn't reply, just drops so he's hanging upside-down with his knees still hooked over Tony's shoulders and his feet still held over the arc reactor. To his credit, Loki did technically stop, even if this isn't exactly comfortable either.

They make their way across the zoo, passing several animals Tony knows they're going to backtrack to later. Finally, they reach the African Plains exhibit and Tony sets Loki down, grabbing onto his hand again as Loki reads out *African Plains* and starts bouncing from foot to foot.

There are both indoor and outdoor viewing areas for the lions. Tony, Bruce and Pepper share a look and head towards the indoor one, since the lions all seem to be inside. That's good. At least this way, there's glass separating them from the lions instead of just a rail.

"LIONS! LOOK SIMBA!" Loki squeals, scrambling down from Tony's shoulders and sprinting towards the glass. He seems beyond words after that, just jumping in delight and laughing when he sees the big cats behind the glass. It's not just his hands moving now. His whole body practically wriggles with happiness.

Shockingly, the lions aren't scared off by the noise, which probably travels through the glass, or all the movement. In fact, it's quite the opposite.
A large male lion makes his way towards Loki, making the kids that had been staring at him before groan when he moves away. Loki's no longer shouting. Instead, all his attention is focused on the lion in front of him, cocking his head to the side. The lion, about four feet tall, is taller than Loki when he's in his child form.

Loki presses Simba's head against the glass, and the lion rubs his mane on the other side of the glass, right where Simba's head is. "This is Simba. The Lion King, 'xcept he's a prince right now, so not yet. Mufasa's the King of Pride Rock now."

Loki starts rubbing his own head against the glass, arms splayed out as if trying to embrace the lion through it.

Even though Bruce is the self-designated photographer and is living up to his title, Tony has to take pictures of this on his own. It's too cute, although Tony wishes in some ways that Loki had been in his usual adult body, since that's what he's used to. Plus Loki's usual shoulder-length hair would sort of match the lion's mane.

"Don't you have to bow, 'cause he's your prince?" Loki nods, as if answering his own question, confirming that subjects should bow to their princes. He doesn't mention he's a prince himself.

Tony has to be imagining that the way the lion's rubbing his maned head against the glass now almost looks like he's shaking his head no to Loki's question.

Loki acts like it was an answer, but then again he talks to toys when they're not seemingly alive. "Oh! Are you not part of Pride Rock? That's in Africa, an' we're in 'Merica, like Steve, so maybe Simba's not your prince here?" Loki pauses as if getting a confirmation from the lion. "They don't haves the Midgardian Day of Giving Thanks in Africa, so I guess it's the really the 'Merican Day of Giving Thanks?" Loki very briefly glances at Tony's reflection, not even turning away from the lion, but Tony nods anyways.

"Did you haves turkey?" Loki asks the lion as an afterthought while Tony, Bruce and Pepper all have fond smiles on their faces. The other adults and even some kids also watch Loki talking to the lion about The Lion King and Thanksgiving. A man looks between Simba's Iron Man suit and Tony before shaking his head, clearly deciding that he must be mistaken about Tony being Tony. The billionaire hides a smirk.

Loki glances down at Simba, who hasn't come to life at all at the zoo, as far as Tony knows, and neither have Stitch or Lilo. It's like they don't actually want these people seeing them alive, like in Toy Story, and that Tony, Bruce and Pepper are the only ones they trust aside from Loki himself.

Loki squeezes Simba's ear, and Simba roars, before asking "How loud can you roar?" Tony's heard Simba's prerecorded conversation more than enough times to know that Simba never starts with that phrase. Maybe he's very subtly 'alive' right now.

Loki roars at the lion, and Simba blurts out the next prerecorded line "Louder!"

As if on cue, the lion roars, really, really loud. A couple children start crying, while older ones and even some adults back away, startled. Tony might have taken a step back himself.

That has to be a coincidence that the lion roared then, right? Maybe he hadn't liked the little lion outside the glass? Maybe he got annoyed at Loki talking?

Loki, however, his shaking with laughter as Simba's voice box says "Wow! That's really loud!"

Tony smiles, remembering a similar interaction where Jarvis borrowed a roar from Jurassic Park,
after Tony found Loki when they'd been separated in New York City.

Some of the other children, who had been annoyed that the lion's attention is focused solely on Loki, gasp when they notice the new arrivals. A lioness approaches, shortly followed by three other lions, two females and another male. Those three look like they're adults, too, but slightly younger than the other two.

The kids get rather annoyed when those lions entirely ignore them as well and head straight for Loki. Some of them hit the glass, trying to get the big cats' attention, and their parents drag them out after that. The rest of the kids appear ready to move on a few minutes later, since the lions aren't doing anything, and kids have short attention spans.

Bruce informs them that the sign says that triplet lion cubs had been born three and a half years ago to a lion named M'wasi and the lioness Sukari. A year prior to that, Sukari had given birth to a female lion named Moxie, the first lion birth at the Bronx Zoo in thirty-one years.

Tony could've sworn Loki was too absorbed with the lions to be listening, but as the new lions approach him, Loki cocks his head to the side and plops on the ground. "You're Sukari?" He asks the largest female lion, showing he indeed had been paying attention.

"I like that name. Sounds kinda like Sarabi, Simba's mother. Are you gonna go hunting soon? Lady lions hunt, not male lions." He giggles as that and bounces to his knees, fingers fluttering.

"Their food's provided for them here, they don't actually have to go out and hunt it. Kind of like us." Bruce says.

Loki doesn't acknowledge that, instead addressing the male lion "And you're M'wasi. That's a M name like Mufasa!" He claps his hands, singsonging "Su-kari! Sa-rabi! M'wasi! Mu-fasa!"

"This is your pride, right? Your family, ohana, lion prides are family." He leans up really close to the glass and whispers low enough that Tony's probably the only one who hears him. "We can pretend you're all in my Monster Family, 'kay? I wish I could come in and hug you, or you could come out and play. But my Tony and Bruce and Pepper says we're gonna leave if I do."

Loki turns to give them a rather annoyed look, reminding them just how dumb he thinks that rule is. The male lions' gaze flicks to Tony probably randomly, except it kind of seems like he's agreeing, which is ridiculous.

"If I was a lion I could go in." Loki mutters. "I had a tail like Simba's but it was blue." He suddenly looks struck by an idea, although he doesn't actually seem to grow a tail.

"Please don't turn into a lion here." Tony says when Loki mentions the tail, because what if he somehow turned into a lion and wouldn't or couldn't turn back? How would they smuggle a lion out of a zoo? Loki doesn't seem to hear him.

"I'm a lion! I'm in your pride!" Loki declares louder, clapping his hands and crawling up to the glass. "Rawr! Rawr!" He curls his hands like claws and scratches them against the glass.

Now that nobody is around, Simba bats the glass while Stitch roars from Loki's back. The lions naturally seem a lot more taken to Simba than Stitch, but they still focus mostly on Loki.

Tony gawks when the lions paw the glass and pretend to bite his head through the glass in a way that seems playful rather than wishing they were actually eating him, although their roars still sound ferocious. Loki, who normally tenses at the slightest attack, doesn't seem to feel at all threatened if his laughter is anything to go by. He follows suit with the biting, head tilted in a way
that almost makes it look like they're trying to kiss through the glass, or it would, if their mouths weren't open wide with teeth showing.

When Tony mentions this, he just gets an exasperated look from Pepper, who apparently doesn't think it looks like that at all. She's undoubtedly thinking that Tony can find an innuendo in anything. She's not wrong.

Loki spends a good five minutes pawing at the lions through the glass and play-fighting with the lions. Considering Loki's past, Tony's surprised he's actually having a playful fight and not panicking about being fake-attacked. The lions' roars are still very loud, after all. He also romps in front of the glass on his hands and knees. Tony gets a lot of those five minutes on video.

During this, Stitch spits out Loki's entire collection of figurines from *The Lion King*, as well as some of Loki's origami animals, including multiple lions and horses, a zebra, a rhino and an octopus. Pepper looks surprised at the dozen or so paper horses Stitch had spit out, but she has no idea how many origami animals are scattered in Tony's lab now.

Loki lines them up in front of the glass with Simba, as the big male, M'wasi, lays down on the ground with his pride, eyes flicking to the mini animals.

Loki introduces the lions to all of his *Lion King* toys, telling them not to eat Timon or Pumbaa.

"I made these." Loki points to the origami animals. "Do you guys really eats zebras? They're like striped horses, but different an' not as awesome. My Sleipnir's the best horse ever, but Pegasus is really great too, 'cause he's stars in the sky with wings- a constellation. There's a lion constellation, Leo, but Hercules killed him."

Huh. Loki's mentioned various constellation myths a couple times before now, Tony thinks. Had he heard about them in Asgard? Wait, is there some basis to Greek Mythology, like how Asgard represents a lot of stuff in Norse myths? They haven't watched the Disney adaptation of *Hercules* yet, but Tony's pretty sure it's different from the myths.

Loki lays on his side next to his row of animals, reaching out towards the glass. "We're getting off the subject. Let's talk about you. Are you... happy?" He asks in a serious voice, and Tony realizes he's quoting the scene of Cobra Bubbles meeting Lilo. Loki doesn't take his eyes off the lions as if waiting for an answer.

"You have your pride here, right?" That's apparently a rhetorical question, since Loki doesn't wait for any response from the lions. "Family's important. I gots two families, my Midgard ohana an' my Monster Family. Do you have any uncles? Scar's Simba's uncle, and he's bad like Uncle Vernon is to Harry." Loki holds up his Scar figurine, and their eyes flick between Loki and Scar, who Tony realizes looks the most like Loki with green eyes, a dark mane, and a lean body. Tony finds himself wondering if Loki would look like Scar as a lion.

"And you get food brung to yous? Sleipnir an' Fenrir say they don't get 'nough." Loki pauses a bit, looking sad. Tony's seen him try to feed both his horse and his wolf, but they seem unable to eat since they're imaginary. He does seem really concerned about the lions, and the food question is a sort of like what a social worker would ask a child who might be neglected.

"Do you gets to go outside?" One of the lions walks over to the door that connects to the outside exhibit, like she's actually answering. Tony's not sure what to think. Loki nods. "Good. Do you see stars? They're not fireflies, nope nope nope! Simba and Timon were wrong and Pumbaa was right! I like stars. You get to see stars, right? Even back there, I had stars. An' horses, but you'd... you'd eat 'em."
They've been in the lion exhibit way longer than anyone else- a couple more rounds of people come and go.

Tony suspects the only reason they don't have to drag Loki away from the big cats is because there are still more animals to see.

Tony's not really one to walk around looking at animals- hence why he'd never bothered going to the zoo as an adult before now- but the huge grin on Loki's face and the awed look in his wide green eyes at the sight of the animals definitely makes it not a waste of time. Having Bruce and Pepper makes this outing more fun, too.

In contrast to when he's dashing around like a kid with no attention span, Loki takes the time to read all the signs aloud and absorb the animal facts on them (apparently he already knew all the lion facts). Since he looks like a young child, maybe in first grade, it looks like he's reading well above his level, even if he stumbles over a lot of the words. Tony has a feeling a lot of stuff doesn't come out of Loki's mouth the way he wants it to. Reading these signs, however, is nothing compared to that huge animal tome Loki read or even *Harry Potter*.

They see tigers, bears, and giraffes before eating at the zoo's Dancing Crane Cafe, which has huge windows overlooking some natural scenery. They get a table by a window, but Loki still seems really anxious about the large number of people in the restaurant with them, and Tony suspects it has something to do with feasts in Asgard. Rather than eating, Loki hides under the table and folds a couple origami cranes out of napkins.

Surprisingly, in the Mouse House, Bruce mutters to Tony that Hulk really likes the mice. Apparently, he's saying *'PUNY CUTE'* in Bruce's mind. Loki curls into a small ball on the ground and tries to scurry like a mouse. He still has *way* too much energy after running around all morning and he hadn't even eaten. It's really unfair.

By the time they reach the gorillas, after visiting bears, tigers, leopards, monkeys and more birds, Tony's admitted to himself that there's no way he's imagining what's been happening. All the animals react in some way to Loki, often flocking towards him, to the irritation and confusion of whoever is watching them at the same time.

Tony watches as Loki somehow manages to get a gorilla to play a sort of made up hand game with him, where Loki pokes the glass and the gorilla pokes wherever Loki's finger is. Admittedly, gorillas are pretty smart and can even learn sign language, but when the gorilla starts tracing the invisible dots, Tony's fairly sure that's not normal. (Wait, are they making constellations? Tony hears Loki mention Leo, Hydra and Orion, but then it looks like he's getting the gorilla to trace the letters of the alphabet too)

The last place they visit happens to be the reptile house. The interior is dark, with glass-covered cages lit up. Loki comments that it's like the description of zoo that Harry and the Dursleys went to, adding happily that he doesn't have to deal with Thor or Odin, while Harry was stuck with Dudley, Vernon and Petunia.

A pair of round glasses materialize on Loki's face after Bruce won't give Loki his, and Loki now looks even more like Harry Potter- not like Daniel Radcliffe, since Loki's still in his own child body, but still recognizable as Harry. His starry long coat kind of matches, in a weird sort of way.

There are touch exhibits here, containing lizards, harmless small snakes and even a chameleon. Loki reaches down eagerly with other kids, crooning and holding the chameleon up to his face with a snake wrapped around that wrist.
The chameleon goes through a whole rainbow of colors for no apparent reason other than to make Loki giggle. Several children look on jealously and try to grab the poor chameleon, which Loki clutches protectively to his chest, telling the kids that they're scaring it. The chameleon changes color to camouflage in Loki's hands.

For a second, Tony debates about buying the chameleon for Loki, as the god slowly holds it out for a boy who hadn't made grabby hands for the chameleon. The chameleon doesn't leave Loki's hands to go in the other boy's, though it does stick out its long tongue on the boy's palm.

Suddenly, there's a scream from a parent who frantically pulls their child away from the touch exhibit. Tony glances down and realizes that, somehow, Jormungand has ended up in the touch area... and he's not his nice necklace size, either. No, he appears to be the size of a large python, like when he wraps around Loki's waist or shoulders. Jormungand's hissing to the other snakes without actually talking like he normally does.

Some kids reach out eagerly while others shy away. Most parents shout and pull their precious kids back from Jormungand, who's hissing and rearing up in a way that Tony can tell is playful but the other adults obviously can't.

Loki stands there, petting Jormungand and letting a smaller snake slither between his fingers like it's nothing. The chameleon rests on Loki's shoulder like Pascal on Rapunzel's.

There's a rather mischievous grin on Loki's face as he watches the chaos of parents frantically pulling their kids away, as if this is all a huge prank. It probably doesn't seem like a joke to the parents when Jormungand slowly slithers off the table and through the sea of legs, hissing and playfully snapping at people.

Loki even starts laughingly shouting "Boo!" at people in a way strongly similar to Boo from *Monsters Inc* until Loki starts hissing and trying to flick his tongue out like a snake. By now, thanks to Jormungand, people are fleeing the reptile house.

Tony yelps in surprise when he suddenly feels something slither up his pant leg, and he looks down to see it's Jormungand.

Loki cracks up at Tony's yelp of surprise, and Tony wonders if this is what the mischievous glint was about.

Then he realizes they have reptile house to themselves, everyone else having fled. Maybe *that* had been the point of all this? Clearing away the crowds? Surely people are going to report a loose snake, although Pepper will probably find a way to diffuse this all. She runs Stark Industries and fixes worse issues than this on a daily basis.

As he thinks this, he realizes Pepper is actually talking to a zoo employee, although Tony can't hear what she's saying, she seems to be convincing them of whatever story she's feeding them, since they meander off to the other end of the reptile house after that.

Loki is now over at the tank in the wall holding a snake, which Bruce identifies from sight as an Anaconda. Apparently knowing that sort of stuff is crucial while on the run in remote parts of the world.

"Jormungand's my snake." Loki is saying to the Anaconda, and Tony notices he no longer as the chameleon on his shoulder. Maybe it ran off. "He lives with me, He didn't even get a body 'til I kinda made it on accident." There's a bit of a pause. "I didn't let him outs."
Wait, he's acting like the snake thinks he let Jormungand out? Or does the snake actually think that? No way, that can't be possible. Then again, half of Loki's powers should be impossible too.

Loki glances at the sign. "An-ocon-da." He reads out. "So not like Harry's snake from Brazil." He frowns as he reads silently, and then says. "Wait, you can be in Brazil, too!"

"Don't let him out." Tony says in case Loki means he'll let this snake go to Brazil, letting the warning be clear. Of all the snakes for Loki to let out, a venomous Anaconda would probably be the worst choice.

Loki looks at the snake and whispers "See? Can't let you out. Sorry. Were you bred in captive'ty too?"

Suddenly, something small and green crawls out of Loki's pocket, crawling up to stand on his shoulder. "You're s'posed to stay in there." Loki frowns at the chameleon, which he'd clearly been planning on smuggling out in his pocket.

"I didn't let him out, nope nope nope." Loki says when he sees Tony, Bruce and Pepper looking at him. Maybe he wasn't actually talking about Jormungand when he said that to the Anaconda. "Followed the rules."

"Okay, technically you did. But there's a rule saying you can't take animals." Tony fights the urge to roll his eyes. Since the petting zoo's been closed since October, Tony didn't think they'd have to make a rule for that since he didn't think Loki would be getting up close and personal to any animals, and somehow it slipped his mind when Loki was at the touch tank.

Pepper squats down. "They live here, and you don't have these habitats in the tower. They wouldn't living without nature." She tactfully doesn't mention that living in a zoo really isn't the same as being free in the wild.

"Pascal lived with Rapunzel in her tower." Loki points out, crossing his small arms as if to say so there. "And he can change colors like me. Camouflage." Loki's shirt turns red under his starry long coat as the chameleon also turns red to match.

"Cans you do blue?" Loki asks the chameleon in a whisper. It slowly turns blue, by itself and not because of Loki's magic, Tony's pretty sure.

"Loki, you can't steal a chameleon."

"Wasn't stealing!" Loki protests. "He wants to come!"

Tony definitely isn't going to get the chameleon for Loki now. That would be like rewarding Loki for trying to steal it (admittedly, Tony had bought Simba for Loki after he shoplifted him, but this seems a little different somehow).

Tony groans. "Look, Lokes, it's not a debate. The animals stay here, end of story. Theft is against the law. You know what that means, right?" Tony's fairly certain theft is against the law in Asgard, too. Or would it be considered animal-napping instead of theft?

Loki nods nervously. "Means you broke the rules the Allfather made, so you get a beating. Or a flogging if it's really bads" Loki's body is visibly tense. "But... but you promised that you'll never ever hit me like there."

"I'm not hitting you, and I'm not going to." Tony says in a gentler tone and Loki relaxes somewhat.
"An' you says you're not gonna be locking up like Vernon, so no dungeons like some criminals get." Loki continues slowly. Why is Tony not surprised that they still have dungeons in Asgard? Hopefully Loki was never locked in them.

Suddenly looking terrified, Loki clutches his hands to his chest protectively and asks "Are your guards gonna... gonna... Jasmine's hands almost got chopped off for bein' an apple thief!"

"What?!" Tony exclaims louder than intended. "Hell no! They don't chop people's hands off for stealing here."

"So what's the punishment?" Loki asks in a tiny voice.

"Nothing, if you don't steal." Bruce gives Loki a pointed look. Loki hesitates, but at a look from Pepper, he slips the chameleon back in the touch exhibit before pulling the little snake that was curling around his fingers earlier out of his pocket and putting that back, too. Figures Pepper would be able to get Loki to part with them. She makes Tony go to board meetings, so there's nothing she can't do.

They leave after that. They've already seen all the animals, but also partially because of the stunt Loki just pulled.

"They wanted to come." Loki says again under his breath as they head back to the helicopter.

"Mr. Stark, we need to talk to you about something."

Phil Coulson is standing beside Tony's helicopter in his usual business suit and sunglasses. Clint is next to him. Like Tony, Clint is dressed in casual clothes, a warm coat, and shades, and he's leaning casually against the copter. Tony takes the time to note that his own shades are infinitely cooler than both the agents' sunglasses combined.

"I didn't know spies frequented zoo charity events." Tony directs that comment at Coulson. Loki stops, holding Simba tightly and hiding behind Tony's leg, his eyes accusing Coulson of never giving Simba back like he said he would. It had been Clint who had retrieved the lion.

"It's a charity to help prevent child abuse, right?" Clint asks, pulling out his wallet and handing Tony a twenty dollar bill, which Tony didn't really expect. "It's not much, but I'm not a billionaire. You know you look like Harry Potter, right?" Clint asks Loki. Tony feels Loki give a tiny nod against his leg.

"Why are you here? I know it's not for the animals. Are you here for Loki?"

"No, we're not." Coulson says. Tony raises a disbelieving eyebrow. He has no doubts that Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D are still interested in Loki, in multiple ways, probably. They might consider him a threat, which is ridiculous, although someone else with his powers might be. They're certainly still interested in his powers and could view him as a potentially useful tool or test subject. No doubt, they'd want to harness those powers as their own.

Having someone who can teleport and take on anyone's appearance is like S.H.I.E.L.D's wet dream. Sneaking into supposedly secure places (like the Helicarrier) would be a joke for someone who could teleport and espionage would be a lot easier if you could look like anyone. And S.H.I.E.L.D doesn't even know about some other powers of Loki's, like Stitch spitting stuff out that had been somewhere else, but if they did, they'd probably want to know if the alien backpack could spit out top secret documents.

Tony feels Loki's small hands grip the back of his pants tighter, and he hoists Loki up into his
arms, holding him close to further protect him in case the agents in front of him try anything. Loki's small hand rests against Tony's arc reactor.

Nobody makes a move towards Loki. S.H.I.E.L.D wouldn't attempt a kidnapping with tons of civilians nearby, since trying to kidnap Loki would certainly bring out the big green guy in Bruce. Tony seriously doubts that Hulk would intentionally hurt innocent bystanders—especially children—but they could be caught in the crossfire. And S.H.I.E.L.D wouldn't want to owe Tony a new helicopter, and Tony would certainly be billing them if it got wrecked in that situation.

If S.H.I.E.L.D was planning on doing something idiotic like trying to kidnap Loki, they wouldn't do it here. That doesn't say anything about later, though.

Tony's fairly certain Clint wouldn't kidnap Loki anytime. He seemed genuinely annoyed about Loki being held in the Hulk cage on the Helicarrier, and genuinely sorry that he'd caused Loki to accidentally teleport onto the Helicarrier in the first place by instinctively pointing an arrow at him.

"Son of Coul," Loki suddenly addresses Coulson and shimmers. He starts to grow until he's his normal size again, taller than the rest of them, even Pepper. Obviously, Tony's no longer holding him. "You lied. You said you'd give me my Simba if I answered and I did but you didn't! You stole him and that's 'gainst the law here too, like why I couldn't bring the chameleon home."

"I'm the one who got Simba." Clint raises a hand, and Loki smiles slightly at him.

"I'm not going back to the petri dish, nope nope nope!" Loki shakes his head vehemently "My Tony said he made it so you can't put me or my Hulk-y in there ever again. No more cuffs neither."

"So why are you here?" Bruce asks warily, fiddling with his glasses. "Is it Avengers business?"

Clint eventually speaks up. "I need a favor, but first I need to know if I can trust you with a secret."

"What kind of favor?" Tony replies flippantly almost as soon as Clint's finished his sentence. "What kind of secret? Please tell me it's nothing creepy like wanting help hiding a body. Actually, I guess you have Natasha for that." Clint smirks, but Tony can tell the archer's not really thinking about anything funny.

"You've kept Loki a secret." Clint says, partially to himself.

"Miss Potts, will you excuse us?" Coulson asks. "You and Mr. Laufeyson can leave." Loki bristles at the mention of his last name. Pepper smiles politely and nods. As the two of them head towards the helicopter, Tony continuously moves, putting himself in between Coulson and Loki just in case. "Mr. Stark, Dr. Banner, will you come with us?"

"Hang on." Tony frowns suspiciously. "How do I know you're not trying to distract us so you can kidnap Loki?"

"We mostly just need to talk to Tony." Clint says pointedly. Bruce and Tony exchange a glance and Bruce heads to the chopper as well. Tony knows that, if anyone tried to kidnap Loki, Hulk would show up to protect him, which makes Tony feel a lot better. Bruce probably wouldn't even be opposed to letting Hulk out to protect Loki, although he may not even have a choice.

"I'm assuming your offer of a living space in the tower still stands?" Clint asks as the helicopter takes off with Bruce, Pepper and Loki.

Tony genuinely grins, rubbing his hands together in excitement. "Finally! I knew you'd come around eventually! I still don't get why you didn't take advantage of this earlier. I mean, my tower
totally kicks S.H.I.E.L.D's quarters' asses any day. If buildings had asses that is." Tony abruptly switches subjects. "You can have your own floor, of course. I can throw in an archery range on your floor if you want, although there's the one in the gym.

Coulson holds up a hand, and Tony stops his rambling. They head towards a waiting car.

During the drive, Tony gets a brief briefing (heh) that'll probably be much longer later. He's told that Clint had been attacked on Thanksgiving. The culprits had been taken out by Natasha and restrained, but apparently, they had hollow teeth filled with cyanide, waking up and offing themselves before S.H.I.E.L.D could get to them and interrogate them.

"No offense, but can't you look after yourself?" Tony asks. "I mean, don't you get attacked on like a daily basis? One of the perks of the job."

"It wasn't just me that was attacked." Clint answers. "I need somewhere really safe for them, and your tower is really safe."

"Ooh! Is it a girlfriend?" Tony asks, before singsonging with a grin and eyebrow wiggle "Is it Natasha?"

Clint denies it, and Tony pats his shoulder. "Sure it isn't, Robin Hood."

Their destination turns out to be a hotel room, and Clint and Coulson exchange a glance, before unlocking the door.

Natasha's standing in the doorway, looking ready to fight, and Tony levels a glance at Clint. "Really, Legolas? I thought you said it wasn't her. You two are totally banging, aren't you?"

"What's that mean?" A little girl's voice asks from somewhere behind Natasha, and Tony blinks. Once she steps aside, two children- a girl about the age Loki appeared to be at the zoo and a boy around the age of the first time Loki shrunk in the helicopter before shrinking into an even smaller child, rush towards Clint's legs, shouting "Daddy!"

Tony gawks. What?! Clint is a father? There's another woman, too, who Clint embraces. Huh. Tony had Clint pegged as a fellow bachelor rather than someone with a wife and kids.

"Uh, just to be clear, this isn't some kind of cover up? Agents in training, that sort of thing?" From the looks he's getting, it's apparently not.

The boy stares at Tony in disbelief and excitement. "You're Iron Man."

"Yes. Yes I am. And you're someone that I literally had no idea existed." Turning to Clint, Tony adds "Well, now I know why you bailed on me for Thanksgiving dinner."

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The bundle in Thor's arms feels oddly still, and for a brief moment, Thor thinks that Sleipnir might be dead until he realizes he can feel the horse's chest rise and fall as he breathes, and when he pays attention for it, he can even make out the heartbeat. He's not sure if it's a normal heartbeat or not, though.

Ah, so Sleipnir is merely tired and gone to sleep. Or did he pass out? Perhaps his body was too weak from lack of nourishment to handle traveling through the Bifrost and remaining conscious at the same time.

Either way, at least he's not dead, although he looks like he should have died long ago, as would
have been the fate of any Midgardian horse. Then again, Sleipnir is not Midgardian. Somehow, he was birthed by Loki, although Thor isn't sure how. Did he somehow become female? How does a Frost Giant even give birth to a horse?

Nearby townspeople stare at Thor, as there had just been a flash of light when he and Sleipnir were dropped off by the Bifrost. In their eyes, he had shown up out of nowhere. Thor had been planning on asking Heimdall about Loki's other friends (or family? Sleipnir's family, at least), but Heimdall had said he needed to make a quick exit.

Less than a second later, the people recognize him and become enthralled to see one of the Avengers who had saved Midgard. Ordinarily Thor would happily pose for pictures for their Book of Faces (Midgardian civilians often ask for that sort of thing), but right now he's dirty and hiding a starved horse bundled in his poop-covered cape.

One unfortunate mortal woman gets too close and smells the stench coming from both Thor and Sleipnir, though Sleipnir reeks much more, having been among the filth longer. The lady backs away, practically retching, and Thor gives her a brief apologetic look before heading towards Jane's lab.

He wonders why Heimdall hadn't dropped him off at the Tower of Stark. If Sleipnir is indeed Loki's child, he belongs there with his... what is Loki? His mother? Father? Parent. Loki is certainly Sleipnir's parent, seeing as he gave birth to the horse.

Now that Thor thinks about it, showing up at Tony's residence with Sleipnir in the state he's in would not go over very well at all. Perhaps it's good he's here instead of at the Tower of Stark. At least he can get Sleipnir cleaned up and fed a bit.

Thor isn't sure if Sleipnir's well enough to travel by Mjolnir, though. The trip from the Bifrost already did this to him.

Puente Antiguo is quite small, so it does not take long to reach Jane's lab- it takes longer to walk from his chambers to the throne room in Asgard than to walk across the whole town. Thor assumes that Jane is actually here, or Heimdall would not have dropped him off in this town. She hasn't been in Puente Antiguo the whole time, of course. A few months ago, when Thor visited her, she'd been in a Midgardian land called London, and she's been bouncing around the globe for her research over the past year. Arriving where they'd first met is rather odd, but wondering why she's here isn't important.

Jane is already outside her lab, no doubt having been informed of the Bifrost's opening by one of her scientific instruments. She calls his name with a grin and runs to embrace him, until she gets close enough to smell him and Sleipnir. Her reaction isn't as extreme as the other Midgardian lady's was, but it would be hard not to react to the horrible odor.

"Thor, why are you- What happened? Did you just get out of battle?" She asks, concerned.

As Jane is asking this, Darcy leans casually in the doorway and pretty much talks over her. "Dude, you missed Thanksgiving. Jane was all mopey since we came all the way here just to have dinner where we first met you-"

"There was research to be done, too." Jane inputs hastily, looking somewhat embarassed.

Darcy rolls her eyes. "Yeah. You were planning on studying chemistry together, or the mating habits of people from other world-thingies. Whatever you call them."
"Realms?" Thor asks.

Darcy ignores that and points a finger in his direction while slowly approaching from the doorway. "But you didn't even show up, so we have like six extra turkeys that you were-" She too stops when she smells them. She's far enough away that the smell isn't completely overwhelming, but she still obviously smells something terrible. She backs up.

"I am truly sorry for missing the holiday." Thor honestly would have loved to spend that day- or any day- with his beloved Jane. "Unfortunately, I was occupied by other things and it slipped my mind entirely." Thor hadn't known about Sleipnir being real before today, but a week ago he had accidentally revealed that both his parents are seidr users. The Midgardian Day of Giving Thanks had fallen in the week since he outed his parents as magical.

"Don't you have showers up there?" Darcy glances at Thor's bundled cape, which is indeed covered with a certain brown substance and giving off a distinct odor, and asks from a safe distance "Did you have to, like, take a dump on that or something? How else do you get covered in literal shit?"

"What happened to your cape?" Jane asks, obviously not giving Darcy's theory of Thor relieving himself in it any credit. "And what's in it?"

"Someone who needs help." Thor says. "I will show you inside." He kicks off his filthy boots before going in. Maybe he'll just trash them altogether.

They walk into Jane's lab, and Thor gently lays Sleipnir on the floor, wishing it was softer, although it's not like Sleipnir's used to comfort in any sort of the word. Thor frowns when he thinks about that and slowly unwraps his cape (making sure that the filthy bottom is folded up over a cleaner part so it doesn't touch Jane's floor). This exposes the starved horse that currently is the size of a newborn foal.

Jane and Darcy both gasp at the sight in front of them, looking like they're trying not to throw up, not that Thor can blame them in the slightest. Sleipnir makes a horrific sight.

The fact that Sleipnir's passed out probably makes it seem like Thor just dumped a horse that starved to death a while ago on their floor. That is, it would seem like that if Sleipnir's chest wasn't visibly moving with his breathing, which at least seems to be normal. Thor's not a healer, but he takes the fact that Sleipnir's not rasping or wheezing to be a good sign.

"Um, why do you have a spider-horse thingy?" Darcy asks, eyes locked on the pitiful sight before her. "You're not gonna eat him or anything... right?"

"I discovered him in the... worse part of the Asgardian dungeons." Thor kneels next to the unconscious Sleipnir.

"Your dungeons do what to people?!" Jane exclaims, horrified. After a bit, she adds "I mean animals."

"Most of our dungeons are far less cruel. They are simply meant to keep prisoners contained, rather like your... 'jails', I believe, not starve them." Thor assures them. "I swear I did not know this was happening, and if I had, I would have put a stop to it."

He's not going to let the lower parts of the dungeon exist when he's king. As he said, the point of the dungeons is merely to lock people up, like the clean, brightly lit upper dungeons with the guards. Not to let prisoners rot away in the darkness, like the lower dungeons Sleipnir was in. The ones Thor hadn't even known about.
Thor would like to think that Odin didn't know, because he doesn't want to think that his father could do something so cruel, but there's no way he couldn't know.

"Now, he requires sustenance!" Thor declares, glancing at the unconscious Sleipnir.

"And a bath." Darcy says. "You too. Seriously, you guys are making me wish I didn't have a nose."

Since Sleipnir's unconscious, Thor isn't sure how to feed him right now, anyways. Perhaps they should start with the bath. Thor changes into a spare set of clothes here, already smelling better himself. It was really his clothes, not him, that reeked. Sleipnir, on the other hand...

Thor draws a hot bath, gently placing the still unconscious foal in. Slowly, gently, he tries to scrub all the dirt and other even more disgusting matter from the horse's fur. It probably helps that he's unconscious, as this way he can't fight or flinch away.

The only bright side that Thor can see is that at least Sleipnir isn't beaten bloody or anything.

Then again, they'd reduced Loki to a bleeding heap on the floor on more than one occasion, and he always healed quickly (quicker than anyone Thor knew) and never scarred, so it would make sense if Sleipnir was like Loki, and all Asgardians.

Thor feels a new wave of guilt over his treatment of Loki, and he hopes that at least Sleipnir had been spared that. In some ways, it's almost good Thor didn't know about Sleipnir, since he probably would've treated Sleipnir as terribly he had Loki.

Thor just doesn't know if Sleipnir suffered abuse in the dungeons or not.

About an hour into the bath, Sleipnir regains consciousness, though he seems rather lost and confused, not even seeming to notice Thor's touch for a while. Thor talks to fill the silence and includes several apologies, but Sleipnir doesn't seem to be listening, instead seeming to retreat back into himself.

After another forty-five minutes, Sleipnir shimmers and grows back to the size he'd been when Thor first saw him. He barely fits in the bathtub, now. Thankfully, he's at least reasonably clean as Thor hauls him out and drapes a towel over him.

However, there is still rather horrible, smelly fungus on Sleipnir's hoofs, and Thor had not been able to get rid of it. Perhaps it requires a healer.

Thor slowly walks Sleipnir out of the bathroom, making sure to support his legs. Darcy comments that Sleipnir is looking better, although his starved state is still rather horrific.

Now, they need to provide Sleipnir with much needed sustenance. There had been some sort of animal store when Thor was banished here, but they had been unable to provide him with a horse, which means they're unlikely to have food for a horse either.

There's a green apple on a table with a bite already taken out of it. Sleipnir perhaps isn't quite as out of it as he seems, since he's giving the food a look of such desperate longing that Thor feels tears leak out of his eyes. Not that Thor usually has any qualms about crying.

As if he hardly dares to believe it's real, Sleipnir closes his teeth around the fruit as if it's one of Idunn's Apples. His eyes widen at the crunch, and then he's practically inhaling the fruit, barely pausing to chew as he eats even more ravenously than Volstagg ever has, with a hunger no being should ever have to know.
As Sleipnir basically inhales the rest of the fruit, cores and all, Thor can actually see his stomach expand from there being nothing in it.

Something in the back of Thor's head tells him there's something more wrong than just having to witness someone so hungry, but he can't figure out what it is. That is, until Sleipnir proceeds to vomit up everything he just ate and collapse in his own puddle of sick, undoing all of Thor's work.

Apparently his starved stomach couldn't handle the apple. Thor feels he should have known that. What if he's doing this all wrong?

Thor wonders if Tony or Bruce could help. Bruce might be able to, isn't he a healer? Sleipnir may be too weak to travel by Mjolnir. He'd already been weak from neglect in the dungeons and traveling through the Bifrost hadn't seemed to help matters.

It's a good thing Midgardians have devices that let them communicate over great distances.

Thor isn't exactly looking forward to the conversation with them, though. It can wait a little. After all, Sleipnir needs another bath already.

Chapter End Notes

Well, this is the last chapter I already have written, so update times are going to be much longer. I'm hoping to get chapter 39 up soon (hopefully by the end of the weekend) since I'm almost done with that, but afterwards, expect at least a couple weeks in between chapters, since college keeps me busy.

Also, in chapter 1 I said the first 38 chapters were 450,000 words on FF.Net while this says 415,000... I guess Author's Notes over there really add up
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

Loki meets the Bartons.

The adults present, minus Loki, discuss the attack on Clint's house.

Chapter Notes

This is actually only part of what I had written for this chapter, but then it was getting really long so I decided to split it up. Hopefully this first part isn't too boring. The second part should be up in a few days, maybe sooner.

The characters' opinions on movies and things do not necessarily reflect my own.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To Clint's relief, Lila appears to have already forgotten to wonder what Tony's question about whether Clint and Natasha were banging meant. To his credit, Tony looks like he at least realizes he shouldn't have said that in front of young kids, although that's probably helped by the look he's getting from Laura as she covers Lila's ears as if more profanity is going to spill out of the billionaire's mouth. Not that that's exactly an unreasonable assumption.

To be fair, Tony hadn't seen the kids when he made that comment about Natasha and Clint banging. Clint smirks as Tony seems to do a double take at his wife and kids. At least Tony won't be making lewd guesses about him and Natasha now. Why does everybody seem to ship them?

"Tony, this is Laura, my wife." Clint stresses the word, pulling her into his side. Tony had made a ridiculous comment about them being agents. "And those are Cooper and Lila. And yes, my family is the reason I turned down your offer for Thanksgiving dinner. Tasha too."

Tony grumbles that they left him with Steve as the only visitor, and Clint doesn't point out that surely Bruce and Loki were there, too. They live with Tony, after all. Then he stares at Nat. "Wait, she was still with you for Thanksgiving, even though you're not-" He glances at the kids. "Uh, doing anything."

"I'm a friend." Natasha says, crossing her arms.

Coulson tells the kids that he hadn't brought them any presents today like he had yesterday. They look slightly disappointed, but Clint and Laura have both made sure not to spoil them- besides, Cooper just had a birthday a week ago- which Clint sadly hadn't been able to make it home to, and he needs to make that up to Cooper somehow- and Lila has a birthday six days from today. Plus Christmas is looming nearer, since tomorrow's the first of December.

Needless to say, Clint and Laura end up buying a lot of gifts in November and December, to cover two birthdays and Christmas. Also, Clint's not sure they'll be home by then, meaning Lila's party
Yesterday, Coulson had given Lila a stuffed polar bear that she had inexplicably named Cheeseball, rather than something logical like Snowball or even just an ordinary name like Abby—seriously, Clint's kids are weird sometimes.

Cooper had been really disappointed he hadn't been allowed bring his Legos, especially his new Millennium Falcon he'd gotten for his birthday last week, since they would have taken up too much space. So Coulson had bought a Lego Batmobile (Coulson says there really should be Captain America Lego, and Clint's kind of surprised they haven't made Avengers Lego sets yet). The Batmobile is assembled on the floor, but the box, bags and instructions are on the table. Clint has a feeling Laura made Cooper build it there so it wouldn't be in the way.

Lila and Cooper are both excited to see the famous Tony Stark and are simultaneously disappointed that he's not in one of his Iron Man suits. Despite Cooper being the one to point out that Tony is Iron Man, it's actually Lila who's chattering his ear off, asking why he's not in his suit, how it works, and why it doesn't have wings like Buzz Lightyear's suit.

Tony gives her a slightly patronizing smile, before he tries and utterly fails to explain his suit in a simple way. Admittedly, Tony's suits are the work of a freaking genius, literally. Clint's completely lost whenever the engineer describes the science behind his suit, there's no way Lila would understand.

There are playing cards scattered on the floor in front of the couch and some drawings and colored pencils on the coffee table, so they apparently haven't been watching TV the whole time.

Also scattered around the room are several toys that the kids packed before they left. Lila had brought her Merida doll and Merida's horse, Angus, as well as the Woody, Jessie and Buzz Lightyear toys they'd gotten after Toy Story 3 came out three years ago. Buzz is technically Cooper's, but Lila plays with the space ranger a lot more than her brother does these days. Lila's love of Toy Story had been further revamped by the Toy Story of Terror TV special that aired last month, where Jessie was the star. Lila had loved that.

Cooper, meanwhile, had brought his favorite stuffed animal, Lucky the "Pizza Dog." Lucky has definitely seen better days, and is missing his left button eye. Cooper has decided on the story that Lucky lost it when fighting a rabid badger that had tried to "attack" Clint. Really, it just fell off, and Laura hasn't been able to find a matching button anywhere.

There's a crunch as Tony accidentally steps on a tiny action figure of Jar Jar Binks, which, unlike Lego, isn't supposed to come apart. Good Riddance. Clint thinks. He hates the Star Wars prequels, but Cooper loves them almost as much as the originals, which should be a crime. Even worse, Lila actually thinks that, one, the podracing is the best part of the entire series and two, Jar Jar is funny, to Clint's everlasting horror and dismay.

So his almost-six year old daughter is rather annoyed that Tony just crushed the figure of the incredibly annoying Gungan.

"I just did everyone a favor." Tony says, looking at the broken Jar Jar. "Please tell me you've seen the original trilogy." Tony looks from the kids to Clint, his expression clearly saying that Clint better have shown them the originals.

"Of course they've seen the good movies." Clint says, and Tony nods in satisfaction, mumbling something about how it would be a crime to not show them the original trilogy.
Lila picks up Buzz and fires his laser at Tony, as if to punish him for breaking Jar Jar. Tony, surprisingly, hams it up and acts as if he'd been shot, but he's probably done stuff like this with Loki a lot. After all, Clint and the rest of the Avengers had ended up being roped into acting out scenes from *The Incredibles* in the Malibu mansion (except for Thor, who had left right after the movie).

Lila keeps firing Buzz's laser and then 'flies' the toy into Tony.

Cooper brandishes a blue lightsaber and pretends to slice off Tony's left arm, making lightsaber noises. Tony hams that up too, and the kids apparently forget about their annoyance with him for breaking a toy.

Laura makes the kids put their stuff away, and Cooper starts packing several action figures, including the broken Jar Jar, into his Captain America shield backpack. "Dad? Can we meet Captain America?"

"Hey, kid... uh, Cooper." Tony looks at the Cap shield backpack as if it personally offended him. "I'm way cooler than Stars and Stripes."

"You don't have your suit." Cooper points out, looking rather disappointed. Laura gives a stern "Cooper."

"Even without my suit I'm still way cooler!" Tony protests, indignant, as Natasha rolls her eyes. "I mean, this isn't even a competition. I'm a genius, billionaire, philanthropist superhero, and you've already forgotten me for an old guy with a shield who's not even here!" After a bit, he adds "I'm not sure I want you in my tower anymore, kid."

Clint's pretty sure Tony's joking, but Cooper seems to think he actually meant that. He glances at Clint guiltily, even more guiltily than that time when he'd been caught playing his Nintendo 3DS under his covers after bedtime, even though the 3DS wasn't supposed to be in his bedroom in the first place (incidentally, he forgot to pack it when they were leaving the house this time).

"And you- Agent-" Tony points at Coulson, who's standing off to the side. "Stop silently disagreeing with me. Even a Captain America fanboy like you should realize I'm infinitely more awesome." Glancing at the toys, Tony adds "Saying Cap is cooler than me is like saying Woody is cooler than Buzz, when Buzz has all the gadgets."

"I like Woody more." Coulson says, and Tony shakes his head as if it's a lost cause.

"I love Woody *and* Buzz. They go together! You can't have Woody without Buzz. And I love Jessie. She's tough. I didn't know you wore normal clothes, Iron Man." Lila switches topics and addresses Tony out of nowhere, staring up at the genius billionaire with the three Toy Story toys in her arms.

It's kind of hilarious, Clint thinks, because his kids are pretty much the only kids that regularly see Avengers- Clint himself, and sometimes Natasha- in a domestic setting and normal clothes, yet apparently Lila hadn't thought about other Avengers doing the same. True, most of the time Tony's on TV, he's either in his Iron Man suit or a business suit, as opposed to now, in jeans, a red winter coat, and a baseball hat. Clint's seen Tony in clothes stained in oil and stuff from his lab, looking more like a hobo than a billionaire.

"I'm sorry I made you mad, Mr. Stark. Are you not gonna let us live in your tower now?" Cooper stares at the billionaire superhero with wide, worried eyes. "I'm sorry."
At one point, Clint would've been sure that Tony would declare the tower a kid-free zone, but seeing how he lives with Loki (who technically isn't a kid, but is like one in some ways), he doesn't have any worries. Even before Loki came into the picture, Tony wouldn't have turned Clint's kids away if Clint needed somewhere to hide them.

Despite Cooper's worries, Clint is positive Tony won't actually refuse them space in his tower just because Cooper has a Captain America backpack and wants to meet the guy. Some people probably think Tony's enough of an asshole to do that, but they'd be wrong.

"I'm not gonna kick you out or anything. Sheesh. Well, technically, you're not even in there in the first place, but I'm still gonna let you live there. You're gonna love it. I have a huge pool that I never use- uh, and arcade machines and pretty much every video game ever made." Tony rambles, as he is wont to do, but his expression is softer than his words. The kids' eyes are wide with excitement, and Clint doesn't think the reality of the situation has really sunk into them yet. As in they might not go home for a while.

"But I would like to hear you say I'm the awesomest superhero." Tony glances at Cooper's Lego Batmobile. "As I said earlier today, I'm way cooler than Batman, and he's the coolest fictional superhero. Seriously, kid, I have got to get you some Iron Man toys."

"Hey, I'm their dad. That automatically makes me the awesomest superhero. Don't turn my kids against me, Tony." Clint raises his eyebrows at Tony. Then, quiet and serious, he approaches Tony. "Thanks for letting us stay. Hopefully it won't be long, but it depends on... you know. I just need somewhere really safe for them, and your tower's the safest place I can think of." Clint looks down at his kids and then over at Laura.

"Of course." Tony says, also more seriously than before. Stark Tower has about a zillion security measures in addition to Jarvis, so if someone tracked them down there, they'd be very unlikely to actually get to them.

The kids only vaguely know of the attack, since they were just woken up late in the night (to them, even though it was only ten pm) and told they had to leave. Clint hadn't gone into too much detail, but at the same time, they do sort of need to know that they're in hiding.

Because of this, the kids don't seem overly anxious about another attack (they're not nearly as worried as Clint and Laura, certainly). Cooper and Lila feel safe with Natasha or Clint watching over them, because they know nobody gets through either of them.

Hopefully their naive belief that heroes can't be beaten won't be shattered anytime soon.

For years, Clint's family had safely remained hidden without an incident, and the attack on Thanksgiving had been a shock. Clint keeps blaming himself. How had he not noticed the freaking tracking device on the Quinjet, even if it was cleverly hidden? He's a freaking S.H.I.E.L.D agent! How had that incident caught him by surprise?!

If it wasn't for Natasha going outside, discovering the goons, and beating them up, they might have actually made it into the house.

He isn't sure when they'll be able to go back home. Now that the location of their house is known by enemies, it's not exactly safe. Frankly, it's not at all safe, really. Hopefully that will change sometime.

Technically, once Monday rolls around the day after tomorrow, the kids are supposed to be back in school, but obviously their safety is more important. Maybe Tony can get them tutors or something
and swear them to secrecy, although Clint won't actually ask for that. Tony's already doing enough, and he'll probably think of that. Or Jarvis will.

"Your backpack is way cooler." Tony says randomly as he points at Lila. She has a brown, fuzzy backpack with Chewbacca's face stitched into it, along with that gray strap he always wears (although it's not actually a plush character like Loki's Stitch backpack). She crams colored pencils and leaves her toys sticking out of the top. She opts for the familiarity of her favorite toys, Woody and Jessie, in her arms, rather than Cheeseball.

The kids and Laura wait in the hotel room, constantly guarded by Clint, while Natasha brings the luggage to the car, which is being inspected by Coulson. Thankfully, nobody slips a tracker on it like they had with the Quinjet.

Clint and Tony escort Laura and the kids out to the car. Cooper is hugging Lucky the Pizza Dog tightly for comfort, which he did back at home but has been doing even more since they left.

Of course, during the car ride, the kids keep asking if they're there yet, until Tony points out his tower when they're able to see it over the buildings surrounding them. This at least gets them to stop asking, now that they can actually see their destination.

Coulson pulls the car into Tony's private garage in the tower, where it will be safely guarded, and they haul all the luggage out, rolling it towards the elevator at the far end of the private garage. As they enter the elevator, Lila clambers to push the button and ends up punching them all, which makes Tony smirk for some reason. Laura stops her, sternly telling her that now it will take forever since they'll have to stop at every floor.

"Welcome back, sir. And do not worry, I will of course override the button commands and take you directly where you need to go." Jarvis' smooth British accent fills the elevator, making Laura, Cooper and Lila jump slightly and look around for the source of the voice. Tony smirks.

"Good afternoon, Agents Barton, Romanoff and Coulson." Jarvis' tone is just a tad cooler when he addresses Coulson, probably because of the whole incident with Loki and the Helicarrier. Not that Clint was particularly happy when he found out what happened there.

"This is Jarvis."

"Is he magic?" Lila asks, still unable to locate the source of the British-accented voice. "Or is he like Siri. Siri isn't magic."

"No Siri isn't magic, and Jarvis isn't either. He's my AI butler, which stands for Artificial Intelligence. So basically, a super-awesome computer... But a lot of thing here are kinda like magic."

Well, that's something Clint wouldn't have heard Tony say even a month ago. A lot of Tony's tower already sort of seems like magic anyways- especially Jarvis- but of course Tony's referring to Loki by that, who is literally magical as far as Clint can tell. The guy's a freaking shape-shifter, for crying out loud! "Do you guys like magic?"

"Magic isn't real." Cooper says halfheartedly. He still seems to believe in Santa Claus, although at nine, that may change soon. As much as Cooper wants to go to Hogwarts, he does seem to know that's not real. Lila, being younger, is a firm believer in both Santa and the Tooth Fairy.

Magic being fake seems like common sense, but Loki's kind of proved that wrong.

Jarvis' voice is once again perfectly friendly when he turns his attention to Clint's wife and kids.
"Mrs. Barton, I presume?" Laura nods, still looking a little surprised to be addressed by a computer. "It's a pleasure to meet you, as well as young Mister Barton and young Miss Barton." Clint's honestly not sure if Jarvis had figured out who Laura and the kids were just by observing them for this very brief time, or if Tony had texted Jarvis or something on the drive here.

"You can just call 'em Cooper and Lila, Jarvis." Clint says. He's given up on getting Jarvis to just call him Clint instead of Agent Barton, and this will probably be a lost cause, too. Jarvis in polite to a fault and never addresses anyone by their first name, except for Loki, but there's always a Mr. in front of it.

"That would be against my programming, Agent." Jarvis says smoothly. Well, Clint totally called that. Why does Jarvis call Loki by his first name, anyways? Doesn't Loki have a last name? "Mrs. Barton, young Mister Barton, young Miss Barton, if there is anything I can do for you, please do not hesitate to ask."

"Hey, J, order the boy, uh, Cooper some Iron Man toys, will you? And a backpack, to replace that one." Tony says. "Actually, we shouldn't be sexist. Order some Iron Man stuff for Lila, too."

"I believe I made the offer to them, sir." Jarvis says cheekily. "They probably do not want to be laden down with mountains of Iron Man merchandise of every variety, which is what I fear you would force me to thrust upon them. Besides, perhaps you are not young Mr. Cooper's favorite Avenger. His dad is one, after all."

"Told you. Stop trying to convert my kids, Tony." Clint says again. He really hopes he's the kids' favorite Avenger. How unfair would it be if it was one of the others?

The floor the elevator stops on is much like any of the other floors. There's a lot of gray and chrome in the color scheme, along with dark wood and sleek, modern furniture. Floor-to-ceiling windows span the wall. Cooper and Lila look around with their jaws practically hitting the floor before darting off to explore. Clint doubts it's possible to get lost on this floor, since it's just living quarters.

There are a several dart boards scattered around, which Tony makes sure to point out at every opportunity as he drags Clint and Laura through the rooms, talking a mile a minute about all the extra features his tower has that "boring" houses don't, mostly for Laura's sake because Clint's been in the tower before. Some of the things are really nice, like how the toasters toast bread to perfection and would never dream of burning it, thanks to Jarvis. At least, Clint thinks it's Jarvis, unless Tony made sentient toasters, which wouldn't surprise him, actually.

"We need to talk." Coulson says, as he follows Tony's almost hyper tour through their floor. They haven't really wanted to discuss the attack in front of the kids to avoid excessively worrying them, which is why they hadn't brought it up once in the hotel on on the ride over here.

Tony nods. "Come on up to the penthouse. Bruce is up there, I'm assuming he's part of this, because he's an Avenger?" They go back into the elevator, after calling for the kids and eventually having to hunt them down. Cooper and Lila grab their backpacks full of toys and follow them. Laura doesn't want to let the kids out of her sight, and Clint wants to keep an eye on them, too. It's reassuring, having them in his sight.

Even at the zoo, he'd been worrying about his family's safety back in the hotel room, even though Nat was guarding them and he completely trusts her both with his own life and with Laura and the kids'.

When the elevator doors open to the penthouse living room, Clint sees Pepper, Loki and Bruce are
seated on the floor. Simba is with Loki, as always. Loki's Stitch backpack, and the apparently new addition of Lilo, are present as well. Clint's pretty sure he'd remember the ginormous stuffed Baloo from *The Jungle Book*, so that has to be new too. Lila gasps in delight at the sight of the huge bear that's probably bigger than she is, and even Cooper looks slightly awed by Baloo but a lot more awed about the penthouse.

Clint notices there are several shoeboxes and clear plastic bins arranged neatly across the floor, with little origami animals or plastic Disney animal figurines in them. There's also a plush Maximus in a larger crate, and the reindeer in *Frozen* and Bambi in another.

Is Loki making a zoo? Clint would bet money that he is, except unlike Tony, Clint has a family to support and limited finances, so gambling isn't a great idea.

It takes a second or two for Loki to divert his attention from his game. "Tony!" He runs over to hug the billionaire. "I'm making a zoo! Come see!" Dang, Clint would've won that bet. Loki starts to drag Tony off, but stops when he notices the rest of them.

"Clint! Tasha!" The god grins widely- and for once doesn't throw in a *Kim Possible* reference by calling them Kim and Ron- before his gaze turns to Coulson. "What's he doing heres? You're not gonna take my Simba ever again!" Loki hugs Simba close to his chest, as if to ensure nobody will try to snatch the toy lion away.

"I'm not here to take Simba." Coulson says with a bland smile. Loki doesn't relax his hold on his lion, but he doesn't look quite as worried. Coulson had been pretty decent to Loki on the Helicarrier, although some of that was a classic Good Cop/Bad Cop method.

Irrelevantly, Loki adds "Your suit makes you looks like a pen-guin but you aren't gonna fly like at the zoo." What? Clint's no animal expert, but he's pretty sure penguins don't fly. "My Tony really wouldn't want to be one of those!" Loki nods decisively, as if he'd just imparted a great wisdom.

"Yeah, I like being human." Tony says. The way Loki's looking at him makes it seem like there's more to his reasoning than that, but the god doesn't share his reasons.

Loki rocks and flaps his hands, his attention back on Coulson. "And you're not gonna put me in another petri dish! I answered all your dumb questions, but you never gave Simba back like you saids you would! Just gave me Olaf. You lied! Were you the one who ripped Simba?" Loki had asked similar questions when they talked briefly at the zoo, a little over an hour ago, but apparently he needs to go over it again. Maybe it has something to do with Coulson being in the tower.

"No. I didn't rip Simba." Coulson says calmly. Loki looks at him with more intensity, clearly trying to figure out if he's lying again.

"Where's the Furious Eyepatch Man?" Loki looks around anxiously, as if expecting Fury to jump out from behind a corner.

"He's not here." Tony reassures him, putting a hand on Loki's higher shoulder.

Pepper introduces herself warmly to Laura and the kids, while Bruce hangs back in the background until Natasha drags him forward to introduce him, mentioning that he's an Avenger too. The kids seem confused that he's not really green right now, and Bruce fidgets awkwardly.

"Is that an Iron Man suit?!" Cooper asks, looking at Simba and obviously excited to finally see a suit, even if it's on a toy lion instead of Tony. "Why does your Simba toy get an Iron Man suit?" Cooper asks jealously, obviously wishing he had an Iron Man suit for Lucky. Or just an Iron Man
suit for himself. He rushes forwards, making the plastic blue blade of his toy lightsaber spring out, accompanied by electronic lightsaber sounds.

"I can beat him!" Cooper's talking about Simba, Clint can tell, but Loki obviously can't.

Loki freezes, looking terrified, and Cooper accidentally hits him in the thigh with a rather hard blow for a plastic lightsaber.

Clint seriously doubts the reason Loki looks like he's about to cry is because of the pain. Admittedly, toy lightsabers can sting a surprising amount for a toy, and have brought both of Clint's kids to tears when they whacked each other with them. But Loki barely seems to register the pain. Like Clint, the god's certainly suffered far worse pain in his life. Pain is something he shouldn't have to be used to but obviously is. Clint has a feeling that, when Loki was comparatively younger than Lila, he was probably suffering far worse pains than getting hit by a plastic lightsaber.

Maybe Loki's just panicking about the idea of being bullied again? Asgard had done far worse than just bully him.

Tony grabs the lightsaber by the blade (which would be fatal if it were real, of course. Clint's pretty sure Tony could build a real lightsaber if he wanted to. Maybe he already has, and just keeps it hidden in his lab or something).

"Hey, we don't go around hitting people here, and I'm pretty sure the rules apply to your house, too." Tony tells Cooper, glancing at Clint, who nods to tell him that no hitting is indeed a rule in their house. Admittedly, it was an accident this time, but it still is going against that rule, but Clint and Laura both remind Cooper of the rule again, even though Tony basically just said it.

Loki is actually crying now, maybe in a bit of relief to here that again, something he'd definitely never heard in that shit hole realm he's from, although he does say something about "Jotun ice spears." Or, that's what Clint thinks he says, anyways.

Tony gives Cooper a look that makes him let go of the lightsaber, and Tony holds it, speaking softly. "Look, Snoopy, it's just plastic, like your figurines. And it's not supposed to look like ice, anyways. It's like the opposite of ice, it'd be really hot if it was real, which it's not." Tony hits himself on the arm with the lightsaber.

The genius billionaire keeps bonking himself on the arm until Loki's looking and sees him do it. "Nobody's going to hit you here, and if they did, it probably wouldn't hurt anyways."

"Besides, ice isn't bad, remember? Elsa kicked the guards' as... butts-' Tony says with a glance at Cooper and Lila. "Kicked their butts with ice spear thingies, and stopped them from killing her."

Tony grabs Loki's Elsa, Anna and Olaf dolls from a couch, handing them to him.

"Elsa and Anna!" Lila shrieks. "And the snowman, and that's the reindeer, right?" Lila points at the toy reindeer in one of the bins.

"Olaf and Sven. Olaf and Sven" Loki singsongs "Son of Coul gave Olaf backs but not Simba."

Clint mentions that he and Laura were going to take the kids to see Frozen today, until their plans obviously changed with them needing to leave after the attack a few days ago.

Lila's looking eagerly at Elsa and Anna, and Laura reminds her that the dolls aren't her toys and she has to ask if she can play with them, and listen to the answer. Lila pouts.
"Why do you have princesses?" Cooper asks Loki.

"Elsa's queen." Loki says. "And she's really really awesome. She's gots ice powers, like Frozone, and she fights bad guys too." Well, it's good to hear Loki say that.

"We haven't seen the movie yet, so no spoilers." Clint says. "As in, don't tell anyone the ending, or anything that was surprising or something."

"Periwinkle has ice magic too. A Frost talent." Lila says, and Cooper groans. "And white hair and blue clothes like Elsa."

"Who's Periwinkle?"

"Tinker Bell's twin sister." Lila answers. If he didn't have kids, Clint certainly never would have heard that Tinker Bell has her own movies, and he honestly wouldn't have minded never knowing.

Lila continues to explain. "They were born from the same laugh, but got separated in Neverland, and didn't know each other 'til Tink went in the Winter Woods. I had dolls of Tink and Peri, but they're still at home." It clearly hasn't sunk in with Lila that they may not go home for a while.

Loki looks very intrigued, while Tony looks like he really hopes he's not going to be dragged into watching Tinker Bell movies. Clint sends him a sympathetic glance, he knows the feeling.

"Loki, this is Laura, my wife." Clint finally gets around to introducing his family. Loki's wide green eyes turn to look at Laura and the kids, although his eyes are still somewhat glazed. It's not like Loki wouldn't find out eventually, but he hopes the guy can keep a secret. "And these are my kids."

"Your kids?" Loki asks, sounding somewhat shocked, glancing between Clint and Laura. Clint nods, smirking slightly, and Loki cocks his head to the side.

"Yes, these are-" Clint starts only for Loki to interrupt again.

"If they're your kids, then they hads to... they came outta you, right, after growin'side you as you get all big and fat. An' it hurts lots when they came out, but you are really happy, too, 'cause of babies." He makes a gesture over his stomach indicating a pregnant belly, and why the hell is Loki looking at Clint when he says this? "I have dreams like Spirit, 'cause Spirit came outta his mother like that, and I'm the mo-"

"Loki, let's not talk about this." Pepper gently interrupts Loki's rambling with a glance at the kids, especially Lila. Also, did Loki have a dream about giving birth?! Clint sort of hopes he'd somehow misinterpreted that.

"My dream?" Loki asks. "'Cause it's a argr freaky dream?"

"No, things like how babies are made, because, uh, there are kids here." Tony answers, though he's smirking and had needed to stifle his laughter earlier. Clint probably would have thought it was funny if his kids hadn't been listening. The kids do know some about how babies are formed. Not all the sex stuff (although Cooper knows a tiny bit of that), but that they grow in a mother's womb and all that.

Actually, Clint's not entirely sure if Loki knows how sex works, since he seems really innocent. When he glances at Tony, the billionaire looks like he's wondering if Loki would've actually gone there, so apparently Loki does know the birds and the bees.
"No talking 'bout making babies." Loki nods in agreement. "It's weird anyways. And gross." Clint finds this slightly strange. Sure, Loki may seem really innocent (even though he apparently knows about sex), but he's still technically an adult. Aren't there lots of adults with disorders or disabilities who still like sex?

"You're super tall." Lila looks up at Loki. "Taller than Daddy, and you have really, really big feet.

"Loki, this is Lila." Clint puts a hand over his daughter's head. "And this is Cooper. They're kind of a secret from most people. You can keep a secret, right?" He asks with his other arm around Cooper's shoulders.

Loki nods as a grin creeps over his face, before fisting a hand over his chest and bowing slightly in greeting to Clint's family. "Do you keep chickens?" Loki blurts out of nowhere.

"We had chicks in kindergarten." Lila answers. "They were so cute and yellow and fluffy and I loved them so much! Chicky was the best chick, but I'm in first grade now." Clint remembers Lila being very upset about leaving Chicky behind. Chickens, however, are an honest-to-god pain in the ass, and horrible little creatures. Hence why they're not on his farm anymore. He learned his lesson, and fresh eggs just weren't worth it.

"Kind-erg-arten?" Of course they probably don't have kindergarten in Asgard, but where did Loki get that pronunciation?

Cooper snickers slightly and tells Loki "You're weird." It is true, in a way, but still...

"You're weird, kid." Tony jumps to Loki's defense, staring down at Cooper. "You don't even know the coolest superhero when you see him. And you like the prequels, and-" he pauses to shudder dramatically "-Jar Jar Binks, judging from your toys."

"Not helping, Tony." Pepper sighs, as Lila announces way too loudly that Jar Jar is really funny. Clint buries his face in his hands.

"Cooper, that was very rude. Apologize." Laura and Clint scold at basically the same time after the little conversation-detour Tony just dragged them on. Clint may actually be a little harsher than Laura is about this, since he knows Loki's history and Laura doesn't. Loki might assume that one comment means Cooper's going to bully him forever, like in Asgard.

"Sorry... Mr. Loki...?" Cooper looks down. Loki doesn't answer as he looks more or less at Cooper and Lila, though his eyes linger on their toys.

"My Tony says I'm not a freak." Loki mutters, wringing his hands. "Bruce says that too. Says I'm not a freak like how Harry's not a freak, that they didn't follows the Quasmirelsa rule in Asgard, 'n neither do the Durleys."

Loki wanders back over to the boxes and grabs a little origami flamingo before pressing it into Pepper's hands. "For you." He says, when Pepper tries to hand the flamingo back. Pepper smiles and accepts the gift.

Smiling slightly, Loki returns to his zoo and crouches down next to a bin that holds that snake necklace Loki has, with an odd name that Clint's forgotten. The snake is much larger than a necklace now and looks very real.

Loki starts saying something about winking and never talking to a snake before, and it raises its head. Loki had looked a little like Harry Potter in the zoo earlier, even with the scars and the glasses, so maybe he's re-enacting that scene?
"Whoa! You have a snake?!" Cooper asks. Laura gasps slightly, no doubt worried about a huge snake attacking her kids, even if he's not a real snake. He does appear real, sometimes, though.

"He's my Jormungand." Loki says, looking at Cooper somewhat suspiciously for some reason. Jormungand, that was it.

"Your... mun-gand?" Cooper scrunches his nose slightly.

"What's a mu-gand?" Lila asks curiously.

"Jormungand." Loki says the name slowly, as if the kids are dumb as he picks up his snake and looks at Cooper and Lila curiously. "His name, Jormungand."

"That's a weird name." Cooper says, but not in a mean way, exactly.

"So's Cooper." Loki replies casually, and it probably is to him. "Do you get the glitches too for All-Tongue?"

Laura looks at Clint for an explanation, but Bruce ends up answering it. "We don't have All-Tongue, remember?" This is actually the first thing Bruce has said since he awkwardly greeted Clint's family. "We actually have to learn every language we know."

"Is your snake a boy snake or a girl snake?" Lila apparently didn't catch the his earlier when Loki said Jormungand's name.

"Boy." Loki answers, singsonging. "Boy, male snake."

"Is he real?" Laura asks faintly. Clint whispers to her that Jormungand isn't really real, and she looks at him, confused. Admittedly, the truth is kind of weird, so Clint just ends up saying that he's about as real as a robot.

"He looked like he moved earlier." Cooper says, before adding unhelpfully. "Some snakes can squeeze you to death! Your snake looks like he could squeeze someone. I saw a snake squeeze a mouse and eat it whole on TV. Some snakes bite you with poison and then you die." Laura now looks very worried.

"Venom." Loki says after a bit, looking at Jormungand instead of Cooper.

"What?"

"Snakes, animals, they haves venom, not poisons." Loki says. "Bilgesnipes have acid."

Cooper's eyes shift towards Jormungand, and he seems like he wants to step towards Jormungand, but both he and Lila end up stepping back a couple steps when Laura pulls them away. "He's not venomous, is he?" Laura asks.

"Nope nope nope! My Jormungand is real nice. He hugs me an' I feel safes. It's even better now he gots a body." Loki nods and wraps Jormungand around his shoulders. Clint's seen Jormungand move on his own before, and he's wondering if it's intentional that Jormungand's not moving now that there are new people here. Loki's Stitch backpack hasn't spit anything out, either.

"What's the other thing you said? A bilge-thingy?"

"Bilgesnipes. They're big, and got scales... big antlers, too. They're real means and dangerous so warriors like hunting them."
Cooper gives the *you're crazy* gesture of twirling a finger around an ear. Clint doesn't think that means the same thing on every part of earth, let alone in other realms or whatever they're called. Loki just stares at him blankly before copying it, although he actually twirls a strand of his long black hair.

"You're crazy." Cooper tells the god after realizing Loki clearly didn't get the gesture.

Loki lets out a frustrated shout in response, sounding half resigned and half protesting.

"Cooper, come over here, will you? You too, Lila." Clint makes the *come here* gesture and uses his *getting kids to do what you say* voice.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I won't do it again!" Loki is saying to Tony. Clint glances at him, confused. Why is Loki apologizing?

Loki's now holding his Lilo doll in one hand and Simba is of course in the other. Tony gives Loki a look that reflects Clint's own confusion about the god apologizing. "Loki, you didn't do anything. You don't have to apologize."

"No! I'll be goods!" Loki promises, and then adds completely randomly. "I wanna dance. I practiced. I just wanna dance... I practiced."

Tony glances at the Lilo doll in Loki's hand. "Wait... you're quoting Lilo here, aren't you? At least you didn't do what she did to Myrtle and start punching and biting. Good job with that, by the way."

It's not like Loki ever hits people, as far as Clint knows, but it's a very good thing he hadn't. Not only is he an adult, but he has godlike strength so things would've ended *very* badly for Cooper if Loki started pounding him.

Clint ushers his kids into the relative privacy of the kitchen, followed by Laura, and Clint kneels down to be on Cooper's level, sending his son a stern look. "Cooper, you're not being very nice right now. You don't know anything about Loki, but you're called him crazy. He's not crazy. He's from another planet sort of thing... um, a realm, and I guess they have those bilgesnipe things there."

"They do. Thor also mentioned them, during the invasion. He also said they had scales and huge horns, and they apparently fight a lot." Coulson remarks from the doorway, having apparently followed them to give Loki, Tony, Bruce and Pepper some privacy, although Clint can see them through the shelves that are basically holes in the wall separating the bar and the kitchen.

"Is Mr. Loki really from another planet?" Cooper asks, sounding excited but a tad dubious at the same time. Then, he frowns "Is he one of the aliens that you fought in New York, Dad? The ones that tried to take over?" Even though Cooper had been seven and a half at the time of the invasion, and Lila had been four, they still heard about the invasion. The whole world knows about that, for obvious reasons.

Clint probably should have told them some stuff about Loki beforehand, so the kids would have a better understanding, but he's not sure if Tony or someone will get annoyed if he gives away personal information. Probably not, after all, Tony told them everything he knew about Loki the first time Clint met the god, pretty much, and Clint's not even going to tell his kids everything.

For example, he's not going to tell them about Loki's powers, because his kids would be incredibly jealous (who wouldn't?) and ask Loki a lot of questions, which would almost certainly set Loki off.
However, he doubts Loki will be able to hide his powers from them forever.

"Did Mr. Loki do something bad? Is that why he was in Time Out?" Lila asks. Had the kids picked up that Loki was in a cage? Lila seems to have equated it to a time out.

Coulson and Clint shake their heads at the same time. "No, he didn't do anything bad, and he's not one of those aliens." Geez, how do they explain the whole Helicarrier fiasco to the kids?

"But why was he in time out if he wasn't bad?"

"He showed up somewhere he shouldn't, and... some people thought he was a spy." Coulson answers. "He's not a spy. He's not a threat at all."

Lila stares up at Coulson. "Did you really take Mr. Loki's toys? Stealing is wrong." She then launches into a long lecture about it and Clint thinks it's really funny watching his five-year-old daughter lecture an adult. She's surprisingly good at it. "So don't steal." Lila concludes seriously,

"I know stealing is wrong." Coulson says after Lila's done with her rant. "I wasn't the one who actually took Simba."

"So he's a good alien, like Yoda and Chewbacca and E.T.?" Cooper asks, and Clint nods.

"Anyways, Loki's from another planet realm thing called Asgard." Clint tells them, not mentioning it's where Thor's from. Hopefully they won't talk about Thor a lot around Loki.

"Is that why he talks weird?" Cooper asks. Thor has a different way of speaking due to being from Asgard, but Loki's speech is different, Clint has noticed. "And what's All-Tongue?"

"All-Tongue is some kind of translator in Loki's head, but I think he said he's trying not to use it now." Hadn't Loki said something about that in Malibu? "Really, I think most of the stuff Loki says doesn't come out how he wants it to, and it probably sounds a lot better in his head."

"You shouldn't make fun of how someone speaks, anyways." Laura admonishes.

"Why was he crying?" Lila asks, even though she and Cooper have both cried after the other whacked them with a lightsaber.

"You have no idea what Loki's been through." Clint continues. "Everyone from his realm was unbelievably cruel to him. He got hurt really bad there, and he probably thought you guys were going to be like that."

"Like Sid's house?" Lila asks, pulling her beloved Woody doll out of her Chewbacca backpack. It's not a perfect comparison, since the bad boy in *Toy Story* also pulled his toys apart to build mutant toys, and blew toys up, stuff that probably hadn't happened to Loki, but Sid had thrown Woody around when pretending to interrogate him.

At least, Clint sincerely *hopes* Loki wasn't pulled apart or blown up, but Asgard is sadistic enough to do something like that, probably. And some of Loki's friends, like the eight-legged horse and that girl with half her body looking like a skeleton-corpse (she had shown up with the illusion-Loki when Loki was in the Helicarrier, and looked like something out of a horror movie) are kind of mutants, like Sid's mutant toys.

"Yeah, kinda like Sid's room. It's also like the Caterpillar Room, if Loki was the only toy there."

Clint says, referencing *Toy Story 3*, where Woody and the rest of the gang ended up at Sunnyside Daycare, and all of Andy's toys except Woody were stuck in the Caterpillar Room, where toddlers
threw them around and just brutalized them in general. To the toys, that room's a nightmare, but to the toddlers, it's a fun place, kind of like how Loki's view of Asgard is a lot worse than every other Asgardian's.

"Only it wasn't toddlers hurting him, it was adults, and unlike the toddlers, they knew they were hurting him and thought it was fun. They beat him up a lot, probably most days, and he's really old." Technically, Sid didn't know he was actually hurting the toys since he didn't know they were alive, but he was still sadistic like the Asgardians were.

Laura looks horrified, even more than Cooper and Lila do. His wife's definitely picking up a lot more subtext than they are. "Remember when you broke your arm, Cooper?" He asks, and Cooper nods. Lila hasn't gone through that... yet. Considering how adventurous she is, it's likely she'll break something sometime. "I have a feeling people hit Loki so much they broke his bones."

"Why didn't he stop them?" Cooper asks in a small voice.

"He couldn't. It was everybody there against him, the odds were always against him, and they made him think he deserved it. So I want you guys to be extra nice to him, alright?"

The kids nod, still looking shocked, and the head back out to the living room. Loki seems to have calmed down now that Tony, Bruce and Pepper have talked to him.

"I'm sorry I hit you with my lightsaber, Mr. Loki." Cooper says. "It was an accident. I didn't mean to hurt you." It probably hadn't physically hurt at all, Clint thinks again.

Loki blinks and looks very surprised at this turn of events, but he doesn't actually answer.

"Hitting is wrong." Lila explains, somewhat hypocritically, since both kids have hit each other plenty of times. "So's stealing, and bullying. Our school doesn't let people bully each other. One time, Jared had to miss all of recess and got sent to the principal's because he tried to steal Clark's Muppet toys and called him a baby."

Loki looks like he isn't quite sure what bullying means, even though he's suffered from it his whole life, although abuse is even worse than bullying.

"Are you really an alien?" Cooper asks Loki somewhat jealously. "I wish I was an alien. Then I could fly around in spaceships."

"You don't look like an alien." Lila studies Loki carefully. "You're not a little green man or anything." Loki looks confused and glances at Bruce, obviously thinking about when Bruce turns green and thinking that little is not a word one would use to describe Hulk. Clint totally agrees with that.

"Not all aliens are little green men." Cooper rolls his eyes. "Although Yoda is."

"Mira Nova's an alien, a Tangean." Lila says, referencing her favorite character from the Buzz Lightyear of Star Command TV show, although neither she nor her older brother were even born when it apparently ran in the early 2000s. Mira is a blue alien princess who can pass through solid objects. She's pretty much Buzz Lightyear's version of Jessie, even having reddish hair like the cowgirl. Lila has been asking for a Mira Nova doll for her birthday or Christmas, which are basically right next to each other. She's going to be heartbroken, because they never made Mira Nova dolls, and Clint really doesn't want to let her down. Maybe he can pay Tony to make a custom one

Lila doesn't mention that Mira has blue skin, though.
"Stitch is an alien, he is!" Loki then adopts a sort-of Russian accent and sounds like he's quoting someone. "'Xper'ment 626. He is fire-proof, bullet-proof, and can think faster than super computer. He can see in the dark, and lift objects three thousand times his size. His only instinct... to destroy everything he touches!" Loki cackles at that.

Glancing at Bruce, Loki adds pointedly in his usual voice. "Stitch got much better 'bout wrecking stuff. Not his only instinct, now. He can love and has his Ohana with Lilo, Nani, Pleakley, even Jumba even though Jumba tried to capture him and hit him into a tree and tried to shoot him. Jumba made him. Stitch, he's not a monstrosity anymore, nope nope nope!"

"Where are Elsa and Anna and Olaf the snowman?" Lila looks around for the Frozen toys, which are now nowhere to be seen. Clint's guessing Loki hid them in Stitch.

"Why don't you show him your toys, and if he wants, maybe he'll show you his later." Clint suggests, since Lila still has Woody in her arms.

"Why do you have all these toys if you're an adult?" Cooper asks.

"I can be a kid if I want." Loki tells them, and Clint had seen Loki in what might have been the god's own childhood body at the zoo earlier today, only he'd been wearing Harry Potter glasses. "I was not long ago." Loki says, obviously going over those events in his own mind. He's right, earlier today wasn't long ago at all.

Clint wonders how Lila and Cooper would've reacted to seeing Loki as a kid first, rather than an adult, but there's really no way of finding out now. They already know he's an adult.

"This is Woody." Lila holds the cowboy up. "He's a cowboy."

"He's nots a cow! He's a person!" Loki giggles, as if Lila's being ridiculous. "Why's he gots a weird helmet?"

"It's a cowboy hat, 'cause he's a cowboy! Jessie's a cowgirl." Lila digs Jessie out of her backpack, and then fishes around for the doll's little red hat.

"What are cow boys and cow girls?" Loki asks, confused, and still not sure that she's not trying to trick him.

"They ride horses and lasso cows." Tony says.

"Woody's a toy all the time but he comes to life. Jessie and Buzz too." Lila adds. "He has his own horse, but I don't have Bullseye, and Angus is too small for him. Plus he's Merida's horse."

They still haven't talked about the attack, and Coulson clearly wants to get to that. Clint heads back into the kitchen, with the rest of the adults except Loki, where they have more privacy but Clint and Laura can still keep an eye on their kids through the hollowed-out shelves in the wall separating the kitchen and the bar.

Bruce bustles around the kitchen, making tea. The chatter of the kids and Loki drifts in, but it's quiet enough to not be able to make out what they're saying, meaning the kids can't make out what they're saying. Clint sees Cooper running around with Lucky the Pizza Dog held over his head, and Lila has Jessie riding Loki's Maximus plush from Tangled. Just with the whole toy thing, they're probably going to get along.

Tony, meanwhile, pours himself a beer and offers one to Clint. Clint usually takes him up on any sort of offer for alcohol, but right now he's worried he'd drink more than strictly advised after the
stress of the past few days, so he declines. Besides, he generally doesn't drink much around his kids.

"So what exactly happened with this whole attack thing at your house on Thanksgiving? How did they even find you?" Tony asks, leaning back and putting his feet on the table, expertly not spilling his full glass. Despite his relaxed posture and rather casual voice, his eyes are very intent and serious. Clint had told him a bit as they were driving to the hotel, but nothing since Tony found out about Clint's whole secret family.

"You were attacked?! In your home?" Pepper asks Laura and Clint in a shocked voice, too concerned to give Tony a look about having his feet on the table. Laura nods worriedly. Pepper glances at Laura "Oh my gosh, that's horrible. Are you all all right? You must be so worried."

Laura nods slightly, and Pepper reaches out to grab her hand. "You're safe here. What about Cooper and Lila? Were they hurt? Did they see it? That must have been really scary for them."

"The kids were already in bed, and slept through the whole thing." Clint tells her. Thankfully, he thinks. How much worse would it have been if they had witnessed the incident? They'd probably be scared out of their wits, whereas the concept probably seems a little abstract now.

"The thugs didn't even make it in the front door." Natasha speaks up, her eyes glinting in a slightly satisfied way. Clint smirks slightly, but it had still been far to close for his liking. Natasha clearly feels the same sort of shame that the incident had caught her by surprise, too.

"You can stay here as long as you need to." Tony says. "I don't even charge rent. I know, I'm like the dream landlord, and some people would kill to live here... but I guess you probably miss your home, wherever the hell it is?" Tony really is more caring than he often seems.

Clint and Laura both nod. The farm, their home, is still dangerous now that the address could have been sent to God only knows how many horrible people. Tony looks at them, and says "Is there anything I can do to make you feel more at home? I can have Jarvis order similar furniture for you, if you want. I'm guessing your house doesn't look like your accommodations, and frankly, most of it isn't exactly childproof."

"You've already done more than enough. We wouldn't want to impose." Laura insists, but Clint can tell she likes the idea. Tony hit that nail right on the head. All the stark, modern, extremely expensive furniture on their floor doesn't feel very homey.

Clint notices Cooper try to sneak up to listen to them, and at least they were only talking about furniture right now.

"Hey, Pep, you wanna pick out furniture online with them later? Just charge it to my personal account." Laura opens her mouth to protest, and Tony says "Literally, I could buy you five houses and barely even notice a dip in my savings. So don't be like Bruce. He's still all 'Tony, this winter coat I have that's practically falling apart at the seams is perfectly fine. You don't have to get me a new one'." Apparently Tony did, because the coat Bruce was wearing at the zoo earlier looked new.

Bruce sends Tony a halfhearted glare, and, from where he's hiding in the doorway, Cooper tells Loki and Lila to shut up. All of them try not to laugh at the fact he thinks they haven't noticed him and the fact he would've just ruined that if they actually hadn't noticed, with varying levels of success.

Pepper says it's no problem, and they can pick out furniture online later. She's clearly not taking no
"Cooper, don't listen in on our conversation." Clint calls. His kids can be rather sneaky, just like Clint and even Laura, although she's not a spy/agent. Clint, however, is a spy, and there's no way his kids would be able to sneak up on him. Especially since Cooper had given himself away even more by telling Lila and Loki to shut up so he could listen.

They watch Cooper walk back to the center of the room with a huff, and Natasha's smirking slightly.

"So how exactly did these attackers find you?" Tony questions. "And who are these assholes anyways? I mean, attacking on Thanksgiving? Really?"

The familiar sound of Cooper and Lila fighting can now be heard from the living room. Laura gets up and goes to the doorway to see what the matter is. Apparently, Cooper wants to play with Buzz, despite almost never touching him these days, and Clint has a feeling he's just doing it to annoy Lila.

"Miss Potts, maybe you should go out to the living room." Coulson suggests lightly. "This next bit is Avengers business."

"No way." Tony says, putting a hand on Pepper's shoulder when she starts to stand up and lowering her back in the chair. "I'm gonna tell her anyways."

"Mr. Stark-"

"Look, if they went after you and your family, who's to say these assholes aren't gonna target people important to the rest of us Avengers?" Tony has a point, Clint thinks.

"I can take care of myself, Tony. Ever since I joined your company, I was in danger." That's true. It's not exactly as if this kind of potential threat is new to Pepper. She's been associated with Tony, and Iron Man, so there are plenty of people who would want to go after her. Even before Tony was Iron Man, Pepper was still a hugely influential person in what was then the world's largest weapons manufacturer.

"Yeah, and that's not okay. You've already been almost killed because of your association with me!" The billionaire continues his rant. "Pepper, you to be safe, and that means knowing what's happening."

"That frying pan just disappeared." Laura says, pointing at the stove.

"What?"

"There was a frying pan on the stove, and it just... vanished." Laura explains, and gives a worried smile. "Now you all probably think I'm going crazy from all the stress..."

"You're not." Clint pulls her close. He has a feeling Loki called the frying pan to him, or if Stitch spit it out. That's the only explanation. He'd used a frying pan during the self-defense lesson, like Rapunzel and Flynn both used a frying pan. "It was Loki, but don't mention it around him. He has these... powers. They're like magic or something... actually. Like, he can literally shape-shift. He looked like a kid a little older than Lila just a few hours ago."

"Yeah, and S.H.I.E.L.D decided to get way too interested in them when he accidently teleported onto the Helicarrier. They locked him up like a criminal and were freaking experimenting on him." Tony glares at Coulson, even though Coulson had actually voiced the opinion that Loki wasn't a
threat.

"So how did they find you?" Bruce asks quietly, getting back to the matter after taking a sip of tea from his mug.

Ugh. Clint really doesn't want to go over this. They shouldn't have been found. Their home has- or had- been a secure location for years, in the middle of nowhere and completely off the map. If it hadn't been for the damn tracking device... The more he thinks about it, the more he keeps kicking himself for the incident catching him by surprise. Also, is Pepper still supposed to be here? Coulson asked her to leave but then Tony protested, and she hasn't left yet.

"There was a tracking device in the Quinjet." Natasha speaks up when Clint doesn't say anything for a bit.

"And you didn't notice?" Tony interrupts, and Clint sighs. Both he and Natasha are kicking themselves for not having noticed- they're super spies, after all.

"Yeah, and we just decided to leave it, because I thought 'hey, there's this random tracking device on my ship and I don't want people to follow me to my house, but I'm not gonna do shit about it.'" Clint says sarcastically. "What do you think? Obviously we didn't see it, or we would've taken it off. My family's off S.H.I.E.L.D's files, as I'm sure you know since you didn't know about them from hacking stuff. I'd already disabled the usual tracking S.H.I.E.L.D uses. I thought we were completely off the map."

"You guys need better tech that can sense this or something." Tony mutters, and it definitely looks like the gears in the inventor's brain are already whirring at incredible speeds. "So where was it?"

"It was under a wing panel, which was just slightly loose, like they were trying to get it back before I stepped outside." Nat says.

"Wait... not many people could've put it there." Tony frowns. "I mean, who gets access to tinker with Quinjets? It's not like someone could've just thrown it onto your ship."

"That's what we're thinking." Coulson tells him. "One of the attackers was identified as Victor Baker, who was, in fact, a mechanic who worked on that ship."

"Ouch. That's gotta suck." Tony says, as the kids and Loki start shouting in the living room, although it doesn't sound like they're fighting with each other. "I'm assuming you took him out and dragged him in. Has he spilled any info yet?"

"We did knock all three of the attackers out." Natasha says. "We incapacitated them and dumped them in Clint's shed to deal with later. But they had hollowed-out cyanide teeth and had committed suicide before we got back to them."

"So you have no idea why this mechanic tried to kill you." Tony says. "And apparently you can't trust S.H.I.E.L.D... not that you ever really can. I mean, you guys are all spies, and you-" Tony jabs a finger at Coulson ", weren't even dead when they said you were. And you guys kept Loki hostage for no reason whatsoever until I came and broke him out. By the way, I also really don't appreciate you trying to experiment on Simba's Iron Man suit."

"We're still working on figurine out who the others were." Coulson says. "We're not exactly using S.H.I.E.L.D resources, because one of them was S.H.I.E.L.D."

Tony nods approvingly. "See, even you're starting to get it. Jarvis, can you dig up everything on Victor Baker?"
"Of course, sir."

Tony glances at Clint. "See why you shouldn't've turned down my offer for Thanksgiving dinner?"

Thor is at a complete loss for what to do as he drains the water from the bathtub and dries Sleipnir off. Sleipnir's bigger now, but not so big that he hadn't fit in the bathtub. If he'd been a healthy size, he certainly would not have fit in there, though.

The incident with the apple had clearly had a negative effect. At first, Sleipnir had looked at it like it was something in his head he was imagining, as if he'd hardly expected it to be real. Then, he'd eaten it much too quickly and had thrown it up.

Since throwing up, Sleipnir has once again been rather out of it, not seeming really aware of what's going on around him. Then again, his world did just change drastically.

Thor knows, from his experience in Asgard with the horses in the royal stables, that horses generally are incapable of throwing up. Sleipnir's clearly not an ordinary horse. For starters, he has eight legs, but secondly, if Loki is truly his parent, Sleipnir obviously has Jotun blood mixed in, and he communicates much more than the average horse does, even with All-Tongue.

It's a good thing that Sleipnir *can* throw up, because his stomach is obviously unable to handle these foods, and it would be extremely problematic if it was simply stuck down there, unable to be regurgitated. If Sleipnir had been unable to throw up, he may have died from being overfed and having no way to digest it.

That thought is horrifying, that Thor would have been responsible for the death of a creature who had already been so badly mistreated that he looks like Death.

After Thor dries Sleipnir off, he slowly walks the horse out of the bathroom. It's more awkward now that Sleipnir no longer fits nicely in Thor's arms, like when Thor had smuggled him out of Asgard.

When he gets out, he sees that either Jane or Darcy had cleaned up the vomited apple chunks and bile from the floor when Thor was bathing Sleipnir for the second time.

Sleipnir is staring at the spot as in horror, ears rapidly swiveling back and forth, a sign that means the horses in the palace stables are anxious.

"Gone gone no I needed that where'd it go where did it GO?! Where?!!" Listening to Sleipnir isn't like interpreting what he's thinking in his mind. Thor actually hears it, even though he doesn't speak, and Sleipnir even *sounds* anxious. It's like his eyes and body somehow convey exactly what he's thinking, or that he's putting his thoughts into Thor's head or something.

"Why do you fret, Sleipnir?" Thor asks, although the horse clearly doesn't hear him. He stumbles away from Thor, towards Jane and Darcy.

"Sleip-nir?" Jane's still unfamiliar with the name. "We cleaned it..."

"Gone?" Sleipnir starts mouthing the floor as if to find any morsel.

"Yeah, most people don't want barf on their floor." Darcy says. "Why are you- wait, were you going to *eat* it?!"

As Darcy asks that, it dawns on Thor that Sleipnir is indeed acting like he was saving it for later,
and now his only hope of food is gone. The thought is horribly sad.

"You were actually going to eat your vomit? That's not even fit for consumption!" Jane gasps, expression shifting between shock, disgust, horror and sadness. "And the apple made you throw up before, so you would've just thrown it up again."

Had Loki's horse ever had to eat something he threw up in the dungeons? Thor doesn't even want to know what the prisoners in the lower dungeons were fed in the first place, but it was obviously far too little. Judging how they'd been treated in every other aspect, Thor wouldn't be surprised if they were fed something so disgusting that the only way anyone would ever eat it was if they were starving.

Which Sleipnir and those prisoners clearly were, and it would never end for them. There is no starving to death for Asgardians like there is for Midgardians.

Thor thinks of all the food served in the palace feast halls that had been unconsumed and undoubtedly been disposed of by servants or slaves. How he himself, in acts of a spoiled prince, had sometimes deemed food to be beneath him, or had ordered for a meal to be brought to his chambers only to decide he no longer wanted that particular dish when it arrived. These sorts of scenarios usually ended with him throwing perfectly good food to the ground. There was the time, after his not-coronation, when he'd overturned an entire table covered with food in rage before deciding to go to Jotunheim and teach the Jotuns a lesson.

Sleipnir most likely would have done literally anything for just a bite of any of that food. Any of the prisoners in the dungeons would have done anything, and yet it had gone to waste when there were starving beings hidden below the palace.

Thor's stomach churns with horrible guilt as he thinks about this.

"Sleipnir, you will get proper food- good food- here, whenever you require or wish for it." Thor vows. "You will not go hungry ever again."

Sleipnir's eyes are saying something incomprehensible about a scar and... hyenas? What are those? And what are lions? Maybe he's a little touched in the head. Who wouldn't be, after what he'd been through.

Darcy asks something about the King of Lions.

"Now, you need nourishment." Thor's words don't stop the rambling he hears from Sleipnir in the back of his head, although it eventually dies down when Sleipnir looks out the dark sky through the window, not seeming to pay attention to Thor.

Even though Sleipnir wouldn't die without it, food is still considered a necessity. Withholding something basic like food should be criminal, whoever did it should have been put in the dungeons instead of Sleipnir. Even slaves are fed adequately, although that may be because starving slaves are weak and cannot do much work. Granted, what they do get is not particularly appetizing, but at least their needs are met- well, except for the slave he'd seen in the dungeon Sleipnir had been in.

Thor doesn't know what exactly to feed Sleipnir, and rummages through the cupboards in search of something. Sleipnir eating the apple wasn't even planned, and had ended badly. Even as Sleipnir was devouring it as if it might disappear at any second, Thor had though that maybe he shouldn't be eating that much, and he'd been right.

Since Sleipnir is apparently Loki's child- Thor still has no idea how that's supposed to work- and
therefore not fully a horse, does that mean he can eat things horses generally would not? Thor isn't sure, but he's not sure the cereal of the Captain of Crunch would be a good choice, although Thor enjoys it, himself. The delicious Tarts of Pop are probably out, too.

Thor eventually finds a can of sliced, soft carrots, which, according to Jane, are not yet past their date of expiration. Maybe these will work. Hopefully.

Thor finds a 'can opener' and twists the crank to peel off the metal top of the can. He's not looking when he sets it down, so the can opener falls from the counter and skitters across the floor to Sleipnir, who looks at it with recognition, somehow.

When Darcy goes to pick it up, Sleipnir puts a hoof over it and flattens his ears back, clearly not wanting to give it up for some reason. He tries to spin it around slightly on the ground before picking it up in his mouth, almost like a dog would. He thinks it is food, Thor realizes.

"That is not food." Thor tells him, going to take it out of Sleipnir's mouth.

'I know.' The eyes say quite clearly as Sleipnir hides behind Darcy. The tone in Thor's head sounding like an exasperated child, and the horse's eyes roll just like a human's. Sleipnir drops the can opener, but for some reason still will not let anyone take it, even though he apparently knows it is not food. What interest does he have in a can opener?

Thor approaches him with the can of carrots. "This is food." He pulls a carrot out and holds it in his palm for Sleipnir to eat.

Sleipnir eyes him suspiciously. Thor doesn't know how often the guards went down there. Would they dangle food in front of the prisoners' faces only to cruelly deny it from them?

The horse completely refuses to take the food from Thor's hand, much to Thor's frustration. Sleipnir needs to eat, why is he not eating?

Darcy grabs the can from Thor and fishes out a carrot herself. "He scared." She says to Thor, as she offers the carrot to Sleipnir.

Sleipnir lowers his head to sniff the carrot in Darcy's open palm. Instead of eating it, he knocks the can out of her other hand with his nose. The can clatters to the floor, spilling soft carrot slices onto the tiles.

He stands over the food protectively, but also looks completely exhausted, and it's not long before he falls asleep. He still hasn't eaten anything. Jane goes and drapes a blanket over Sleipnir's terribly thin frame.

Thor has a feeling that, in the dungeon, Sleipnir had often had to stretch out the meager rations he was apparently given so rarely, since he probably never knew when, or if, his next meal was coming.

"He needs to eat." Thor says.

"He looks like he needs to sleep. And forcing him to eat might make things worse." Jane says.

"I think I'll retire for the night as well." Thor says, despite the fact the sun has not even set yet. It's been a confusing day. Jane looks like she wants to ask more about what's happening, but then nods.

Twenty minutes later, Thor in bed, but sleep eludes him.
He remembers, now, watching Loki offer food to thin air, remembers mocking Loki for it with Sif and the Warriors Three. He sees the memories in his mind's eye, watches Odin furiously punishing Loki for it whenever he saw.

The Allfather had always been adamant that Loki's friends- or family, in Sleipnir's case?- were not real. But he had to have known.

He knew. Thor's hands ball into fists. Father knew all along, but he still told Loki they weren't real. He hurt Loki for talking to them! After all, if Odin hadn't known, why would he have gotten so angry about Loki talking to Sleipnir? He was probably worried Loki would find out the truth.

Thor is even more horrified at what Father had done. He must have known Sleipnir was real, yet he'd insisted he wasn't and had punished Loki for trying to feed his not-so-imaginary friend, or for even talking to him. Yet all along, most likely, Sleipnir had been starving in the darkest depths of the dungeons. Thor doesn't actually know how long Sleipnir was down there, but it was clearly too long.

Thor never imagined his father to be capable of such cruelty, but he should not be able to get away with it. He should face consequences.

Hours later, when the sun has set and Jane had crawled into bed next to him, Thor is still awake. He wraps his beloved Jane in his arms, wondering what would happen if she knew of his treatment of Loki.

Tomorrow, he will call Tony Stark and tell him about Sleipnir.

He knows he will have to tell Jane about how he'd treated Loki sometime, and it may very well be brought up during his conversation with Tony tomorrow. He fears Jane's reaction to finding out the horrible things he'd done. He does not want to lose her, but he could not particularly blame her if she no longer wanted to be with him.

A few tears slowly travel down his cheeks. It will be his fault that she might leave him.

But for the first time, Thor is on the same side as Tony and the other Avengers on the issue of Loki and Sleipnir, rather than Odin and the rest of Asgard.

As the other adults go into the kitchen, Loki stays out in the living room with his zoo. He doesn't really want to leave these kids alone with it. What if they try to take his toys? Well, he guesses Jarvis would make sure they wouldn't, so he could leave.

Cooper had seemed mean at first, hitting him with the lightsaber, but he'd actually apologized. They never did that in Asgard, not even when they tricked him.

Loki hopes they're not like the other kids were like when Loki was a child in Asgard. At first, when he'd been really little he thinks, but it's hard to remember when exactly, Loki had been ecstatic that they wanted to play with him. He had even thought they were his friends, until that time he got tricked by that servant and the Warriors Three.

Whenever Thor actually included Loki in a game of pretend as a kid, Loki was always the evil Frost Giant that would be slain rather violently. It fit, since he'd even had his Jotun skin sometimes then. It wasn't fun at all, especially when Thor hit him with wooden swords, which hurt more than that thing Cooper hit him with a little bit ago. Loki would have rather been in the library reading or off playing his own games, but Thor and his friends sometimes dragged him in to be the villain in their games.
Of course, wooden swords are nothing compared to the whips Odin used sometimes, or the weapons guards would use on him when he did something bad.

Loki rocks back and forth anxiously, trying to get Asgard out of his head.

The kids at that place Tony works at were really fun, especially Claire, who was probably a little younger than Lila. Clint is pretty fun, so maybe his kids are too?

Loki gently sets Jormungand in the bin that's the snake exhibit, planning on letting him out later, like Harry did, but Loki couldn't do with the snakes at the zoo earlier today. Jormungand's body actually feels even better than it used to not long ago, when he transformed from that tube thing in Tony's lab.

Jormungand doesn't move right now, but he feels... real. More real than ever before, but he's not. Everyone in Asgard made sure he knew he's a crazy idiot, because his Monster Family isn't real. Especially Odin, who got really mad when Loki talked about them, or to them. Sometimes he'd get flogged by the Allfather himself for it instead of one of the guards.

"Can I touch your snake... um, Your-ma-gund?" Cooper asks, still botching Jormungand's name. Loki knows what it's like to not get stuff out of his mouth right. Cooper glances back towards the kitchen, as if someone will tell him not to. Probably Laura. She hadn't seemed to like Jormungand at all, so maybe her kids don't really.

Loki stares at him, not sure if the boy really means this or if he's trying to trick him, like that servant. What if he tries to hurt Jormungand? Nobody's allowed to hurt Jormungand or anyone in Loki's pretend Monster Family. Family means you look out for each other.

Loki's not sure what Cooper and Lila will think of his Monster Family. Since these kids are smaller than him, and it hadn't hurt when Cooper hit him with that blue thing.

"No." Loki mutters, leaning over the bin with Jormungand in it protectively. "He's mine."

"Why not?!" Cooper demands. "Please? I won't hurt him. I wish I had a pet snake."

Jormungand slowly slithers out of the bin, and Cooper gently strokes him. Loki watches anxiously, but Cooper really doesn't seem to be hurting Jormungand. Jormungand sends Loki a look that says he's not lying.

That's a relief.

Lila hugs Baloo, squealing "He's so big and squishy!" Lila kind of reminds Loki of little Anna in Frozen, and Anna definitely would be a great friend. Maybe she wouldn't hate him for being a Jotun or doing magic, just like his Tony doesn't.

"Baloo's the bear exhibit." Loki says- there had been bears at the zoo earlier today. Baloo's actually the only bear he has, and by far his biggest toy. Lila's right about him being really huggable. She has a white animal that Loki's pretty sure is another bear sticking out of her backpack, along with some dolls. Her backpack is brown, fuzzy. It also has a face on it, and a diagonal silver stripe, but it doesn't actually look like another toy, like Stitch does.

"Cheesball is a bear! She's a polar bear!" Loki smiles, liking that his guess about the white animal being another bear was right, as Lila pulls the toy bear out of her backpack. Loki likes getting things right. But the name... Loki thinks All-Tongue (or his own stupid brain) is messing up again. Cheese ball?
When he asks, Lila repeats it and says that yes, her bear's name is Cheeseball. Jarvis says that's exactly what that sounds like - a ball made of cheese - but not real cheese, which makes no sense - and it leaves your fingers orange. Lila and Cooper both agree they're really tasty, and Loki's not sure whether they're talking about the bear or not anymore. Loki is about to lick Cheeseball the bear, but Lila yanks him away. Glancing at his fingers, Loki sees they're not orange.

"Hi Baloo! I'm Cheeseball. I moved in from the arctic." Lila says, as Cheeseball. Wait, polar bears live in snow and ice, like penguins? Loki doesn't think they have polar bears or penguins in Jotunheim, but the place of Midgard that they live here sounds a lot like Jotunheim. Lila then replies for Baloo, in a lower voice that sounds absolutely nothing like Baloo's "Hi, Cheeseball. Have you ever been to the jungle?"

"He lives in the jungles in In-dia, with Mowgli and Bagheera, 'xcept Mowgli went to live in the man village." Loki bounces but frowns slightly. "That was really dumb. The jungle's lots 'n lots better, 'cause they can't hit you there if they're not there! I was Mowgli not long ago."

"You're too old to be Mowgli." Cooper states, staring at him. "You're like at least as old as Dad. Mowgli's like my age. I'm nine."

"Nine? What... nine whats?" Loki asks, confused. It can't be centuries. Cooper would look a lot older if he was nine centuries old, since he'd be almost as old as Loki. Unless he can turn into a kid too? But people on Midgard can't do that, right?

"Nine... years old." Cooper looks at him strangely, like he shouldn't have had to ask. Oh, years. Nine years is nothing, but Midgardians live really short lives. Tony said Harry is almost eleven years old, Loki remembers with a pout, so Cooper's younger.

This means Tony's going to die way before Loki, and that can't happen!

"I'm almost six." Lila announces proudly. "How old are you? Mommy won't answer that question."

"One thousand." Loki answers. "Plus little bits, I think." Maybe not even a full century over one thousand.

Both kids laugh as if he'd told a great joke. "No! You're lying! Nobody's a thousand!" That's a lie, because Loki's over a thousand, and Thor and the Warriors Three, and Odin and Frigga and Heimdall and a ton of other people are all older than Loki is. Volstagg is older than Thor.

"When's your birthday? Mine's November 23." Cooper says. "I got the Lego Millennium Falcon! It's so cool!"

"My birthday is December 6, and it's taking fooor-veeeerrrr!" Lila moans and then asks what day it is. Jarvis answers that it's November 30. Lila counts on her fingers. "That's six days from now! And then there's Christmas so I get lots and lots of presents in December! But then I don't get any more presents for almost another year."

"I dunno when mine is." Loki looks at his hands. Nobody in Asgard knew, since he was born in Jotunheim, although it's not like they would've celebrated it in Asgard even if they had known, so it almost doesn't matter. Although it would be nice to have a birthday like everyone else.

"How do you not know your birthday?!" Lila asks, shocked.

"Do you not celebrate birthdays on your planet?" Cooper asks after a bit. "We have parties here, and kids bring cake into school when it's their birthday."
"Thor got them, but I never dids." Loki mumbles.

"You know Thor, like the Avenger?" Cooper asks jealously. "You're so lucky! You know like all the Avengers, don't you? Wait, did you know Thor for a while?"

"I don't wanna talk 'bout Thor! He's mean!"

"Did he hurt you? Did he hit you with his hammer? Dad said he only hits bad guys, but he said you're not a bad guy. He says you got hurt there." Cooper doesn't sound quite as jealous.

Loki covers his ears and starts rocking back and forth, humming to drown Cooper out.

Someone taps him, and Loki opens his eyes.

"Have you really met Captain America?" Cooper asks jealously. "Mr. Stark, Iron Man, said in the hotel that he had Thanksgiving dinner with Captain America, and he keeps saying he's cooler than him."

Loki nods. "Yeah, we did, but my Tony's right that he's more awesome than Steve."

"Can Jessie be the zookeeper?" Lila asks out of nowhere. "She's really good with animals." Lila pulls a string on the 'cow-girl' doll's back, and Jessie says "Yodel-ay-hee-hoo!" Jessie talks like Simba does when you squeeze his ear and he doesn't move his mouth or change his face at all. Simba moves his head, then, but Jessie doesn't even do that.

Loki sighs in relief, glad they're not talking about Thor or Asgard. He squeezes Simba's ear to show them that Simba can talk just like Jessie. Well, he can do even more than Jessie recently, but Simba isn't alive right now, so he just moves his head and tail slightly as a snippet of I Just Can't Wait To Be King plays.

Lila picks up Loki's stuffed Maximus, obviously recognizing the horse, because she says his name. She must know about Rapunzel, too, then.

"He's mine." Loki says, just so everyone knows, as Lila puts Jessie on Maximus and makes them go up to various exhibits to feed the tiny animals imaginary food. Loki's pretty sure birds don't eat pigs, though. Or do some of the Midgardian ones do it? The zoo hadn't said anything about that, but he had learned that owls eat mice and other small rodents, and sometimes even rabbits. Loki ate rabbits in Asgard, sometimes, but Loki hasn't eaten one on Midgard yet.

Cooper holds up a golden stuffed animal about the same size as Simba- a dog, Loki realizes- and asks "Can Lucky try on Simba's Iron Man suit?"

"Lucky?" Loki asks. That sounds almost the same as his name, but Loki doesn't know if he's lucky. Well, he was really lucky to end up with Tony, but he certainly wasn't lucky in Asgard.

"Yeah, Lucky the Pizza Dog." Cooper says, hugging the golden dog, who's missing his left eye. Loki guessed a dog correctly, too! Dogs are kind of like wolves, but wolves are grey. "His tag said his name was Arrow, but that's a dumb name. Lucky's better. Dad says so too."

"Hey, how comes he just only gots one eye?" Loki doesn't like that, and the words tumble anxiously from his mouth, sounding dumb. It makes him think of Odin and the other Furious Man, both of whom are missing eyes, because why else would they wear eyepatches? It's Odin's right eye that's missing (apparently he lost it in the war against Jotunheim when he took Loki), whereas the Fury guy's eyepatch is over his left eye. Lucky isn't wearing an eyepatch like they do, but he's still missing his left eye.
"He had a fight with a rabid badger." Cooper says, and Loki blinks in surprise. Also, what's a badger? After a bit, Cooper says "It fell off, and I lost the button."

"What... kind? No, breed! Is he a... be-agle? That's what breed Snoopy is. I'm not but my Tony calls me Snoopy, and I even haves his house." Tony had gotten an even better tent-like thing for the therapy room that looks just like Snoopy's red doghouse. It's sturdy and big enough that Loki can lay across the top like Snoopy (though it's flat for a bit instead of really pointy like Snoopy's), and tall enough that he can stand up in it, although only in the center where the roof is the highest—he has to crouch when it slants.

"No. He's a golden retriever." Cooper pauses, looking at Lucky. "Or maybe a Lab. Arf arf?" He makes Lucky run after Maximus and Jessie, who are still being moved by Lila.

"Lucky can be Jessie's pet dog!" Lila announces.

"No he's not!" Cooper says, making Lucky growl and pretend to bite Jessie. Lila scowls, saying that that's not how it's supposed to go.

Loki grabs Stitch. Lilo and Stitch aren't actually moving right now, and neither is Simba, so they look like lifeless toys, just like all the others. Loki knows it wouldn't have been pretty if he brought toys to life in Asgard (not that he ever had any toys there to begin with, and Thor certainly hadn't shared), and he's not sure if Cooper and Lila would react the same way or not.

"Everyone thought Stitch was a dog. Lilo said he used'ta be a collie b'fore he got ran over, but Nani, she thought he was a ko-ala... a evil koala. Lilo and Stitch always find a home for each of Jumba's 'xper'ments. Their one true place where they belong."

Loki's One True Place is wherever his Tony and Bruce— but especially Tony—are.

"Can Lucky try on the Iron Man suit? Please?" Cooper almost begs.

Loki shakes his head no and clutches Simba tighter. It's Simba's suit, he made it for Simba.

"Why not? I wanna try it on Lucky!" Cooper sulks.

"We have'ta rescue the animals and find their's one true place too." Loki says to Lilo and Stitch. "It's NOT cages! Cages are bad! But Gantu got them an' said the animals are gonna stay locked up forever and ever an' never ever get out! He trapped Mufasa and Sarabi 'n Nala!"

They're trapped like M'wasi and Sukari at the zoo, but this cage is even worse. After all, these bins are as bare those glass capsules Gantu catches experiments in, or the petri dish cell Loki had been stuck in himself. At least at the zoo the animals had things that are in nature, like rocks and water and grass and stuff.

In Loki's mind, the bins switch from a zoo to more of a prison, although that's kind of what a zoo is anyways.

Loki doesn't have a Gantu toy, and he grabs his Scar figurine from the bin of lions. Scar is an evil lion so of course he's going to be the villain in this game. "Scar wants to rule over all the Nine Realms, not just Pride Rock! He's planning to kill Mufasa 'gain and the rest of the pride, and he's gonna kill the horses so the hy'nas can eat them!" He makes Scar stalk towards the bin with his lions. Cooper makes Lucky attack Scar, and the stuffed dog is a lot bigger than the little plastic lion, but Scar doesn't die. Besides, Simba's supposed to stop him.

"They can't 'scape 'cause Gantu captured them!" Loki cries. "He tries to capture Stitch a lot, 'cause
Stitch is blue."

"Mira Nova is blue." Lila says and she'd mentioned this person before. Loki tenses, but Lila chatters on excitedly. "She's Buzz's partner in the Star Command show, which is like so old. She's awesome! She's a princess but she's a Space Ranger too, and she's brave and strong. And she can go through walls." Lila had mentioned this Mira person earlier, but Loki has no idea what she's talking about.

Jarvis pulls up a holographic drawing of a blue woman with red-orange hair, wearing a white suit with green bits. Lila actually seems to like someone who's blue, because she says that she's asking for a Mira Nova doll for her birthday.

Cooper and Lila both gasp, startled.

"That's a hologram, like in Star Wars..." Cooper says, eyes wide with excitement as he pokes the picture, and it spins around in midair.

Loki frowns. Why do stars have wars? Is it like how the scorpion would try to kill Orion in the sky, if Sagittarius the Archer wasn't watching the scorpion to make sure it doesn't travel across the sky to do that? Loki doesn't want starts to fight, that makes them seem too much like Ass-Guard.

"Stars are nice! No fighting. They're nice light, but you can't touch them." Right, they were talking about holograms. "Holograms are lights, too, just fake just air, 'cause you can see through 'em. You can't touch light even when you do, you don't feel it." Jarvis was right about holograms being like illusions, except illusions look solid, and recently Loki kind of felt Fenrir, even though his hand still went through his wolf.

"The ones in movies are all blue but this has different colors." Lila sounds amazed.

"Lots of Tony's are blue. Jarvis is blue sometimes." Loki tells them. "Blue's not bad!" He waits for someone to contradict him, but Cooper says blue is his favorite color, like Claire had.

Blue not being bad is something he wouldn't have believed in Asgard, but that he's learning here. Stitch is blue, and so are Genie and Sulley and this Mira person Lila likes, apparently. Kurt's blue, too, and Loki met him for real. Of course, Loki's really blue, and Elsa probably is, too.

"Can you make any color?" Cooper asks Jarvis. Loki knows the answer to that, since he's painted with holograms and used lots of colors. Cooper's next question is one he has no clue about, though. "How come you guys get holograms here? They're supposed to be sci-fi. Why don't we have holograms at our house? It's not fair you guys get all the holograms."

Wait, they don't have them everywhere?

"Yes, holograms come in every color, young Mr. Barton, although Sir is partial to blue." Jarvis answers patiently. "As for why holograms are not everywhere, the technology is currently too expensive for the general public to afford."

"Can you make an Iron Man suit over Lucky, Jarvis?" Cooper asks hopefully, holding the dog up.

"I hope you don't mind, Mr. Loki." Jarvis says. "Here you go, young Mr. Barton." A holographic Man of Iron suit appears over Lucky, like when Loki had been designing Simba's before Jarvis and Dum-E made it real. Cooper grins.

Simba's Man of Iron suit is way better than that, Loki thinks, hugging his lion. That one doesn't even have a real arc reactor! And Simba's suit is going to fly soon. So Simba's still the best!
"You can make any color?" Lila asks, eyes wide.

"Indeed, young Miss Barton." A holographic rainbow appears as proof.

"The Bifrost!" Loki shouts as he runs through it, laughing. The Bifrost was one of the few places in Asgard he actually liked, along with the stables, the fields, and the library, but he almost never got to go to the Bifrost.

Lila follows him as they repeatedly run through the rainbow of holographic colors. Lila says Tinker Bell and her fairy friends slid down a rainbow in a short video.

Hologram Tink suddenly flutters in front of Lila's face, and she shrieks that this is even better than her Tink doll at home. She reaches out to grab the fairy, but her hand passes through her and she looks slightly upset that she can't actually hold Tink.

Then another holographic fairy appears, with white hair that's slightly spiked up and an icy-blue dress and leggings. She has the exact same wings as Tink, and white balls on the tops of her shoes. "Periwinkle!" Lila shouts. She'd mentioned before that Periwinkle is Tink's twin sister, and that only they have the same wings and the balls on their shoes.

Periwinkle really is a lot like Elsa, and Jarvis makes her shoot little holographic snowflakes. Lila actually seems to like that, but then again, she'd seemed to really like Loki's Elsa doll. Would she hate Jotuns?

Cooper groans as Loki and Lila let the two holographic fairies fly between them, and Loki wriggles his shoulders, giggling uncontrollably.

"Jarvis, you wanna be Scar?" Loki asks, flicking his fingers hopefully. Jarvis does a really good Scar voice, even though he's not evil, so he's been Scar a lot, starting on the day Loki got Simba.

"Of course, Mr. Loki. If you wish, I can even do more than simply provide a voice. Would you like a holographic illusion?" Loki nods, excited. A couple seconds later, there's a holographic 3D Scar standing in the room. He's as big as the lions in the zoo were, but he's slightly transparent, like all holograms.

Lila and Cooper gasp.

Clapping his hands and grinning at one of Jarvis' cameras as he tosses his Scar figurine off to the side, Loki tells him "You're the best, Jarvis!"

"Who is this Jarvis? I believe you meant Scar, but at least you were right about me being the best." Hologram Scar's voice has the same sort of accent that Jarvis and Loki himself have, but eviler. Loki had actually forgotten about him.

"He looks like you." Lila says, looking between Scar and Loki. "You have green eyes and he has green eyes, and you both have long black hair."

"I'm not Scar!" Loki protests. "Scar's real evil, but just 'cause he is, not all lions are bad."

"Scar's bad." Lila nods. Cooper has wandered off by the entrance to the kitchen.

"Now, are you quite done gaping like my idiotic hyena henchmen?" Scar asks disdainfully. "I am rather busy, you know, trying to take over and dispose of my worthless brother Mufasa." Scar says the name as if it leaves a bad taste in his mouth. "And Simba too. Then I will be king!"
Loki holds up Simba and speaks for him, like he used to do all the time in his games until Simba came alive. "Uncle Scar-"

"Well, if it isn't my nephew, the monkey." Scar interrupts disdainfully. "The monkey who is sadly mistaken in believing he's going to be king of Pride Rock, when in fact I will be king of much more than that. You will all kneel before me when I rule over all of the Nine Realms!" Jarvis was listening to the Nine Realms bit! Well, Jarvis always listens, but still. And Scar said he'd be a monkey's uncle in the movie.

"Guys, shut up. I'm trying to listen." Cooper says from the doorway by the kitchen, apparently trying to eavesdrop on whatever they're talking about in there, even though whatever they're talking about can't be nearly as important as making sure Scar doesn't conquer the Nine Realms.

"Cooper, don't listen in on our conversation!" Clint says through one of the holes in the wall separating the bar from the kitchen. "Go play or something. I'll know if you're not."

Cooper scowls and walks away from the kitchen, although when the holographic Man of Iron suit forms around Lucky again, he grins, making Lucky fly around with his hands.

Loki can't help but laugh when Scar starts singing. "I'll be King undisputed, respected, saluted and seen for the wonder I am! Yes my teeth and ambitions are bared! Be prepared!" Loki finds himself humming along without even realizing it.

"That's about me, not you." Scar tells him.

"You're not gonna ever be's a king!" Loki shouts as Simba. "Not of Pride Rock and not the Nine neither!"

"Oh really? And a puny lion cub like you is going to stop me? Even if you do have-" Scar glances at Simba's Man of Iron suit. "-some kind of armor."

Lila grabs Cheeseball the polar bear and then starts flipping bins and boxes with animals in them over, so they're trapped under them, instead of just in them. Some of the boxes aren't even clear, so it must be really dark in them. "Ha ha ha!" Lila laughs, apparently as Cheeseball. "Now you animals will never get away! I will be queen of the universe!"

"I am not going to rule with a polar bear." Scar says scornfully. "And if you think you are going to beat me, you white lump of fur, you are sorely mistaken. It's too hot for you here, anyways."

"I'm mellii-tiiiing!" Lila cries as Cheeseball, slowly making her sink to the floor.

"It's not like a snowman." Cooper rolls his eyes rather grumpily. "She won't melt. This is dumb."

"She's a snow polar bear, so she does melt." Lila sticks out her tongue at Cooper and throws Cheeseball at him. Cooper dodges, before chucking Cheeseball back in retaliation. Lila doesn't pick up Cheeseball again. Apparently the polar bear is dead, and she does kind of look like a lump of snow, if snow was fuzzy.

"You know, perhaps I won't kill any of these animals." Scar pauses thoughtfully. Right, they're supposed to be stopping him. "What would be the fun in ruling if I didn't have anyone to grovel at my feet?"

"But you have'ta feed animals in zoos and you're not gonna!" Loki tells him. After all, Scar hadn't fed his subjects in the movie, and the hyenas complained until Scar yelled at them. "You can't just starve 'em."
"Woody will save the horses!" Lila shouts, pulling a string on Woody's back.

"Reach for the sky!" Woody talks in the same non-living way as Jessie and sometimes Simba, and he has a string just like Jessie. Lila shakes Woody so his legs flop as if he's running, and charges rather fearlessly towards Scar, holding Woody in front of her. Scar moves in between Lila and the bin with the horses.

"Really?" Scar arches an eyebrow scornfully. "You're sending a tiny man to stop me and rescue the horses? I think I'll eat him." He lunges so Lila drops Woody. The 'cow boy' doll lands in a heap on the floor, and Scar stands over him to prevent him from getting away.

"Buzz Lightyear to the rescue!" Lila shouts, running back to grab another toy that's sticking out of her backpack. This one looks familiar, in a green and white suit with a couple purple accents and a weird bubble thing over his head. The blue alien Mira's suit in the picture Jarvis showed is a lot like Buzz's.

Loki realizes where he'd seen this Buzz Lightyear man on the American Day of Giving Thanks, along with the huge floating Snoopy. Lila presses a red button on Buzz's chest, and purple wings pop out with little lights blinking on the end of them. Loki laughs. Tony's suits should do that! Maybe they can make Loki's Man of Iron suit do that? They're going to make it fly soon.

"I wanna be Buzz!" Cooper says, grabbing for him. Lila tries to pull Buzz away, and Cooper's voice rises. "He's mine, Lila! Give him!"

"Nooooo! You never even play with him!" Lila's voice is even louder, as Cooper tries to tug the action figure from her hands.

"Young Mr. Barton, Ms. Barton, might I suggest sharing Buzz Lightyear?" Jarvis speaks up, not as Scar, but in his usual polite tone. They don't even seem to hear him, and Cooper grabs Jessie like a hostage. "Also, young Mr. Barton, I thought you were excited that Lucky had a holographic Iron Man suit."

"What's going on in here?" Laura asks, standing at the entrance to the kitchen, and she clearly doesn't see the Scar hologram. Hoping he's not in trouble, Loki points wordlessly as Lila tries to grab Woody from Cooper. Clint wouldn't shoot Loki with an arrow for this, right? That one time in the rafters had apparently been an accident, but that time he ended up in the other rafters and then in the petri dish. And Son of Coul is still here, but Loki doesn't think Son of Coul actually put him in there.

"Cooper, give Jessie back to Lila." Laura says. Cooper and Lila stop fighting for a second and look at their mother.

"She started it! She wouldn't give me Buzz!" Cooper protests, still holding Jessie out of Lila's reach.

"If you guys keep fighting over Buzz, I'm going to take him and neither of you will get to play with him." Laura gives them a pointed look. "Lila, Buzz is Cooper's toy, so he gets first pick. Cooper, if you're only trying to claim Buzz back to get on your sister's nerves, that's really not nice of you. You hardly play with him these days."

Cooper scowls as Laura gives him a knowing look. He groans, lets go of Buzz, and throws Jessie to the ground. "Stop Cooper!" Lila shouts, picking up Jessie and carefully replacing her helmet-hat thing.
Cooper doesn't respond, stomping away. He grabs Lucky the Pizza Dog and sulks on the floor. Lucky's holographic Man of Iron suit is gone now.

"Cooper, I get that you're upset about having to move." Laura says in a slightly softer voice. "I miss our home too. But you can't take your anger out on your sister. Or any of us."

"Their game is stupid." Cooper mutters.

"Well, you don't have to play it. You have your own toys." Laura says.

As Lila pretends Buzz is flying through the air, Loki does the same with Simba. He's made his toys actually fly plenty of times before with his magic, even when the toys weren't real, but he doesn't this time.

Laura goes back into the kitchen.

After some more sulking, Cooper gets up, muttering that "Batman is cooler than Buzz." From his backpack (which looks like Steve's shield, but still isn't nearly as great as Stitch) he pulls out a black sort of car thing that looks like it's made of little bricks. He starts driving it along the floor towards Scar.

"It's the Batmobile." Cooper explains when Loki asks what it is. "Mr. Coulson got it for me yesterday, 'cause I couldn't take my other Legos." He seems rather upset, and Loki has no clue what 'legos' are.

"Son of Coul got it?" Loki repeats in disbelief. Cooper nods while Lila shouts that Coulson had given Cheeseball to her yesterday. Why did Son of Coul get them toys when he didn't give Simba back to Loki? Not that Loki's at all surprised that he's treated differently, he just couldn't imagine the man getting anyone toys.

Well, he had given Olaf to Loki when he was in the petri dish cell, but he hadn't given Simba back!

"It's Batman's car." Cooper explains. "He has like the coolest car ever! Look!" Cooper flicks a little switch, and a tiny plastic thing shoots out. Cars are dumb, though.

"Where's the Man of Bats?" Tony had mentioned this Man of Bats guy at the zoo.

"It's Bat-man." Cooper says slowly, but not like Loki's dumb. "They probably don't have him where you're from." He opens a little cockpit thing and takes a tiny figure out, smaller than Loki's Disney figurines or origami even. He's wearing a black cape and a hood-mask thing with pointed ears.

Loki's pretty sure he had actually seen the Man of Bats on Halloween.

"My Tony says he's like the Man of Bats, 'cause he's a billionaire and a hero, but my Tony's way more awesome!" Loki flaps his hands. Cars are dumb, they could never beat a Man of Iron suit in an awesomeness contest! Tony's suits fly, and Loki's and Simba's will soon, too.

"But Batman isn't real." Cooper says, and Loki laughs. Tony's infinitely more awesome than someone who's not real. Then again, Tony hadn't really been Hulk when he'd worn that costume, and Bruce isn't really Captain America. Loki's not Man of Iron.

"Help!" Lila cries in what Loki thinks is her Woody voice. Woody is still between Scar's paws.

"Don't worry, Woody, I'll save you!" Lila grabs Jessie and rushes at Scar. Scar lunges, and Lila moves Jessie out of the way. "I can't get close enough! We need a... a diservion, but Buzz is still
caught!" Lila shouts as Jessie, now making Jessie dodge Scar's attacks.

"Tink and Peri, now!" Lila shouts, and the holographic fairies appear, darting around Scar, who's clearly annoyed.

While Scar is distracted by the pixies, Lila ducks down and grabs Woody from between Scar's feet. "Thanks for saving me, partner!" She says as Woody once he's free.

"No problem, Woody!"

"We have to stop Scar from hurting the animals." Loki starts playing again, holding Simba as if he's flying, and heading towards the animals.

"Surprise! Ha ha ha ha ha!" A holographic Gantu suddenly appears out of nowhere, standing between them and the zoo. Right, Gantu's the one who captured them in the first place. He's really big, of course, as tall as the ceiling, taller than even Hulk. Gantu is even bigger in the movie, Loki thinks (Jarvis said he was twenty feet tall once, more than three of Loki stacked together), but for some reason shrunk to around this size in the show. He's probably not more than twice Loki's height now, if that.

Lila and Cooper both gape even more than they had at Scar. "The Big Dummy!" Loki says for Lilo, but he can't get her voice right. Stitch growls without Loki, ears going back, and coming alive a little. The kids are too busy staring at Gantu to notice, though.

Gantu swings a massive hand at Buzz. It passes through him, but Lila pretends Buzz was knocked out of the air before trapping him under a plastic bin like the animals. "Oh no! The big gray guy put Buzz in a cell that even his laser can't break!" Lila lifts the bin up and presses the button on Buzz's arm, and the little blinking light on his right forearm lights up accompanied by an odd sound. Lila called it a laser, but it's not, because Loki's seen real lasers in Tony's lab, although Tony won't let him touch them.

Gantu and Scar both laugh evilly.

Loki chucks Stitch at Gantu's face, but the blue alien backpack just goes right through the huge holographic grey alien. Gantu looks like he's stepping on Stitch, who doesn't move.

"No!" Loki runs up to Gantu and starts kicking him and making his Lilo doll kick him too, even though their feet go right through him. "Stop it, little earth girl." Gantu growls, and it takes a second for Loki to realize he's talking to Lilo, not calling Loki a girl.

He dives past Gantu while the alien is trying, unsuccessfully, to crush Stitch. A huge grey hand with only two fingers and a thumb reaches down towards Loki, but it misses him and it would've just passed through him anyways.

Loki laughs, and turns towards the upside-down bin that's trapping Jormungand.

"Sorry 'bouts him." Loki says, sort of quoting Harry. "He doesn't know what it's like, being stuck. He's a Big Dummy, like Dudley." Like Thor, Loki thinks, smirking. Grabbing the bin over Jormungand, Loki tosses it aside.

"Thanksssss, amigo." Jormungand hisses, playing along with the Harry Potter bit before snapping at Gantu and wrapping around Loki.

Cooper is now trying to hit Gantu with the blue sword thing he'd hit Loki with earlier (which isn't a
Jotun spear), but it keeps just going through his leg. "It's supposed to cut your leg off!" Cooper says over the sword's weird humming noises. Admittedly, that's what most swords do. But that sword isn't even sharp, and Gantu's a hologram.

"Ha! I'm immune to your puny earth weapons." Gantu boasts.

"You can't be! Lightsabers can cut through anything!" Cooper protests. Still, Gantu's leg doesn't fall off. He just seems annoyed, pulling out his plasma blaster and firing holographic plasma blasts at Cooper. Cooper dodges and occasionally deflects them with the glowing blue sword.

Loki pulls Stitch out from under Gantu's foot (not that that's hard, since there isn't actually anything pressing down on him), and returns the alien to his back. Stitch hangs on to Lilo and spits out a frying pan for Loki, which Loki holds in the hand not holding Simba.

"Let's give Gantu a wedgie!" Lilo exclaims, and Stitch cackles delightedly. Cooper and Lila suddenly quiet down, obviously having heard, but they don't seem to realize who said it, and both Lilo and Stitch are still and silent now.

Cooper does notice Loki hadn't had the frying pan before. When the boy asks where Loki got it, Loki lies and says it was under the sofa. "Rapunzel and Eugene fight with frying pans." Lila says from behind Loki, and Loki grins. "Merida uses a bow like Daddy, and Mira and Buzz have lasers."

Gantu trains his blaster on Loki and shoots, but Loki blocks the shot with his frying pan. It doesn't bounce back like when it hits Cooper's sword, though.

Loki starts to grin as Gantu fires off more shots and he blocks them, too.

"I want a turn!" Lila says, trying to grab at Cooper's blue sword thing. "Cooper, it's my turn to be a Jedi!"

"No Lila! It's my lightsaber! Go get your own!" Cooper says, and one of the holographic blasts hits him in the chest as he's distracted. "Now look what you did, dummy!"

Lila runs off and pulls another sword- a 'lightsaber' from her brown fuzzy bag with the face on it. This sword has a green blade, but it's still weirdly round, which seems dumb. She joins them in deflecting Gantu's plasma bolts.

At one point, Loki accidentally makes a force field around his whole body, and Cooper and Lila notice, of course. How could they not? "There's green around your hands, too!" Lila points.

"Just holograms! Everything's holograms!" Loki lies quickly, tensing up. His force field is semi-transparent, like holograms.

Shockingly, the kids shout that they want force fields, too. No, they're trying to trick him, make him think they like it! But when Jarvis makes a holographic fake force field around them, one that doesn't look quite the same as Loki's, they seem excited. They don't start teasing him.

Cooper says the Warring Stars have force fields, too.

Loki whacks Gantu in the butt with the frying pan (even though it goes through him).

Gantu falls to the ground, defeated. A chair is sticking through his stomach and a coffee table is inside his left arm, since he's just a hologram.
Loki blinks. He won. He's never won before. The warriors always beat him, and Gantu's kind of a warrior.

He wishes this was real, in a way.

The three of them flank around Scar- Loki with Stitch and Lilo on his back and holding Simba and his frying pan, while Cooper and Lila hold their lightsaber things.

"Oh dear me. I certainly seem to be outnumbered." Scar says, and Loki's almost forgotten it's really Jarvis by now. He sticks his tongue out triumphantly at the holographic lion. This is why Scar shouldn't try to take over. He always loses in the end, even if he killed Mufasa, but Mufasa isn't dead now, and he's not going to die this time!

"Oh wait, I forgot. I have an army." Scar grins wickedly. Holograms of Ed, Shenzi, and Banzai appear.

Three hyenas isn't an army.

As if Jarvis is reading his thoughts, suddenly a lot more holographic hyenas are in the room, surrounding them and blocking off the trapped animals. Loki holds Simba and the frying pan as if the lion's holding it in his mouth and whacks a hyena with the pan, but another one immediately takes its place. If it wasn't a hologram, it would've bitten his leg off.

Cooper has grabbed his Captain America shield backpack and is holding it like an actual shield as holographic hyenas bite at it, while whacking them with his blue sword thing. They just keep coming, though, and Cooper tries to throw his backpack like Steve throws his shield. It doesn't work, though.

"Retreat!" Cooper yells, grabbing Lucky the Pizza Dog. "We need a fort, quick!"

"Yeah!" Lila says, running over to the couch. Some of the hyenas disappear.

Loki watches in slight confusion as the kids pull one of the cushions away from the back of the couch and put it on the floor. It's joined by the two other cushions on the back of that sofa, and then the three cushions people sit on.

He joins them in relieving a couple of the other couches and chairs of their cushions, and soon there's a large pile on the floor. If Loki stacked them all, they might get close to his height, and they'd definitely be taller than Lila and Cooper.

He starts stacking them, and makes a sort of wall, but Cooper shakes his head. "No, not like that. It has to be a fort you can go in."

Oh. That sounds even better. Loki knocks his fort down, giggling.

Cooper stands two of the cushions up on their sides and lays another on top of them, like blocks. They stay up for a little bit, then topple over. It's not as dramatic as a Jenga tower crashing down.

Loki quickly realizes that they can't make a big enough fort for them to fit in with just the cushions, although they can make a tunnel that Lila can crawl through. That's not really a fort, though.

Jarvis suggests that they use blankets as well. There are a couple draped over sofas, but Loki also goes to his bedroom and strips the blankets off his bed.

Back in the living room, Lila and Cooper are trying to push one of the couches across the floor
without any success. Loki pushes it easily, and they both jealously say that he's really strong, even though he's really not. It's a good thing they weren't in Asgard, because they're even weaker than he is.

At Lila's instructions, Loki pushes three of the sofas they'd stripped of their cushions into a sort of U shape.

Cooper and Lila drape one of the blankets from Loki's bed on top, for a roof, but they have a lot of trouble.

The first time Loki does it, it falls in, but then it stays up as if by magic, like when his block towers don't fall down. Lila and Cooper don't comment, to Loki's immense relief.

They use another blanket to cover up the entrance- or exit, depending on how one looks at it- of their fort.

They crawl in, only to decide they should make a cushy floor for their fort out of all the pillows. It's a great idea, because now it's a lot softer than the floor.

Simba's arc reactor provides light.

It's nice and safe in here, like in Loki's Snoopy doghouse tent in the therapy room, or under his bed. The main area of the fort is as big as Loki's bed, since one of his blankets is acting as the ceiling, meaning Loki can lay down in here. This is even better than being under a table, and almost as awesome as the therapy room tent that looks like Snoopy's doghouse, though he can't lay down there.

"This is the strongest fort ever in the whole universe!" Lila declares triumphantly. "Nobody can get us here!"

"Nobody!" Loki flaps his hands and laughs, and then there are footsteps outside their fort, and someone pulls the sheet up.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if this chapter seemed uneventful, but again, it again, it was only the first half of what I had originally.

Since I was almost done with what was going to be the second half of this very long chapter, that should be up in the next few days... so you'll get another fast update. And it may be more eventful. There'll be more about Sleipnir in that part :)
Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

Loki realizes that he can't talk to Sleipnir.

Tony gets a call from a certain Asgardian Avenger.

Chapter Notes

I know this doesn't seem like a fast update time compared to how I frequently I posted the first 38 chapters, but since chapter 39 was the first chapter I posted the same time here as on FF.Net, this is actually a really quick update time. Although most of this was already written, too.

Sadly, I definitely won't be able to update anywhere near this quickly in the future.

Oh, I saw Dr. Strange on Friday, and it was really good. I forgot to mention it when I posted chapter 39 on Sunday.

"Seriously, do you guys need anything? Uh, I don't think the fridge on your floor is stocked, since I had literally no warning that your floor would suddenly have four semi-temporary residents, but Jarvis can fix that. Overnight shipping is great. But I guess you're eating up here tonight." Tony tells Clint and Laura. Clint looks at Laura and then nods.

"So... pizza?" Tony grins, and Laura says that they need some kind of veggie, so Tony tells Jarvis to order a veggie pizza. Apparently, that doesn't count, and Jarvis says something about ordering salads.

Laura is worse than Bruce about what they eat, and Tony's Science Bro certainly seems to care more than Tony about that sort of stuff.

Now that Tony and the others are done talking about the disaster and the Bartons', they head back into the living room.

When they enter, Tony sees a large fort made of three sofas that hadn't been pushed together before, pillows, and blankets from one of the beds draped on top and over the sofa-less side. Tony hopes they hadn't stripped his bed of its blankets for their fort.

Actually, the blanket making the roof almost looks like it's being held up by invisible magic...

Thankfully, there are other sofas to sit on. Coulson and Natasha, instead of leaving, sit with the others on one of the sofas that hadn't relinquished its cushions for the huge fort.

"What? Are you guys bunking here, too?" Tony arches a brow at the two agents.

"No, we were going to leave soon." Coulson says.
Judging from the chattering and laughing inside, the Barton kids and Loki are in the fort. Lila can be heard introducing Loki to a Merida doll, and Angus, Merida's horse. *Brave* had actually been one of the team's Movie Night movies back before Loki came. Tony had made several cracks that Merida would totally be Clint and Natasha's kid, with the red hair and the archery.

Lila is prattling on about how the witch turned Merida's mother into a bear.

"Like magic?" Loki asks quietly enough that Tony almost hadn't heard it.

"Yeah, it was magic." Lila answers cheerfully. "And Merida and her mom didn't fight as much when she was a bear." Lila goes on to explain that Cheeseball isn't Merida's mother, who turned into a black bear instead of a polar bear, but that she pretends Cheeseball is Merida's mother sometimes. Cheeseball isn't even in the fort, instead lying forgotten on the floor. For some reason, Coulson looks slightly hurt about that.

Tony really hopes Loki doesn't get any ideas to turn him into a bear or something. Or a llama, which is why they *haven't* watched *The Emperor's New Groove* yet. Tony knows he's a lot like Kuzco, he does not need Loki re-enacting scenes from that movie and turning him into a llama.

Lila asks Loki about Elsa and Anna, who Loki had tossed back to Stitch when Clint first took his kids into the kitchen. Stitch doesn't spit them out.

Pepper and Laura are looking at a holographic screen, evidently picking out more homey furniture for the Bartons' floor. They completely ignore Tony's totally helpful input—seriously, the what kid *doesn't* want a huge bed designed to look like a pirate ship? And he's the one paying, right? Then they have the nerve to let Coulson join them, and, surprisingly, Bruce. Tony's Science Bro puts in a comment now and then, although most of them are also just shooting down Tony's brilliant ideas.

Tony scowls at all of them over his beer. Natasha is picking out clothes for the kids—evidently they didn't pack enough— but she won't let him help pick anything out, either. Even though Lila should have an Iron Man swimsuit, instead of one with Ariel on it (although, Tony has to admit, mermaids fit the water theme of swimming much better than he does, and he hates swimming, although most people don't know that. But an Iron Man swimsuit is still more awesome!).

Clint approaches the fort and pulls a blanket up. Lila's shriek sounds slightly scared but she's laughing at the same time. The little girl reflexively kicks her dad in the ribs with her tiny foot, and it actually manages to connect since Clint is squatting down and leaning into the fort.

"What was that for?" Clint asks, although he's clearly not annoyed as he grabs her foot and then reaches in to tickle her sides. Lila squeals with laughter, letting go of Jessie and Merida.

"Daaad!" Cooper says, holding his Cap shield backpack like an actual shield. Tony really needs to get that boy some toy Iron Man gloves. "You have to come in our fort and be safe. Scar and the hyenas want to come in and eat us!"

Clint looks around the room at the toys scattered everywhere. Tony spies Loki's Scar figurine on the ground. He picks it up, creeps towards the fort, and thrusts it in. "Looking for me?" Man, Jarvis is great at Scar's voice, and Tony's terrible. But Jarvis already has a British accent, so he has an unfair advantage.

"No, Jarvis made Scar, and Ed 'n Shenzi 'n Banzai. Gantu was so big!" Loki says. "And lots and lots of Scar's hy-eee-nas. A army."

"I was indeed cast as all the villains and incorporated the use of holograms." Jarvis says. "We
started with Scar, and then moved onto Captain Gantu and a lot of hyenas, as Mr. Loki said.” At least he wasn't playing HAL-9000 or something, Tony thinks. He's a little surprised Loki hadn't made Jarvis make a holographic Dr. Drakken or Shego.

Holographic 3d models of Scar and a ton of cartoon hyenas appear. The hyenas are blocking upside-down bins with Loki's toy and origami animals under them. Buzz Lightyear is trapped under a bin as well.

The fort's inhabitants manage to yank the blanket down, leaving Clint outside. He shrugs and plops down on a sofa, where the others join him.

"Nobody's coming in here." Cooper's voice is muffled slightly from within the fort.

"What about my Tony?"

"Our fort only keeps out the bad guys. He's not bad, he's a hero like Dad." Cooper answers. "We need some defenses for our fort, just in case the dumb hyenas come."

Lila adds that they need to rescue Buzz, and Loki insists the animals need it more.

"I thought you said you were Gantu, too?" Tony asks Jarvis.

"We beat him! Tony, we won 'gainst him! He tried an' shot me, but he hit my frying pan. Like Flynn!" Loki's voice comes from inside the fort.

"Mr. Loki did a very good job of defending himself with a frying pan when I was playing Gantu, and later hyenas." Jarvis says, and Tony grins. "I even made holographic force fields." Tony at first thinks that's the AI's way of saying Loki made a force field, but when Jarvis sends a video to Tony's phone, the billionaire sees that Jarvis had actually made holographic force fields for Lila and Cooper.

Then again, those were to cover up the one Loki presumably made himself. Loki had lied and told the kids his own force field was a hologram, but he hadn't actually panicked.

This is a big improvement.

"Good job, Snoopy. You were awesome! I am so proud of you." Tony tells Loki, sticking his head in the fort.

Sure it was pretend, but it definitely sounds like it went better than that self-defense lesson with Natasha and Clint after they'd watched The Incredibles. Loki had still been jumpy as a rabbit that time, flinching whenever Natasha punched at him. He apparently doesn't flinch when his opponents are holographic evil hyenas. Maybe it's because holograms don't hurt?

"I beat him too!" Cooper and Lila exclaim at the same time, clearly annoyed that Loki's getting all the credit.

Clint tells his kids he's proud of them, and their protests die down a bit.

"You can totally beat Scar and the hyenas." Tony says, hoping to see Loki in action. He heads over to the sofa and grabs his glass.

"We need guards." Cooper says again, not coming out of the fort.

"No guards!" Loki shrieks loudly. and Tony knows Loki has really only had bad experiences with
guards, and way too many of them as well. Disney movies don't exactly help, either. Guards were the antagonists when they went after Esmeralda and Aladdin. Flynn was being marched to his execution by guards at one point, and Elsa was almost shot with a crossbow, even if she did kick ass in her fight against the Duke's guards.

"No guards no guards no guards no guards please no." Loki's mumbling, panicked, probably with his eyes tightly shut. "Guards hurt."

Before Tony has managed to set down his glass without spilling its contents, Natasha, surprisingly, has already moved and is now next to the fort. She speaks quietly through the sheet, seeming to know that Loki actually likes small, enclosed spaces.

"There are no guards here. Just protectors." Natasha says, and of course she'd be able to think of a way to rephrase it that doesn't set Loki off. Tony briefly nods his thanks at her.

"No guards?" Loki asks quietly.

"No guards." Coulson says it this time. Natasha murmurs something to Loki in Russian.

Lila very tactlessly asks Loki "What do you have against guards? Were you ever in jail where you're from? Dad says you're not bad though."

"Lila, just let it go." Clint says. Tony rolls his eyes when Loki starts humming Elsa's song from Frozen (and great, now it's stuck in Tony's head again, stupid song!) but at least Loki doesn't seem to be panicking anymore. He's clearly using Let It Go as a coping mechanism.

"Here, Darth Maul will help us." Cooper announces, probably pulling a toy version of the weird red-and-black-tattooed Sith out.

"No!" Lila protests. "He's scary! And he's a bad guy. He killed Qui-Gon, so he's on the bad guy side with Scar." Lila sounds upset about Qui-Gon's death. It is kind of similar to Mufasa's death, Tony thinks. Darth Maul killed Qui-Gon and was then killed by Obi-Wan, who was the closest thing the older Jedi had to a son. Scar killed Mufasa and was then killed by Simba, although Obi-Wan's revenge was minutes later whereas Simba's was years, after he became an adult.

"But he's so cool!" Cooper whines. "He has a double lightsaber."

Tony sees Loki smirk and switch Woody and Jessie's hats while Lila's busy fighting with Cooper. Tony smirks at Loki's little prank.

"He's a bad guy!" Lila shrieks, hurling a small plastic Sith out.

"No bad guys!" Loki shouts, evidently taking Lila's word about Darth Maul. He runs out of the fort and comes back with his arms full of his Avengers toys, Elsa, Anna, Olaf, and the plush Jiminy Cricket that Tony bought him recently. Jiminy is a lot smaller than when Tony bought it, just like how Loki changed Pinocchio to actually be wooden, and bigger.

To Tony's puzzlement, Loki hands Jiminy to him. He looks at the little plush cricket and then at Loki. "Why am I Jiminy?"

"'Cause you're my conscience." Loki says, matter-of-factly.

Tony snorts. "I'm your conscience?" There would be so many people who would better fit that role than him.
Loki nods. "Always let your conscience be your guide!" Of course... Tony's put a lot of effort these past two months into trying to convince Loki that Asgard's treatment of him is wrong, and that he's not wrong for doing magic or being a Jotun.

Man, he really is Loki's conscience. It strikes him again how different his life has become in just two short months as Loki crawls back into the fort, dumping the other toys on the cushions.

Lila squeals and shouts Elsa and Anna's names, grabbing at the dolls. Loki lets her hold them, surprisingly, but makes it clear they're his.

"Lila, look, it's Dad!" Cooper exclaims. He runs out of the fort, waving Loki's Hawkeye toy at his father, the real deal. "Dad! Dad! Look! It really looks like you!" He's also clutching Loki's Captain America action figure.

Apparently, the kids have temporarily forgotten about continuing their game with Scar, the hyenas, and the caged animal toys.

Coulson looks at the Captain America figure like it's the greatest thing ever. Tony rolls his eyes.

Laura blinks at the sight of her husband in miniature, extremely realistic plastic form. "He's much handsomer than those action figures of you we saw at the store. Even better-looking than that collector toy you showed me online once." She kisses Clint, to a loud chorus of eew's from her kids, and then glances at Tony. "Was it custom-made?"

Tony nods, grinning. It was, but not in the way Laura thinks. Unless she thinks Loki improved it with his magic, in which case she'd be right.

"Auntie Nat!" Lila runs out, holding the Natasha figure as well as Elsa and Anna. She leaps onto the sofa, landing between Nat and Laura. "Why are you looking at tables?" She asks, face scrunched up. "That's boring! Look!"

The little girl demands their attention as she shows them the action figure to Natasha. "She has red hair, like you and Ariel and Jessie and Mira and Merida!"

"They're all fiery redheads. Pepper, you should totally be in that group. The Spicy Ginger Society or something." Tony grins at Pepper, who rolls her eyes. Lila, meanwhile, is lamenting the fact she doesn't have red hair herself.

"They don't have toys of you, Mom." Cooper says, and Laura just smiles and says she knows. Cooper points at Bruce. "Mr. Banner has a toy and he's not even Hulk right now. I've only seen Hulk toys, not toys of him." Bruce shifts uncomfortably as Cooper goes back into the fort.

"Why does Mr. Loki have an action figure like the Avengers? And why's it have Iron Man clothes?" Cooper demands. "He's not an Avenger! He's not even famous!"

"Did Mr. Stark make it for you?" The boy asks Loki jealously. "Why do you get everything?"

"Nope nope nope. He boughts the 'vengers for me but didn't make mini-me. We don't have a can opener now." Loki says and Tony bursts out laughing. That's right. Hadn't the Loki action figure been transformed from the can opener Loki carted around on his first day here? Everyone but Bruce turns to look at both Tony and Loki really strangely, even the kids. Pepper clearly remembers Loki carting around a can opener the first day, but doesn't seem to get how that relates to the Loki action figure.

"I don't see why you got made into a toy." Cooper mumbles.
Their pizza and salads arrive, much to the delight of the kids (but they're only enthused about the pizza, and clearly couldn't care less about salad). The kids leave their toys in the living room, but Loki brings Simba with him to the kitchen, as always. This doesn't go unnoticed.

"You brought Simba in here?" Lila asks. "Mommy says no toys at the dinner table."

Cooper jumps in with "Why do you bring it everywhere?"

Tony's stopped asking that question a long time ago, and he can't imagine Loki without Simba. Plus, now that Simba's armor acts as a tracker, the lion will help Tony find Loki if he goes missing again.

"He, nots 'it!'" Loki shouts, holding Simba closer and glancing worriedly at Coulson, clearly still under the impression he's going to take Simba if Loki lets the lion out of his sight, which is sort of what happened on the Helicarrier. Simba, as far as Tony knows, hasn't become animate while the kids are here, just like he hadn't moved around other people at the zoo. If someone took him, Tony has the distinct impression Simba would try to get back to Loki.

"Is this like a feast to cel'brate our victory 'gainst Gantu?" Loki asks, and Tony can't tell if he likes the idea or hates it.

"What?" Lila asks.

"After they won the warriors always hads big feasts." Loki's tone makes it clear he hadn't liked those, where he was most likely surrounded by even more warriors than usual who probably were drinking by the tankard. Loki's tone brightens a bit on the next part. "But even you guys eat in victory after fightin' the stupid Doom-bot things." Loki glances at the Avengers who are currently present.

"Well, normally you work up an appetite when you're saving the world." Clint grins, grabbing a couple slices of Pepperoni. He then grabs a salad, probably from the look Laura sends him telling him to set a good example for the kids.

"Or you're just always hungry." Natasha and Laura say simultaneously.

"Hey, have you seen how much Cap and Thor eat? I've got nothing on them!" Clint says indignantly, before glancing at Loki to see if he reacts to the Thor bit. Loki just looks like he agrees.

Laura insists the kids get a salad, like Clint had, and then tells Loki he should get one, too. Loki doesn't seem to mind veggies- most of them are green, after all.

When Loki starts pretending to feed Simba, he gets some strange looks from the kids, who clearly don't notice that Simba actually takes a little nibble out of the pizza slice Loki's offering. Loki doesn't offer any to Stitch, but Tony has a feeling the alien backpack would eat the whole slice in a blink of the eye.

Loki starts muttering and offering the pizza to thin air (probably one of his friends is invisible right now). The muttering gets slightly anxious, and he rocks back and forth. "Can't eat that can't eat that."

The kids start to look a little freaked out. "Mom? He's being weird..." Cooper says, staring at Loki, who indeed looks like he's mumbling to himself.

Tony frowns. Don't kids have imaginary friends? If anything, the adults should find it weirder,
right? Laura looks a little unsure, as if wondering a little about Loki's sanity.

Loki ducks his head, clearly worried they'll be angry, and slides under the table. Tony sighs.

Clint and Laura thankfully shepherd the kids out to the living room to give them some privacy.

Tony sighs and ducks under the table.

"'s just like Asgard." Loki mumbles. "Stupid boy! Don't talks to things that aren't there!"

"But one of them was there, right?" Tony asks. "Even if they weren't visible?" Loki nods. Some people might say Loki's imaginary friends are a bad thing, that he shouldn't have them at his age. Others may even think they're hallucinations, but Tony has a feeling they helped Loki a lot in Asgard. And they seem sentient, somehow, even if they're imaginary.

"Sometimes people say things they don't really mean." Tony tells Loki. Admittedly, Cooper had clearly thought Loki was weird at first, but after the Clint's talk with his kids following the lightsaber incident, they'd apparently gotten along really well.

"Cooper liked my Jormungand." Loki says a little unsurely.

"Okay, that I think he meant. He seemed to think Jormungand was awesome, which he is." Tony answers, and Jormungand nods at Loki encouragingly.

The Barton kids can be heard laughing and shouting in the living room. When Tony glances out, he sees Cooper slicing at holographic hyenas with both the green and blue lightsabers, while Lila makes Elsa and Jessie stomp on them.

Surprisingly, Loki crawls out from under the table and holds Simba in front of him while he charges at the hyenas, roaring. Fenrir appears by his side, snarling, and Loki clearly didn't expect his wolf to show up. He looks happy, but also worried about the others' reactions.

Coulson manages to hide his reaction, but Laura, Cooper and Lila all stare, shocked and a little scared.

Right now, Fenrir is slightly transparent, as if he's a hologram, whereas normally he looks quite solid. Tony gets the feeling that's on purpose, because the others assume he's just another hologram made by Jarvis, and Laura breathes a sigh of relief.

Lila bravely approaches the huge wolf, who's at least a head taller than her even on all fours, and lays a tiny hand on his side, although it goes through him. It helps that he's intangible, with the hologram cover-up. Fenrir makes a gentle noise towards her, and Loki grins.

Fenrir and Loki join the kids in defeating Scar's holographic hyena army. Jarvis even shoots out holographic snowflakes for Loki's Elsa- who Loki has reclaimed- Frozone and a holographic fairy (that Periwinkle character Lila mentioned, apparently) as if they're using powers, and then makes it look as if a hyena had been frozen.

Loki laughs delightedly, jumping from foot to foot and flicking his fingers. He accidentally lets out a couple snowflakes of his own.

Lila makes Woody almost save Buzz, until he's cornered by hyenas, and Jessie and Lila (who by now has switched from shooting finger guns to firing an invisible arm laser to doing karate chops) swoop in to save the day and rescue Buzz from under the bin. Tony definitely sees what Clint means about Lila liking strong female characters.
Both kids pretend to use the Force to push the hyenas, and Jarvis obliges by making them fly backwards. That's definitely something Loki's done with his powers for real.

The battle takes about ten minutes, and somehow everyone gets dragged into it. Natasha and Clint are handed the action figures of themselves but told to pretend they're Kim Possible and Ron Stoppable.

Coulson borrows Cooper's Cap shield backpack and reaches for Loki's Cap toy, but it vanishes into thin air and reappears in Loki's hands. Loki sticks his tongue out at the agent, and the kids had been so busy fighting that they hadn't noticed.

Finally, the holographic hyenas stop coming, and Loki makes Simba defeat Scar before he frees all the animals from under the bins, grabbing the Lion King toys to be reunited with Simba. "Now there's no more evil bad sad cages!" Loki shouts, picking up the bins and sliding them across the floor. "You're not gonna be trapped in 'em ever again!"

Cooper, Lila and Loki crawl back into the fort after that, leaving the blanket wall up.

They end up drawing pictures. Loki draws himself, Simba, Stitch and Fenrir defeating Scar, a hyena, and Gantu.

Cooper draws his toy dog in what is clearly supposed to be an Iron Man suit. Apparently Jarvis had made a holographic Iron Man suit briefly go over the toy. He also draws a X-Wing flying over a giant stick-figure boy that's evidently supposed to be Cooper holding an uncolored lightsaber.

While Lila's using the blue marker to color in the sky behind her green and purple butterfly, Cooper asks for it, saying he'll only need the blue for a second to color the blade of his lightsaber.

Lila ignores Cooper and the boy's whining gets more insistent.

Somehow, Loki's coloring Stitch in with a blue marker, even though Tony's pretty sure there had only been one blue in the box, but the kids are too busy bickering to notice.

Cooper tries to yank the blue marker out of her hands while she's still coloring. Lila retaliates by crumpling Cooper's drawing. This devolves into them screaming and hitting each other, while Loki curls up in the corner of the fort with worried eyes.

Tony's really glad he's not a parent, because the screaming is giving him a headache, and that's coming from someone who blasts rock music in his lab at volumes that may not be healthy.

Clint mutters that this is a sure sign it's the kids' bedtime before going to break up the fight.

Laura looks like she's mentally berating herself for not checking the clock. "Bedtime, kids." She sighs, looking rather ashamed of her kids' behavior.

Both kids protest loudly.

"But I'm not tired!" Cooper whines, even though he clearly is. "Ten more minutes?"

"It's nine-thirty. You already got to stay up well past your bedtime. Lila, it's even more past your bedtime." Laura makes it clear they're not going to get an extension.

"Can we sleep here in the fort, please?" Cooper begs, flopping onto the cushions making the floor of the fort. "It'd be like camping inside!"
"Yeah!" Lila shouts, and both kids give their mother Bambi eyes. "Pleaseeeeee, Mommy?"

Clint looks like he's going to say yes, because honestly, sleeping in a fort would be awesome. Then Cooper says "Mr. Loki can sleep here too."

Okay, no, that really won't work, Tony thinks. Not when Loki still has nightmares almost every night. Tony shakes his head firmly, and Clint decides to throw Tony under the bus. "Sorry, guys, Mr. Stark says no." He tells his kids.

"Besides, he gave us our own floor. We're sleeping there." Laura adds.

The kids grumble that they're not even tired as they reluctantly crawl out of the fort, even though Lila's eyelids are drooping as if they're weighed down by lead, and Cooper looks pretty tired too.

"You're lame." Cooper tells Tony, who smirks.

"My Tony's not lame!" Loki shouts.

Laura tries to make Cooper apologize, but instead, Lila asks "How come Mr. Loki gets to stay up later than us? Is he gonna get to sleep in the fort?"

"He's an adult, so he gets to choose his bedtime." Tony answers, and Laura sends him a look like she thinks Loki should have a bedtime. Does she mother everyone?

"But he acts like us." Cooper mutters irritably. Clearly someone's grumpy when they're tired.

Lila crawls back into the fort.

"Lila..." Laura warns sternly.

"I forgot my toys, Mommy." Lila explains, and then demands. "Who switched Woody and Jessie's hats? Cooper, stop!"

"It wasn't me Lila!" Cooper shouts back, louder than necessary. "It was Mr. Loki!"

"Was too you!" Lila hollers at her brother. "You always do it!"

Tony's very glad he doesn't have to deal with this sort of stuff.

Eventually, Clint and Laura get the kids into the elevator. Natasha is holding Lila in her arms while Laura shepherds Cooper along. Coulson joins them in the elevator, apparently ready to leave with Natasha.

So now it's just Tony, Loki, Bruce and Pepper in the penthouse, which is incredibly messy, what with the fort and the bins acting as Loki's zoo. The kids have left some of their toys up here, including the polar bear, but Lila had been sure to take her Toy Story toys, and Cooper had grabbed Lucky.

"You needs apples! Golden apples!" Loki says irrelevantly and runs to the kitchen. When Tony follows him, he's hunting through a fruit basket on the table, pulling out the apples. He frowns, realizing they're all green or red, and then a green one shimmers and turns golden. Loki passes it to Tony.

"Is this, uh, still good to eat?" Tony asks, as Simba bats an apple around the counter. He's alive now.
"Aside from the color, none of the physical or chemical properties seem to have changed, sir." Jarvis says. "Although there is residual energy from Mr. Loki, but it is not harmful."

"It's not really Idunn's." Loki mutters, sounding annoyed. "Need a real one."

Loki starts pulling crumbled bits of hamburger- wait, is that the hamburger he hadn't eaten at the zoo restaurant for lunch?- wrapped in napkins out of his pockets, until he notices Tony staring at him. "Stitch would have ate it if I let him eat it." Loki says matter-of-factly, which sounds redundant.

"But why do you have food in your pocket?" Tony asks as Loki unfolds the napkins and carefully arranges hamburger chunks in some sort of pattern known only to him on the countertop. Apparently, neither of them noticed Loki hiding his lunch in his pockets. Then again, he'd been hiding under the table in the zoo's Dancing Crane Cafe.

"How do you gets food to your head... brain?" Loki asks after a bit, rubbing the side of his head with the palm of his hand. Tony blinks at the non sequitor, but there's that whole saying, people in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. Tony's mind jumps around a lot, after all.

"It goes there automatically, through your blood." Tony says. Or at least, he's assuming that's how it works for Loki, too as he seem to have very similar physiology to humans, even when his skin is blue. After the whole palladium poisoning incident, Tony's pretty well-versed with how the body works, although he can't really do anything medical like Bruce can, even if Bruce isn't an "official" doctor. (Bruce does have a bunch of doctorates in physics, but that's entirely different, obviously).

"You didn't have to save your food, you know. You especially didn't have to keep it in your pocket. You'll always get stuff to eat here."

"It's not mine. For my Sleipnir and my Fenrir." Loki says. "Well, not Sleipnir, 'cause horses are... plant-eater animals- oh it's herb-vores, the word! Herb'vores eat plants! But my Fenrir's a wolf and wolves are carn'vorous, so he eats meats."

"Hey, I at least know horses are herbivores. They eat, like, grass and, uh, that yellow straw stuff- hay! Right?" Tony knew basically nothing about animals for most of his life, but has picked up at least some stuff from Loki talking about them, and Tony had read all the signs at the zoo, too. Not that they had horses there, but how different are zebras, really? Loki could probably tell him exactly what makes them different, actually.

Loki's giggling about Tony forgetting the word for hay, even though Loki literally just blanked on the word herbivore for a bit."Hey, pot calling the kettle black here." Tony says, pointing at Loki. Loki cocks his head to the side, and Tony's pretty sure they went over this expression sometime before and Loki thought it was a really strange saying.

"So Fenrir has to get meat an' Sleipnir gets... apples. Or carrots, 'cause there's no grass here. Tony, we need more grass."

"But... aren't they just air? They can't really eat..." Tony points out. Then again, Loki had pretended to feed Simba even before he was seemingly alive, and Tony's seen him trying to feed his sentient imaginary friends before. Jarvis had even mentioned Loki trying to feed Sleipnir after chasing Stitch naked through the penthouse when the alien stole Bruce's snow globe, when Tony and Pepper were at that Thanksgiving charity gala.

Loki suddenly looks really sad, fiddling with the hamburger chunks as he mumbles "I try, I do. Real hard but it never works..." After a bit, he sneers slightly. "Idiot! Don't waste food on things
that aren't there!" Loki's voice doesn't sound like his own, and he's obviously quoting someone in
Asgard. Maybe many people had told him that, since they'd apparently bullied him for having
imaginary friends.
"Hey, you can feed them if you want to." Tony says, gently, not wanting here to be at all like
Asgard. If Loki wants to pretend to feed his friends, Tony's not going to make him feel bad about
it. "And Jormungand technically isn't just air. Are you going to feed him, too?"
Loki tilts his head to the side, and Jormungand hisses something in the god's ear. "Snake food at
the zoo." Loki reports.
"You fed him at the zoo? Okay." Tony supposes it would make sense for Loki to pretend
Jormungand ate when he was slithering around the touch exhibit.
"What about Hel?" Tony asks. "I mean, she's like literally bone thin on one side. You think she'd
need some food." Loki just shrugs. Apparently it's not an issue for Hel. Maybe it's because she's
sort of dead?
The god holds a bit of hamburger meat out on his palm. "Fenrir." He calls softly, and the huge wolf
bounds over. The wolf mouths the meat, but it doesn't go anywhere as his teeth apparently pass
through it. Fenrir whines slightly, and Loki looks at him, frowning, before popping the hamburger
into his mouth, muttering, apparently to the food, "Now go to my brain, to my Fenrir..."
They wait, as if trying to see if it'll reach Fenrir. It doesn't seem to. Why can't Loki feed his
imaginary friends? After all, if he imagines them eating, shouldn't they at least look like they're
eating? Of course, with the exception of Jormungand, the only tangible one, they wouldn't be able
to make the food go away.
Loki then grabs a green apple and holds it out. Loki only seems to use green apples, not red ones,
which works out since Tony prefers the red ones, and no, that's not because they're closer to Iron
Man colors. "Sleipnir..."
Sleipnir doesn't appear.
He frowns. "Sleipnir?"
Loki closes his eyes and rocks back and forth, dropping the apple so it rolls across the floor. He
doesn't say anything for a bit.
"Hey, you alright?" Tony asks quietly, laying a hand on Loki's shoulder and looking at him with
concern.
"He's gone..." Loki whispers, so quietly Tony almost doesn't hear it.
"What?"
"He's gone!" Loki shrieks, eyes flying open as he looks around wildly. "He's all goooone! Where?!
Where! He's nowhere! Sleip-niiiiiir!"
Loki becomes rather incoherent after that, darting around the floor and searching for Sleipnir as if
he'll pop out behind a doorway or show up under the furniture, even though he's really in Loki's
head.
"Mr. Loki, I am sorry to report that I do not see Mr. Sleipnir anywhere in the tower." Jarvis is truly
apologetic, as opposed to some of his snarky apologies to Tony.


Loki stops in his tracks, rocking from side to side. "Nowheres?"

"He normally doesn't come out without you explicitly wishing it, right?" Tony tries to suggest that Loki just try imagining him (that's what he does, right? Although Loki's friends do seem strangely sentient), but Loki just calls out Sleipnir's name more and doesn't respond.

Bruce tries to tell Loki that he should take deep, calming breaths, and that it might be easier to find Sleipnir in his mind if he's relaxed. Bruce sits down and tries to get Loki to join him, but Loki pulls away, crawling around on the floor and sobbing out Sleipnir's name.

"Fenrir? Where's Sleipnir?" Loki asks tearfully. "You're in The Dark with him, in my head?"

Fenrir just gives a sad little whine that somehow seems to indicate that he's thinking 'not anymore.' What does that mean? Are Loki's friends not in his head when they're out like this? That makes no sense, though.

"Jormungand?" Loki asks, not bothering with the actual question of where Sleipnir is.

Jormungand hisses that he doesn't know, because he's here. In a way, since he's a necklace or belt or scarf (depending on his size), he seems separate from Loki's head all the time now, whereas Loki's other friends aren't always present and are presumably in Loki's head when they're invisible.

Loki always acts like they're not in his head when they're visible.

Loki crawls into the fort, Jormungand wrapped tightly around him as the god's body shakes with sobs.

Tony, Pepper and Bruce crawl in the fort, all trying to offer reassurances and just calm Loki down. Pepper hands Maximus to Loki, who gives them a look that says quite clearly that Maximus could never replace Sleipnir, yet he hugs the toy horse to his chest with Simba all the same.

Fenrir follows them in, and Hel appears, saying that he's not in her Realm of the Dead or something. Right, isn't that Loki's story about her? He's definitely mentioned that Hel rules dead people, and asked her to make sure Tony doesn't die. It's pointless, of course, but it seems to bring Loki comfort.

"You gonna leave too?" Loki asks the them frantically, burying his head against the huge wolf. When Tony brushes a hand against Fenrir, he swears he feels fur, but his hand passes into Fenrir all the same. Maybe Loki's illusions are getting even more extraordinary.

"Don't leave me, please! Please don't!" Loki might be begging this of Tony, Bruce and Pepper as well as his Monster Family, and Tony assures Loki he's not going anywhere. He can't make any promises about Loki's friends, though.

Tony finds himself singing Loki's lullaby over and over, until he's barely aware of what he's singing anymore as his eyes start to droop closed. Loki keeps asking his other Monster Family members not to leave.

"Mayb'll find him 'n my dreams." Loki mumbles, slurring the words, and soon he's asleep, his grip on Tony's shirt loosening.

Bruce is a light sleeper, which was a very useful quality when he'd been on the run and the military sometimes decided to strike in the middle of the night. Well, then the Other Guy would take control, but if Bruce hadn't been awake in the first place, they would have just taken him.
Anyways, Bruce feels movement beside him and he wakes up to see the blurry form of something falling and block out the small amount of light that had been there. The thing that fell had been the blanket acting as the entrance to the fort Loki and the kids had built, and the light must have been coming from the penthouse or Simba's arc reactor.

It seems Bruce had fallen asleep in here when trying to calm Loki down.

Bruce's eyes adjust to the dark, and he sees Tony and Pepper cuddled up together, Tony with his arms wrapped around Pepper, whose body is blocking the light from Tony's arc reactor. Apparently they'd all fallen asleep in here, which isn't too surprising, Bruce supposes. After all, it had been a long day today, with the zoo trip and then Clint's family moving in. It's still a little weird, thinking about Clint being a family man. He never seemed like the type.

Bruce wonders how Tony and Pepper would react if they woke up and found themselves in the position they're in now, something that was probably fairly normal when they were dating and actually slept together. Not that he's going to wake them up.

It's a pity the fort blocks the view from Jarvis' cameras, so Jarvis can't get pictures.

Bruce suddenly realizes that Loki is nowhere in the fort. Simba is gone, too, of course.

Bruce crawls out, but there's no sign of Loki in the living room, either.

"Mr. Loki is in his bedroom, Dr. Banner." Jarvis says, quietly enough to not wake Tony or Pepper. "He appears to be dreaming, and at least at the moment, it does not seem to be a nightmare. But it is... odd."

Well, at least he hadn't wandered far, Bruce thinks, before frowning and wondering what Jarvis means by odd.

From the holographic starlight in Loki's room, Bruce soon finds out.

Loki is crawling around on all fours, tossing his head so the mane of his horse head mask flies around. Loki seems almost eerily like a horse. Even with the awkwardness of a humanoid body being nothing like a horse's, Loki is trotting around on his hands and knees with more grace than Bruce would ever be able to manage, probably more than anyone would be able to manage.

Bruce thought Loki's lion impression at the zoo was good. This trumps all his other animal impersonations at the zoo by a mile. It's like he's literally a horse in a human body.

Fenrir, Hel, and Jormungand are all crowded around Loki, and it's clear Loki doesn't want to lose contact with them.

Simba is alive now, running around and pouncing on Loki's calves, which are conveniently at floor level when he crawls around. "Rawr!" Simba roars playfully. Loki rears up on his knees, waving his arms.

Bruce blinks when Loki's feet morph into hoofs, and his legs slowly become more horse-like. It kind of reminds Bruce of Lampwick turning into a donkey on Pleasure Island, or that guy with goat legs in the Narnia books, Tumnus. Then again, Bruce has seen Loki grow a blue lion tail and Stitch ears before, as well as turn into other people, so this really isn't that strange in comparison.

Loki gets up on his new hoofs and somehow manages to stay balanced, even though his feet cover less surface area now. How does he manage to not fall over?
Loki lets out a whinny that also sounds very realistic, but then says, from under the horse mask, "Bruce?"

"Yeah, it's me."

The god lets out a snort with a toss of his head, like a horse might Bruce thinks. Or maybe it's just a snort and he's reading too much into the horse thing with the mask and the legs- are they real or an illusion? The snort sort of sounds like he's scoffing that of course he knew it was Bruce there. Bruce smiles slightly.

"Have you been a horse before?" Bruce asks as Loki moves around on his legs- which have knees that bend the opposite way- as if it's nothing new to him. Bruce pokes one, and it feels hairy and inhuman. Definitely not an illusion, then.

Loki cocked his horse-masked head to the side. "In my dreams. But... can't turn into animals, you stupid boy, stop talkin' nonsense!"

"Whoever said that was clearly wrong." Bruce raises an eyebrow. "Uh, you know you have horse legs, right?" How would Loki not know? But he hasn't actually acknowledged his new legs yet.

"They feels nice." Loki says dreamily, plopping down to the grassy rug and kicking his hoofs in the air before trying to grab them with his hands. Bruce doesn't think he'd agree with that, if he had horse legs. They look kind of awkward, especially since Loki has half the number of legs a normal horse would and there's probably a reason horses don't go around walking on their hind legs all the time.

"Did you have a bad dream?" Bruce asks. Loki does have nightmares almost every night, although Bruce is no stranger to nightmares himself and he's pretty sure Tony has them too. Actually, probably all of the Avengers have them.

Loki's voice is quiet, but it steadily grows louder and more agitated. "There was a really bad zoo withs awful cages, with nothing in 'em 'xcept the animals!"

Wait, is Loki describing a dream, or is he just talking about the pretend game he'd played with the kids? Bruce sort of thinks it's the latter.

"But you let all the animals out, right?" Bruce asks. "And, I mean, the cages were just bins, right?"

"My Sleipnir got out, but then he went 'way towards the light an' he didn't come back when I called him..." Loki's voice is choked, as if he's about to cry, and he snuggles up close to Fenrir and Jormungand, clearly trying to ensure they're still there. One hand scratches behind Fenrir's ears like one would do with a dog, instead of a large wolf, although Bruce can see that Loki's fingers are actually sticking into the wolf's head.

That light part sounds like what some people believe going to an afterlife is like, and what some people who'd had near-death experiences have reported. Bruce isn't sure he buys into it. Loki, meanwhile, seems to believe that Hel rules Helheim and decides what happens to people when they die.

Has Loki's imaginary friend somehow died? But Hel is just another imaginary friend, right? And can imaginary friends die? Well, most kids who have imaginary friends stop imagining them, and then they sort of fade, but Sleipnir seemed like more than an imaginary friend, and Loki said he'd had to go away in Asgard, whereas he's been showing up a lot here.

"Hel hasn't seen him." Loki says, almost as if he's reading Bruce's thoughts, or maybe it's just a
coincidence. He had been asking his friends if they'd seen Sleipnir earlier, and Hel said she hadn't.

"Oh. Um, hopefully he turns up." Bruce really hated seeing Loki that sad. He still seems sad.

Loki pauses, as if he wants to ask something and is searching for the words. Instead, he starts singing "If you find the field where the horses roam, and you need a place to call your home, the moon and the stars will give you light, to sleep in the grass in peace tonight."

"This is my happy place, like my field." Loki says, and Bruce can't see his expression from under the horse mask. He hums the next bit of his song but sings the final two lines. "Their hoofs beat to the stars and the moon above, just follow them to find the one you love."

"He's still not here!" Loki exclaims tearfully as he kicks his horse legs in the air, so as to avoid kicking any of his remaining pretend Monster Family.

"Sleipnir." Bruce guesses, even though there's really no other answer.

"Can you ever not finds Hulk-y in your head?" Loki asks as Simba wriggles onto his stomach, "Uh, no, he's always there." Bruce answers, slightly taken aback by the question. In his mind, Hulk grunts 'Hurt Nice Man Loki sad.'

"How d'you talk to him if he doesn't?" The rubber horse head turns to face him briefly before gazing up at the holographic stars. It's really weird, trying to have a serious talk while someone's wearing a horse mask.

Usually it's the other way around, and Bruce tries to ignore his green counterpart.

"Maybe horse mad?" Hulk says in Bruce's mind. Bruce pauses, surprised. "Um, Hulk wants to know if Sleipnir's mad at you." Bruce relays the message.

Loki rocks slightly, but he seems to look inward, almost like he's meditating. He's more focused than he'd been during their actual meditation lessons.

"Maybe 'cause the food doesn't get to him?" Loki asks unsurely, looking at Fenrir. "Are you mad 'bout that, Fenrir?" Fenrir gives a little whine and nudges Loki with his nose, so it looks like he's sticking his snout into Loki's side.

"I don't think Sleipnir's mad about that." Bruce tells him gently. After all, Fenrir's usually the angriest one, and he's clearly not mad.

"Then why's he gones?"

"Are you doing something different with them?" Bruce asks after a bit. Why does Loki expect him to know the answer anyways. "Maybe he's just sleeping or something?"

"'s like... doors, kinda. Monsters open doors." Loki says, and Bruce has no idea what he's talking about. "Love is an open door, an' I loves my Sleipnir and I think he loves me too. He was the first I ever r'member loving, like how I love my Tony and you an' Hulk-y now." He cocks his head to the side.

Bruce smiles at that, his chest filling with warmth. In his head, Hulk actually seems happy to hear that Loki loves him.

"My Fenrir's and my Hel's are open now. My Jormungand... maybe doesn't really gots a door now?"
I dunno. Jor, where's your door?" He asks, confused, as he strokes Jormungand as if to ensure he's still there. Maybe it has something to do with Jormungand sort of having a body?

"My Sleipnir's door... why's it closed now? Stuck, I can't open it! Like befores!"

Loki makes tugging motions in the air, as if trying to yank open an invisible door floating in the air above him.

"You said this happened before, right?" Bruce asks. He knows he's mentioned, repeatedly, that his friends had to go away in Asgard, and they only returned a little ways into the time he's been here with Tony.

"Yes! What if they puts it through the door ripper 'gain? Make it all torn up like before?" Loki asks anxiously, flapping his hands and kicking his hoofs. "No! No little pieces, not like Boo's door!"

Bruce can't tell if Loki's imagining a door currently being shredded, and what's this about it happening in the past? He puts a hand on Loki's shoulder and decides to roll with the *Monsters Inc* analogy. "Hey, remember, Mike put Boo's door together for Sulley, and then he could visit Boo again?"

Loki nods, hope dawning on his face.

"Well, Sleipnir had to go away before, but he returned, right? So who's to say he won't return again?"

Bruce really hopes he isn't screwing this up.

Tony hadn't realized he'd been asleep until he wakes up... sometime. He doesn't open his eyes, so the billionaire feels rather than sees a female body pressed up against him. He doesn't think he'd snagged a one-night-stand last night, and he smells a very familiar scent. Pepper. The body in his arms is familiar, another reason he's certain it's not a random hookup. Tony snuggles closer, breathing in her sent.

From his arms, Pepper lets out a sleepy sigh.

It's only now that Tony realizes he's in the fort from last night. He must have fallen asleep when comforting Loki.

Pepper had evidently fallen asleep in the fort, too, and somehow Tony wound up snuggling her in his sleep. It wasn't uncommon by any means for them to wake up like this back when they were dating, but now...

It's only now that Tony wakes up enough to remember that they haven't been together for some time. Pepper seems to reach this realization at the same time he does, and they hastily separate.

Oh no, they're inevitably end up talking very thoroughly about this. What if she thinks he's doing this on purpose? He is a playboy, after all, or was, and he really can't deny that it felt *really freaking good* to have someone in his arms again. He hasn't done anything of that sort since Loki arrived just under two months ago.

But he and Pepper are in the past.

Pepper's not looking at Tony, but past him. Loki is sitting in the corner of the fort, surrounded by toys. He's playing with his Quasimodo figurine, and Quasi's three imaginary gargoyle friends.
Bruce, however, isn't in the fort.

"Hey." Tony says, as Loki stares at them.

"Why'd you stopped your hugs?" Loki asks them. "Hugs make you feel better likes you were happy, but then you were..." Loki's face adopts the expression Tony's face must have had when he realized he and Pepper weren't together anymore. "Why?"

"Uh..." Should they even tell Loki they were dating once? "How's Sleipnir?" Tony blurs. "Like, did you find him yet, or...?"

Loki shakes his head sadly, fiddling with an origami horse and curling tighter into the corner of the fort. "I don't want broken doors! But Bruce says maybe he'll come backs, 'cause he came back b'fore after he went away there so maybe he'll come back now too."

After that very repetitive statement (and what's the thing about broken doors), Loki says, surprisingly nonchalantly after what he just said two seconds ago. "Jarvis made waffles with me."
He nods in the general direction of the kitchen and smiles a bit. "They were really good, but I almost made them get stuck, but he reminded me to spray it. What happens if they get stuck? Are they just there forever?"

Tony decides not to mention that he once did buy a whole new waffle maker (he's assuming that's what Loki was talking about) because he forgot to spray it and his waffle was hopelessly stuck and he didn't feel like cleaning the waffle maker. As in, he couldn't just stick it in the dishwasher.

When Tony crawls out to get breakfast (his back is a little sore) Loki stays in the tent.

"Good morning, sir. It is 8:32 AM, December 1, 2013. I trust you had a restful night?" There's a slightly amused tone in Jarvis' voice, as if he knows how Tony woke up with Pepper. Tony glares at one of the cameras. "Your charity event yesterday definitely caught the media's attention, although this time it wasn't to report that you showed up drunk." The press had loved tearing him apart when that happened, and he'd been thoroughly chewed out by Pepper.

Holographic articles of the zoo event pop up, and Tony skims through one as he has Jarvis start some waffles. Maybe that'll get Loki out of the fort.

"'It is unknown as to why the billionaire has decided to support this cause. He seems surprisingly passionate about it, having given a speech rather than passing it off to an employee'" Tony reads aloud. "Blah blah blah, seriously, they don't just consider maybe I'm against child abuse? 'He left the zoo after his speech.' Wow, that disguise seriously fooled everyone? That is actually tragic." At least the tabloids hadn't run across Loki, though.

He scrolls down some and finds a bit about that Augmented Alternative Communication app he'd programmed, which he'd mentioned before that interview with Marla Simhan went to the dogs. There's a brief blurb about one of SI's employee's daughters using the app, along with an eye-tracking device, to communicate when her Rett Syndrome has left her unable to speak, walk, or control her hands' movements. There's also a photo of the girl, with a non-holographic Starkpad mounted on her wheelchair.

Jarvis says the Bartons are asking if they can come up, and that the kids are clambering to go to the pool. Sure enough, when they arrive in the elevator, Clint's spawn immediately dash towards the fort. They're wearing their swimsuits- Lila's is a one-piece, blue swimsuit with Ariel and Flounder on it, while Cooper's swim shorts have sharks on them. Cooper isn't even wearing a shirt at the moment.
"That's Ariel." Loki points at the picture on Lila's swimsuit. "I don't like her father! Didja know Stitch hit her with a wave once?"

"No he didn't!" Lila laughs.

Apparently, they've already had breakfast on their own floor. Lila chatters to Loki about how big and bouncy the beds here are, and bemoans the fact her mom made her stop jumping on them, and Cooper nods in agreement. The girl bounces a bit on the cushions acting as the fort's floor to compensate.

It hasn't quite seemed to sink in with Lila that she and her family are going to be away from their home for an indefinite amount of time. Since it's no longer safe, they may actually never return.

"My Tony an' Bruce and Pepper slept with me here." Loki joins Lila in bouncing on the cushion floor. Tony's sofa cushions have taken a lot of abuse from Loki the past few months.

"You slept in the fort?! Why did you get to?" The kids clearly think it's unfair, which in some ways it kind of is.

Laura patiently tells them that the same rules don't apply to Loki, which the kids find hugely unfair, but she manages to distract them by saying they're heading down to the pool now.

Loki asks if he can join, and then runs to go change into his swimsuit.

Clint approaches Tony, clearly wondering if he should ask something. Tony just gives him a look telling him to spit it out. "This is going to sound weird, but, well, Lila's turning six in six days, including today-" Tony interrupts him to point out the double sixes in that sentence, and Clint rolls his eyes and continues "-and she has her heart set on a doll that they never even made in the first place. She knows that, and she's really bummed."

Tony has a feeling he knows where this is going, even though if he'd had this conversation twenty four hours ago he never would have believed it. Then again, at this time yesterday, he didn't know Clint had a family. "You want me to make a doll for your daughter?" He quirks a brow. "Really? I'm the world's greatest engineer, and you're asking me to make a doll?"

"I can pay you, of course." Clint says, and then glances around "Right, billionaire. Not like you need any money or anything." He sighs. "Never mind."

"No guarantee or anything, but kind of doll is it?" Tony asks, folding his arms. Okay, honestly, he's probably going to do it regardless, even though it kind of seems like an insult to his engineering skills, and maybe his manliness. But hey, Tony's well-versed in the art of providing people with extravagant or specialized gifts. He's seen how Loki lights up at the sight of his favorite toys, and Lila seems to be the same when it comes to the Toy Story toys she'd brought.

"Lila's really into this show, Buzz Lightyear of Star Command, a sort of spin-off on Toy Story. Anyways, you know that Mira Nova character Lila mentioned earlier?" Clint asks, and Tony nods. Jarvis helpfully pulls up an image of this Mira character. "She's blue." Tony comments, mind automatically jumping to Loki's true form. Maybe seeing Lila be really happy about getting a blue-skinned doll would make Loki feel better about his own blue skin. He's occasionally turned his Loki toy or Elsa doll blue, but not enough.

"She's this show's version of Jessie to Woody. You know, a strong female character who's right up there fighting with all the guys, like Nat." Clint smirks. "Lila's really into strong female characters... Laura's taught her well."
Tony's barely met Lila, but Clint's daughter doesn't seem like the kind of girl to sit idly by and let stuff happen to her. Judging by how she fought holographic hyenas last night and doesn't let Cooper push her around, she seems like the type who would go out and bend the world to her will, rather like Pepper and Natasha, actually.

"Ok, fine." Tony says.

Clint grins. "Thanks, you're a lifesaver. She would've been heartbroken. I'm assuming you can have all the electronic stuff Buzz has, and wings and a helmet and everything, right? Oh, and maybe real doll hair? Wait, could you have hair and a helmet somehow?"

Okay, the doll hair definitely isn't something Tony has laying around his workshop, and he normally doesn't work with plastic either, but it should be a piece of cake. He's Tony freaking Stark.

Tony gives the archer a wounded look. "You really have to ask? I build freaking Iron Man suits. This is child's play- no, baby-play. I building circuit boards at four years old. So do you want me to make it actually fly or something?" Clint actually says no to that, adding that the kids' Buzz Lightyear toy doesn't fly. Tony could fix Buzz up, too, of course. He offers, but Clint says that's going a little overboard.

However, Tony doesn't offer to build a working lightsaber or equip Buzz or the soon-to-be-made Mira with a real laser, because even he knows that doing so would end with someone losing an arm. Or a head.

"Thanks, really. She's already going to have to miss her party with her friends now that we're here, so I really want her to get what she wants. Cooper at least got his party last week, although I couldn't make it." He sounds really guilty about that.

"Wait, your kids have birthdays less than two weeks apart?" Tony asks, surprised. Clint nods, saying Cooper's is November 23 and Lila's is December 6. Man, this must be a busy time of year for them, with two birthdays and Christmas in the span of a little over a month.

"I can arrange for the awesomest party for both of them, since their birthdays are apparently really close together." Tony says. If Lila wants a Space Ranger themed party, Tony could arrange to have the next best thing- real astronauts- show up.

"You said you guys haven't seen Frozen, right?" Admittedly, he's really thinking of Loki again. For starters, Loki loved that movie and would no doubt want to see it again. Furthermore, if Loki sees Lila like Elsa and her magic, that'll probably help him.

"We were gonna see it today, but then all that shit happened." Clint says.

"I'll see about getting another private viewing." Tony says, and Clint looks somewhat shocked, before looking like he's realized some of Tony's motives for this are for helping Loki. "Maybe we can have a whole team movie event, including Thor, just in case someone decides to attack." Another bonus is that, if Thor watches it with them, it might help change the thunderer's prejudice against ice powers. Frozone may have done a little of that when Thor watched The Incredibles, but more examples certainly wouldn't hurt. Especially since he'd see how much it hurt Elsa to be hated for her powers.

"Thanks." Clint says again, looking really pleased. "I really didn't expect you to do all this. And Cooper'll really love meeting the remaining two Avengers." Tony already knows that the kids haven't met Steve from Cooper's question yesterday, and by process of elimination they haven't
met Thor either. Do they know what Thor did to Loki?

Technically, Clint's kids only met Tony and Bruce yesterday.

Loki, wearing his swimsuit that doubles as his Mowgli costume, runs towards the elevator with Simba in his arms and Stitch on his back. Clint follows him to join his kids in the pool.

Pepper joins Tony in the kitchen, and before she can mention how they woke up, they're interrupted, thankfully.

"Sir, you are receiving a video call from Dr. Jane Foster." Tony frowns. The astrophysicist? Well, she's also Thor's girlfriend, but, still, why is she calling him? He waves it off at first, feeling he should stick with Loki for this conversation, but Jarvis report that they claim it's very important.

It probably has something to do with Thor, that's really the only explanation. Tony hasn't heard from the thunderer since that time when all the Avengers visited the Malibu Mansion and watched The Incredibles. Had seeing that made Thor view turning invisible, making force fields, and having ice powers in a slightly less negative light?

"Uh, put her through, I guess." Tony shrugs, speaking around a mouthful of waffles. Pepper is with him, while Bruce has gone after Loki.

A holographic screen is projected from his phone. Ordinarily, Jarvis would put the call on the TV, but Tony's eating breakfast and he doesn't actually have a TV in his kitchen. Maybe he should fix that.

Tony gets a very nice view of a woman's breasts under a shirt that leaves some to the imagination, but Tony has a great imagination. There's a voice in the background saying "Jane, have you even looked at the screen? You're giving him a total view of your boobs, but since he's like a super playboy, he probably doesn't care."

"I really don't mind" Tony grins, and Pepper smacks him in the back of the head. He quickly adds "But you're taken, so you're safe from this genius, billionaire, playboy philanthropist."

Tony may have a reputation of one-night-stands, including people who were in a relationship or even married (not that those people seemed to care in the slightest. To be fair, he only found out after they'd exchanged fluids). He's not going to go after someone he knows is in a relationship, though. Also, Thor would probably rip him limb from limb if he thought Tony was ogling his girlfriend, and Tony would rather keep all his limbs.

"I'm not taken." The other woman shouts.

The camera angle tilts upwards, but not before Tony gets a brief glimpse of another incredible female body, belonging to, presumably, the person who told Jane that she was giving Tony a free look but is available herself.

Jane Foster looks a lot like Padme Amidala from the Star Wars prequels, Tony thinks.

"Dr. Foster, you're as beautiful as Thor says you are. He talks about you, like all the time." Tony tells her, and she looks slightly embarrassed but pleased at the same time. Technically, Thor hasn't said much about Jane the past few times he's visited, but that's mostly because Tony had been tearing into him about Loki. "Who are you?" Tony nods towards the other equally stunning woman with dark, straight hair. Apparently this other woman is the snarky one.

"Darcy Lewis." The other woman, Darcy, introduces herself.
"Why are you calling?" Tony arches an eyebrow. "Is it because I became an expert in thermonuclear astrophysics in one night?"

"You can't become an expert in astrophysics in a night." Jane tells him firmly, looking rather insulted. "It takes years and years, no matter how smart you are, and there's always new stuff to learn, so you're never really an expert."

She obviously has the same love and passion for science that Tony does himself. Bruce has it, too. After all, Tony doesn't let just anyone be his Science Bro.

"I'm sorry about him, Dr. Foster." Pepper speaks up, leaning in so she's in the picture. "Tony has the world's biggest ego, but I'm sure he didn't mean to insinuate that your work is easy, or that he's better at it than you are." Tony shoots her a betrayed look that Pepper returns with one of her infamous glares.

"Of course I didn't." Tony nods hastily. He honestly hadn't meant that. Besides, he's not the most knowledgable about everything. Bruce knows gamma radiation better than Tony does, and Loki definitely has Tony beat with information about animals, stars and Disney.

"So why are you calling?" Tony asks.

"Thor said that you'd want to know what happened yesterday..."

"What? Did Asgard declare war because I called it 'Ass-Guard' on my fruit basket?" Tony blurts out. Darcy snickers at the renaming of Asgard.

Man, he hopes they didn't take that personally. Okay, he kind of does, and he really wouldn't mind handing out some long overdue retribution to Loki's abusers, especially Odin the Ass-Father.

But deep down, he's not sure how well Earth would do against a army comprised of Asgardians almost as mighty as Thor. That'd be way worse than the Chitauri, which were bad enough. And if Thor is pissed about that, he's certainly not going to be siding with Tony on this and-

Fury's going to kill Tony if it turns out he accidentally started an intergalactic war with a crazy-sadistic space viking god society.

"He didn't say anything about declaring war." Jane says slowly, and Tony feels a mixture of relief and disappointment that he won't get to make the Asgardians suffer.

Pepper's phone rings and she excuses herself and leaves them to take the call. Apparently it's something important for Stark Industries, from what she's saying as she leaves the room, she's no doubt going to some horrendously boring meeting or something, even though it's the weekend. Tony's glad he rarely has to go to those things anymore as he turns back to Jane and Darcy onscreen.

"So what has he told you about Asgard?" Tony asks. Probably that it's a magnificent, glorious realm or some bull like that.

"He said it's wonderful, but from what happened yesterday... some of it seems horrible." Jane trails off.

"They definitely have some huge asses there. And not the fun kind." Darcy mutters.

Wait, has Thor told Jane the darker parts of his society, like all the severely screwed-up shit they put Loki through? It doesn't seem like he's mentioned that he was a large part of it, though...
"So you know about Loki?" Tony asks.

"Low key?" Darcy asks it like it's the phrase instead of a name.

"I'll take that as a no." Tony mutters. So what are they talking about? Were they horrible to people other than Loki? Well, both Loki and Thor have mentioned they have slaves there and that they're not treated too well, so maybe it's that? Has Thor decided to go on an emancipation mission or something?

"Where's Thor?"

"He's here, but he's busy." Jane answers after a bit. "It's about what happened yesterday."

Tony thinks he hears Thor's voice speaking softly from somewhere offscreen, but he can't tell what he's saying.

Thor sounds quieter than normal, and rather gentle. Even before Tony knew about Loki, Thor never exactly seemed gentle. Outside of battle, he was always a bundle of excitable energy, delivering bone-crushing bear hugs to unsuspecting victims. He also has that tendency of booming his words, and Tony hasn't really heard him quiet like this. Sure, he's heard the thunderer talking in a normal voice, but this is like he's trying to coax a frightened animal or a small child.

"He's trying to find food that won't make a horse barf." Darcy supplies, more solemnly. Uh, so Tony supposes he got the animal part right. He's still not entirely sure how this merits a phone call to him. "He says most horses literally can't throw up, but this one does, like, every time he eats."

"Then he guards it like he's planning on saving it for later." Jane adds, as if it makes a sense in a terrible way. "He threw a fit when we cleaned it up."

"What." Tony deadpans. While this is all horrible, why is he getting a call about a horse? "Uh, can you start from the beginning? I think I'm missing something here... or a lot of things. I mean, I know literally nothing about veterinary stuff, so I literally have no idea why you're calling me. I mean, if it was some weird robot horse, I could help, but then it wouldn't be eating-"

Tony hears a faint background noise of retching and barfing, sounding so pained that Tony winces. He's no stranger to throwing up- most of his experience in that is from drinking too much, although he did have the flu once. This sounds even worse than when Tony felt like he was puking his guts out. Tony pities whoever the victim is.

Onscreen, both Darcy and Jane wince as well, temporarily looking off to the side with horrified expressions on their faces.

"You need the number of a really good vet or something. I can have Jarvis get ahold of the best vet money can buy or something, but I'm still not sure what this all is about..."

"Thor brought this really weird spider-horse creature from Asgard yesterday." Darcy says.

Tony's freezes, horror-struck. Spider-horse? No... it can't be.. That sounds like Sleipnir. Hadn't that been how Loki described Sleipnir when he first mentioned him in Dr. Carlisle's office?

No, that's literally impossible. Sleipnir's just an imaginary friend, right? Admittedly one that can seems to be autonomous from Loki and seems sort of real in his own way, but still just an illusion. Do they have a lot of eight-legged horses running around or something?

"A horse with eight legs." Darcy clarifies, probably mistaking his expression for imagining some
grotesque creature. "Aside from that, there's not really anything spider-y about him. He doesn't have eight eyes or pincers or anything."

"I need to talk to Thor. Right now." Tony says in a tone that doesn't leave an option to argue. Jane nods and calls for Thor over her shoulder.

Thor appears, wearing normal clothes instead of his Asgardian armor and cape. His current outfit consists of a red flannel shirt, and jeans that look like they have bile on them.

"Thor, what the hell is going on?!" Tony demands almost before Thor's in the picture. Because what Tony's thinking is impossible.

"Well, Friend Stark." Thor says, looking down. "Heimdall informed me yesterday that there was someone you would be interested in in the dungeons."

Thor's never exactly been subtle, so he gets right to it, although he looks extremely guilty. "Loki's... friend, Sleipnir, is real."

Tony stares. He'd just dismissed the idea, and even now that Thor's said it aloud, it seems so unreal.

"Come again? Because I think I heard you say that an imaginary, eight-legged horse that you guys beat Loki up for talking to is in fact, real. Weren't you one of the main nay-sayers about Sleipnir?"

"I was wrong." Thor admits, slowly. "He was locked in the deepest dungeon, a horrid place I did not know existed, and he was... mistreated there."

"How so?" Tony growls.

"It's awful." Darcy says sadly, and then adds. "Don't puke."

The view flips, shifting from Thor, Jane and Darcy to a window in front of the device. All that's out there is what looks like a tiny town in the middle of nowhere in the desert, until someone turns the device around.

Tony spits his coffee out in shock at the sight that greets him, and some of it goes through the holographic screen on his phone.

This horse is literally skin and bones.

The eight legs are sort of a giveaway that this is Sleipnir, except he's much bigger than the colt he appeared to be when Tony saw him. His black mane, the same color as Loki's hair, is very long.

Corpses of people or animals who starved to death probably don't look as bad as Sleipnir does right now. Loki's friend Hel is literally a skeleton on one side of her body, and Sleipnir's as skinny as that half of her.

Sleipnir is rolling around on the floor almost frantically. He rolls into a doorframe and seems to compulsively bite it while he arches his too-skinny neck and makes weird grunting sounds. Thor explains it's called Cribbing, and it's seen in some horses but is considered abnormal. The thunderer goes on to say that he's seen it in (presumably well-fed) horses in the palace stables, so Tony supposes it's not a sign of starvation, which was his first guess. In some ways, it reminds Tony of Loki's somewhat atypical movements.

Tony's seen a ton of terrible stuff in his time, and it's not like animal cruelty doesn't exist here on
Earth, but still... How the hell is Sleipnir not dead?!

"Sleipnir?!" Tony asks, shocked, when he feels he can talk without wanting to hurl. "That's really you? You... uh, you've grown in some ways, but shrunk in others." Okay, that probably wasn't the best thing to say, but Tony's mouth is running away with him. Not that that's uncommon, especially in situations when he has no clue what the right response is.

Really, though, Sleipnir's a hell of a lot skinnier than even an anorexic supermodel.

"Damn, you look like shit... no offense. Really, don't take it personally. Uh, Loki misses you, a lot." There's no way Tony wants Loki to see his friend in this state.

Sleipnir stops biting the door and slowly tilts his head to the side, apparently hearing Tony's voice but not knowing where it's coming from. He's nothing like the energetic, playful colt that always showed up for Loki.

Was he really like this all along? His lethargy seems almost overwhelming, although considering how starved he looks, that's really not a surprise at all. Sleipnir rolls over to something on the floor, and Tony realizes it's a can opener. Is that a coincidence, or does he know that Loki played with one on his first day here?

The screen flips back to Thor, Jane and Darcy.

"I know not where he came from." Thor says after a bit. "I simply found him in the dungeons. But Odin must have known, and he should answer for this heinous crime." Thor actually sounds angry at the Odin, as he very well should. If Thor thought this was in any way okay... "We do not do this in Asgard."

"No, you just abuse people for being blue, because that's so much better." Tony levels a look on Thor.

Thor did seem to be telling the truth when he said he didn't know about this, though.

"As soon as I found Sleipnir, I immediately brought him to Midgard." Thor says. "I am trying to make him well again."

At least that's an improvement. Would he have left Sleipnir in the dungeons at one point? Tony would like to think not. It does seem like Thor genuinely wants to help Sleipnir.

Man, Tony wants to freaking murder Odin even more now. He'd totally do it, in cold blood, if he had the chance, and it would be very drawn out and painful. That sick shitty bastard... Loki's treatment was bad enough, but how can anyone mistreat a living being as badly as Sleipnir's been mistreated?! This stuff happens on Earth, too, except earth horses probably would have been dead by this point.

"Who's Loki?" Jane asks Thor.

"Can I call you back in a bit?" Tony asks. As much as he'd like to witness the conversation about Loki, he needs to figure out what in the world he's supposed to do now. Or what in the Nine Realms he's supposed to do now. This situation's level of messed up is big enough to cover all nine of them.

Jarvis ends the call, and Tony rubs tiredly at his face.

He's still not entirely convinced this is real, he really hopes it's just some messed up dream,
although he doesn't want to know what dreaming this would say about him.

It's a moot point, since pinching himself proves it's not a dream. Even with that proof, he's still having a hard time believing this. That anyone could so badly mistreat another living being. At least Loki had been fed, even if he's on the skinny side.

He wonders if Thor will actually tell Jane about how he'd played a big role in Loki's abuse, even if he's apparently innocent where Sleipnir is concerned.

Sleipnir's got to have some issues after being locked up for so long. Admittedly, he hadn't seemed to when interacting with Loki before, but there's no way anyone could get out of that and not have some serious issues. It'd be like if Tony was locked up in Afghanistan for his whole forty-three years of life instead of three months, which was bad enough. Sleipnir's probably older than Tony is, right? Considering Loki's over a millennium, Tony would hazard to guess that Sleipnir's at least a century? He looked like he was pretty much grown.

And then there's that thing about how Thor said he had problems eating. Apparently, he can't die from starvation, or he would have done so long ago. That's freaking horrible.

"Uh, is something wrong?" Bruce asks, coming in and sitting down in the chair next to Tony. Tony briefly glances up, and Bruce awkwardly asks "Is this about last night?"

"Yeah..." Tony moans, not looking up, "Things are really, really shitty right now."

"Why? Because you and Pepper aren't dating anymore?"

"What?" Tony stares at him incredulously.

Bruce gives him a knowing look. "Well, you two were cuddling last night in the fort." His lips twitch upwards and he fails at hiding his smile.

"Wha...You saw that? You weren't even there when I woke up."

Bruce shrugs and smiles. "You were doing it when Loki woke me up at around three in the morning."

How did Tony not wake up then?

Tony sighs. "I almost wish it was that. We haven't even talked about it yet. At first, I was glad for the distraction from that, but I wish I never got that call. Well, no, I wish what it was about never happened." Wait, but that would mean Sleipnir wouldn't be alive... is Sleipnir being alive good or bad?

"What is it?" Bruce asks, very warily at hearing Tony's tone.

"Uh, maybe we should go to your cool off floor? Because I totally wouldn't blame you at all for going green over this. I'd have smashed the whole tower already if I could." He wouldn't blame Bruce in the slightest if he Hulked out while hearing this news. Bruce hasn't Hulked out over some of the things they've learned about Loki, which were horrible. This has a pretty good likelihood of resulting in the green guy taking control, though.

"That bad?" Bruce asks really warily.

Tony groans. "Hell yes. And I'm all for you letting off some very justified anger on the big guy's cool off floor. I wanna don a suit and go blow shit up."

"Preferably Odin's face."

"But neither of
those are gonna help me figure out what I'm supposed to do now. And I think you can probably help."

Bruce nods, and closes his eyes. Tony gets the feeling he's having a conversation with Hulk in his head. Hey, that should help the relationship between Bruce and his huge alter-ego, right?

Apparently, he was bargaining with Hulk, since when he opens his eyes, he says. "All right. The-Hulk- says he won't come out when 'Hurt Nice Man' needs me, but if Loki needs him, he's coming out whether I like it or not. And I think I may have to let him blow off some steam later." Bruce sounds somewhat surprised that he'd actually managed to bargain with Hulk, which is weird, because Hulk's living in his head so one would think he'd know Hulk better than anyone.

And yet, Bruce still hasn't totally seemed to decide Hulk isn't a monster, although this makes it seem like they're getting there.

"Sleipnir's real." Tony says.

Bruce frowns. "What? But he's just... you know, imaginary. Loki grew horse legs last night when you were sleeping. He was crawling around his room, saying it was their field, looking for Sleipnir. You know, in his song 'follow them to find the one you love'."

"No, he's real. Thor apparently found him yesterday, and he honestly didn't seem to know, so he might actually be innocent here. Not that that changes the fact that Sleipnir been starving in an Asgardian dungeon for who even knows how long! A century?! Two?! Loki's like a thousand, right? I have no clue how Sleipnir's even still alive! He looks like he's been to hell and back multiple times. He looks worse than Loki's Hel." Tony rants. "I mean, now Loki trying to feed him makes horrible sense."

"I really wish you were kidding about this, but I can tell you're not." Bruce moans, and Tony definitely shared that sentiment when Thor told him. "How bad a shape is Sleipnir in?"

Seeing it is so much worse than hearing about it, Tony knows from experience. Tony hesitates a tad, but he trusts Bruce's hold on Hulk and he trusts Hulk not to smash him, so he tells Jarvis to pull up a screenshot of Sleipnir from the video call he'd just had. Somehow, the frozen image seems even worse. Tony could count the bones jutting out of Sleipnir's body, and the fact he appears to be an older horse rather than a young colt somehow makes him seem even skinnier.

Bruce's eyes bleed green, but apparently his deal with Hulk is working, since he doesn't transform. "What sort of sick psychopath does that?!!" Bruce's voice is deeper than normal, maybe because his eyes are green and thus Hulk is partially out. He sighs and rubs his face before looking at the photo with mostly-successful clinical detachment.

"I'm not going to list the obvious malnourishment, but he's probably dealing with atrophied muscles, if he really was locked in a cell without much space to move. I mean, look at him. His head's drooping, he's not standing. I wouldn't be at all surprised if he had some infections, although it's hard to tell just looking at him.

"So what do you even do with a starved horse?" Tony asks Bruce as Clint walks in, saying something about Cooper leaving his swim goggles up here.

"What do you mean 'what do you do with a starved horse?!'" Clint demands incredulously. "You feed it! I thought you were a genius."

Then, he notices the holographic picture being projected from Tony's phone. "Holy shit." He stares.
"I have literally never seen a horse in such horrible shape. I mean, yeah, people treat them terribly here, too, but how is he still alive?"

"You've worked with horses?" Tony asks, feeling a bit more hopeful but also confused. "Since when?"

Clint just frowns at the picture some more. "Wait a sec, that horse has way too many legs. Wasn't Loki's horse like that?"

Tony nods. "He is Loki's horse. He wasn't so imaginary after all." Clint looks horrified when Tony once again recounts what he'd heard from Thor. At the end, Clint's looking like he really wants to turn somebody into a pincushion for his arrows.

"How the hell am I supposed to break this to Loki?" Tony asks, running a hand over his face and through his hair. He can still barely wrap his head around it, it feels surreal even after telling two other people.

He gets Jarvis to show the camera feed from the pool. Loki is sitting with Simba, Lilo and Stitch on a surfboard- which he'd insisted on bringing back from Malibu, even though there's not an ocean here- and it's apparently his way of keeping his toys that can't get wet close to him while he plays in the water.

When Loki kicks his legs in the water, the surfboard goes almost impossibly fast, as if it's motorized. He's giving Lila and Cooper rides on it, much to the kids' obvious delight, before the diving board catches their attention.

"Jarvis, are there any movies or anything about imaginary friends turning out real?" Not that a movie would come close to solving this problem or replace having an honest conversation with Loki, but they've helped in the past. Special thanks to Stitch and Elsa, with honorary mentions to Violet Parr and Lucius Best/Frozone.

There probably aren't any movies where an imaginary friend was really starving in a freaking dungeon, because what kind of sicko would make a movie about that? What kind of sicko does that, anyways?

Jarvis waits a bit before answering. "The closest I can find to a longtime not-so-imaginary friend is Mr. Aloysius Snuffleupagus, although his first name is rarely used and he also goes by Snuffy."

"Who?" Tony asks.

"I was getting to that, sir. Mr. Snuffleupagus was believed to be Big Bird's imaginary friend for fourteen years. His first appearance on Sesame Street, on November 8, 1971, marked the trend of him conveniently disappearing whenever someone else might have seen him. On November 18, 1985, he was finally seen by the adults on the show, who were under the impression that Big Bird was making him up."

Jarvis provides a picture of a brown, hairy, mammoth like thing with yellow eyes, and then the same creature that's a slightly different shade of brown with longer eyelashes and non-yellow eyes. Apparently they'd changed his look sometime over the years, because he looked really weird at first.

"Um, I'm assuming this weird mammoth thing is Mr. Snuffle-whatever?"

"Snuffleupagus." Clint looks at Tony in surprise. "You've never seen Sesame Street?"
"I don't have kids." Tony says, because presumably Clint's watched it with his. Admittedly, it did exist when Tony was a kid, but it's not like Howard ever would've let him watch it even if he'd wanted to (maybe he had, and Howard had shot it down?). "And what does it teach, like numbers and letters and stuff? I already knew all that well before I was two. You're talking to a genius, remember? I was building circuit boards at four, when most kids would just be learning all their ABCs."

"I knew all that, too. I just liked the puppets." Bruce says.

"Yeah, okay, Sesame Street is probably not what we're looking for, J." Tony mutters, although Loki had mentioned the little girl at the SI daycare wearing what Tony and Bruce later worked out was a Cookie Monster shirt, although Loki called it Cootie Monster at first. The girl had listed Cookie Monster and Grover as good blue monsters. 

Technically, Elsa and Anna made Olaf as kids, and Elsa brought him to life later, and Quasimodo had those gargoyle friends, but Tony doesn't know if those were actually supposed to be real or not.

There probably isn't a movie that covers something so colossally messed up. At least, not one Loki would watch.

"If I may make a suggestion, sir, perhaps you might want to call Professor Xavier?" Jarvis suggests. "By the way, your next appointment is scheduled for today at three o'clock."

Tony nods, and Clint looks like he's torn between staying here and going back to the pool. Tony waves him away. The archer leaves, looking decidedly less happy than when he'd arrived.

Maybe Charles will have an idea of how to tell Loki about this. After all, the man-mutant, whatever, he's still a person, despite what some bigots apparently think- is Loki's therapist right now.

Apparently, Charles doesn't do video calls, so there's no point in having a holographic screen.

The phone rings for a bit, until Tony starts to wonder if the Professor even has an answering machine, until there's finally an answer.

"Hello, Mr. Stark. Are you calling to cancel our appointment today?" Charles asks.

"Uh, no, actually, we really need you soon." Tony says, his mind racing.

"I'm teaching a class in twenty minutes, but if it's really urgent, I can cancel it. I'm sure the students would not mind." He sounds faintly amused about that last part.

Tony quickly fills Charles in on the whole situation with Sleipnir. Charles never encountered any of Loki's friends, though.

The man just listens patiently, not speaking until Tony's done "-and I don't know how to tell Loki without screwing something up, and I don't know how to nurse a starved horse back to health. Not to mention, Loki will totally freak out when he sees Sleipnir like this, not that I blame him at all, of course, but what if it has some horrible effect?"

"This says you're supposed to feed them alfalfa hay, starting with one pound every four hours for the first few days." Bruce reads off of a tablet. "You're also supposed to contact a veterinarian, for obvious reasons, although Sleipnir's an alien horse, so a normal vet may not work..."
He pauses and then frowns. "Immediate overfeeding could result in death."

"Is there any chance that Sleipnr might not make it?" Charles asks somberly.

Tony blanches. He hadn't even thought of that. "I mean, I figured since he somehow is still alive now- and he looks like he should have died long ago- he wouldn't die now, but they said he keeps throwing up. I don't know." He hates not knowing.

Sleipnir's not going to die, is he? After everything he's been through, he deserves to have a chance at a good life where he's treated right.

"If I still don't know what to do with him. I mean, my tower isn't exactly horse-friendly, and if he was here Loki might have to watch his friend die." Besides, horses are supposed to be outside or at least in a barn or something. Sleipnir really deserves to be outside after being locked in a dungeon.

Maybe Tony could have Sleipnir at the Malibu Mansion, or even the Hampton mansion that he hasn't set foot in in years, but that still wouldn't solve the problem of Loki seeing his friend like that.

"Sleipnir can recuperate at my school." Charles suggests. "We decided to actually make use of the barn out back. A fairly new extracurricular here is horseback riding, as well as Animal Husbandry, so we have all the necessary equipment for looking after horses." Charles says.

"What about alien god horses?" Tony mumbles. Then again, Charles' school is apparently full of mutants, who undoubtedly have a better grasp on this sort of stuff than most.

"I believe we may even be able to help alien god horses." Charles says lightly, but it becomes more serious. "Many of the horses we have now did not have particularly pleasant pasts. Rather like a lot of my students."

"Did I ever tell you how glad I am that you're Loki's therapist?" Tony asks. Seriously, Charles has done a lot of good, after only one session and a phone call. He introduced Loki to Kurt and is now helping tremendously with this Sleipnir situation. Plus he seemed to help Loki during a flashback once.

Tony wishes he'd hired Charles from the beginning instead of Dr. Carlisle.

"I see you're scheduled for a three o'clock today, but it might be best to get Sleipnir situated before, and Loki can come visit him if he gets better."

"Yeah, sounds great." Tony mumbles, still trying to convince himself that Sleipnir won't die. He hadn't missed the 'if' in Charles' sentence. Sadly, they can't use 'when' just yet.

"I'll call for a jet to pick up Thor." Tony says.

"Oh, there's no need. We have our own jet, remember?" Charles asks. "Just tell Thor ahead of time, will you?" Tony nods and gives Charles the number Thor had called from, even if it's technically Jane's number.

"Hopefully you'll be able to bring Loki to see Sleipnir soon."
Jane's giving Thor a completely deserved look of disappointment that only grows when he continues telling them who Loki is.

She clearly isn't pleased with him, but she says she knows he's a better person than that, and that he'd better do something to make it right.

There's no changing the past, but Thor is honestly trying his hardest to do what is right when it comes to Sleipnir. Even Tony seemed to realize that to some extent.

Not long after this conversation, Tony calls them back and asks about the rest of Loki's friends. After all, if Sleipnir is real, who's to say they are not. Tony says something about Loki trying to feed Fenrir and Sleipnir last night and asks if they're starving Fenrir in a dungeon too.

Thor tells him that he actually had thought to look for Loki's friends in the dungeon when he discovered Sleipnir, but didn't see any of the others.

Tony nods, looking disappointed, and changes the subject. Apparently, he set up a place for Sleipnir to recuperate, but it's not his tower or any of his houses, not even the one in Malibu, which had a nice yard.

Tony explains that a jet is coming to pick Thor and Sleipnir up to take them to that place, and that Thor had better go along with it. They'll get a call when it arrives.

At one time, Thor would have loudly demanded who would dare order around the son of Odin and Prince of Asgard. Now, he follows orders from Steve, the Captain of America, and Furious Nick. Besides, he has to admit that he's not entirely sure what to do with Sleipnir. Every effort to feed him hasn't ended rather badly.

He wants to help Sleipnir, honestly, and not just in an attempt to make up for a few of his countless transgressions against Loki.

A few hours later, a call from an unknown number comes in, and it's a woman's voice asking if Thor's there. When he says he is, she tells him to go to a certain crater outside of town. She doesn't refer to it as such, but Thor realizes she's talking about the crater Mjolnir had left upon impact with the ground when Thor was banished. It had been quite a popular place, and S.H.I.E.L.D had eventually built a whole structure around it, but apparently people have lost interest in it.

This would be much easier if Sleipnir was small again. He'd attract a lot of stares from the Midgardians if they saw him in this larger form, and it would be much harder for Thor to get him there.

It takes a bit, but Sleipnir does shrink down to the size of a colt, like he'd been when Thor snuck him out of the dungeons and here to Midgard. He looks much better than he had then, if only because he is clean now. Unfortunately, he has not gained any weight since he has regurgitated everything he's eaten.

Thor wraps Sleipnir in a light blanket, not because of the temperature, but to keep Sleipnir hidden from curious eyes. He makes sure to tuck the can opener in with him. For some reason, Sleipnir seems very attached to it, and Jane is letting him have it as a parting gift.

Finally, he sets out to the crater. He doesn't use Mjolnir to fly, even though it would be quicker. People recognize him even in Midgardian clothes, although part of that might be because Mjolnir's strapped to his hip. He just smiles politely at people but does not stop until he reaches his destination. (Two teenagers, one male and one female, try to follow him, but he tells them that this
is Avenger business. When that only makes them more eager to follow him there, he tells them that there is dangerous radiation, and they scurry).

There's some sort of aircraft by the crater. It's smaller than the Helicarrier, dark and sleek with wings sticking out of the side.

A woman with white hair waits outside of the craft, and she introduces herself as Storm.

The interior of the craft- the X-Jet, or Blackbird, has a row of seats on both sides, facing inward. In the aisle between them is what looks like a harness for Sleipnir, only they'd apparently been planning for an adult horse.

Sleipnir seems incapable of changing sizes right now, so Thor takes one of the seats, still holding Sleipnir to make sure the horse isn't injured during their flight.

. Sleipnir certainly seems to want to change sizes rather than remain in Thor's arms, as Storm makes the jet rise into the air. Thor isn't sure if most jets are able to simply fly up or not.

Thor gently strokes Sleipnir, trying to calm him down. He's honestly not sure if this is making it better or worse.

He learns that Storm is aptly named and actually has powers quite similar to his own. She calls clouds to mask the jet from view.

It is very intriguing, and shocking, to meet a Midgardian with powers much like his own. She tells him that she is a mutant.

Apparently, there are many people who dislike her for her powers, and Thor feels himself grow angry. Thunder rumbles around them. Who would dare look down on powers so similar to his own? They are a gift, not a curse.

Yet, they'd treated Loki's powers much like how Storm's powers are treated by some people here. Tony had told Thor, once, to imagine what it would have been like if he'd been abused and ostracized for his powers.

He might have been, had he grown up on Midgard.

Eventually, their jet lands lands on a very luscious lawn. There's a huge house next to it, that might rival one of Tony Stark's, except it looks much older. There's even a barn out back.

Thor gets off the jet, and Storm tells him to wait for "the Professor". Then, the jet takes off again, but it doesn't look like it flies far, just around to the other side of the house for some reason.

"Hey, Goldilocks." A voice says. Thor vaguely recalls Tony calling him something like that a few times, but this clearly isn't Tony.

Thor turns to frown at the speaker, who turns out to be a shorter, black-haired man with sideburns, and something sticking out of his mouth. The man takes the thing out of his mouth and exhales rather odorous smoke. Thor fishes around his brain for the word for it. A... cigar, that's it. No, maybe it was cigarette? Whichever it is, they're not on Asgard, and Thor can't understand the appeal of them.

"I am Thor, Prince of Asgard." Thor inclines his head slightly in greeting, both to be polite and to ensure this man will know how to address him in the future. The man looks thoroughly unimpressed.
"No, really? I had no idea you were the thunder Avenger from another world." The man tells him. "I thought most people carried around huge hammers like that."

Thor is distinctly reminded of Tony's brand of humor, which isn't always obvious.

"Are you not cold?" Thor asks, mostly because he's starting to get cold, himself, which means Sleipnir probably is, too. Maybe they should get him inside, considering his frail state. Glancing at Sleipnir, he realizes the horse doesn't seem at all bothered by the low temperature. Right, if Sleipnir is Loki's child, he may be immune to cold since Loki is a Frost Giant. Not to mention, the dungeons were rather cold as well.

The man snorts slightly. "Canadian winters eat these pathetic New York winters for breakfast. There's not even snow here right now." That's right. Apparently, many parts of Midgard turn into a sort of less hospitable Jotunheim during the season known as 'winter.' Here, snow and ice are not foreign things associated with an enemy realm.

"Besides, the Professor doesn't let me smoke inside. Keeps telling me I should quit, too." The man doesn't sound like he's even given a single thought to actually quitting. One thing is certain, he's not the Professor that Storm mentioned. "Not like he can say it's killing my lungs by turning them black or whatever shit happens to most people, though."

Thor has no reply for this, but it turns out he doesn't need one.

Sleipnir has started wriggling, and now he starts to grow, seeming annoyed that he hadn't been able to do so in the jet. The blanket he'd been wrapped in falls to the ground, exposing the emaciated horse. Sleipnir bends his neck to pick up his precious can opener in his mouth.

"So, do you treat all horses like shit there in Ass-gard, or just this one? Do all horses have too many legs there?" The man asks, nodding at Sleipnir and taking another drag from the cigarette. Like Tony, he seems to mispronounce Asgard so it has the word ass in it on purpose as he gives Thor a hard look.

"Most have four legs, just like on Midgard." At least the answer to that question isn't horrible.

"Are they fed any better?" The man demands, teeth clenched around the cigarette. "Surely you could have divvied up the food more evenly. Because this is both horrible and stupid. You still use horses as transportation up in viking land, right? This is like letting your car rust and never filling her tank, and then trying to drive her somewhere. Except horses are actually alive and have rights!" The man glares rather fiercely at him.

"The horses in the palace stables are... fed very well." Thor once again feels rather ashamed of Odin, and he feels really bad for saying this in front of Sleipnir, who can obviously understand them more than any other horse could. They take very good care of the horses in the stables, and this is like rubbing it in for Sleipnir. The comparison between the palace stables and the dungeon where Sleipnir was secretly kept just makes Sleipnir's treatment seem that much worse.

"I see. So because he's different, he doesn't deserve something as basic as food." The man's tone is as acidic as a bilgesnipe.

"I did not know of his existence until yesterday. I was not a part of this." Thor looks at Sleipnir. How many times had he laughed at Loki for talking to someone who "wasn't real" and thought nothing of it, while Sleipnir was wasting away in the dungeons? "I found him in the dungeons and immediately removed him."
"What's his crime? Lemme guess- being different. Having two many legs, like some sort of mutant." If looks could kill, someone would certainly be dead, and it wouldn't be Sleipnir. "You do this to all your prisoners?"

"Most of our prisoners are treated much more humanely, in the upper dungeons. I had never visited the lower dungeons, where he was kept, until the day before this one." Thor admits, ashamed, and the look this man's giving him certainly doesn't help his guilt. Neither is the fact that Sleipnir may be listening, hearing again how much worse it was for him. Thor hadn't even done anything to Sleipnir, hadn't known about him, yet he still feels guilty about what happened. "I swear, if I had, I would not have allowed him to stay down there. It should be a crime, to leave anyone in the conditions he was in."

Jane and Darcy both say that it's animal cruelty, and Thor finds he's inclined to agree with them. When he first found Sleipnir, he'd thought that nobody would ever deserve to be in those conditions.

The thought that his father knew Sleipnir was there and let it go on makes Thor's blood boil.

He feels bad for how he treated Loki, too. They haven't even gotten into that. They always mocked him for getting stupider, saying he was too weak, but if they hadn't hit him, it wouldn't have happened. Part of it had seemed awfully sudden, though.

"So who the hell put him there?" The man growls. "If I ever find them..." His fists curl, and suddenly, long metal claws shoot out of his knuckles. Thor can do little but stare.

"It better not have been you." The man narrows his eyes Thor, and light glints off the wickedly sharp claws. "You seem to declare your innocence a lot, and sometimes that means the opposite."

"Logan, I don't think there's a need for your claws." A voice says.

"I think there is a need for them, Professor." The clawed man- apparently Logan- replies darkly.

"Logan, he's telling the truth." The bald man- the Professor that Storm told him to wait for, apparently- says.

Somehow, Sleipnir seemed to recognize the Professor from the moment he saw him.

Thor's rather relieved that the Professor is vouching for him. Yes, he'd been horrible in his treatment of Loki, but Sleipnir's treatment almost seems worse, and Thor wouldn't want to be blamed for it.

Then again, he's not sure he wants those claws of Logan's slicing through his father, either. He doesn't want to think that Odin might deserve something like that. That Thor himself might deserve that for how he'd treated Loki.

The claws slide back into Logan. The cuts from where they'd stuck out of his knuckles knit together, until there's no sign that he'd ever been injured. It heals faster than the same injury would for Thor, and Midgardians are much, much slower in healing than Asgardians.

But Midgardians don't suddenly grow incredibly long claws out of their knuckles, either. Nor does any other being Thor can think of, actually. Who is this Logan man? Is he one of these mutants, like Storm?

"Thor," The Professor says, his face and voice not betraying any of his thoughts. "I'm not sure if Tony told you about me. I'm Professor Charles Xavier. I work with Loki." Thor had been too
focused on the claws to really look at Professor Xavier until now. He is bald and dressed more formally than Logan, but that's not what catches Thor's attention.

Professor Xavier is in a wheeled chair that Thor vaguely recognizes as a Midgardian invention for people who cannot walk. The thought of someone being unable to do something as basic as walking is a very odd one. Someone requiring a chair to move around like that would not last a day in Asgard, and would most likely be mocked and tormented endlessly for it.

"There are people here on Earth who mock those who are handicapped, too." Professor Xavier says rather more mildly than Thor would have expected, considering the words..

It's like the man was reading his thoughts, Thor thinks with slight horror.

"I could do that, of course." Professor Xavier's voice echos in Thor's mind, almost like Sleipnir's, even though Sleipnir does not actually talk. Thor looks around in shock, and Professor Xavier smiles slightly. Logan smirks at Thor.

"What is this seidr magic?" Thor demands. He's been having to shift his view on that, but still, the idea of someone going in his head is not a pleasant one.

It seems, when Thor looks at this man, that what he's lacking in physical strength, he makes up for in mental strength. However, that doesn't really say a whole lot. In Asgard, physical strength tops mental strength any day.

If Professor Xavier had been in Asgard, he certainly would have been treated much the same as Loki had been, only for this man, it would have been for being both weak and Midgardian (Thor no longer looks down on Midgard, but most of Asgard does. He's trying to change their views, with limited success).

But here, he seems to be the leader, and even the Logan person- who seems like a true warrior- apparently holds Professor Xavier in high esteem.

No matter what Thor was taught in Asgard about physical strength being the most important, he cannot deny the immense power that Professor Xavier seems to have, despite the fact he is confined to a chair.

When Professor Xavier speaks again, it's coming from his own mouth and not Thor's head. "I am a mutant with telepathic abilities, but I can read you like an open book without so much as going an inch in your mind. You wear your thoughts on your sleeve. Now, we really should be focusing on Sleipnir, I believe."

Professor Xavier's wheelchair starts to move without anyone pushing it, like Midgard's cars. "Come." He says simply.

Originally, Thor goes to support Sleipnir and help him walk, but Sleipnir goes towards Logan instead, not seeming at all concerned about the long claws the man had coming out of his knuckles earlier, when they could theoretically pop out at any second.

"I swear it looks like he's thinking things at me." Logan mutters, as he helps Sleipnir towards the barn. Sleipnir sends him a look that clearly asks "You can hear me?"

"Well, you're not actually talking, but you have this thing with your eyes." Logan tells the horse. "I'm guessing you're some kind of super-genius mutant horse or something, Sleipnir. That's your name, right?"
"I'd say that's an accurate assessment." The Professor smiles at Sleipnir.

Thor follows them around the huge house, and into the barn, which obviously has stables for horses.

"Riding is a new extracurricular." Professor Xavier comments, though Thor isn't sure what he means by *extracurricular*.

"What is this place?" Thor asks.

"A barn. Surely you have those where you're from." Logan snarks while helping Sleipnir into a stall.

"It is a school for mutants." Professor Xavier explains. "A safe place, in a world that often does not accept us."

"Storm said that she is a mutant. Her abilities are quite similar to mine." Thor says.

"Yes. And some of us have abilities quite similar to Loki's." Charles says mildly, but there's definitely a reprimand for Thor's past treatment of Loki in there, and a warning telling him not to treat those here like that.

"If you're close-minded," Professor X tells him, "You really should not be here."

Charles can't physically help Logan and Thor get Sleipnir situated in the barn with the other horses, but he remains with them. The eight-legged horse gravitates towards Logan during the whole ordeal. Sleipnir has his own stall, and Thor says it's bigger than his cell in the dungeons was.

It's already abundantly clear that Sleipnir's neglected stomach cannot stomach solid foods well. Thor has mentioned trying to feed him, and reports that Sleipnir threw up every time.

Thor seems to be genuinely concerned about Sleipnir and refuses to leave until he is better.

Charles calls in Jean and Hank to start looking over Sleipnir. Sleipnir seems surprised to see the blue man known as Beast.

Thor also seems shocked to see a blue man, but he does not say anything racist. Then again, Hank doesn't look like a Jotun, even though he's blue, since he has fur. Thor hasn't met Kurt yet, and Charles isn't sure what he'd say. He doesn't dive into Thor's mind to find out.

Hank and Jean talk quietly to Sleipnir while they give him his check-up. Sleipnir clearly isn't used to being touched, and he seems to be trying to shut it out at first.

Aside from the obvious severe malnourishment and atrophied muscles, Sleipnir's list of ailments is less severe than Charles would have thought, considering all he's been through. Being locked in the dark has given him a Vitamin D deficiency, as it would in people, except it takes longer for horses to absorb Vitamin D than humans.

He has colic, from eating too much too quickly (Thor reports that Sleipnir had eaten an apple when he first arrived on Midgard and threw it up). This leads to an elevated heart rate and breathing. Sleipnir rolls around on the ground a lot, as well as make a groaning sound and sometimes nip at his abdomen.
His sheath is infected and swollen, which evidently makes it very uncomfortable to urinate, a result of Sleipnir being in an extremely filthy cell. Another result of living in filth is that there's Thrush on his hoofs, which some of the horses here had when they first arrived at the mansion.

But there aren't any huge bacterial infections. His body isn't covered in sores or bruises, and there are no broken bones. Hopefully this means that Sleipnir at least had not been beaten, although broken bones apparently heal quite quickly for alien beings.

Sleipnir does have a habit called cribbing, which means he bites on a solid object and arches his neck. One of the other horses used to do it as well.

Sleipnir won't give up the can opener he insists on carting around for some reason, guarding it extremely possessively.

It's decided that they'll start feeding Sleipnir with a nasogastric tube to give him the required nutrients before moving to alfalfa hay. He's also going to need physical therapy for his atrophied muscles.

Getting the nasogastric tube in is somewhat tricky. They try explaining why he needs it, but Sleipnir clearly doesn't see how a tube will help anything, and doesn't even seem to be listening half the time.

Despite his severely weakened state, Sleipnir keeps jerking his head back. Charles can't blame him, it has to be a very odd feeling. Even though it's a slow, lethargic move, it still makes it difficult to insert the tube, and they have to hold his head still.

Sleipnir's breathing quickly as they do, and Charles can see he's having some kind of panic attack.

Slowly, Charles slips in.

*Odin is sitting on top of Sleipnir. Sleipnir isn't emaciated, and actually looks healthy and incredibly strong. He seems annoyed about Odin mounting him, not that Charles can blame him. He twists, bucks, kicks until Odin goes sailing neatly over his shoulders, landing in a heap in a pile of horse poop. He doesn't look much like the usually pristine royalty now.*

*Sleipnir tosses his head back as if laughing.*

*When Odin approaches him again, the eight-legged snorts, darts away easily on nimble legs even in the enclosed stable hall. He rears up, front legs kicking, and the Allfather stops his approach.*

*He charges at the Allfather. Odin snarls in fury, especially when a blow catches him in the face, almost knocking off his eyepatch and bruising him quite badly.*

*Charles is pretty sure Odin's arm just got broken by a stray hoof, too.*

*Odin deserves it, and Charles rarely wishes pain on others.*

*Odin calls for guards, and they approach in golden armor, twirling ropes. The door is open now, but the guards are blocking it. It seems Sleipnir's still not done with Odin, who is staggering to his feet, his face very beat-up.*

*Ropes land over the horse's neck and tighten. He yanks, sending one guard sprawling, and tries to Stomp on him, but the ropes from the other guards hold him back. It's obvious they're cutting off his air supply.*
One of the guards injects Sleipnir with some kind of substance that makes his fighting lessen even more.

Odin's one remaining eye glares at Sleipnir with a fury that makes it quite clear that he's been extremely bad and is now in a huge deal of trouble. Sleipnir doesn't look sorry, but he does look scared.

He tenses, as if waiting for Odin to mount him again. Or for the first blows of a beating. Which will come first?

The guards wrap his eight legs in rope, pulling him off his feet. He tries to fight them off but he can't as they're dragging him away. Odin's parting words to Sleipnir echo around Charles in the memory.

"Now, you're going to stay there until you learn to behave."

It's all too loud, too bright, making his brain pound as he squeezes his eyes shut. It's all outside him, he thinks, so very different from The Dark. The Dark had been everything and nothing, still and silent but not when he'd talked with Loki. For a very long time, maybe, he hadn't. They'd hurt him, but he'd looked out of Loki's head to see what he was seeing a lot of the time, even if most of it hurt.

Here, there's no Darkness, no Loki. Where's his Loki? Sometimes, Sleipnir catches flashes or hears him in his head, even though he's in Loki's head, so it shouldn't be the other way around like it seems. Nothing makes much sense. Sometimes he gets glimpses of the tower, of a little boy and an even littler girl. And Tony, of course Tony.

He tries to scream out to Loki, but his voice apparently doesn't work because Loki never responds. Maybe Loki doesn't care about him anymore, now that he has even more real friends? What if he's decided Simba is better? After all, Simba has a real body.

There are other horses here, in the stables, but they're kind of slow so Sleipnir doesn't talk to them much. They don't talk much, either. Still, Loki loves horses, so of course there are horses in his mind, and a field and the stables he's in, just like his and Loki's field. They were never there in The Dark, though.

He can see the stars now. He could never see them before, but they're here. Comforting, tiny, pinpricks of light that form pictures like Leo the Lion or Pegasus, the horse with wings. Sleipnir wishes he had wings, because then he could flap them and try to fly back to Loki.

Right now, he can't even run. He can't, even though he ran with Loki not long ago, he thinks, in The Dark. Or maybe that was a long time ago...

If you find the field where the horses roam,
And you need a place to call your home,

The moon and the stars will give you light,
To sleep in the grass in peace tonight.

He still almost never eats. Loki rarely managed to feed him, and when he did, the food was always really gross by the time it got to Loki's brain. It never looked like what Loki ate.
There's a tube that gives him a weird, horribly scratchy feeling in his nose that goes all the way down his throat and he can't spit it out.

His stomach hurts, not that that's anything new. Even when it feels... full. It takes him a while to realize that's what it is, because he's never felt it before, but his stomach still hurts. It's not like when Thor fed him and he threw up, because he doesn't throw up now. He isn't sure how he's feeling full, though, because he still hasn't eaten anything.

The water sparkles slightly in the trough. Water is something he'd gotten even less than food. Its ripples seem to laugh and welcome him as he lowers his head to slurp it up. It cools his throat and for a moment, prevents the scratchiness of the tube. He closes his eyes in bliss and melts into water.

Then there's hay, and it's marvelous, glorious, better than everything. He's not even imagining it, because he can feel it. Sleipnir can't remember ever getting hay before. He tries to save it, though, because who knows when he'll get food again. He was stupid with the apple, when he didn't make it last.

He doesn't let anyone get near his hay, because surely they'll take it away.

They tell him he'll get more. They have to be lying. But it's always there when he wakes up.

Thor often visits, but Loki doesn't, and Sleipnir doesn't know why. He doesn't want Thor, he wants his Loki, so at one point he kicks Thor in the ribs. Also, Thor had gotten too close to his hay. Still, Thor returns.

The two women Thor talked to never show up anymore, which is sad because Sleipnir liked them. Had Loki known them? He has to, because Sleipnir only knows who Loki knows. Had Loki made them up, too?

There's a lot of touching here, which Sleipnir tries to shut out. He was never touched in The Dark. But this touching is kind of nice. People come in, young people, and sometimes touch his nose, looking sad and horrified all at the same time. They mount the other horses sometimes, ride them out into the field. Sleipnir wishes he could go with them, but he's really glad nobody's sitting on him.

Older people come and do stuff like bend his legs, and try to get him to walk, saying something Sleipnir doesn't understand about muscles and 'atrophy' or is it 'a trophy'? Sometimes it's the blue, fuzzy man or the woman. They're nice, but Sleipnir likes the dark, clawed man best, except he doesn't have claws now. Sleipnir likes him because he doesn't seem to like Odin, and he makes Sleipnir feel safe, safer than the other people who do it. Also, he's snarky to most people but gentle with Sleipnir, like Tony is to his Loki.

There's a girl that's with the dark, clawed man a lot, but she doesn't touch Sleipnir, and backs away when he cautiously tries to nuzzle her. She doesn't touch any of the other horses, either.

The dark clawed man- Logan- suggests that maybe he'd want to go outside. He almost tries to stand, until he realizes. Surely they'll take his hay away when he's not guarding it. He balks, refuses to leave the stall, plonks back down on the floor.

Logan lets him stay, but that's not the end of it. He asks again, and the girl... Rogue, she's nice. She doesn't touch. She promises to look after his hay, make sure none of the horses take it.

Sometimes, the dark clawed man- Logan- takes Sleipnir out into the field, making sure he doesn't
collapse. Sleipnir likes it more when Logan supports him than when Thor did.

_The silver stallion gallops away_

_His herd follows him and they start to neigh_

_Their hoofs beat to the stars and moon above_

_Just follow them to find the one you love._

Professor X has a gentle voice when he talks to Sleipnir, asking him about what happened with Odin, and what happened in The Dark. Sometimes, the Professor's voice is in his head, but Loki's still isn't and why can't the Professor be Loki? Or maybe the Professor _is_ Loki, and Loki's pretending to be Professor X. Loki's the only one who ever talked in Sleipnir's head before.

Sleipnir isn't even sure about Odin, because maybe that's something that happened to Loki? But Professor X says that's his memory, not Loki's, which makes no sense. He keeps saying weird things about not being in Loki's head. Yes, he's not in The Dark anymore, but Loki's been happier in Midgard so maybe his head changed.

Fenrir used to be in The Dark, Sleipnir thinks and tells Professor X with his eyes, but he hadn't seen Fenrir there for a long time, maybe. Maybe it wasn't too long.

Sleipnir bats at his can opener. He wishes his Loki would come find it, because then he'd find him. And Loki's can opener turned into a mini Loki, so surely this can opener will produce Loki sometime.

Professor X says Loki will come soon.

_I'm out of The Darkness after so long,_

_Yet still I am not where I truly belong._

_The stars and the moon all shine above_

_But now I cannot find the one I love._
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

Some more movies and times with the Barton family, before Loki has his second session with Charles Xavier.

Chapter Notes

Well, this update was faster than some others I've had. Fifteen days isn't bad. Thanks to my semi-beta readers, Nessaiya and RenneMichaels.

REALLY long chapter alert, the longest yet. I hope it isn't too long or boring...

A few reviewers from last chapter had some good points that I tried to address in this chapter. In the first part, actually. Also, thanks to AbstractionDesolation for suggesting Pete's Dragon (the original from 1977, not the remake from last year), which I've never actually seen, but it has a lot of relevant themes. Obviously there are spoilers for that. I spoiled it for myself too, since I just watched youtube clips and looked it up on wikipedia...

There are also major spoilers for the Toy Story movies, which are some of my favorite movies ever. But even the most recent of those movies, Toy Story 3, has been out for almost seven years (wow, it's really been that long?) so presumably if you haven't seen them by now, you're not going to.

After Tony calls Thor back about taking Sleipnir to Charles' school, he heads towards the elevator and down to his lab, mind still racing. Well, it always is, but he has a lot to wrap his head around, so even though it's not even 9:30 in the morning, he's holding a glass of scotch.

Sleipnir's condition itself hadn't really been the shocking part of what he's learned this morning. Animal abuse and cruelty happen on Earth, too. Hell, so does inhumane treatment of humans. Nothing new there, even if it shouldn't happen. There are undoubtedly plenty of horses and other animals on this planet that were treated just as horribly as Sleipnir apparently was, but those poor creatures probably hadn't made it, whereas Sleipnir has somehow survived. Probably because he's an alien horse with super-durability.

But Tony had just had both the fact that Sleipnir is evidently real and that he was in such a horrible state dumped on him all at once. So maybe his reaction to the news had been a little over the top, but who can blame him? Sleipnir means a lot to Loki, and the god is Tony's friend and even family, in the same sort of way Bruce and Rhodey are.

Tony had definitely snapped at, and wrongly accused, Thor during the initial conversation when he first found out about Sleipnir. It hadn't exactly been fair of him to act that way, Tony reluctantly thinks as Jarvis makes the elevator descend. Sure, Thor was horrible to Loki, but he's clearly trying
to do the right thing now. Thor had evidently been the one to get Sleipnir out of the dungeons. He could have left Sleipnir there, and Tony would have never found out. The only person who would've known would be Thor and whatever asshole put Sleipnir there in the first place. Odin, probably.

So Thor's actually a good guy in this situation, just like he's one of the good guys as an Avenger. Tony hadn't really had anywhere else to direct his anger at that moment, and he hadn't apologized when he called Thor back just a few minutes ago telling him there's going to be a jet picking him up. Tony's never been good with apologies.

Yes, Thor treated Loki terribly and that shouldn't be automatically forgotten or forgiven, but Tony's certainly no saint, himself. He once was the freaking Merchant of Death, something he can never, ever make up for no matter how much good he does as Iron Man or how many philanthropic acts he commits. Not to mention, two of his teammates are freaking assassins who killed who they were told to. But the Avengers don't bring up each other's dark pasts at every opportunity.

Tony hates it when people dredge up his darker past and what his company used to do, yet he's still flinging Thor's treatment of Loki in the thunder god's face at literally every opportunity. Loki's abuse didn't have anything to do with the conversation about Sleipnir, and it was pretty clear Thor wasn't actually responsible for Sleipnir's treatment. Yet Tony still rammed a reminder about Loki and even an accusation about Sleipnir down Thor's throat.

After stepping out of the elevator and immediately being greeted by Dum-E in the bot's normal over enthusiastic way, Tony has Jarvis pull up a holographic screen showing the pool again. Clint and the kids are in a wave pool (yes, Tony has a wave pool, as well as a an olympic-sized pool) while Laura relaxes in the hot tub. Cooper and Lila are jumping over the pool's waves, and often run over to tell Laura something. Eventually, Cooper joins his mother in the hot tub.

At the deep end of the wave pool, away from the others, Loki is sitting on the surfboard with Simba, Stitch, Lilo and Maximus. It's clear the stuffed horse from Tangled doesn't even come close to replacing Sleipnir in Loki's mind, but maybe he wants a horse near him now that Sleipnir's gone? Well, he always liked Maximus anyways, maybe Tony's reading too much into it.

Jormungand slithers in the water around Loki's surfboard, and Tony almost thinks he's going to flip the surfboard over, but he doesn't, and Loki's non-water-friendly toys stay dry. Loki grins as the waves make the surfboard bob up and down and eventually a large enough wave is made that it carries the surfboard across part of the pool, but the grin isn't one of Loki's blinding smiles that seem to light up the room with pure happiness.

According to Jarvis, Bruce is not going green on his cool-off floor, but is instead making himself a cup of tea.

"So, J, what have you found about the guy who decided to ruin Clint's Thanksgiving, Victor Baker?" Tony asks. Also, that guy's name sounds like some cheesy pseudonym for some baking contest winner, not a murderous mechanic.

"Nothing out of the ordinary, sir, and I started searching while you were discussing it last night." Jarvis reports. "Victor Baker had been working at S.H.I.E.L.D. for three and a half years, before this incident and his subsequent suicide. He was a mechanic who often worked on Quinjets, and there were no signs of tampering before this occurrence. There was also no trace of the cyanide tooth on his medical records, but those are from a year ago."

"So, no idea why this guy decided to track and attack two Avengers?" Tony asks. Why would a random mechanic do that? Did he hold a grudge or something? Maybe he was really a double
"I'm afraid not, sir."

"What about the other assholes? Weren't there three of them?" Tony asks.

"That part is even more strange, sir. I have not been able to find anything about them in S.H.I.E.L.D's files, although I have not been able to break into those restricted to only Director Fury."

"There's nothing about them?" Tony asks, surprised. "That's.. I mean, it's not like Mr. Murderer Mechanic would bring two random thugs off the street on his assassination attempt of two of S.H.I.E.L.D's best agents who kick ass for a living."

"I do not believe they are part of S.H.I.E.L.D, sir." Jarvis says. "I have been running a facial recognition software based on the pictures Agent Romanoff took with her phone, which she sent to me last night.

"You said that you didn't have access to Pirate-Eye's stuff?" Tony asks. Technically, they could hack into it, but that would be very time-consuming and Fury would blow a gasket. Not that Tony really cares about that last part- he enjoys driving Fury crazy- but it would probably make things worse, now.

Tony glances back at the screen showing the pool. Fenrir's paddling around in the water now, which occasionally seems to splash, but maybe that's an illusion too? Is Fenrir an illusion? Sleipnir apparently isn't. Tony had asked Thor, but Thor had said the others weren't in the dungeons.

A few hours later, Tony is working on an Iron Man suit while Jarvis multi-tasks. The AI has just finished calling Fury, who didn't have any info on the two people who were with Victor Baker. The Director does seem really annoyed that someone tried to attack Clint's family (evidently, he knew about them, and Tony learns that, when Clint joined S.H.I.E.L.D, Fury had actually helped the archer agent set up what had been a safe house for his family up until a few days ago).

Jarvis is also starting to work on Lila's birthday present, since Loki's out of the lab. They can't do it when Loki's in here, because one, Loki would probably accidentally tell Lila about it and ruin the surprise, and two, there's a chance Loki would want to keep the blue-skinned space ranger doll for himself, since Tony and Jarvis are making it. So Loki not knowing about it is just easier for everyone.

The AI is also undoubtedly looking up everything under the sun about caring for horses, both medically-speaking and in general.

To top it off, Jarvis found another story about imaginary friends being real, and it's not Sesame Street. It's a Disney movie called Pete's Dragon, which came out in 1977, the same year as Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope back in 1977. A New Hope was released on May 25, 1977, four days before Tony's seventh birthday. The only reason Tony had gotten to go see it was because the Stark family got invited to opening night. Tony immediately loved Star Wars, of course, and it had been his best birthday as a kid, even though his parents had barely paid attention to him, although that was nothing new.

Pete's Dragon is apparently live action except for said dragon, but Tony's not actually sure if Loki would watch it. They've never made it through a live action movie because that style bores Loki for some reason, but maybe a cartoon dragon would mean he'd stick with it?
Loki enters the lab, still damp from the time in the pool, as Tony's working on upgrading the scanners on his Iron Man armor. If Victor Von Doom ever shows his face, Tony's going to scan the tar out of him and figure out if his teleportation is the same as Loki's. Jarvis hides the plans for Lila's gift, but Tony has a feeling the AI is still making a 3D model, even if it's not visible.

Loki definitely looks a lot less happy than normal as he hugs Simba and Maximus tightly. Fenrir and Hel appear by Loki's side, the large wolf sticking extremely close. Loki looks enormously relieved to see that his other friends haven't disappeared like Sleipnir, and simultaneously disappointed that Sleipnir doesn't appear with them.

Hel sometimes looks like a zombie on her dead half, like the undead thing Jack Sparrow became in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and sometimes her dead half just looks like an ordinary skeleton. Right now, her dead half looks like a skeleton, and Tony wonders if she even has an eye on that half, or just an empty socket. Her hair is covering it up, though.

Dum-E squeals and rolls happily around Loki before beeping, concerned. Loki smiles slightly at Dum-E as the robot tugs on Loki's starry long coat with his claw.

"How was swimming?" Tony asks. Loki seems to love the water, something Tony has the exact opposite opinion about.

Loki doesn't answer, but his Lilo doll says it was fun surfing, and Stitch nods. In the movie, Stitch had been wary about surfing at first, because he risked drowning in the water, but came to love it.

Lilo seems really excited that Hel is here and starts talking to the older girl excitedly. She'd never been at all perturbed by Hel's odd appearance.

Loki starts to take his Stitch backpack off, but Tony holds up a hand, stopping him. He really doesn't trust the blue alien backpack running loose in his lab, especially after the chainsaw incident that ended with a lab table being hacked to pieces and going to furniture afterlife. Or the dump.

Stitch flattens his huge ears and bares his teeth at Tony, muttering something uncomplimentary that sounds like "Ika patootie" in his alien language. Tony wonders if All-Tongue actually works on Stitch's language, apparently called Tantalog. Jarvis once pulled up a list of translated Tantalog phrases used in the movie and show that he'd found somewhere on the internet, but it only had a hundred or so words and phrases. That doesn't exactly constitute a complete fictional language that could actually be translated, like how people can actually learn Klingon.

Looking for a distraction, both for Loki and Stitch, Tony has Jarvis display holographic versions of the photos they'd taken at the zoo.

Seeming a bit less sad now, Loki starts showing Fenrir and Hel some of his favorite animals. Jormungand had been there the whole time, of course, and so had Simba, Lilo and Stitch, although they'd been lifeless most of the time at the zoo. Tony's not sure if they're aware of what's going on around them when they're just normal toys or not.

Lilo's chatting excitedly to Hel about zombies while looking at the zoo photos, although she clearly thinks her photos of tourists are better (even though they only exist in the show and movie, and Loki's Lilo doll doesn't actually have any. Lilo does have her weird rag doll, Scrump, and the green and white camera she uses in the movie and show, but it apparently doesn't work).

Fenrir and Stitch are pointedly ignoring each other. The two dog-like creatures don't seem to get along all the time. Fenrir seems glad to look at Loki's photos, especially the ones with Loki in his child body, until Stitch decides to try and poke Fenrir to annoy him, even though Stitch's fabric
claw goes through the wolf. Loki's wolf growls warningly, and Stitch just cackles. Loki shoots the alien a warning look.

Bruce comes down to the lab, seeming not at all surprised to see Loki's other friends here. Unlike Loki, he's also not surprised that Sleipnir isn't present, but Bruce knows the truth.

Tony can't help but wonder about Loki's other friends. After all, Sleipnir's real, and Loki had acted like the rest of his Monster Family would know where Sleipnir is. Hadn't he said something about Fenrir being in The Dark with Sleipnir, last night?

But then again, Fenrir hadn't known where Sleipnir is, and Thor had said he checked the dungeons for the others and hadn't found them.

Are they real, too? Or maybe Sleipnir's the only real one? There's no way for Tony to know.

Simba loves looking at the pictures of the lions, although not as much as actually seeing them in the zoo, obviously.

Loki moves on from the photos after a bit and fiddling with holographic 3d models. Tony's at least glad that he's doing something instead of just moping. He watches as Loki fiddles with a 3d model of a young horse. Then, he duplicates the holographic legs, so it has eight.

It's obviously supposed to be Sleipnir, and it even becomes gray, looking a lot like the illusion that used to show up, only it's not the same. Loki stares at the hologram with an unreadable expression. "No! Not my Sleipnir!"

This is even worse than witnessing Loki's misery about losing Sleipnir last night. Both because Tony knows what shape Loki's horse was found in, and because he has to literally bite his tongue to avoid revealing the truth. If, by some chance, Sleipnir doesn't make it, it'd be cruel to give Loki hope beforehand only to yank it away.

Loki furrows his brow, tongue poking out of the corner of his mouth as he starts wiggling his fingers and waving his hands, body swaying slightly to a rhythm seemingly only he can hear. Green energy flares up around his hands like fire.

Well, at least Loki doesn't panic about the green around his hands like he did when he first arrived two months ago.

"Uh, what are you doing, Bambi?" Tony asks. Nothing's actually happening, as far as he can see.

Instead of answering, Loki just looks at Simba, like the lion's hiding a secret as he tries to climb up Loki's leg. Jormungand slithers around the god's shoulders, and Loki glances at him, too. The snake basically seems like a sometimes-living toy, like Simba or Stitch.

"I can do it, like the brooms." What on earth is Loki talking about? "I dids it with my Simba, Stitch an' especially Jormungand, like the Blue Fairy so why... I can'ts! Not now, it doesn't work! Why? 'cause it's holograms? Holograms aren't bodies!"

Oh, Loki's trying to bring the hologram to life, like how he'd made Jormungand out of a rubber tube, and brought his toys to life. But those started out as objects, not holograms. Admittedly, Jarvis can make holograms seem very lifelike, but it's not actually the same.

Loki angrily swipes the hologram out of existence, grabs some paper, and starts folding. He ends up with an eight-legged origami horse, and Tony had seen a flare of green magic around the god's hands when he was making it. The origami Sleipnir looks quite impressive, even if it's tiny.
It tosses its head and starts galloping on its eight paper hoofs. Loki had brought origami animals to life for brief periods, but they were still paper and never lasted as long as Simba, nor did they seem quite as real as Simba or Fenrir and the others.

Unlike when Loki made Jormungand out of a rubber hose, the origami Sleipnir doesn't become any more realistic than a paper horse, but that's probably because Sleipnir's actually real.

Loki just scowls at the origami horse, clearly thinking it's not the same either. He snatches it up and crumbles it into a ball, tossing it aside. "Not my Sleipnir!"

"Hey, um, I'm sure Sleipnir's safe and happy, where he is." Tony says after a bit.

Loki gives Tony a rather annoyed look that clearly asks how would you know?

Tony has to stop working and concentrate on physically restraining himself from blurting out that Sleipnir's alive but very malnourished.

Instead, Bruce grabs *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Loki had originally started reading the *Sorcerer's Stone*, but Tony had ordered the original British version to fit Loki's accent. When it arrived, Bruce had shaken his head and pointed out that Loki's not British, which is obvious, but he still has a similar accent).

Tony continues working on the scanner upgrades while Bruce reads aloud to Loki. Tony's read aloud to Loki before, too.

This time, though, Loki says that he wants to read it, so Bruce passes the book over to the god. At first, Loki reads silently, until he glances at Tony and Bruce. When he reads aloud, he doesn't fumble quite as much as he had even a few days ago.

Before their trip to the zoo, they'd gotten through Harry's own zoo trip, and the mysterious letters arriving. Loki had, apparently, first thought they were delivering letters of the alphabet, and when Tony asked incredulously how they delivered messages in Asgard, Loki muttered something about Odin and ravens, and scrolls.

Right now, they're at the part where Hagrid arrives. Loki really seems to like Hagrid, and is in awe of Diagon Alley, although they need to explain the concept of banks when they reach the Gringotts part. Loki actually seems to have temporarily forgotten to mull over Sleipnir's disappearance as he reads to the remaining three members of his Monster Family, his toys, and the two scientists.

Loki thinks it's hysterical that Harry needs to buy a stick, as Loki calls wands, to do magic. It's ridiculous, Loki points out with a snicker, since Harry had done magic without a wand, and had even teleported to the top of his school. Tony says that maybe the wands help wizards focus magic or something.

Loki finally gets what all the Hedwig comments at the zoo were about, although Harry doesn't name Hedwig until after Diagon Alley.

By the time Pepper returns later that afternoon from whatever mind-numbing meeting she'd been at, Loki has gone back to asking about Sleipnir.

Bruce convinces Loki to come up to the penthouse with him once Pepper enters the lab. She's one of the few people with almost unlimited access, along with Bruce and Loki themselves.

Pepper starts to bring up the cuddling incident in the fort from this morning, and Tony shakes his head. "Nope. I really can't have this conversation right now. I've got enough on my plate already."
Pepper gets her patented look that tells him she's not taking any crap, and Tony just explains the whole situation regarding Sleipnir and how that's kind of taking priority.

Before Tony's even done explaining how Sleipnir is real, Pepper looks like she wants to rush up to the penthouse, wrap Loki in a hug, and not let go while she finds Sleipnir and wraps him in a hug too. Then she looks like she wants to kick some ass.

Tony knows both feelings, and he's not even the cuddly type, although he cuddles with Loki a lot in an entirely platonic way.

"Loki doesn't know." Tony tells her, and Pepper looks like she agrees that waiting to tell him might be best, although she, like Tony, clearly wishes they could just tell him immediately to alleviate some of Loki's sadness about Sleipnir being gone.

Tony calls Charles to see how Sleipnir is doing, even though it's only been about eight hours since Tony even learned about Sleipnir's reality. Sleipnir's probably at Charles' school by now, Tony hopes.

As soon as Charles picks up, he says "I thought I'd hear from you, Mr. Stark. Sleipnir has settled in as well as can be expected for him. Two of my friends and colleagues, who have acted as medics in the past, have checked him over."

"How's he doing? He's not going to die, is he?"

"No, I believe he will get better." Charles says, and Tony breathes a huge sigh of relief. "He's malnourished but somehow does not have any serious diseases."

"Right, well, I'll grab Loki and we'll see you in a bit." Seeing how upset Loki is, he should just go to Charles' mansion/school right now. Tony goes to hang up, but Charles' voice stops him.

"I never told you the location of my school." Charles points out, although he doesn't exactly sound surprised at the idea of Tony knowing it.

Tony snorts. "So? I can find out like literally anything." Well, he hasn't found out the identity of those other two attackers at Clint's house yet, although the key word is yet. Finding the mansion's location hadn't been particularly hard.

"Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters. Really, who uses the word youngster? It's almost as bad as younglings, like what Yoda calls little kids. Anyways, your address is 1407 Graymalkin Lane, Salem Center. Northeast corner of Westchester County, New York. It really wasn't hard to look up, even when you left all the mutant stuff out."

Before Charles can reply, Tony adds "Don't worry, I'm not gonna pass that off to mutant-hate groups or anything. And I have nothing against mutants, which you probably should've noticed during our last session. Anyways, I can fly over so Loki can visit Sleipnir whenever I want, and we're coming now. I can't stand seeing Loki like this, and I bet Sleipnir misses him too."

"Sleipnir does seem to miss Loki a great deal, although he still seems confused about where he is." Charles confirms, but then says patiently. "Mr. Stark, I understand your concern, but you may want to wait."

"Why?" Tony demands. "Loki's been beside himself. Like, he literally cried himself to sleep last night because he can't talk to Sleipnir like he used to, even though Sleipnir's closer now than he was a week ago." Charles makes an interested sort of sound at that, and Tony continues. "He keeps asking about him and keeping them apart is just mean. And you literally just said Sleipnir misses
Loki too."

"Yes, but I don't imagine Loki would react well to seeing Sleipnir in the state he's in now." Charles says. Who the hell would take that well?

Charles has a point, though. Actually, Tony had even thought that he didn't want Loki to see Sleipnir like such bad shape when he'd first seen the starved horse, but was ignoring that at the moment.

"I'd suggest waiting a few days until Sleipnir is really settled and hopefully a bit healthier. I will call you as soon as I think he's ready." Charles promises.

Tony nods. "Great, can we just schedule Loki's next appointment for then, too? I mean, I'd probably royally screw something up with trying to tell him, which is why I haven't told him, which is why Loki's distraught because, to him, Sleipnir is gone." Yes, waiting makes sense, but it's really hard seeing Loki so upset.

Charles agrees, and adds that he'll send a jet to pick them up when the time comes, even when Tony points out he has his own jet, but Charles says he'll get one to pick them up anyways.

Loki is playing with the kids when Tony and Pepper go back up to the penthouse, and the kids had apparently been wondering where Loki was for most of the day. "Were you really building a huge robot that saves animals, Mr. Stark?" Cooper asks.

Tony blinks. What? Where in the world did that come from?

"Uh, no. And I'm not Mr. Stark. That's way too formal. I think I'm more the 'coolest uncle ever' type. I mean, if Natasha can be your Aunt Nat or whatever, I can be Uncle Tony. I'm way more awesome than her, after all. Uh, don't tell her I said that." Natasha would probably do something horrible to him if he said that to her face, so he doesn't.

"Tony, you can't just declare yourself an honorary uncle to somebody else's kids." Pepper sighs.

"Of course I can. I just did, didn't I? And who wouldn't want me as an uncle?" Tony counters, grinning.

They eat dinner with the Barton family again, and then decide on a movie night. Lila and Cooper seem amazed that Tony has a private movie theater, and rather surprised as well, as if the tower and pool hadn't clued them in.. After some bickering, they decide on Toy Story (Lila's suggestion) because Loki seems really curious when he hears that Woody, Buzz and Jessie have their own movies. Loki points out that Boo had Jessie, although that was just an easter egg since both movies were made by Pixar.

Tony sits between Loki and Pepper as the movie opens with Andy playing with his toys, Woody in particular. Lila shouts out a couple lines along with the movie and tries to slide her own Woody doll down the railing for the theater stairs as Andy slides Woody down a banister onscreen.

When Woody comes alive for the first time after Andy takes his baby sister Molly downstairs for his birthday party, Loki blurts out "My Simba does that!" All four members of the Barton family look at him, ranging from a look that says duh, he's a toy (Lila) to looks of disbelief (Cooper and Laura). Clint looks like he isn't sure what to think. Clearly part of him is telling him that toys aren't alive, but another part is probably wondering if Loki's powers could actually do that. After all, Clint has seen Stitch spit out and eat toys.

It would be hysterical to see the looks on their faces if Simba came alive right now, but he doesn't.
Tony had actually forgotten that Jessie isn't in the first *Toy Story* movie, but he hasn't seen them for some time. Like almost any Disney or Pixar movie they've seen, Loki's engrossed in it, as it's revealed Andy's moving and the boy gets a surprise Buzz Lightyear gift for his birthday. Loki clearly loves that Buzz has wings, although he'd seemed to love that about Lila's toy, too. He laughs when Buzz "flies" around Andy's room, which was "falling with style" according to Woody.

The fact that Loki has no idea what a gas station is when Andy and his mom stop at one and Woody and Buzz get left behind because they're fighting, once again highlights that there's still a lot Loki doesn't know about Earth. Similarly, the arcade at Pizza Planet is mostly new to the god, but he mentions something about Lilo and shells when an alien is grabbed in the claw machine by Sid. According to Lila, the little green, three-eyed aliens are the scientists in that Buzz Lightyear show she likes, along with that Mira character Tony's making a toy of for Lila's birthday.

Surprisingly, Sid's mutant toys don't even freak Loki out, not even the weird one that's a baby doll head missing its right eye mounted on an Erector set spider body with pinchers. The spider baby is easily the creepiest member of Sid's mutant toys anyways, but Tony would have thought that Loki would freak out about the fact he's missing an eye, like Odin or Fury. Then again, they both wear eyepatches, and honestly, Hel looks even weirder than any of Sid's mutant toys.

Clint had mentioned, before the movie started, that he'd used the analogy of Sid's room being like Asgard with his kids. Lila actually hugs Loki when Sid throws Woody around and burns his forehead with a magnifying glass, telling Loki that Sid is bad. Loki looks somewhat startled at the hug, before asking Lila's Woody doll if he's alright.

"He's not actually real." Cooper says exasperatedly. "Besides, he's not *that* Woody. Mom and dad got him at a store with Jessie and Buzz a few years ago. Woody and Buzz are just made up, it's just a story they made up."

Buzz learning that he's actually a toy and isn't real seems kind of like a twisted parody of Sleipnir actually being real. When Buzz tries to fly and instead crashes at the bottom of the stairs and loses an arm, Loki looks very sympathetic.

The one trigger in the movie is when there's thunder and lightning as Sid straps Buzz to The Big One rocket, because of course dramatic scenes always have thunder, which only increases setting Loki off when it's already a trigger. Ironically, the storm is actually what make Sid postpone blowing Buzz up. Woody and Buzz reconcile overnight, and when Sid tries to blow Buzz up the next day, Woody and Sid's mutant toys come to life and scare the toy-torturing boy senseless.

When the movie's over, they leave the tower's theater and the Bartons go to their floor. Afterwards, Jarvis drops Tony, Loki, Bruce and Pepper off in the penthouse, while Loki hums *You've Got a Friend in Me*.

Once they're alone, Simba becomes animated again. The lion had already acted lifeless around the Bartons and at the zoo, even before they watched *Toy Story*. Simba, and the rest of Loki's toys, actually seem to follow the Toy Story rule, although Loki, Tony, Bruce and Pepper seem to be exceptions. Well, and they don't seem to care about Jarvis seeing them.

Fenrir and Hel also appear, and once again, Loki looks like he'd been thinking maybe Sleipnir would show up with them this time. The dejected look on Loki's face when he sees his horse still isn't hear makes Tony's heart clench painfully. Pepper and Bruce look like they're having similar internal, someone-just-squeezed-my-heart-so-it-hurt reactions.

"Simba?" Loki asks, and the lion looks at him. "Is that why you don't come real around Lila and Cooper and at the zoo? 'Cause it's 'gainst the rules? I didn't know that 'til now."
"Most toys don't move." Tony points out. Loki surely noticed that, after all, Simba didn't start coming alive until recently.

"'Xcept when there's no people." Loki says, nodding. "Woody, Buzz an' Rex and the others can't come alive 'round people. But they can, Woody did with Sid, but he was breaking rules. Is my Simba breaking the rule, 'cause he comes live 'round me?" Loki looks at Simba with wide, worried eyes. "You're not gonna gets in trouble, right, for breaking the rule? Hobbes comes alive 'round Calvin, just Calvin, and he never gets troubles."

Hobbes is just an imaginary friend projected onto a lifeless stuffed tiger, though. Sort of like what Simba probably was for Loki before becoming animated.

"I'm not going to get in trouble. I'm a prince, I can do what I want!" Simba says somewhat cockily.

"How come Pinocchio can move near everybody's? He doesn't gots to flop over and play Dead Possums like they all did. Is it 'cause the Blue Fairy made him living and then real? Did she make Woody alive? But I made Simba alive, I think."

"Uh, yeah, because Pinocchio was going to be a real boy someday, I guess." Honestly, Tony never would have thought of that.

Loki's eyes widen. "The Blue Fairy! When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are. Anything your heart desires will come to you! Lilo wished on a star too, 'xcept it was Stitch's spaceship!"

Loki darts up the stairs and outside to the landing platform for Tony's suits, rather than the normal balcony, and stares up at the sky.

Tony follows him out into the cold night. There aren't many stars visible, which isn't exactly new.

Loki doesn't pull his gaze away from the sky when he speaks to Tony. "Which one's the wishing star? The second to the right? That's to Neverland, but maybe that works too. But they're alls the Second Star to the Right sometimes if you turn. So it's magic!" Loki spins around, as if proving his point. His long coat billows out.

Loki stops spinning and stares at the sky pensively for a bit. When he speaks, he's clearly not addressing Tony. "It's me again. I need Sleipnir to be my friend. So that he won't run away. Maybe makes him reals, too, as real as Tony and Bruce." He looks down from the sky and around, clearly expecting Sleipnir to magically appear. Sleipnir doesn't.

After a bit, Loki huffs in annoyance and heads back inside. He grabs his tiny Jiminy Cricket plush and larger Pinocchio doll that had been plush but is now a wooden puppet, albeit without strings like in the beginning of the movie. "Why didn't it work!" He asks the toy cricket. "You saids If your heart is in your dreams, no request is to extreme, anything your heart desires will come to you. But the Blue Fairy's not here 'n neither is my Sleipnir!"

"Loki, I'm sorry." Pepper says gently. "I'm not sure the Blue Fairy's coming."

"He's left!" Loki says, before casting his eyes down and muttering. "It's good he's gone. He didn't even wanna be here anyway... we don't need him. It's clear he doesn't mean this last part, since his voice chokes up, and Tony gets the feeling he's quoting someone. Lilo, Tony realizes. He's quoting Lilo from when Stitch left.

Then, Loki's voice takes on a cruel tone. "Idiot! He's not real, you're talkin' to nobody!"
"Don't say that. I'm sure he'd love to be here." Tony says.

"And he's not nobody." Pepper says before Tony can.

"Ohana means family." Loki's Lilo doll speaks up, and Tony realizes the quote Loki spoke is from Lilo. Loki's Stitch backpack finishes the rest of the Ohana quote together. "Family means nobody gets left behind. Or forgotten."

"Then why's he not coming back?" Loki asks tearfully. "He's my family, and I loves him. Love is an open door, but his door's... the door still won't open!" Bruce has a look on his face that says he'd had a similar conversation with Loki last night.

If they keep having heart-wrenching conversations like this, having to wait until Sleipnir's better to take Loki to see him is going to be hard.

"Do you think my Sleipnir's mad 'cause of Simba?" Loki asks. Tony's not sure if he's been thinking this for a while, or if the question's influenced by the fact Woody was jealous when Buzz became Andy's new favorite toy.

"No." Hel says. "He has to know you love him. I knew you loved me, even when I didn't talk."

"And he's not mad 'bouts food?" Loki looks at Fenrir for confirmation, and Tony gets the feeling he'd asked that during his conversation with Bruce last night. Fenrir shakes his head, actually shakes his head no.

"If Genie was here, he could gets my Sleipnir back for me." Loki exclaims, still seeming annoyed at the Blue Fairy.

"Would that be one of your three wishes?" Tony asks, expecting Loki to immediately nod yes. However, Loki actually shakes his head no.

"What?! How would that not be one of your wishes, Snoopy? You just wished on a star for Sleipnir to be real!" Tony stares at Loki incredulously. "And you tried to make a hologram of him real earlier!"

"Only three Genie wishes." Loki says seriously. "Gots ta choose 'em carefully. Can't ask for more wishes, and you can't get Genie to kill anybody or resurrect thems or make 'em loves you, nope nope nope! Not allowed!"

"You don't need to resurrect Sleipnir anyways." Hel says. "He's not dead."

"So what would your wishes be?" Tony asks. "I mean, you wouldn't have to wish to be a prince like Aladdin did, you already are one. So are you gonna wish for a pony or something?"

"I means... I want my Sleipnir, really. But, more than that, too! I only gots three, unless the Blue Fairy lets you wish multiple times, 'xcept she didn't even help now." Loki sounds rather annoyed at the Blue Fairy, even though she doesn't exist. Pepper, Bruce and Tony exchange looks.

"I want Sleipnir, but my Hel and Fenrir too..." Loki pulls up a holographic document as he clearly tries to figure out how to say what he's thinking, scrolling through the pages of animal facts, movie scenes and song lyrics he's transcribed, even the stories Loki's made up. "I wants..."

Loki stops scrolling, and through a combination of slowly typing out words and muttering things for Jarvis to transcribe that Tony can't make out, eventually comes up with a list of three wishes. Loki won't let any of them look at it until he's done.
When Loki’s finished, the three of them lean forward and read:

1. I wish all my friends and family were real, and would not die before me. All of them. So I’d never be without any of them.

2. I wish I always lived with my Tony and Bruce instead of stupid Asgard Ass-Guard. I would have always been happy with my Tony, never hurt and not as stupid.

3. I wish for your freedom, Genie.

Tony is perhaps unfairly shocked at the level of thought Loki had put into these wishes. Instead of just wishing for Sleipnir (and it seemed astounding five minutes ago, when Loki said that one of his Genie wishes wasn't the wish about Sleipnir he'd just made to the stars), he wished for all his friends and family, and Tony's certain he's included in that.

"I wouldn't mind living with you, either." Loki glances at Pepper and adds or Pepper to the text of his second wish. "'xcept you don't live here and if I'd lived with you 'stead of Asgard I wouldn't be living with my Tony and I need my Tony. Why don't you live here, Pepper?"

Actually, Pepper had lived in the tower for a while, but had decided she needed some space. Even though the tower has a ton of space.

Tony changes the topic.

"Wow. Those are some really thoughtful wishes. Most people would just wish for a trillion dollars or something. But, as much as I wish you didn't have to go through all that shitty abuse, well, I wasn't born anywhere near where you were. So you couldn't exactly live with me your whole life, since you've been alive way longer." Tony says apologetically and keeps talking a mile a minute.

"And believe me, you certainly wouldn't want to live with my dad. Also, Aladdin already freed Genie, so I'm not sure you'd have to wish him free." Now Bruce and, surprisingly, Loki, are giving Tony assessing looks, while Pepper just looks understanding. She knows Tony has Daddy issues.

"He didn't beats you, right?" Loki asks worriedly, and it's obvious he's talking about Tony's dad instead of Genie.

"No, Genie didn't beat me." Tony says flippantly. Even Loki gives him a look for that, and Tony says "My old man didn't beat me either." Howard was just never around, and when he was, he was usually drunk and belittling whatever Tony did, because Tony was never good enough for him, could never live up to the great Captain America, who was believed dead at the time and in reality was in some kind of cryogenic suspended animation in the ocean.

"What's are your three Genie wishes?" Loki asks Tony.

"You know I can literally buy anything I want, right? Like I could have my own private island or even buy out a small country if I wanted to. Actually, I might already have my own island, I'm not sure. Point is, there's literally nothing I'd have to wish for that I couldn't just get anyways." Tony says, smirking, although he knows that's only referring to material things.

Honestly, he'd wish that he could change his past of the Merchant of Death, except then he probably wouldn't have been Iron Man and never would've met Bruce or the other Avengers or Loki. He wishes he could prevent all the hardship both Bruce and Loki have gone through. He wishes Yinsen hadn't died.

Loki doesn't seem fooled about Tony being able to buy any wish, because he clearly gets that not
all wishes are for purchasable things. Heck, none of Loki's wishes are something you can buy.

Loki's eyes go wide and Tony can see the metaphorical lightbulb over the god's head of long black hair. "You'd wish for... to be outta the water, like Aladdin's second wish after he got throwed ins the water all tied up, couldn't get out."

To someone else who was familiar with Aladdin, and how Genie used Aladdin's second wish to save Aladdin from drowning after the guards tied him up and threw him in, this may sound like a reference to that, but Loki's clearly talking about what Tony told him about his own experiences.

Loki knows, has even seen, how Tony reacts to being submerged in water, with the whole pool freezing incident, and during their break from Pinocchio, Tony somehow told Loki he'd gotten hurt in water. The fact that guards threw Aladdin in to drown him is sort of close to Tony's experience being waterboarded.

Pepper clearly knows what's going on, but back when they'd shared a bed, she'd witnessed a few of his nightmares of being waterboarded. She'd been his rock, as always, offering help even when his pride turned it away.

Bruce is giving Tony a very assessing look, clearly knowing it's not simply Loki referencing the movie like some people would think. Tony wonders if Bruce worked out the connection with the cave in Afghanistan yet.

Tony quickly changes the subject.

"So, we still have time, and Jarvis recommended a movie, *Pete's Dragon*. Um, I've never actually seen this one." It's apparently one of Disney's less-known movies- Tony didn't even know about it until today- but then again, it's mostly live action.

"I remember that movie." Pepper says with a fond smile. "I loved it when I was a little girl."

After some rather lengthy credits in the start of *Pete's Dragon*, there's a shot of a boy seemingly floating through the air, and Loki seems quite jealous that "he's flying, like Peter Pan", before Pete starts talking to an invisible creature named Elliot that he's evidently riding on.

Loki also comments that Pete looks real, clearly wondering why they're watching this, although Loki obviously knows what talking to someone who's invisible is like.

Rather ugly obvious villains suddenly pop out from behind trees and start calling for Pete, before bursting into a song. It's a surprisingly dark song about how they're going to torture and kill Pete in various ways, from drowning him to tying him to railroad tracks and cutting him up. They're apparently his adoptive family called the Gogans, and are abusive assholes like the Asgardians.

Even before the Gogans' song, Loki clearly assumed they were going to beat Pete for "being freakish talking to nobody." However, it's a kids' movie, so of course they don't beat Pete and instead the Gogans are knocked in the mud by an invisible dragon.

Fenrir makes a sound, and Tony gets a feeling the wolf wishes he could have done stuff like that to the Asgardians, but he's intangible.

Pete's cartoon dragon is named Elliot. The dragon becomes visible around Pete the following morning. Elliot is green and rather pear shaped, with a long neck. He has wild pink hair and tiny pink wings that would never actually be able to lift him off the ground.

Pete feeds Elliot apples, which clearly hits a sore spot for Loki, since he's unable to feed Sleipnr
or Fenrir. Loki even tries again, and mutters that they're lucky on the screen. They're only twelve minutes in, and already there's yet another song, about Pete and Elliot loving each other. Ugh, how much singing is there going to be in this? It seems like even more than most of Disney's stuff, and more annoying in Tony's opinion).

Pete ends up in a town called Passamaquoddy. Elliot remains invisible, but causes a lot of mischief that people stupidly blame on Pete despite the fact there's no way a small boy of about ten could leave huge footprints in cement. Honestly, those people are idiots.

Loki's only half paying attention as he tries to make origami dragons that look a lot cooler than Elliot, and Tony's only half paying attention to the movie. "Is he really there?" Loki asks. "They all don't see him, an' he looks different from them. Like a drawing, like Simba onscreen. Does he really gets to eat? You can touch him, right, like my Jormungand! 'Cause otherwise he would never knock over stuff, an' Pete couldn't ride him. An' you couldn't see his footprints. My Sleipnir doesn't have hoofs-prints."

"Yeah, he's real, um, even if he's a cartoon and people don't see him. And you're right." Actually, Jormungand sort of does sound like that version of a tangible "imaginary" friend, but then again, so do Simba and Stitch.

Elliot reveals himself to a drunk man, which leads to yet another song in a pub. Huh, there are a lot of Disney pub songs, like in Beauty and the Beast and Tangled.

"He's getting Pete into troubles, 'cause they don't see him, an' they says he's not real! Fake! Fake, you idiot boy, you're making him up you freak!" Loki says, his tone making it clear he's been in Pete's situation before. Except he probably got worse than just raps on the knuckles like Pete does at school for Elliot's antics.

Pete meets Nora, who can't see Elliot and believes he is imaginary. Nora and Pete become friends and eventually become a family, while Pete is continuously hunted by the Gogans, and Elliot is soon hunted by Dr. Terminus, whose name is incredibly cheesy. Apparently, dragon body parts are a gold mine of random cures.

"Here." Grinning, Loki passes Tony a drawing he's been working on during the movie, and Tony feigns a sudden, intense interest in what's happening with Pete and Elliot when he sees it's a drawing of him and Pepper cuddling in the fort from that morning. Bruce is smirking far too much, and Pepper looks slightly embarrassed.

Long story short (although somehow this movie is over two hours, two very long hours in Tony's opinion), the Gogans and Terminus end up failing, Elliot ends up revealing himself to the town and they finally believe he exists. Pete lives with his new family consisting of Nora, her husband Paul, who had been missing at sea earlier in the movie, and Lampie, Nora's father and the drunk old man Elliot had revealed himself to earlier.

In the end, Elliot has to leave Pete to help other children, and it's made clear the boy will never see his dragon again as he says goodbye. Oh, great. Maybe this wasn't the best thing to show Loki...

"At least he gots to say goodbye." Loki mutters. "Never got to with my Sleipnir... What'f, what if he's gone forever? He can't do that! Family means nobody gets left behind or forgotten!"

"Hey, maybe Sleipnir isn't gone forever." Tony says, really hoping Sleipnir won't die on him and make that statement false. "I mean, he had to go away in Asgard and he came back, right?"

Loki scoots closer to Hel, Fenrir and Jormungand. "You're not leaving like Elliot just did, guys!
No! And my Sleipnir's gotta come backs!"

After Pepper leaves, even though Tony had offered to let her stay, Loki asks if they can sleep in the fort again. "Okay, but this is the last time." Tony says. "You can build a fort on a floor nobody uses much, but I kind of need my living room back, okay?"

Loki nods, and Tony actually changes into pajamas this time. Last night, they'd just fallen asleep in the fort in their usual clothes. A few minutes later, Tony walks out of his bedroom, now wearing the Iron Man pajamas he'd bought for himself along with Loki's. Of course, Loki's wearing his own Iron Man pajamas. Loki laughs about how they match each other. Both Toy Stark and the Loki action figure are wearing them, and Simba's of course wearing his Iron Man suit.

"Okay, but this is the last time."

Loki frowns and looks at Bruce. "Now Bruce 's lefts out."

"Who's left?" Tony's confused. Is Loki asking about his friends being real, or toys being real? They already established Elliot was real in his movie, right?

"Everything." Loki says, throwing his arms out. "Cooper saids they just made 'em up, the stories. That, that Woody and Buzz don't really come to life, that they weren't Andy's before Lila's. That it's all made ups, not reals. Is that why the Blue Fairy didn't come?"

Tony sighs. He'd never exactly corrected Loki on thinking movies were real. Loki's clearly realized that people don't actually look like animated characters, and at one point had seemed to decide that there was some cartoon realm where all the characters lived.

"I'm real, even if Cooper says I'm not!" Simba says. Loki laughs, seeming to like that Lila and Cooper don't know that toys really can come to life.

Tony debates about mentioning that *The Jungle Book* was an actual book before Disney made it into a movie. Heck, even *Tangled* is based off the famous fairy tale of Rapunzel, and Peter Pan didn't start out as Disney either. Actually probably most Disney movies are based on some other story.

"You know," Tony tells him. "Up until I met Thor, I thought he was just a story. Actually, I thought all of Asgard was just made up."

"Kinda wish it was." Loki mutters. "That's parts of my second Genie wish, I guess."

Meeting Thor, and, more recently, seeing all the powers Loki's capable of- including bringing toys to life- has definitely changed Tony's views on what's impossible. Hell, aliens aren't even a theory anymore, thanks to both the Chitauri and Thor and Loki.

"And before I met you, I thought a lot of the stuff you do was impossible, like turning invisible and shapeshifting into me or a kid, like what you did at the zoo." Tony snorts. "And I never thought I'd see living toys. You've made things real, literally, that I was absolutely positive were just made up. Looking at you again, Simba. And all you guys." Tony says, glancing at Loki's toys.
Yep, magic definitely seems real, even if there's got to be science behind it. So it wouldn't be that much of a leap if genies, flying carpets and talking animals like in Disney flicks are real. Hell, Sleipnir's a talking animal, at least as an illusion.

Maybe there are even fairies or something in one of the Nine Realms. Thor and Loki have both mentioned elves as if they really exist.

Man, if, before he met Loki, Tony could have listened to the thoughts he's having now, he would have concluded he'd gone insane.

"Here," Cooper says, handing Loki a circular white plastic thing with three oval-ish holes and round edges. Two of the holes are smaller ones next to each other like eyes, and there's a bigger hole on the bottom that looks like a smile. Loki grins and holds the thing up to his face, although it's a little too small to be a mask.

Lila giggles at him and does the same, but Loki's getting the feeling it's not really supposed to be a mask.

Is it some kind of shield? Loki wonders as he holds it out by the center part, where the's a sort of curved T formed by the center plastic bits between the holes intersecting. It would be a really dumb shield, because it's so small and someone could stab through the holes.

In it, there's a long, rectangular white thing with a bunch of buttons. Lila's holding a similar long white thing with buttons, about the size of a small dagger but not at all sharp, and not in one of these round things. Maybe it's some kind of club, and this is the shield to block it? Loki doesn't want to fight them with actual weapons.

They're on the floor the Avengers sometimes meet on, not the penthouse or the floor Cooper, Lila, Laura and Clint now live on. The kids seemed really excited about the boxes by the screen here on this floor, and all the discs and weird things with buttons like what Loki's holding now. Video games, apparently.

Tony, Bruce and Clint are all out. Loki knows they're off doing Avengers stuff. They've been gone for a couple hours, and Loki's worried that Tony won't come back, like his Sleipnir still hasn't, but Jarvis repeatedly assures Loki that Tony is fine. Loki's pretty sure Jarvis worries about Tony, too, even if he never sounds like he does and always sounds calm. Dum-E definitely worries about Tony, as do some of the other robots.

Right now, it's just Loki, Laura, and the kids in the tower. Plus Jarvis and all of Loki's toys and Jormungand, but only Jarvis know Loki's toys are alive. Lila treats her Toy Story toys, especially Jessie, like they're real.

In the hours Tony, Bruce and Clint have been gone, Loki had built another fort on this floor with the kids, and they played a hiding and seeking game throughout the tower.

Sometimes when he'd been the Seeker, (kind of like Harry, only not on a broom and looking for kids instead of the Golden Snitch), Loki had just asked Jarvis where Lila and Cooper were hiding. Yes, he'd cheated, but it had been hilarious to see the kids' shocked faces when he found them really quickly, even when they were hidden on another floor.

He hadn't cheated all the time, though. A lot of times he hadn't asked Jarvis where the kids were, and had just looked, himself. They'd been hiding in the Snoopy doghouse in his therapy room, once, although they'd actually been trying to climb up it when he arrived. Loki had spent a bit of
time laying on top of it, like Snoopy. It fits his nickname.

When the kids were looking for him, he'd repeatedly changed his hiding spots. He's really good at hiding, he'd had lots of experience in Asgard.

Jormungand's even better than Loki at thinking of hiding places, especially for when Loki was the one seeking the others, and he had actually looked instead of cheating by asking Jarvis.

Jormungand, Simba and Jarvis all told Loki that he had turned invisible once, when Lila and Cooper almost found him. He did that sometimes in Asgard, too, except sometimes they found him anyways and then he got beaten even more.

The last place he'd hidden was in the air vents. It's really cozy in the vents- well, it's not soft by any means, but he likes that it's small and dark, like under his bed. Plus he can crawl through the vents and go to different parts of the tower, and he can't do that under his bed. Fenrir doesn't fit in the vents, though. And Sleipnir would hate it in there, Loki thinks.

Jarvis says that Clint really likes going in the vents, and Tony had mentioned that once, too. Loki's noticed Clint also likes perching up high.

Jarvis would't let Loki go in the elevator shaft, though, like both Buzzes, Rex, Hamm, Slinky and Potato head went in one in Toy Story 2 last night, and Rex defeated Zurg. Zurg had said something about being Buzz's father, and everyone else had immediately said something about some people named Darth Vader and Luke, who lost a hand from one of those lightsaber things, except Cooper and Lila's lightsabers couldn't even cut off the hand of an origami person made of paper.

Apparently, after Cooper had found Lila and they were both searching for Loki when he'd been hiding in the vents, the kids had gotten distracted here on the Avengers' floor by these video game things. Jarvis had told Loki that the hiding game seemed to be over and directed Loki to where he is now. Which means Loki had won the hiding game!

"Pick a character." Cooper says, as if he and Lila are waiting for Loki, snapping Loki out of his thoughts.

Oh! They're playing pretend. Maybe Jarvis will be Scar again.

"Pumbaa." Loki grins, and switches to his deeper, more gravelly Pumbaa voice. "Has anyone seen my friend Timon? Simba you didn't eat him, did you, whens he was dancing hula?" Timon does the hula, just like Lilo. Which means grass skirts aren't only for girls, because everybody wears them during the song before Stitch's show.

Maybe Loki should use his magic to make himself a hula skirt later, except the kids still don't know about his magic. Even though he's done some things with it around them (admittedly, one of those things was turning invisible when playing a few hours ago, but a few days ago, he'd made force fields and snow but passed them both off as holograms).

"No, you have to be a Mario character." Cooper tells him, like he should have somehow known that. What's a Mario, anyways? "This is Mario Kart, not Disney Kart. I don't even think there is a Disney Kart. Well, there's Sugar Rush in Wreck-it-Ralph, but that's just candy people."

"Vanellope races karts!" Lila chirps. Loki's even more confused now, and Cooper points at the screen.

On the screen, there are a bunch of little heads in boxes, but there are two other big characters- a gorilla, and a woman in a blue dress with platinum-blonde hair covering her right eye, who has a
fat, star sort of creature floating next to her. The woman kind of looks a little like Elsa crossed with the Blue Fairy.

If they're pretending stuff, why can they only pick from these weird characters on the screen? Loki doesn't even know who any of them are. Besides, he can pretend to be anyone, like Pumbaa.

"Just pick someone!" Cooper groans.

Loki nods and points at the Elsa-Blue-Fairy person with the star and says he wants to be her, hoping he's doing the right thing. Lila immediately protests "No! I'm Rosalina! I always play as her! Pick someone else!" Apparently, he'd been wrong.

Pointing at the screen with his finger apparently doesn't work, even though most screens do that, and they say he has to use the thing in his hands to pick one. Loki still has no idea what the thing in his hands is or how to use it, other than that the kids were waving them around earlier.

The kids stare at him in disbelief before trying to coach him in it. Apparently, he has to point a certain part of the "We remote" at the screen.

"Haven't you played Wii before?" Cooper asks, shocked.

"We played a lot. R'member, we were just playing hiding games!" Loki says, confused. How does Cooper not remember?

Eventually, Loki somehow apparently picks a character in a red helmet (or is it a hat?) and red and blue clothes. A high-pitched voice says "Baby Mario." Cooper laughs about babies, saying Loki's a baby. That had been one of the insults that they'd used a lot in Asgard, but Jormungand gives Loki a look that says that Cooper's talking about the baby onscreen, not Loki.

Then, the characters are sitting in car-like things that are spinning in place, and Loki cocks his head to the side. "Cars are dumb." They are, they strap you down so you can't move and they're small and Loki really doesn't like them. Although, the RC car Woody and Buzz rode didn't look that bad. They just sat on him instead of in him, plus there were no straps, and he was alive, three things that make him better than any of Tony's cars.

"They have bikes, too." Lila says, and the Rosalina person onscreen is on one of the two-wheeled 'bike' vehicles. Anna had a bike in Frozen that she rode down the stairs as a kid, and Stitch stole a similar, pink and purple vehicle from Mertle, except it had three wheels, so it probably wasn't the same thing at all. But Stitch, Jumba, Nani and Pleakley rode on a bike sort of thing after Jumba freed Stitch and agreed to help Lilo, even though minutes earlier, Jumba had just captured Stitch, handcuffed him, and smashed Stitch's head repeatedly against a tree.

Somehow, Stitch hadn't gotten stupid after being smashed in the head a lot by Jumba, which just shows again how weak and pathetic Loki is because even the slaves hadn't become idiots like Loki has. But Stitch really doesn't like needles either, after getting one plunged into his head by a guard when hanging upside-down from the ceiling of Gantu's ship, before he escaped and landed in Hawaii on Midgard. Being scared is weak, and Stitch is even scared of water, like Tony, but Tony and Stitch aren't weak!

"Earth to Mr. Loki..." Cooper's voice snaps Loki out of his thoughts. They used to call Tony 'Mr. Stark', but Tony told the kids to just call him Tony last night.

Loki picks a red bike with a face on it and arms, and there's a bit of text saying Bullet Bike, and then a bunch of stats that Loki doesn't get a chance to read before the screen changes again. Loki
says he wanted to look at them, but Cooper says it's too boring, as pictures of random locations show up at the bottom of the screen.

But then the screen is split up, and the characters in bikes and cars are sitting on some kind of path, and there are numbers counting down in the middle. The cars start moving after 1, and Loki has no idea what's happening. Cooper tells him he has to push the 2 button, and he does, but he can't even tell what's happening or where he's supposed to look, because there are four different movies all on the same screen.

Cooper and Lila are turning their remote things for some reason, so Loki tries to do that too, but this game is still really boring and confusing. There are just three screens showing car things swerving around a beach, and one screen that shows little heads traveling around a sort of loop thing.

Loki finally figures out where he's supposed to look, and that he's supposed to be driving this Baby Mario person, but it's impossible.

Lila has been shrieking a lot, but now shouts something new about blue shells, and apparently they're bad. Why are blue shells bad? Because they're blue? But blue isn't bad... right? Cooper seems to think the blue shells are great, though.

Then, a few minutes after that, Lila suddenly thinks they're great and Cooper hates them.

This game really isn't fun at all, Loki thinks, as Baby Mario runs into yet another wall. He puts down his white wheel thing, bored.

He ends up pulling apart another one of the boxes that was near the TV. This box is white and slightly curved inwards.

He hopes Tony won't mind that he broke it, but there are circuits inside. He likes circuits, they look really neat, and he'd read a book about them. Tony's been teaching him more, and even let him help with the circuits in his suit, but they haven't worked on that since before the zoo.

Loki gazes at the circuit boards and then gives them to Stitch. Lila and Cooper aren't looking, and don't notice that Stitch eats them, which gives Loki an idea.

He then turns to the couch, where Woody, Buzz and Jessie are. Boo had Jessie, but Jessie had been in Toy Story 2, which they'd watched last night.

In that movie, Jessie, who had been in a box for years along with Bullseye and Stinky Pete, really doesn't like the dark. Sleipnir doesn't like the dark either, and he really hadn't liked hearing about Harry's cupboard under the stairs.

Loki had maybe freaked out during the scene in Toy Story 2 where the old guy threaded a needle when Woody was completely vulnerable and lifeless after his arm was torn off completely. But the needle was used for something good- reattaching Woody's arm, instead of pain pain pain. Woody hadn't even seemed to feel it, although he'd felt Sid burning his forehead with a magnifying lens. Loki wonders if that hurts more than needles in general.

There seems to be a lot of detached arms in those movies- Buzz lost his left arm in the first movie until it had been fixed by the mutant toys, who weren't bad like Woody and Buzz first thought. In the second movie, Woody got a rip in his right shoulder, so Andy hadn't taken him to Cowboy camp. Then, he'd lost his right arm completely after being kidnapped by Al. It had been sewn back on by the old guy with the needle.
Then, Stinky Pete had torn Woody's right shoulder again, at the airport. Loki had disliked Stinky Pete the Prospector from the very beginning, even before he showed his evilness. Finally, Andy had stitched up the rip in the end, once the toys, including Jessie and Bullseye, made it back to Andy's house.

During the scene when Jessie remembered her old owner, Emily, Lila had tightly hugged her own Jessie doll and declared she'll never abandon her in a box and drive away in a car. Also, Loki's pretty sure Jessie doesn't like being under beds like he does, because she fell under Emily's bed and was forgotten for a long time.

Loki really hopes he'll never get abandoned like that. Emily had loved Jessie once, but then just left her and it was really sad. Last night, Tony had promised, once again, that he won't abandon Loki. But he will, if he dies.

Tony says Sleipnir hasn't abandoned Loki, but it sure feels like that sometimes, because Sleipnir never answers. Loki feels like Anna when Elsa wouldn't let her through the door.

Loki really hopes Tony's staying safe, wherever he is right now, because Tony can't die. According to Jarvis, Tony's still fighting, but his armor hasn't even gotten so much as a dent. Loki looks at Toy Stark, hoping the real version of him doesn't get hurt at all.

He scratches at his nose. Sometimes, it feels really itchy, like there's something in it. It feels like there's something in his throat, too, and for a brief second, the world morphs into a sort of barn, but it's not the Asgardian palace stables. Loki starts to breathe quickly. Did he teleport? How is he going to get back to Tony?

"Ha! First!" Lila shouts victoriously, and Loki realizes he's still on the floor the Avengers meet on, with Lila and Cooper. Or did he teleport back? At least Simba is with him.

"I would have won if I didn't use your stupid blue shell." Cooper declares angrily. "You cheated!"

"No I didn't!" Lila says, before turning to Loki and laughing. "You're awful at this, Mr. Loki. You're in twelfth place. I passed you twice, you were still on lap one!"

"It's his first game, Lila." Cooper says. "You still didn't know how to play, huh?" He pauses and looks at the wheel thing and box Loki left on the floor.

"You pulled apart the Xbox 360?!" Cooper asks, looking at the pieces of the box Loki had taken the circuits from, apparently an X-Box, whatever that is. X's don't look like boxes. "I was gonna play Minecraft on that... You don't even know what Minecraft is, do you? Are you still playing this?" Cooper gestures with his own wheel thing.

Loki shakes his head no. "Nope nope nope! It's dumb."

"It's more fun if you know how to play. I'll show you more this time, Mr. Loki!" Cooper promises, but Loki just shakes his head again. Cooper and Lila ask a few more times if Loki wants to play, before finally seeming to get that his answer is no, and they start playing without him, their attention once again solely on the screen.

Loki turns to his other toys currently on the floor- Simba, Maximus and Bullseye. Bullseye is new-Tony had given Bullseye to Loki this very morning, and Loki's been carrying him around with Maximus and Simba. Tony's given Loki every toy, except Simba because Loki found him, and Lilo just sort of showed up one day when Stitch spit her out.
Lila had been extremely jealous that Loki got Bullseye, saying she's the one who has Woody and Jessie and that Bullseye goes with them. Jessie is obviously Lila's favorite toy, and she'd wanted Bullseye for Jessie to ride. Lila had begged to play with Bullseye, and Loki had let her for a bit because he'd gotten to play with Buzz.

Lila had tried to trade her colored pencils for Bullseye permanently, but Loki already has colored pencils and likes his new toy horse too much. Bullseye even came alive along with Simba in the air vents, but he's not nearly as good as Sleipnir.

Loki still misses Sleipnir a lot, but Sleipnir showed up in his dreams last night, and they were both trying to get to each other, running and screaming, but Loki couldn't hear Sleipnir and he never got close enough no matter how fast he ran.

He'd also dreamed about a barn he knows he's never seen before, because it's not the palace stables in Asgard. But it felt safe.

And then, of course, he'd had nightmares, too. Although the dream was Sleipnir was kind of a bad dream, actually, because he couldn't get to Sleipnir.

At least his other Monster Family members haven't disappeared on him like when they all had to go away in Asgard. He really hopes that they won't instead of just them not having left him yet.

Simba and Bullseye both move now, but they're really quiet because they're not alone with Loki. Well, Bullseye's always quiet. He's like Fenrir, in that he doesn't talk and sometimes acts like a dog, even though he's not. Fenrir's closer to a dog than Bullseye is. Stitch and Lilo remain motionless on Loki's back, but maybe that's because they're almost never quiet if they're alive and would surely make enough noise to attract Cooper and Lila's attention.

Woody had said that moving around people was breaking rules, and Simba had agreed, but it's only against the rules if anyone else sees them. Lila and Cooper are both looking at the screen with the cars and bikes and thus don't notice Simba and Bullseye moving, and the music and sounds from the screen drown out any sound from Simba's armored feet or Bullseye's plastic hooves hitting the floor.

Loki wonders if Woody, Buzz and Jessie would move around him, or if they'd think of it as breaking the rules because he's not a toy. Then again, Bullseye moves around Loki, so why wouldn't they?

As he thinks this, Bullseye is nudging Woody and Jessie with his plastic mouth. Jessie reaches up to pet him, her face morphing from the frozen plastic smile to a more gentle one. Then, she and Woody climb on Bullseye's saddle, which has a weird horn on it, and the toy horse gallops across and forth behind the couch, racing Simba.

Loki pokes the button that makes Buzz's wings pop out, and then imagines him jumping off the couch and soaring, not crashing to the ground.

Buzz stands up, climbs onto one of the couch's armrests, and falls with style across the couch to land on the other arm rest with hardly a sound.

Loki looks back at Cooper and Lila, just to make sure they're still focused on the screen, although he guesses the toys would've played dead like possums if they had looked. As Lila and Cooper race their stupid fake cars and bikes, they remain unaware of everything the toys are doing literally right behind their backs. It's really funny, and Loki can't help laughing.
His laughter gets their attention, which he hadn't planned for, but the toys immediately stop moving. Simba stays standing like he always does in Toy Mode, but Bullseye and Maximus fall over, making Woody and Jessie end up splayed on the floor.

It looks like the kids are picking a new place or something, and they soon turn back to the screen. The toys remain lifeless, as if to make sure they won't turn around.

The screen makes it look like they're flying over the Bifrost, and Loki laughs, jumping up and down. "The Bifrost!" Loki liked the Bifrost. It was one of the few nice places in Asgard, although he almost never got to go there.

"The what?" Lila and Cooper ask at the same time. They seem to have no idea what the Bifrost is, even though it's literally right in front of them on the screen, with all its colors. There are even stars around it. What else would it be?

"Bifrost, rainbow bridge!" Loki has to wonder why all these people like Rosalina are driving on the Bifrost. Are they going to Asgard or from Asgard? If they were smart, they'd drive away from Asgard, and Loki suddenly wishes he'd had one of those cars or bikes to drive away with them, except what if then he hadn't met Tony?

He's pretty sure most of these people wouldn't be allowed into Ass-Guard, like the green creature that sort of looks like Rex, only with a huge nose and a shorter tail, and orange little bumps on his back. Cooper says he's named Yoshi.

Laura comes out of the elevator, smiling at them and sitting on the couch with a book. "Why aren't you letting Loki play?" She asks her kids sternly.

"We did, Mom!" Cooper insists. "He didn't want to play Mario Kart."

"Then why don't you find a game you all can enjoy? There seem to be tons." Laura gestures to the many cases lining the shelves.

Cooper starts asking Loki if he's played certain games, and Loki shakes his head no to each one.

"How do you have all these video games and have no idea what they are? You have like every video game system ever, even the really really old ones from like a hundred years ago. Like that, the first Nintendo, the NES." Cooper still seems shocked.

"Actually, young Mr. Barton," Jarvis says, sounding amused. "The Nintendo Entertainment System was released in North America on October 18, 1985, and was released over two years prior to that in Japan. So it has only been twenty eight years since its release in North America, not one hundred. People did not have televisions in their homes one hundred years ago."

"That's still so old. You have a phone, right? Or an iPad?" Lila asks Loki, like there's no way he can't say yes to one of them.

Loki nods after a bit. He doesn't know what an 'eye pad' is, but he has a phone, like Tony's. That's what the weird box thing that he kept losing is, right? Both kids sigh in relief at hearing he has a phone.

"What apps do you have?" Both kids ask eagerly. What's an app? "Can we see it? Please?"

Loki's not entirely sure where it is until Jarvis helpfully informs him it's in his room. He heads up in the elevator to the penthouse with Lila and Cooper before going into his room. Loki sinks down into his field-like carpet, and Lila joins him on the soft floor, delightedly watching the holographic
horses run around the walls. She's holding her Jessie doll, and holding Jessie so she can watch too. She treats Jessie like Loki used to treat Simba, before he started coming to life, like pretending she's real almost makes her real.

It's funny, Lila doesn't know that Jessie was actually moving earlier, even though she's seen Jessie move in the movies. But how are those not breaking the rules?

Loki starts to show them all the constellations floating near his ceiling, and they seem interested for a bit until they're asking about his phone and something about clashing clans, birds that are angry (but never any other emotion for some reason), and cutting the rope.

Loki sighs and grabs his phone from his desk, passing it over.

The kids are at first just excited about the holographic screen, though not as excited as when they first saw holograms a few days ago, although they soon move on to playing some sort of game on it.

Somehow, despite apparently being experts on these game things, neither Cooper nor Lila have ever heard of 625 Sandwich Stacker.

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Clint arrives back at the tower with Tony and Bruce after defeating another horde of Doom-bots with the Avengers, although Thor wasn't there. According to Tony, the Asgardian still with Loki's horse, Sleipnir, at some kind of school, which is odd.

Thankfully, Natasha and Steve agreed to handle all the briefings and paperwork that usually come after missions.

Thor hadn't been at the battle, but Tony's been talking everyone's ear off about how he'd "scanned the crap" out of Doom and how it's going to help a lot with some device he's working on to block the megalomaniac from teleporting.

Clint had invited Steve to the tower in a few days for Lila's sixth birthday party. Steve hadn't seemed overly surprised that Clint had kids, somehow, and had then repeatedly asked what sort of present he should buy for Lila. Clint tried to say that Steve didn't have to get Lila anything, but Steve was having none of it.

It hadn't helped that Tony was boasting that whatever Steve gets for Lila will pale in comparison to the billionaire's own present for Clint's daughter, listing that the Mira Nova doll is custom, one of a kind, and something Lila really wants. Technically, all of those are true.

Jarvis addresses Clint almost as soon as he enters the tower.

"Agent Barton, you're just in time. Young Mr. Barton and young Ms. Barton just now attempted to make a call on Mr. Loki's StarkPhone. I blocked it, assuming that you do not want word of your location getting out."

"Thanks, Jarvis." Clint grins. Jarvis is the best. "I take it Laura knows?"

"You're quite welcome, and yes, I have informed Mrs. Barton as well. She says that you should join her in talking to your children. They are in Mr. Loki's bedroom at the moment."

Clint heads up to Tony's penthouse and finds Loki's bedroom door open. Holographic stars float near the ceiling of Loki's room, and holographic horses run around the walls. There are also a ton of drawings, presumably mostly Loki's, although some sort of look like Steve's work, taped to the
walls. The carpet strongly resembles a grassy field, and Loki's splayed out on it, looking a tad worried as he holds Tony's pant leg with one hand. Tony's out of his Iron Man suit, and is holding a StarkPhone, presumably Loki's.

Laura's sitting at the desk chair, and Lila and Cooper definitely know they did something they weren't supposed to, just by Laura's demeanor and their own demeanor, but clearly have no idea what they did wrong.

"Dad! Mom says we can't call anyone." Cooper tells him as he walks into the room.

"She's right." Clint says before getting a welcome back kiss from Laura, much to the disgust of the two kids. He beckons for the kids to follow him.

"But why?" Cooper asks as they go into the penthouse living room. Tony and Loki stay in Loki's bedroom, and Clint wonders if Tony's going to talk to Loki about the phone.

"Because. Who were you even trying to call?" Clint asks, sitting on one of the sofas. The fort the kids and Loki made a few nights ago has been disassembled.

"Evelyn." Cooper answers, clearly hoping that will change their mind about calling. Evelyn is their next door neighbor, although since they live on a farm, she's a bit farther away than most people's neighbors are. Evelyn is nine, the same age as Cooper, and the two of them have been in the same class as each other since preschool. This, coupled with the fact that they're neighbors and can play with each other even when their parents can't drive them anywhere, have made Cooper and Evelyn really good friends, despite being the opposite gender, and at the age when kids mostly befriend people of the same sex.

Evelyn seems to be the one non-familial exception to Cooper's 'girls are icky' mentality, and Lila absolutely adores the older girl. Evelyn, who is an only child, adores Lila in turn and makes sure to include her in things, even when Cooper doesn't want his little sister involved.

"She'd be so jealous if she knew we were in Iron Man's tower! And that there are holograms!" Cooper exclaims excitedly, before adding irrelevantly "Mr. Loki is really confusing, and sometimes what he says doesn't make sense. And he doesn't even know what video games are, he never played them aside from like one stupid little Disney game!"

"I bet you confuse Loki, too. He is from another world. And Cooper, you can't tell Evelyn that we're here."

"Why not? She wouldn't tell if I told her not to. It'd be a secret."

"Remember I said that bad people tried to attack us?" Clint asks, and both kids nod.

"Yeah, and Auntie Nat kicked their butts!" Lila shouts, punching the air and doing a karate kick. Clint and Nat have been teaching Lila self-defense for a little over a year and a half, and Cooper for almost four and a half years, since he's three years older than Lila. It's important for them to learn to defend themselves, especially considering Clint's job and the many people out to get him. They'd started earlier than most kids, because they can get one-on-one instruction whenever Clint or Nat are there, although they also take classes in town (it's a bit of a drive from their farmhouse, though).

Real villains aren't like the bad guys in the cartoons the kids watch, though. Real bad guys don't care about hurting children. Helen had told Dash and Violet this in the cave on Syndrome's island in The Incredibles.
"Yes, but they may try to hurt us again if we go back. They know where our house is, and could
tell all sorts of bad people."

"Then you could just beat them all up! And shoot them with arrows." Lila nods decisively.

Well, Clint isn't one of Earth's Mightiest Heroes for nothing, but there still is the chance of being
outnumbered. And he doesn't want to risk his family's safety.

"I could, but I don't want to risk it. They could send lots and lots of really bad people.

Cooper frowns worriedly. "Who are they?"

"I don't know. Bad people." Clint says. He's definitely not going to tell them one of them was a
S.H.I.E.L.D mechanic. Not that the kids know a whole lot about S.H.I.E.L.D in the first place.
Most of Clint's work is classified, after all, and most young kids have no filter between their brain
and their mouth so he wouldn't share much with them anyways.

"What if they try to hurt Evelyn? And her parents?" Cooper whispers fearfully in Clint's ear,
perhaps so Lila doesn't hear.

"They won't." Clint says. After all, the attackers were clearly after Clint and his family specifically.
Evelyn and her parents don't even know that Clint is Hawkeye. So far, they haven't recognized him
from the news footage on the Avengers, but then again, he's normally wearing sunglasses as
Hawkeye. He often wears an obvious hearing aid as a civilian, too, instead of the inconspicuous
ones Tony designed for him to wear as an agent or during battles.

People who know his domestic life probably wouldn't expect him to be a superhero, especially
since he's told them he's a traveling circus performer, as an explanation for his frequent absences.
He doesn't have fond memories of the circus, but he manages to avoid talking about his "job" with
most people.

"They're going to be fine." Clint assures Cooper, who nods hesitantly. "The bad guys aren't after
them."

"So are we never going home?" Cooper asks. "Are we going to be here forever? Will I ever see
Evelyn again?"

Clint sighs and exchanges a look with Laura. They honestly don't know. Their home- which was a
safe house- isn't safe anymore. It's the one place the kids have known all their lives, and they won't
be able to return until they know it's safe.

It may never be safe again. Clint really hopes they don't need to leave their life behind entirely,
though.

"We need to stay here, where we're safe, sweetie." Laura says softly. Cooper doesn't even scrunch
his face at being called sweetie.

"Lila, I'm afraid we can't have your birthday party at home." Clint starts to say. Lila's face falls.
"We're going to still have your party, of course. It will be here, but-" Clint starts, and Lila cuts him,
her face now much happier.

"Yay!" Lila cheers at the top of her almost six-year-old-lungs. "I can't wait 'til my friends see how
big our floor is! And how big the pool is and all the cool holograms! It will be the best party ever!
We can swim and play video games, and we're in a tower like Rapunzel's, but it's Iron Man's
tower!"
And now for the bad news...

"Lila, honey." Laura says softly, halting the girl's excited chatter. "We're having the party here, but... your friends can't come. I'm sorry."

"What?" Lila stares at them in disbelief, as if she thinks they're playing a prank on her. They'd never trick her like this, though.

"They can't know where we are, either. It's just going to be us, and Aunt Nat if she can make it. And probably Mr. Stark, Mr. Loki and Mr. Banner."

"And the other Avengers." Clint adds.

"You mean like Captain America?" Cooper asks excitedly, and Clint nods, grinning at his son's excitement. There are only two Avengers the kids haven't met now- Steve and Thor, although Clint isn't sure if Thor's even invited. Both the Captain and the Asgardian seem like they'd be great with kids, Clint's always thought that. Even now, he still thinks Thor is probably really good with kids, despite how he'd apparently treated Loki.

"Yeah, like Captain America." Clint says, and Cooper cheers.

"Wow! I'm gonna get to meet Captain America? He's so cool! Too bad Bucky Barnes died... I really like him in the books. He's always got Cap's back."

"Don't mention Bucky around Cap." Clint tells him seriously, and Cooper nods. Steve is still misses his best friend a great deal. To the super-soldier, it's only been a couple years since Bucky's death, whereas to the rest of the world, it's been over seventy.

"Lila, I know you want your friends, but we're going to see Frozen. That'll be fun, right?" Clint tries. Lila still looks disappointed, but not quite as much as before.

"But I want Kim and Cydney and Evelyn to come! They really wanna see it too!" Lila shrieks loudly, sounding like she's close to tears. "Why can't they?"

"I know you want your friends, and I'm really sorry they can't come, but it will still be fun. You'll see." Laura tries to console Lila, who is now sulking and ignoring them.

"If they can't come here, we can go home and have my party there." Lila says simply, as if they hadn't just said they can't go home.

"We can't go home, remember, princess?" Laura reminds their daughter gently. "And we can't call anyone either. The bad people might find us if we do. Promise you won't call anybody."

Both kids nod solemnly.

"At least you'll have Dad at your party." Cooper tells his little sister, and the utter disappointment and hurt in his tone about Clint not being able to show up for his own party a week ago makes Clint feel like someone reached in his chest and savagely twisted his heart. He really needs to make that up to his boy, and he hates that his job pulls him away from his wife and kids so often.

"And at least you actually have a dad who's not shi- I mean, at least you have a good dad. A lot of people don't, you know." Tony says as he strolls into the room, before Clint can usher his family to more privacy than the living room of the penthouse, which isn't even their floor. Although it's not exactly like this was a super private conversation. Tony already knows everything that happened, after all.
"I don't even have a father. Well, dids, but he didn't even wants me an' the Allfather hates me."
Loki mumbles before echoing Tony's message. "You at least gots Clint."

"Mr. Tony's your daddy!" Lila says simply.

All four adults, even Loki, laugh slightly at that. "Uh, Loki's way older than me. By like centuries."
Tony says. "It's literally impossible for me to be his dad."

"You're like his Daddy." Lila clarifies, and then looks at Loki. "You're lucky. It's not even your
birthday or Christmas, and you still get presents. Like Bullseye." Lila tells Loki jealously.

Both kids obviously think it's unfair that Loki gets gifts at random times (Laura had explicitly
forbidden Tony from lavishing Cooper and Lila with expensive gifts, both to avoid spoiling them,
and because Cooper just had a birthday, whereas Lila's is in a few days and Christmas is coming up
fast).

"He also never got any presents before he met me." Tony says. "And he's way older than you.
You've probably still gotten more presents than he has, and you're not even six. Dang, Snoopy, I've
got to buy you more stuff. Just name it and you'll have it."

"You already know my Genie wishes." Loki mumbles, and Tony looks pained.

"Were you poor?" Cooper asks Loki, thankfully not saying anything about genies not being real.

"No, the palace was real shiny." Loki answers. "Just hated me, so I never gots a party or gifts. I
think I said that to you b'fores?"

"The palace?" Lila asks "You lived in a palace?"

"He's a prince." Tony smirks as Lila's eyes bug out. Lila quickly drags Loki into a make believe
game where she's the princess and Loki's the prince.

Later, Clint, his kids, and Tony are trying to find a video game that Loki will actually like, while
Tony has passed off his data on Doom to Jarvis.

Loki at least gives Wii Sports Resort a try. The Mii characters on Tony's Wii have been seriously
upgraded, to look like more realistic versions of Clint and the others, rather than the usual cartoon
characters with no arms and balls for hands. Presumably, either Tony or Jarvis hacked into it.

They need to coach Lok a lot on how to play (sometimes he doesn't even face the screen when he
swings his remote, or he just swings it wildly when it's somebody else's turn, as if he expects it to
do something). The god asks a million questions about bowling, clearly fascinated, although some
of the questions are totally random. He still sometimes drifts off into playing a game with his toys
when it's not his turn, and ends up with a terrible score.

Clint completely crushes everybody in archery. And that evening, they watch the final movie in the
Toy Story trilogy. The caterpillar room at the daycare isn't nearly as bad as Asgard, of course, but
the whole concept of the place being heaven for the toys on top, like Lotso, and hell for the toys on
the bottom still stands. Lotso is even an evil dictator, like Odin. Loki seems to hate him almost as
much as Stinky Pete, who Loki never liked.

Chuckles the Clown's flashback of when he, Lotso, and Big Baby had been lost by Daisy sets Loki
off, especially when the three toys finally make it to Daisy's only to realize she'd replaced Lotso.
This is what causes Lotso to snap and become bad, and there's thunder and lightning in the
background. It takes a good ten minutes for Tony to calm Loki down after that.
When the toys are in the dump, Loki asks why Wall-E doesn't come help.

All three *Toy Story* movies involve various toys getting separated from Andy before making it back to him in the end. Loki seems to really like the idea of lost toys finding their way home.

In the end, when Andy gives all his toys, even Woody, to Bonnie, both Laura and Loki cry, while Clint totally doesn't. It's a sad scene, but Clint has a feeling Loki's crying isn't just about the movie.

On Thursday, December 5- two days after the battle where Doom actually showed up with his Doombots, and one day before Lila's sixth birthday and the party, Bruce and Tony get a call in the lab from Charles. Loki is elsewhere playing with the kids at the moment, but he still spends a lot of time in the lab with them. On the screen Jarvis is displaying, Bruce watches Loki and Lila play a game where they, along with lifeless toys, including Lila's beloved Jessie, are searching for Maximus and Bullseye. A lot of Loki's games have revolved around horses since he noticed Sleipnir was gone. It's somewhat heartbreaking.

Charles tells Bruce and Tony that Sleipnir is healing remarkably fast and that they can come visit him. He adds that Sleipnir's not well enough to come live with them yet, although the tower isn't exactly a great home for a horse anyways, Bruce thinks. He's fairly certain Tony's thinking of moving them somewhere more suited for horses, once Sleipnir's ready to come live with them, and he's fairly certain the Barton's had lived somewhere rural before, so they'd probably like that.

Charles still insists that he send someone to pick them up in one of his jets, despite Tony protesting that he has his own private jet.

Charles also suggests that perhaps they should have the therapy session with Loki before taking him to see Sleipnir, which is a very good idea. Bruce is certain Loki wouldn't want to have a session after reuniting with Sleipnir, which makes perfect sense.

Loki joins them in the lab a few minutes later, clutching Simba, Maximus, Bullseye and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, which he quickly buries his nose into. He's at the tail end of the book, having read it on and off the past few days, always insisting on reading aloud when either Tony or Bruce are there.

Of course, they'd had the debate of which Hogwarts house people would be in. Loki, it turns out, hates the name Ravenclaw, because he doesn't like ravens. Bruce himself is a self-professed Ravenclaw. Bruce knows Thor would be a Gryffindor. Tony bounces between saying he's Gryffindor and Ravenclaw- or Gryffinclaw, as Tony calls it..

Loki seemed to want to be one of those houses so he could hypothetically stay with Tony, but had said he'd have to be Slytherin to stick with Jormungand. He seems to sometimes view himself as a Slytherin, which is odd because they're not portrayed particularly well in the books. Honestly, Bruce was thinking Hufflepuff for Loki, because he's definitely loyal.

Ironically, the troll showing up on Halloween is rather like how their Halloween party had been interrupted by the arrival of Thor, along with the incident leading to Harry and Ron befriend Hermione, like how Loki had been less scared of Steve after hearing the Captain stick up for him. The Christmas scenes in the book gave Loki a tiny idea of what Christmas will be like when it comes in just twenty days.

Loki thought it was weird that Harry needs a cloak to be invisible, but he thinks he's seen Loki actually try to turn invisible. Loki had mentioned something about turning invisible when playing Hide and Seek with the kids.
Bruce knows Loki can turn invisible, but like with a lot of his magic, including teleporting, Loki has a hard time controlling it or doing it intentionally. Loki says he sometimes got saved by turning invisible in Asgard, but that sometimes it hadn't worked or they'd found him anyways and then it "hurt even more." In the cell in the Helicarrier, he'd turned invisible and made illusions of himself instead of teleporting like he'd been trying to do.

Since the battle with Doom, Tony has thrown himself into the teleportation blocker, having gotten a lot of great data since Doom actually showed up for that battle. Bruce follows most of what Tony says to him, talking a mile a minute, and it seems Tony's getting close to finishing the teleportation blocker.

"Sir, the X-Jet, as Professor Xavier calls it, has just arrived, and Mr. Wagner is requesting to be let in." Jarvis announces a few minutes later.

"Mr. Wagner...that's Kurt, right? The blue guy?" Tony asks, and Jarvis confirms it. Loki grins, using his really long legs to propel himself across the floor in a rolling swivel chair towards the elevator.

Loki sits in one of the spinning wheeled chairs and uses his legs to propel it across the floor towards the elevator.

"And 'Fessor X is here?" Loki asks. Is he trying to be like Professor X, by being in that chair?

"No, actually, just Mr. Wagner." Jarvis says. Loki blinks in confusion.

"We're going to Charl- Professor X's school." Tony tells him, stopping himself from saying Charles not because Loki isn't allowed to call the man by his first name, but because Loki still apparently thinks of Charlie Brown whenever anyone says that. "Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters."

"'Fessor X is easier than Xav...aver." Loki still stumbles over his last name.

Tony claps Loki on the shoulder. "You totally fit the gifted part, but you're not really young. But I know you're gonna like it a lot." Bruce knows there's a hidden meaning about Sleipnir in there.

In the elevator, while spinning around and around in the chair, yet somehow not seeming dizzy, Loki slips into his Jotun form. He still doesn't look comfortable in it, but clearly decides he's going to be blue when Kurt's around. Bruce really admires that decision. He wouldn't have blamed Loki at all if he'd decided to never show his Jotun skin on purpose, yet he's done it a few times, including to get Bruce to agree to let Hulk out.

The doors open, and Loki kicks off the wall to propel his swivel chair, but the wheels get caught in the little crack where the elevator doors close. The chair tips, spilling the god onto the ground. Unfazed, Loki gets up, rights the chair, and starts madly pumping his legs to glide across the floor towards Kurt. He ends up teleporting when the chair's rolling, perhaps because it's vaguely like flying. When Loki reappears a fraction of a second later, he falls into Kurt, knocking them both to the floor.

"Your skin is very, very cold." Kurt says, to Loki's obvious horror. Kurt disappears from under Loki with a puff of blue-black smoke and reappears a few feet away with another puff.

"Sorry!" Loki sounds panicked. Bruce has a feeling Loki thinks Kurt will hate him now, and he knows Loki hadn't wanted to teleport in the first place or get close enough to touch Kurt, let alone
"It is nothing to apologize for." Kurt assures Loki.

Bruce recalls hearing somewhere that Jotun skin is apparently so cold it can burn even the Aesir, yet that's never actually happened with Loki. Perhaps that's not true, or Loki can somehow regulate his body temperature. After all, Loki did freeze his Iron Man costume suit on Halloween, which Tony and Loki were trying to make fly before the zoo trip but have been sidetracked recently. Loki also made a whole pool freeze with his ice powers.

Loki looks at Simba, who's still in his hands, with relief. If he had teleported somewhere far away like the one Helicarrier incident, Jarvis would be able to track the location of Simba's suit. It's a good thing Simba still goes everywhere with Loki, in that regard.

Loki actually tries to teleport back to Tony without any prompting, and manages to teleport at least closer to Tony on the second attempt.

Kurt smiles. "It looks like you have been practicing your teleporting."

"You know Jack-Jack can teleport? And fly! I can't fly." Loki says jealously. "He can be metal, too, and fires and he can turn into a kinda little red Hulk-y."

"And shoot lasers from his eyes." Tony adds, gesturing as if his fingers are lasers shooting out of his own eyes. Bruce thinks Kari, the babysitter who watched Jack-Jack when the Parr's were going to Nomanisan Island, deserves some sort of medal for babysitting a baby with uncontrollable, dangerous powers.

"Wait, you know someone who can shoot lasers, right?" Tony points at Kurt, who nods, saying the man goes by Cyclops.

"It's still bad at it. Even Jack-Jack's better than me." Loki mumbles, and it seems he's back to talking about teleporting. "I practiced, for my Tony, but 'm bads."

"You're not bad." Tony says firmly.

"Bad at it." Loki pouts. "Have to be able to get back to my Tony, in case I'm losts again."

"Well, you can hardly expect to master this power in a week. It took me much longer to learn, and still I have not mastered it." Kurt says mildly, with a slight smile on his lips. "The fact that you are less scared of it now is already a huge success, is it not? I was scared, too, when I first started teleporting."

"You were scared?" Loki asks in disbelief. Kurt nods, saying that it was really unsettling accidentally popping over somewhere without meaning to.

Loki certainly looks like he agrees.

"Last time, you could not even do it every time you tried. It seems you at least go somewhere now, when you want to, instead of going nowhere."

Loki shrugs. " Tried' ta do it back in Ass-Guard, but I didn't go far and then they got me an' I was in Big Trouble. It hurt even more when I did." Loki shudders, twisting his fingers anxiously. "And I tried in the petri dish 'xcept instead I just send-ed...?"

Bruce murmurs sent to him, and Loki nods."I sent-ed my Hel and 'nother illusion me to my Tony..."
and Bruce. I couldn't get out even though I got there by tel'porting and I didn't even wanna be there!' Loki's still really annoyed about that. Bruce tells him that sent is one of those words that doesn't end with -ed for the past tense. Loki purses his lips, mumbling about how Midgardian English doesn't even follow its own rules. Like how Odin didn't need to follow the no lying and no magic rules.

"My Tony's tryin'ta build a thing that stops tele-porting," Loki adds. "That's when I practice, but I can't do it much 'cause I get tired an' it's hard."

"I don't have anything against teleporting." Tony says hastily, to both Loki and Kurt, it seems. "Frankly, I'm jealous as hell that you guys can do it, and I really wanna work it into my suits. Flying's great, but flying all the way around the world gets pretty dull. The blocker isn't supposed to be for you or anything. But Dr. Doom can teleport, and the slippery bastard always manages to get away. Well, most of the time he doesn't even show up in the first place, just sends his robots, the coward. So, it's to catch him. I'm not going on an anti-mutant spree or something."

"There are many who would, but I did not think you were one of them." Kurt says. "I saw the battle on TV. I am not sure my teleportation works the same way as Dr. Doom's."

"Yeah, I didn't think so." Tony mutters.

"How do you go where you wants to?" Loki asks. "Wanna be able to get back to my Tony."

"Perhaps I'll show you later. I hear you can do much more than teleport." Kurt has obviously seen Loki in both his natural blue Jotun, form and his pale Aesir/human-looking form.

"I can turn into Tony." Loki says quietly, glancing at Tony, who smiles slightly. "An' Mowgli. Oh, ands after you left last time, I had Stitch ears and a Simba tail, 'xcept that was blue, not yellow. And then I got horse legs a little bit ago."

"I would like to see that." Kurt says, as if he actually genuinely wants to see. "Blue suits you, by the way."

After a nod from Tony, Jarvis pulls up a picture of Loki with the ears and the tail, from the evening of the first day Kurt and Charles had come to the tower.

Loki grins slightly. "Pinocchio, he grew jackass ears ands a tail but didn't like it one bit. And the boys didn't like bein' jackass donkey animals, but I don't think I'd mind." Loki announces as he climbs the stairs, at the top, he positions Pinocchio and lets him fall down the stairs, like in the beginning of his stage show with Stromboli, while singing "I've got no strings to hold me d- oof!"

Kurt tells him that he doesn't have to show him a tail if he doesn't want to, but Loki really seemed to like having a lion tail, and he'd liked the horse legs he'd sprouted when Bruce had that conversation with him a few nights ago. The god bites his lip in concentration but seems unable to grow one now.

"Don't we have somewhere to be?" Tony says pointedly, and Kurt nods. They head out and climb aboard the jet. There are two rows of seats facing a center aisle, and Loki puts up a fight about strapping himself into the harness, which is even more than a normal seatbelt, since it covers both shoulders.

During the flight in the jet, Tony glances at his phone and frowns, tapping away with intense concentration and muttering something about being disconnected from Jarvis and stuff about stealth shields and blockers.
"Don't cut me off from Jarvis." Tony tells the blue man tersely

"Oh, I forgot all the stealth features were on." Kurt says, and flips a switch on the dashboard.

Apparently, this X-Jet has some kind of stealth feature that blocks the signal to other potential tracking devices on it. If S.H.I.E.L.D had that, Bruce thinks, the whole attack on Clint's house wouldn't have happened and Bruce still wouldn't have known by now that Clint actually has a family. He certainly wouldn't have met them or been living in the same building as them, or been on the invite list for Lila's sixth birthday party in two days.

"I totally would've been able to disable that, but I guess you just saved me the trouble." Tony mutters, before speaking into his phone. "J, you with us?"

"I am now, Sir. I was getting quite worried when I lost contact with you." Jarvis' voice comes out of Tony's StarkPhone. As always, Jarvis sounds perfectly calm and collected, but Bruce is certain Jarvis was more worried than his tone lets on.

"Yeah, there was some stealth tech that blocked my signal." Tony says. "It's not gonna happen again J."

"I'm quite glad to hear it. I prefer to keep track of you, sir, as well as you, Mr. Loki." Jarvis' voice is entirely sincere, unlike the AI's sarcastic banter with his creator.

Not long after, the jet goes down, and Bruce sees a mansion that actually looks like a castle. Loki seems more focused on the huge yard.

Tony looks at the window and whistles. "Whoa, this is literally like Hogwarts. I mean, it's a boarding school for people with special powers and it even looks like a freaking castle. I mean, seriously, this is awesome."

Then, the grass actually opens up to form a large circular hole leading to a sort of hanger underneath the ground. Tony clearly thinks that's the greatest thing ever, proclaiming "this is even more awesome!", while Loki seems to dislike the idea of grass opening up to reveal metal that's, in his words, not real.

Tony is still grinning. "So do you guys actually teach science here, because they kind of totally skip over science and math in the Harry Potter books, and honestly, that should be a crime. And, well, this jet shows you at least don't shun science here."

"Yes, we teach those. Professor Xavier is the physics teacher." Kurt answers, as he lands the jet in the hanger. The ceiling closes above them.

Tony whistles as he goes into the hanger, which is silvery and metallic. The engineer gives off his usual vibe of wanting to bury his hands in all the technology and stay for hours. Which Bruce knows Tony would certainly do, if it weren't for the fact the rest of them are currently leaving.

A round doorway opens automatically, leading to a path of hallways that's pretty much all black, with white lights spanning the entire length of the walls and ceiling.

Bruce doesn't like the lack of windows, and Hulk is starting to get agitated in Bruce's mind. It's a relief when the upper floors of the mansion turn out to be styled quite like an old English country house, rather than the cold, trapping metal of the lower floors and the jet.

There are various teenagers moving around the hallways, along with some adults. A couple curious glances are sent their way, but the first person who stops to talk to them is an adult. A blue man.
This man is a lighter shade of blue than Kurt is, and he doesn't have all the lines on his skin. He's older than Kurt, and big. He's definitely more muscular than either Kurt or Loki, something that clearly makes Loki a little uneasy. But Loki liked Hulk from the beginning, despite the fact the other guy is even more ripped than Thor or Steve, who Loki seemed scared of at first.

"You're like Kitty!" Loki blurts out, laughing. "'xcept you gots a lion mane like Mufasa and M'wasi!" Bruce wonders if this man is the one known as Beast, that Charles had mentioned during Loki's last session. He has blue fur on his arms, probably everywhere on his body, but not his face. Bruce's own arm hair is nothing like that, and neither is the Hulk's body hair. What would Hulk look like if he was covered in fur?

The man looks slightly confused, saying something about not being able to travel through solid objects. Maybe there's a mutant named Kitty who can do that? Apparently, the Mira Nova character Tony's making a doll of for Lila's birthday can "ghost" through objects.

"Boo's kitty. Sulley." Loki clarifies.

Loki puts a fist over his chest and bows as the blue man introduces himself as Dr. Hank McCoy. He seems quiet and calm, much like Bruce.

"Bruce's a doctor, too. A good one, not like Doom 'n Drakken." Loki is saying. "And he's my Hulk-y."

"I'm also known as Beast." Hank says, not looking at all surprised to learn that Bruce can turn into a huge green monster. Not a wholly bad monster, Bruce adds mentally to Hulk, who grunts.

"Hulk good monster, even if Hulk angry. Like Hurt Nice Man Loki's wolf, Fenrir." Hulk says in Bruce's head.

"Not Belle's Beast." Loki says, shaking his head. "Nope nope nope! Can I call you Hank? 'cause otherwise I'll keep thinking 'bout Belle's Beast. Like how I can't think of 'Fessor X as 'Charles' without thinking Charlie Brown. Marcie calls him Charles."

"I'm not that Beast." Hank agrees. "And yes, you may call me Hank."

"You not a Jotun, Hank?" It comes out as a question even though Loki sounds like he knows Hank isn't. "Kurt looks more like me, but he isn't one, either. Elsa is, though, an' maybe Frozone. You know his real name's Lucius, and Frozone's just his superhero name. It sounds likes Frozen, it does, it does, an' he can make ice just like me an' Elsa and Slushy. Lila says Periwinkle's a Frost Fairy."

"No, I am not. I'm a mutant." Hank tells Loki, and Loki starts chattering on about how Sid's mutant toys really weren't evil like Woody and Buzz first thought, that they actually fixed Buzz's arm, and Janie and Pterodactyl.

"Dr. Banner?" Bruce realizes the blue man is holding out a hand to shake. "I've read your work on gamma radiation." He grins. "And I've heard you can somewhat resemble me, only green, and bigger."

Somewhat awkwardly, Bruce shakes Hank's hand and nods. "Yeah. Um, I didn't think you'd be interested in my work."

"My specialty is mutant genetics, but what happened to you isn't all that different, although it was caused by external events rather than your genes."

Bruce knows all about how the gamma radiation changed his DNA, and after the accident, threw
himself headfirst into trying to find a cure. He never did, although he supposes he wouldn't be where he is now if he wasn't Hulk.

"You are in a school full of mutants." Hank tells Bruce. Usually people, especially people like Ross, use the word *monster*. But Bruce has been trying to convince Loki that being a monster isn't necessarily a bad thing. He has a feeling Hulk is included in Loki's 'Monster Family'. "Nobody would mind if the Hulk came out."

"He gives really good hugs!" Loki pipes up, grinning, and Tony's clearly listening in as well. Tony had been the first person who actively encouraged Bruce to let Hulk out and even tried to make Bruce become big and green.

Way back when they first met on the Helicarrier, Bruce thought Tony was crazy. Okay, he's thought that sometimes since then, too.

He never thought Hulk would get a whole floor to himself, and Tony made that possible. Now, Bruce is being invited to let Hulk out here, where there are blue people and who knows what other kinds of people.

He fits right in here, it seems.

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**Knock knock kno-knock knock.** The rhythmic knocking on Charles' office door is followed by Loki humming, and Tony's voice saying "Snoopy, you don't need to go into a whole rendition of 'Do You Want to Build a Snowman' just because you knocked like that."

"Come in, gentlemen." Charles calls in response to the rhythmic knocking on his office door. Even without their voices cluing him in, he would have known who it was. He can pick up on their thoughts, after all, without even going into their minds. Besides, it would be a reasonable guess to assume it was Loki, considering they have an appointment scheduled at this time.

There's a fourth presence, one that he'd vaguely picked up on at the tower during their first session, but it's shrouded and Charles can't discern anything about it.

The three men enter. Charles sees that Loki is hugging two plush toy horses- the horse from *Tangled*, and Bullseye from the *Toy Story* sequels, tightly to his chest, along with Simba, as always. He still has the Stitch backpack, but there's a Lilo doll next to Stitch as well.

"Hey, Teach. What's up with this place?" Tony asks, smirking and quirking an eyebrow at Charles. "I mean, you have all this great technology and awesome lower floors, but all the stuff in the main part of the mansion is so normal and boring."

Charles smiles slightly. "Really? I don't think are the words most people would choose to describe any of this." Still, he's rather pleased that Tony seems completely unfazed by mutants. Then again, considering what the other two men Tony is with are capable of, why should mutants surprise him in the slightest?

"Well, you don't use any of that technology up here, this is like an old English country house or something. You could stand for some more modern decorations, I could give you tips, I mean you've seen my tower, it's the best." Charles knows that Tony's mouth usually runs a mile a minute, and suspects the genius is trying to fill the silence with something that's not about Sleipnir.

"So when are we gonna get to the big event?" Tony asks impatiently, while almost bouncing from one foot to the other like an excited kid on Christmas. He still hasn't technically mentioned Sleipnir, although it's obvious that's what the *big event* is.
Tony is clearly very impatient and wants to bring Loki to Sleipnir right away, despite what Charles said about having a session with Loki first, but at least he knows that Sleipnir is getting better and is unlikely to die, so he doesn't have to worry about Sleipnir as much as he had been.

Loki himself is considerably more willing to have a session and wait, but unlike Tony, he's not anticipating the reunion because he doesn't know about it, although he's apparently been wishing to be reunited with Sleipnir ever since he disappeared.

Charles isn't sure how Loki will react to the news about Sleipnir. It might be wise to get a good feeling of where Loki's mind is right now, in case he reacts particularly strongly or shuts down when he learns. Besides, even before Thor brought Sleipnir to Charles' school, Charles had been planning on trying to establish a connection with Loki's mind.

Waiting another hour or so, so they can have this session, isn't the end of the world.

Besides, Sleipnir is having physical therapy right now, with the aid of Logan, who Sleipnir's taken a huge liking to. Despite his gruff exterior, Logan seems to be a magnet for hurt students, or horses, in Sleipnir's case. The mutant had been planning on leaving the day Sleipnir arrived, but once he met the horse, he decided to stick around. Logan tries not to show it, but Charles can tell he has a softer spot behind his gruff exterior for the eight-legged horse in turn.

"Hi 'Fessor X! Wow, you gots lots of shiny stuff in here. What's that?" Loki asks, curiously inspecting the slightly-shiny chess board on Charles' desk.

"Horses!" Loki claps his hands delightedly, grabbing the four knight chess pieces, which are basically horse heads. "How come they don't gots any legs an' bodies?"

"It's a chess board." Tony answers Loki's question. "The horses are knights."

"Like Ron and Harry played?" Loki asks. "Ron was a knight on the big one! 'Mione was a castle."

"Yes, it's like that." Bruce explains. "Remember how Harry noticed that Wizards' Chess is different from Muggle chess because in the wizard version, the pieces move by themselves, talk and smash each other when captured? This is Muggle Chess, although you could make it Wizards' Chess."

"But 'Fessor X is not a muggle, right? So why's you got Muggle Chess?" Loki sounds confused. "They don't have chess in Asgard. I read books 'bout Hnefatafl but nobody would ever play it with me. I coulda won sometimes, if they'd let me play, I thinks. Maybe."

Charles had seen Thor watching a few students play chess the other day, and Thor had commented that "such games are useful for developing battle strategy, which Father says every warrior should be well versed in", so perhaps he had played Hnefatafl. Thor had admitted that he'd often just charged blindly into a fight without thinking things through.

"Does the rule stand here?" Loki asks, looking from Tony to Charles to Simba. "'Cause I don't think 'Fessor X is a muggle."

Simba suddenly starts to move as if he's alive, only he's still a toy.

"You're alive?" Charles asks, surprised. Simba isn't the only one moving, either. The other toys Loki currently has out are moving too.

"Loki brought me to life." Simba says. "When we watched Pinocchio, after you left last time. The same day."
"That's amazing." Charles says truthfully. Instead of looking proud, Loki just casts his eyes downwards. Charles catches thoughts about the Blue Fairy and Genie.

"You are always welcome to use your powers here, just like anyone else." Charles tells him. "This is a safe place for people with gifts."

"My Tony says it's like Hogwarts." Loki nods slowly.

"And since you're the headmaster, I guess you'd be Dumbledore." Tony says to Charles. Loki tenses, and Tony glances at him. "Right, I forgot you don't like Dumbledore, Loki."

"Why don't you like Dumbledore?" Charles asks, and he gets a brief flashing image of Loki's thoughts, comparing Dumbledore to another bearded old man with long hair, only this man has a golden eyepatch over his right eye.

"He just left Harry with the Dursleys!" Loki says before clinging onto Tony anxiously. "Are you gonna leave me here, 'cause it's like Hogwarts? Harry and Ron stay there, but I don't wanna stays here if I can't be with you, Tony."

"I'm not going to ditch you here." Tony promises, putting an arm around Loki's shoulder. "Remember, I'm not leaving you."

Loki wrings his his hands together so hard that his fingers look like they could snap, and Charles catches some several thoughts from the god about how Sleipnir did that. He quickly presses a small plastic, twisty toy called a Tangle into Loki's hands. It helps with some of his students, and Loki starts to twist the colorful plastic sections, bending the toy into different shapes.

"...My Sleipnir saids that, an' he's gone 'gains." Loki blurts his thoughts aloud, though it's obvious he hadn't meant to, and his glassy green eyes get slightly wider as he looks worriedly at Charles. His long fingers tighten around the Tangle toy, wringing it even more ferociously.

Tony puts an arm around Loki's shoulders, and glances at Charles at the mention of Sleipnir. The billionaire is biting his tongue to keep from saying anything.

"You can talk about anything here." Charles tells him gently. "I promise I won't make fun of you, and I won't tell anyone unless it's absolutely necessary. For example, if you attempt to commit suicide." Not that Charles thinks Loki will do that, although he'd apparently given Tony and the others a scare about that once.

Oaths apparently hold a tremendous weight on Asgard, and Loki looks a little convinced, mumbling something about pinky promises.

"Hagrid was Norbert's mother. Norbert's a dragon, 'xcept not like Elliot. A Nor-wegan Ridgeback dragon. Hagrid had to let Harry and 'Mione takes Norbert 'way in a little crate. What if he was scared? Hagrid was sads 'cause his baby had'ta go." Loki says quietly. "Norbert, he killed a toy bear, chewed it like Scud! Maybe it was Lotso, he would d'serves it more than a innocent bear 'cause he's evil but he gots tied to a... truck thing?"

"It's perfectly understandable that Hagrid was sad." Charles says.

"You don't know my Sleipnir, do you? He's nots a freak, not a bad monster! But they saids I'm a freak for talking to him, my Jormungand, Fenrir ands Hel in Ass-Guard! So don't you now think I'm a freak, 'Fessor X?! Dr. C didn't seem to really believe they's real, just in my head! They are, but..."
"I know Sleipnir's real." Charles says before adding firmly. "He most certainly is not a freak, and you are not a freak either. You talk to him in your head, correct? When I first developed my powers, I thought I was going mad, hearing voices nobody else could hear. It was a few years before I realized I was actually hearing other people's thoughts."

Loki doesn't comment when Charles says he knows Sleipnir, seeming too focused on him saying that neither Sleipnir nor Loki himself are freaks.

Charles is positive that Loki was somehow communicating telepathically with Sleipnir whenever he talked to him, which was fairly remarkable even when they were both in Asgard. After all, telepaths aren't exactly common.

If Loki had indeed been telepathically communicating with Sleipnir when he was here on Earth, and Sleipnir was still in Asgard- another realm entirely- that would be absolutely astounding. Charles is easily the most powerful telepath here on Earth, and he uses Cerebro to extend his abilities across the globe.

If Loki was communicating with Sleipnir without any aid like Cerebro, even when they were on separate realms, Charles' power might be dwarfed next to Loki's.

Yet, Loki and Sleipnir apparently haven't been able to communicate since Thor rescued Sleipnir and brought him to Earth, despite the fact that they are a lot closer, distance-wise, than they'd been even a week ago, when Sleipnir was still in the dungeon.

Charles' theory for this lack of communication is that Sleipnir has been simply overwhelmed by everything around him. In the dungeon, he undoubtedly had nothing to do aside from communicate with Loki or look through Loki's head or watch what Loki was doing, which would make the dungeon seem like Loki's head.

If he hadn't been able to do either of those things, Charles suspects Sleipnir would have gone insane. Here, though, there's so much more for Sleipnir to take in than just darkness.

Charles hasn't delved into Sleipnir's mind yet, since Sleipnir isn't well enough, but he has witnessed a few of Sleipnir's flashbacks. He's not surprised that Sleipnir has flashbacks, just like Loki. They've both been through more than anybody should have to bear.

Charles has talked a fair deal to Sleipnir the past few days, although Sleipnir communicates telepathically rather than through actual speech.

The horse is quite bright, certainly smarter than normal horses and probably even a fair deal of humans, yet he still doesn't seem totally convinced he's not still in Loki's head. Sleipnir clearly believes that the dungeon, or The Dark, as he calls it, was really inside Loki's head.

Apparently, Sleipnir sometimes gets flashes of what Loki is doing, but when he tries to communicate with Loki, Loki doesn't seem to hear him.

It's been quite clear that Sleipnir has been missing Loki a great deal, as well. He also seems to have an intense fear of the dark, and it's all too obvious where that comes from, despite the fact the horse is still confused about the darkness of the dungeons not being Loki's head.

"Can't finds him, no matter how hard I tries to open the door with loves! And I can't make him real, not like my Jormungand, an' the Blue Fairy didn't do it even though, when you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are!" There's a snapping sound. Loki's pulled the Tangle apart, although it was made to be taken apart and put together again. Loki doesn't seem to realize this,
and stares at the pieces, until Tony gently takes them from Loki's hands and reconnects them, showing him it can be fixed.

Loki stares at the rebuilt Tangle toy in his hands, fidgeting with it. Nobody says anything, because it's clear Loki's planning on saying more but is trying to get it out.

"Dream about him, sometimes, but we can't hear each other, not even shouting. Can't reach an' meet, no matter how fast we runs. But he's there, why can't we? Last night, there was a man withs dark clothes, 'n dark hair, somes on the side of his face. And he hads claws coming right out of his hands, like big long metal ones. Longer than a cat's!"

Loki had a dream about Logan? That is interesting. Apparently, he's been picking up a bit of what's happened to Sleipnir as well, or perhaps Sleipnir did manage to communicate for a bit. Sleipnir's been quite fond of Logan. Logan, under his gruff exterior, seems to have a soft spot for the eight-legged horse.

"Perhaps he's been trying to talk to you just as much as you've been trying to talk to him." Charles suggests. "You try talking to Sleipnir in your head, but you are unable to like you did before, correct?"

Loki stares at him, clearly trying to discern whether or not Charles actually believes him, or is going to make fun of him later.

Slowly, he nods. "'s likes his door's shut, at least not shredded like Boo's was, I don't thinks? But love is an open door and I loves Sleipnir, but I can't get it open! You can't lock people out like Elsa, Sleipnir!" Loki ends with a sort of angry sob as he yanks the Tangle fidget toy apart, on purpose it seems, and flings the tiny curved pieces across the room.

"I don't hate you." Loki whispers, as if apologizing for getting angry. "Sorry sorry sorry sorry."

"I'm sure Sleipnir doesn't think you hate him." Charles says, although Sleipnir had seemed to worry Loki had forgotten him. Charles has tried to convince the horse that's not true.

For a bit, Loki just rocks back and forth. "Sleipnir?" He asks, before knocking his knuckles on the side of his head in the same rhythm. Knock, knock kno-knock knock.

Loki's Stitch backpack spits out dolls from a new Disney movie, one with two strawberry-blond braids in her hair and the other with a single platinum-blond braid. Loki stares at the dolls. Green energy flares around his hands and the dolls morph into child versions of themselves.

Loki starts to sing, moving the two dolls around. It seems he's singing for the red-haired little girl doll.

"Do you wanna build a snowman?"

Come on let's go and play!

I never see you anymore,

Come out the door.

It's like you've gone away.

We used to be best buddies, and now we're not."
I wish you would tell me whyyyyy!

Do you wanna build a snowman?

It doesn't have to be a snowman.."

"Go away Loki." Loki mutters. Maybe he'd been talking about Sleipnir all along, since he'd first knocked on his head as if it was a door, even if he was acting it out with the dolls, Charles thinks as Loki finishes singing a heartbroken "Okay, bye..."

"I may be able to help you open the door." Charles offers. Tony perks up at that, clearly thinking they're going to go visit Sleipnir. Charles holds up a hand. Taking Loki to see Sleipnir would help, but maybe something actually damaged however they telepathically communicate, rather than it being that Sleipnir is simply overwhelmed. "I can go into minds."

"You're gonna look into my insides?" Loki asks, eyes wider than normal. "It's all squishy in there."

"Not quite that far, just your head, if you'll allow me. It's entirely your choice." Charles smiles gently. "I promise I won't mess around in your mind, or look at any of your secrets." It usually takes a lot more than a single reassurance for most people to be comfortable with the idea. It's perfectly understandable for one to be wary of having somebody else inside their head.

Tony Stark certainly seems to hate the idea of anyone going into his mind. Charles doesn't need to go into the billionaire's head to tell that. Tony does a great job at hiding what he's thinking- no doubt from his experience growing up in the eye of the press and having extensive experience with the press and paparazzi his whole life. It's undoubtedly increased, too, from when he was a kid to when he took over Stark Industries. Then, even more when he became Iron Man and yet even more when the Avengers were formed.

Loki stares at the floor. "Won't matter none. If you do... Are you gonna do what the trolls did to Anna? They fixed her head."

"Not really." Tony says. "They changed her memories, so she didn't remember Elsa's magic at all."

Loki nods, as if that's what he meant. "But her head was still real colds and they fixed it!" He turns to Charles. "'Fessor X...? Can you takes mem'ries out? I wouldn't care, I don't think, if you tooked out some. I'd be happy if they'd be gone, the scary ones that make bad dreams and flashing back... like 'bout the Ass-Guardians, that's what my Tony calls 'em."

Tony, Bruce and Charles all look at him sympathetically, all of them understanding why not remembering some things would probably make Loki happier. "But I don't wanna forgets my Sleipnir, or the nice things." Loki adds.

Charles is definitely capable of blocking memories, but he doesn't think he should.

"That would most likely do more harm than good." Charles tells him. Blocking traumatic memories would probably help Loki's PTSD, but he would have to make Loki forget the majority of his life. Having gaps, especially huge gaps, in one's memory can be worse than remembering.

Logan would certainly be able to attest to that.

"Can you look for my Sleipnir? He's gotta be in here somewheres." Loki taps his head. He seems surprisingly unconcerned with the idea of Charles going into his mind, but then he pauses, unsure.

"You know I'm stupid, right? It's gonna be real dumb in there." He mutters, clearly ashamed, gaze
on the floor as he rocks back and forth. "Can you make me less of an idiot like they mades me?"

"Loki, you're not stupid." Tony says. "You solve Rubik's Cubes. You memorize almost whole Disney movies, and know a ton more than I do about animals and stars. You've been doing great not using All-Tongue, and heck, you were even helping me with circuits earlier. You are not stupid. Trust me, I don't go around telling many people that they're smart, because most people really are idiots, but you are not one of those idiots, you hear me, Bambi? I've seen how smart you are in two months. The Ass-Guardians had a thousand years and they didn't see it. They're the real idiots."

"If you don't want me to go in your mind, I won't." Charles looks at Loki, who eventually raises his eyes to meet Charles'.

"But you can makes me betters, right?" Loki asks with wide eyes. "You helped with the flashing back memory, 'bout when they said nobody would ever likes me."

Charles closes his eyes and starts to enter into Loki's mind.

As he slips through the usual initial layer of darkness, he's not entirely sure to expect. After all, Loki is an alien from a world full of beings that were once worshipped as gods, who have fallen into mythology. Presumably, there's going to be some difference between his mind and those of humans or even mutants.

Upon entering Loki's mind, Charles is immediately bombarded by what can only be described as complete and utter chaos. It catches him off guard, as he hadn't been expecting this.

Loki's mind appears to Charles as a town built in a forest, only it looks like several natural disasters wreaked havoc, leaving the ruins of buildings and trees all about. It actually reminds Charles of the wreckage in Manhattan right after the Chitauri invaded and were thwarted by the Avengers, except this isn't a city.

There should be some central node or platform from which Loki's thoughts originate, but Charles can't locate it. Typically, one encounters a representation of the person whose mind they're in, letting them converse inside the person's mind, but Charles hasn't spotted a single Loki yet. Furthermore, many minds are represented by a room showing what the person is thinking now, with the other mental activities in rooms spanning off from that, whereas this has everything at once.

Thoughts simply rush by, each vying for attention as strongly as the next, much like the hubbub of the surroundings. From what Charles catches of them (which isn't much, since they are fleetingly swift and often drowned out by the almost overwhelming noise in the rest of Loki's mind), Loki's thoughts are much more articulate than most of his speech.

Above him, stars constantly twinkle in and out, rearranging themselves into various constellations in a way that is extremely distracting yet oddly calming and mesmerizing at the same time. It would be quite easy, Charles thinks, to lose oneself in watching them, as he watches a jet made of stars fly across the sky, although it flaps its wings like a bird. It seems to be racing a penguin, also made of stars, before they both explode and scatter into tiny pinpricks of light, like normal stars, before they form into Mufasa, like the scene in The Lion King. There are also floating lights that look like lanterns, and what seem to be tiny stars flying around near the ground.

Loki's mental noise is a lot more active than most, making it hard to focus on any one thing when something else constantly calls for Charles' attention. A less experienced telepath would undoubtedly be thrown off by all of this myriad of madness.
Charles, however, forces himself to ignore it, and continues to observe his surroundings as he stands there. Yes, he's standing. After all, when he goes into people's minds, he doesn't need a wheelchair, and can "walk" mentally.

The ground below Charles' feet looks as if it had once been a field, because there are bits of grass poking up. Most of it, however, appears to have been burnt quite badly, as if a wildfire had spread through here. Similarly, there's a tree that's split down the middle of its trunk, looking like it was struck by lightning, furthering the image that some sort of disaster happened here.

There are also numerous fissures running through the ground, splitting it apart, like how earthquakes are portrayed in movies, even though the ground doesn't actually split open in real life. Some of them are small enough cracks to step over. Others are far too wide to cross.

This is clearly a very damaged mind.

A crowd jostles Charles as it moves continuously, none of the members going in quite the same direction as any of the others. It's pandemonium, especially the noise coming from individuals, temporarily distracting him from the actual location itself.

There are quite a variety of beings in the crowd, too. People, animals (some of which don't seem to be from Earth, like the huge scaled creature with horns) and animated characters form the huge mass of beings. Some walk leisurely, others appear to be in a rush, and some stand around casually.

Some members don't bother with the ground at all, but fly instead, such as Iron Man, a pegasus (but not the Disney version of Pegasus from their adaptation of Hercules) and the glowing lights that Charles eventually realizes are Tinker Bell and some other fairies. They can fly over the wide over the large fissures in the ground. However, the majority of the crowd, including Charles, is not gifted with the power of flight, so they have to actively avoid the cracks, which definitely makes travel more difficult. Some are far too wide to simply be stepped over.

Charles wonders what happens to anyone or anything that falls into the fissures. Are they lost forever? Charles can't see the bottom of them, not even the little ones.

Loki's brain is somewhat like that movie, Who Framed Roger Rabbit? in that there are cartoon characters next to real people. It's rather odd seeing an entirely realistic Tony Stark next to Flynn Rider from Tangled, because Flynn actually bares some resemblance to Tony, only without the goatee.

Charles gets brief glimpses of other Disney or Pixar characters in the crowd- ranging from Bambi, Genie and Peter Pan, to Sulley and Boo and several superheroes from The Incredibles, as well as Buzz Lightyear. Wall-E is next to some sort of robot with a claw arm that looks real instead of CGI. Not all the characters are Disney. He spots Charlie Brown (which makes him think of Loki mistaking Charles for him), as well as several other Peanuts characters, with Snoopy being the most prominent. Hobbes, from Calvin and Hobbes, is also visible.

The most prominent characters are Stitch and Simba. There are multiple versions of Stitch and even more Simba's, both as the animated characters from their respective movies, and as the toys (or backpack, in Stitch's case) that Loki never lets out of his sight and apparently brought to life. Some of the Simba's are wearing Iron Man suits like Loki's Simba is, but some are naked like in the movie. An adult Simba, or maybe it's Mufasa, is wearing an Iron Man suit, even though Loki's Simba toy is still a cub. There are also realistic lions mixed in the crowd.

There are a lot of Tony Starks in Loki's head, and Charles sees the other Avengers as well,
particularly Bruce and Hulk. Some other very prominent, reoccurring figures are Sleipnir, a girl who looks like a skeleton on one side, a huge wolf, and an even larger snake. Sleipnir was so starved in real life when he first arrived that he was as bone-thin as the dead side of the half-dead girl.

Charles doesn't think these representations of Sleipnir are what actually connects Loki to the horse, though, since there are so many of them, and they're mixed in with fictional characters that Loki certainly doesn't have a connection to.

Some of these figures are doing battle with versions of Thor or other people who appear to be Asgardian. Several versions of Iron Man blast some viking-looking man with a repulsor while a suit-less Tony grapples, barehanded, with yet another Asgardian on the ground. A little ways off, Hulk smashes an old man with an eyepatch and long, gray hair into the ground like a rag doll, roaring "Puny God."

However, there are more figures of that Asgardian with the eyepatch over his right eye that remain unscathed.

The Asgardians clearly outnumber the Avengers by a lot, but Earth's Mightiest Heroes are holding their own against them, even defeating some of them. But there are plenty of Asgardians who aren't being defeated.

Pulling his attention from the cacophonous crowd and battle, Charles focuses once more on the surrounding landscape.

All around, there are ruins of what were obviously once buildings but are now simply piles of wreckage, mostly wood but some metal.

What happened to cause all this destruction? Charles wonders, aghast, as he tries to make his way through the crowd to move to different parts of the town. He's actually jostled by a huge man with wild black hair and a beard, who he thinks might be Hagrid, since there's a small boy who looks like Harry Potter. They don't look like the actors in the movies, instead resembling what Loki apparently imagines they look like from the books. Harry looks... rather like Loki, and it's not just because of the green eyes and black hair.

Some of the damage, like the fissures, sort of make it seem like Loki's mind had been torn apart from the inside, since earthquakes originate from under the ground, not an external force. As soon as Charles thinks this, one of Loki's thoughts flits by, letting Charles briefly glimpse a purple alien creature with a club-like tail that looks as if he's from the same series as Stitch. Richter, Experiment 513, the thought says. His One True Place is making Quake Shakes.

Was that a coincidence, that Loki happened to be thinking about an earthquake experiment as Charles was thinking about the fissures? Surely this experiment didn't cause the fissures in the ground.

But why would Loki's mind have done this to itself? It almost has to have been from someone else.

There are buildings that appear unscathed, but Charles feels that they were built up amid the wreckage rather than somehow avoiding the wrath of whatever had destroyed the others. A fair deal of these are medieval buildings, but there's also a beautiful ice castle that looks like something out of a Disney movie. He also spots Snoopy's doghouse, which one of the Snoopy's is laying atop of in his iconic way. Next to the cartoon doghouse is a more realistic doghouse.

Two structures tower above the rest of the town. One of these buildings is Stark Tower. It
practically glows, the extremely modern style of it looking rather out of place in a medieval town built on a field but looking very much like a safe haven at the same time.

The other giant building is an odd structure resembling a golden pan flute, or pipes standing on end. Despite being golden, it seems rather sinister and casts a long shadow over the town.

The pan flute building is opened up like a dollhouse, revealing the countless rooms and hallways. The hallways are ornately decorated, almost more lavishly than anything on Earth, with lots and lots of gold. There's a huge hall full of tables brimming with food and drink, what appears to be a throne room, and, farther off, some sort of workplace.

This has to be the Asgardian palace, judging from the decorations and the people walking within. Most of them look a lot like vikings, like the Asgardians doing battle with Iron Man, the other Avengers, and the wolves. In the palace, Charles sees several versions of Thor at different ages.

The Asgardians outnumber all the other figures in Loki's mind by a considerable amount, although it makes sense, since Loki spent the majority of his very long life there. He's only been on Midgard for a few days over two months.

Scattered around in hallways and the banquet hall, but clustered in the work area, are people wearing simpler clothes. Servants, Charles thinks. But there are also people who wear little more than rags and have shaved heads, clearly even of a lower status than the servants.

Circling above the palace are two large ravens that look extraordinarily odd. They have what appear to be some sort of spear as beaks, and instead of talons, they have hands like an old man's.

Charles gets the feeling that these ravens did not originate in Loki's mind, that they are the work of someone else. To make matters worse, they seem malevolent.

The light from Stark Tower does chase away some of the shadow from the Asgardian palace, but the palace still darkens the town below.

Charles turns his attention to the smaller buildings in the town.

Several other buildings seem to be in various stages of reconstruction. Some are simply wooden frames, the bare bones of the buildings, so to speak. Oddly, there are a couple rather unsteady-looking structures made out of what appears to be children's building blocks and cardboard boxes. There's even a fort made of couches, blankets and pillows.

Since there are complete buildings and buildings that are being rebuilt, Loki has evidently healed somewhat from whatever left his mind in this state. But the ground that everything stands on clearly hasn't healed much, if at all.

It's often a good idea to make a connection when entering a new mind that one intends to enter again. Charles can even establish a mental link with someone, rather like what he expects Sleipnir and Loki have, although he hasn't actually seen any evidence of one in Loki's mind yet.

Ordinarily, minds are relatively clear and Charles' presence would be noticed immediately, but as he's been quietly observing this whole time, he's unintentionally hidden in the crowd bustling around him.

Charles finally finds an area that's not crowded. It's a field, by some stables, and horses are grazing on grass. This area somehow seems to have avoided the damage to the rest of the ground.

"Loki?" Charles calls out to make his presence more known in hubbub of Loki's mind, although
he's now in a slightly less crowded area. "Loki?"

Panic starts to build in Loki's mind, so that some of the surroundings blur.

"It's me, Loki. Professor Xavier." Charles tries to calm Loki down. Otherwise, the rising panic in Loki's head will completely envelop him, as well. "You invited me into your mind, remember?"

Fenrir stalks out from behind some of the horses. He's huge. Even now, when the wolf is standing on all fours, his back probably reaches somewhere between Charles' stomach and chest... and Charles isn't even in a wheelchair right now, he's standing up.

Yet, there's something else about him. Charles had seen many versions of the wolf, as well as Loki's other friends, in the crowd. This Fenrir is different, he feels as real as Charles does at the moment.

It seems Fenrir is another actual, real person (or animal) in Loki's mind just like Charles, rather than a product of it like everything else.

An obvious warning growl rumbles from the wolf. He doesn't speak aloud, but just like with Sleipnir, Charles can hear the wolf's thoughts. Even if he couldn't, both Fenrir and Sleipnir are very expressive.

'If you harm anything, I will rip your throat out.' Fenrir's mental tone and body language convey that he's dead serious about that as his eyes flash dangerously.

Charles has no doubts that this Fenrir would actually be able to do that. It would not end well for him.

"I would never willingly bring Loki harm. I'm attempting to heal him." He tells the wolf.

The wolf relaxes a touch and nods, but gives him a look that, despite not being able to make the universal gesture of two fingers pointing to his eyes and then Charles, says quite clearly 'I'm watching you.'

"Professor Xavier?" Loki's voice asks. The first representation of Loki that Charles has seen in Loki's mind slowly comes out from the same hiding spot Fenrir had come from, behind the horses.

The fear and panic in Loki's mind lessens when this Loki sees it's Charles, and the surrounding area becomes more focused once again.

"Yes, it's me." Charles smiles. Loki fists a hand over his chest and bows.

In his mind, Loki looks basically the same as he does in real life, with bare feet and the night sky long coat. Even though Loki's eyes are still somewhat glazed in his mind and he gives off a childlike vibe here as well, it strikes Charles that he hadn't said 'Professor X,' or stumbled over Xavier, like when he's speaking aloud.

"This is my field." Loki gestures to the area around them, smiling before collapsing in the grass. One of the horses nuzzles him. "Bruce calls it my happy place. When we meditate, he says I should go here when I'm scared."

Hel, Simba, Stitch and Lilo emerge with Loki. Simba is in his Iron Man suit, and currently looks like the toy Loki has, rather than the movie version like some of the Simba's in the crowd.

Loki and Hel are holding hands, and the tall man doesn't seem at all concerned he's holding the girl's dead hand. Despite the fact that Loki's an adult and Hel's a child, it's clearly Hel is providing
more comfort for Loki with the gesture than the other way around. Charles gets the same sort of feeling from Hel that he did from Fenrir, that she, too, might be real.

"You're standing up!" Loki says to Charles suddenly, eyebrows shooting up in surprise as he stares at Charles' legs. "I thought you had the chair with wheels because you couldn't walk?"

"I don't need a wheelchair here." Charles says, walking forward a bit to prove it.

"So why do you need it out there?" Loki asks with innocent curiosity. Charles briefly explains that his spine was broken.

"I'm real sorry I can't fix you like Rapunzel probably could." Loki pauses thoughtfully, and a sudden thought flies over to Loki from out of one of the buildings. Loki comments on it. "Wait! In my dream, they were trying to get me to walk and I almost couldn't. They were fixing me! So they just do that with you, and then you're fixed? Maybe?" Loki's face shines with somewhat naive hope.

"Physical therapy can't help me." Charles says, wondering when Loki had physical therapy. He catches a glimpse of the thought, and the location looks like a barn. Actually, it looks like the school's barn, that Sleipnir's in...

"Who was trying to get you to walk?" Charles asks.

"Oh. The claw man in my dream! ...Lo-gan?" Loki answers, nodding. "He's like my Tony, kinda I think. Maybe that's why I dreamt him?"

For the second time, Loki's mentioning something that actually happened to Sleipnir, only he seems to think it happened to him.

"No. I know Logan. I mentioned him the last time I was at your tower. He goes be 'Wolverine' sometimes." Charles tells Loki.

"Did Fenrir scare you?" Loki asks out of the blue. "I was worried he was gonna disappear when he went out alone. But he's real good at protecting me, even if he couldn't bite the Ass-Guardians." Before Charles can even open his mouth, he asks "Hey, did you find Sleipnir yet? He's still not here in our special field, like our song." Loki hums a melody that Charles remembers Tony singing to calm Loki down last time, and it seems to make Loki's mind more peaceful. "I've looked about a million times since he went missing. His door's still closed, like Elsa. At least my Fenrir and Hel are still here."

Loki's hands tighten around Fenrir's fur and Hel's dead hand, clearly trying to ensure they'll stay there.

"Where's Jormungand?" Charles asks, plucking the name of the snake from Loki's brain.

"I think he's outside a lot." Loki says, and Charles is briefly confused. They're outside now, since they're under the starry sky, and then he wonders if Loki means the snake is outside his brain. "His door's open all the time now. Maybe that's why Sleipnir's won't open...?" He sounds as if he's just considered this.

"No, that's not it." Hel says.

"Where are these doors?" Charles asks.

Loki cocks his head to the side, once again seeming to debate about whether to trust Charles and
deciding to, before beckoning for Charles to follow and setting off. Fenrir, Hel and Simba stick close by him, while Lilo and Stitch run ahead.

The rubble, the crowds and the larger fissures all make progress rather slow.

Occasionally, Loki actually floats a few inches off the ground, but he doesn't rise any higher, probably so he can keep his hold on Hel and Fenrir.

Oftentimes, his Loki guide gets distracted watching the stars or interacting with some of the people in the crowd. He only interacts with the fictional characters, though, not any of the Tony representations or the ones of Hel and Fenrir, which sort of confirms some of Charles' suspicions.

"Hi, Elsa!" Loki says excitedly, when they're near the ice castle. A CGI version of the platinum-blonde doll Loki had been playing with nods regally to Loki, but there's a fond smile on her face. She looks like the adult version of the doll instead of the child, and is wearing an ice blue dress and translucent cape.

"Loki." Elsa shoots a couple snowflakes into the air. Loki grins and does the same, flapping his hands slightly.

"Where's Anna?" Loki asks, and the CGI version of the strawberry-blonde haired doll with two braids runs out of the ice castle, along with a living snowman who giggles and introduces himself as Olaf, adding that he likes warm hugs.

"Still no luck getting the door open?" Anna asks Loki sympathetically. Elsa looks rather sad and guilty all of the sudden, and Loki nods dejectedly.

"I bet he's going to open it real soon!" Anna says optimistically, bouncing from foot to foot. "You won't have to wait thirteen years like I did."

"No, you won't." Charles promises.

"You don't have to hunt through a million doors, either." Sulley says, stepping out of the crowd. The big, fuzzy blue monster is holding Boo.

"Kitty!" Loki laughs. "Hank really does look like you. But I look more like you than my Tony, who looks more like Boo. That's funny, because he says I'm like Boo. They all thought you were a monster in the monster world, Boo, but you're not!" Loki suddenly looks worried. "They're not going to shred my Sleipnir's door, are they? Like with Boo's?"

"I don't see a door shredder anywhere." Sulley answers, as Boo babbles something about Kitty.

At one point, Charles catches a brief glimpse of a little boy and a younger girl, both with brown hair. The Loki with Charles quickly blocks them from view, shooing them back into the crowd. Charles catches the children's names, though- Cooper and Lila.

Loki goes well out of his way to avoid the Asgardians, even in his own mind. They jeer insults at him. "Idiot!" "Worthless!" "Freak!" "Frost Giant scum!"

"They're wrong." Charles tells Loki. There needs to be fewer Asgardians, and they need to be silenced. Fenrir snarls furiously at them, but sticks by Loki's side like a bodyguard rather than running off to join the fight going on between the Asgardians and the other figures in Loki's mind, including the other, less real Fenrir's. Stitch, now with antennae, back spines, and four arms, is delighted to join the battle, though, cackling maniacally as he fires some kind of plasma gun he'd found somewhere.
Loki seems to notice Charles still glancing at the ruined buildings and fissures in the ground, particularly the large one that they need to work their way around.

"Told you I'm all messed up in here." Loki says, kicking at a bit of rubble and somehow not seeming to hurt his bare foot.

"You know, I think you're an extraordinary young man." Charles tells him sincerely, and then cautiously remarks "It looks like you got hurt a lot."

Loki doesn't answer, but he stops walking, gazing at the sky. Charles waits for him to say something.

"Once there was a great big stone wall that he built with his horse. Really big, to keep the warriors out, so he could have the sun and the moon." Loki starts telling a story, as he starts walking again, stepping over small cracks and rubble.

Charles is not at all surprised that the damage is a sensitive topic Loki wants to avoid. Yet, Loki had mentioned stuff about it before. He won't push Loki to talk about it.

"The horse ended up lifting most of the stones, since they were so big." Loki continues. Once again, Charles is struck by how different Loki's language in his head is from his actual speech.

This story sounds familiar, and Charles realizes it's one of the Norse myths, the one about a giant and his horse building a wall around Asgard on a set deadline. When it looked like they would certainly build the wall before the deadline and thus win Freya's hand in marriage (although Loki didn't mention Freya or marriage at all), the horse was distracted by a mare, and then the deadline passed so the smith technically hadn't fulfilled his end of the bargain.

Of course, there's no telling how accurate the myths are without asking Thor or Loki, although he's not sure how reliable of a narrator Loki is. The god certainly seems to be telling it differently.

"But then the warriors attacked it. And sometimes..." Loki huffs in annoyance, staring angrily at the scorched, cracked ground.

Charles just waits patiently for him to continue.

"Sometimes they hit it so hard, some of the stones got loose and fell away! The wall was rebuilt, but the enemy warriors always hit it again, breaking it again and again." Loki kicks at a bit of rubble, somehow not injuring his bare foot.

"So we had to keep building it, but out of wood sometimes, not stone." Charles catches a glimpse of Pinocchio in the crowd, and wonders if this is a reference to that.

The fact Loki said we this time hasn't slipped Charles' notice either.

"It wasn't even as much of a real wall, it wasn't as strong." Loki picks up a spare bit of rubble from one of the buildings and chucks it at the ruined building.

"I'm sorry." Charles says.

Loki doesn't answer, just continues his story. He slows down a bit, and when he speaks, his voice is slower, and lower.

"Odin was really mad about the horse, and then wall got damaged even more than when the warriors hit it. So broken it was almost all gone." Loki mutters softly. "And the horse hasn't been
able to help fix it yet, because he had to go away, so the wall's still broken." Loki doesn't continue, and it seems that's the end of the story.

Wait a minute, the part about the horse going away... Loki's mentioned countless times that Sleipnir went away.

"Is the horse Sleipnir?" Charles asks, although at first Loki had been referencing the wall myth, but now it seems like he's talking about Sleipnir.

Loki nods, blinking back tears. It seems his story switched midway from the wall myth to one about Sleipnir, then.

"This isn't the wall around Asgard, is it?" Charles gives voice to his hunch. He looks around for a wall, but they're not anywhere near where a wall would be built around the edge. He wouldn't be surprised if there really was a wall, but at the same time, the wall could probably represent the damage done to the whole town of Loki's mind.

Loki doesn't answer, but Charles catches an affirmative thought.

Apparently, the wall is part of Loki's mind.

"Do you know who did that to the wall?" Charles asks slowly. "Was it Odin?" Loki had mentioned Odin right before mentioning the total destruction of the wall.

"Ravens." Loki mutters. One of them caws loudly overhead.

"Those ravens?" Charles points at the two bizarre ravens in the air above the Asgardian palace, with the spears for beaks and the old man hands instead of talons.

"Maybe? Or maybe Odin? They look like him, with Gungnir and his hands. I don't know." Loki sounds really confused. "Doesn't matter, I'm broken now! It's the wall's fault, the wall wasn't strong enough! I wasn't strong enough! Stitch got his head slammed into a tree by Jumba and he didn't end up stupid like me!"

"Loki, this is not your fault. If the warriors hadn't hit the wall, if they hadn't hit your head... they deserve all the blame. It would have happened to anyone, it doesn't make you weak." Charles says firmly.

"Should have made the wall stronger!" Loki insists.

"Even the strongest wall will fall if it's attacked enough." Charles tells Loki quietly. "And walls take time to rebuild. If people keep attacking, that makes it harder to rebuild it."

"It's really hard." Loki mumbles.

"I may be able to help you rebuild it." Charles tells him.

Loki looks up, eyes wide with hope. "My Tony helps sometimes, too. My whole family does. Like how Lilo's ohana helped rebuild her house."

"You've already been rebuilding, clearly." Charles gestures to some of the intact buildings, and the ones in the process of being repaired.

"Then why can't I fix Sleipnir's door?"

"Because it's not broken." Charles says simply, and smiles. "Now, I have something that will
brighten your mood."

"What?" Loki asks, hopping up and down.

Charles smiles even wider. "Are you ready to meet Sleipnir again?"

Chapter End Notes

So next chapter is the big reunion, finally! :)

Sorry I'm so evil and made you wait another chapter. Hope you liked this.
Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

The big reunion!

Chapter Notes

I figured you guys would want a shorter chapter sooner than a longer chapter later :)

I went back over the last few chapters and tweaked a couple things about Sleipnir's medical info. Early I said Sleipnir didn't have Thrush, but that's really unrealistic considering how filthy the dungeons were, so I changed it so he does.

I also added Loki briefly glimpsing the stables Sleipnir is in when Lila and Cooper were playing Mario Kart last chapter. Oh, and all the horses in the stables in this chapter are named after real horses

Hopefully, you guys like the Loki-Sleipnir reunion!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once upon a time, there was The Dark.

It was all encompassing, full of gnawing hunger and creeping terrors that were always out of sight because there's nothing to see in The Dark.

The Dark clutched him in its black fist and squeezed him tightly, because horses aren't supposed to fit in brains.

Sleipnir's stomach cried until he was so desperate he ate his own poop. It didn't do much, his stomach begged for more that Loki tried to give him but couldn't. The hunger tore him apart in his stomach, the Darkness smothered him in its clutches.

And, oh, how it made him want to scream.

But Loki shone high, like a beacon of blue-green light, a calming presence that chased all the hurt from The Dark in his own mind away, like their soothing melody, their special song.

Loki showed Sleipnir what was beyond The Darkness, whispered secrets in his mind as he took him places, so that sometimes Sleipnir almost believed he left The Dark for good.

Most of the places outside hurt, full of horrors that hurt his Loki. Leering faces and harsh hands that flew out to strike at any moment, bringing storms that left ruin and destruction.

When Loki woke up scared, or when he was hurt after yet another beating and waiting for his body to mend, Sleipnir was there for him. Don't be scared, Loki. Sleipnir would say before he sang their song to him. Their song about their field, their happy place.
Some places didn't hurt quite as much. The stables felt familiar the first time Loki took him there, as if Sleipnir had been there before, though all he remembers is The Dark.

Loki liked the library, but he usually got chased out. The field by the stables was better when the stars shone bright in the sky, because it was quiet at night, no mean people to chase them away like there often were when it was day and the stars slept.

Don't be scared, Sleipnir, Loki would tell him in return, when Sleipnir had bad dreams about Odin trying to ride him in the stables, or being dragged by the guards.

Loki apparently dreams about being a horse, and he was still living in the nightmare of Asgard with Odin, Thor, warriors and guards. So it's clear it's Loki's dream, even if Loki says he didn't remember and never really was a horse outside of his dreams. Sometimes, he'd said, he dreamed that Sleipnir came out of him as a baby.

All the same, Loki would be the one to comfort Sleipnir after his nightmares, singing, letting the familiar, soothing melody drift between them and wishing they could hug.

Don't cry, Sleipnir... Loki's here.

Loki even tried to help Sleipnir's hunger. I swear I'll find out how to get you food. He'd promise, and sometimes- rarely- food did appear, but it never fared well in the trip to The Dark in Loki's brain. I'm sorry.

We'll go to our field tonight.

The best place was their special field, in Loki's mind, with their horses and their stars, even better than the one outside. It was pretend, just like Sleipnir, but there were never any mean people to send them away, just Loki and the horses.

There, they'd play their games, for fun and for keeps, to chase away the pain like they chased each other around the field. Sometimes, they'd fly up to the stars, where there was nobody to hurt them because Loki was the only person left in all the Nine Realms.

Then they'd travel through the realms, laughing and romping until Sleipnir was back in The Dark, surrounded by echoes of laughter that would surely return with his Loki.

Fenrir was in The Dark, too, once, Sleipnir is sure. Sleipnir couldn't see Fenrir, couldn't see anything, but he knew the wolf was there, because he heard him, even if he was out of reach.

Loki hadn't been able to talk to them without getting hurt, because Odin became furious whenever he found out. Furious for talking to Sleipnir or Fenrir, because they aren't real.

The wolf often got really mad in The Dark, when their Loki got hit and neither of them could do anything to stop it, to protect him. Sleipnir was always just as furious and sad as Fenrir, who would snarl and growl with rage as their Loki got another beating and stones from the wall tumbled down.

Fenrir was the angriest when the few times the Bad Men visited The Dark, completely unwelcome in Loki's head but there anyways, making things worse as they always do.

One time, Sleipnir heard an anguished scream from one of the Bad Men and the smell of blood.

Fenrir had disappeared from The Dark not long after that, leaving Sleipnir alone. He only heard
from Fenrir when Loki did.

The Dark squeezed harder, making Sleipnir stay silent longer.

Sleipnir saw when Jormungand found Loki, and helped him stay out of trouble, followed later by Hel, who scared Loki and Sleipnir at first. But they were all monsters, so they became a Monster family, and Loki was Sleipnir's mother but the others' father.

Jormungand and Hel were never in The Dark with Sleipnir, like Fenrir was once. When they started talking to Loki, Sleipnir began to again too.

For as long as Sleipnir can remember, that was his world. His one and his only, his everything and anything. Loki chasing away the darkness in his own mind as it tried to pull Sleipnir back.

But Odin got mad, and the ravens cawed, burning like fire, like monsters coming from the sun. The storm raged harder, burning, ripping, tearing. Knocking the wall down more than the warriors ever did.

The wall fell down, and they had to go.

He became a silent observer of Loki's world, alone in The Dark without Fenrir or the others. He hated not even being able to sing their song to comfort his Loki, who was hurt again and again. So much hurt, it never ends.

But then Loki's world changed, and there was Tony. Tony, with his hugs and kindness, casting a calming, blue-white light, like the moon, over their world. Making it safe, for the first time ever.

Finally, Sleipnir could talk to Loki again instead of just watching, they could sing their song together. When Sleipnir talked to Loki, he could even see Fenrir again, and Hel and Jormungand, although he never saw them in The Dark.

Tony and Bruce see Sleipnir unlike anyone else but Loki. They talk to him like only Loki did. They're family, like his Loki and his Fenrir.

They help make The Darkness brighter, like Loki.

Then Thor came in green light and took The Dark away, making Sleipnir's world bright and deafening and overwhelming, but the noise and light all around him are oddly familiar, as if he'd had them in a past life that some back part of his brain has only barely not forgotten.

Now, his world has Logan and food and skies and stars. Logan reminds Sleipnir so much of Tony that sometimes he has to wonder if the man really is Tony after all, except he casts a glow like light reflecting off metal, and it takes away some of the storm raging around Sleipnir, raging inside him because he can't find his Loki.

Logan says he's not Tony as he helps Sleipnir walk, but Sleipnir only knows who Loki knows, and Loki doesn't know Logan. When Sleipnir's eight legs shake so hard he thinks he'll collapse, Logan will let Sleipnir lean on him, two of his front legs over the man's shoulders, the man's hands wrapped around them. They don't have claws, but they only did that one time with Thor, and Sleipnir's starting to think maybe he'd imagined them.

Once, when Sleipnir wakes up scared in the night, Logan comes to calm him down. Just like Tony. Like Loki, but he can really feel Logan's hands.

Don't be scared. It's not The Dark. He can see the stars, and Sleipnir sings the lullaby to himself,
but he wishes his Loki could sing it to him. He cuddles his can opener, wondering when Loki will come. He gazes at the stars, and they twinkle and laugh and comfort until it's day again.

It's not the same as Loki singing to him, and Logan doesn't sing at all, just strokes him. But for the moment, it's enough.

His food is still here, and his water, and Sleipnir can hardly believe they haven't gone away yet. When he drinks the water, it makes him have to pee, and peeing *really* hurts, so it's good and bad and he can't decide which.

He still gets the itchy scratchy tube put in his nose and down his throat, but Hank says he's getting better and they might be able to move to a bottle soon. He has hay, too, but he can't eat much without his stomach revolting.

He doesn't throw up as much as when he first got here.

Hank asks why he needs his can opener, but Sleipnir can't explain that surely it'll turn into Loki or bring him one day. Professor X seems to know, but he doesn't say anything, just says that Loki will come soon.

Logan has a thing sticking out of his mouth that smokes and smells, and Sleipnir sees Logan with one of the smoking sticks in his mouth more often than not. Logan says the smoke blocks out all the other smells around him, as if the world is too bright for his nose instead of his eyes.

*There she is, my baby. She's a beauty, isn't she?* Logan introduces Sleipnir to his two-wheeled thing, that's apparently a baby and a 'motorcycle' on their next walk. Sleipnir remembers seeing things like this driving on the Bifrost.

Sleipnir's not sure how this motorcycle thing could really be Logan's baby, but then again, he can't really be Loki's baby like they like to pretend because Loki's not a horse, and neither can Jormungand or Fenrir because he's not a snake or a wolf.

When Sleipnir asks about the motorcycle with his eyes, Logan says it's not *really* his baby, with a smirk on his face like Tony. People can't give birth to bikes, he says, and bikes aren't real. So Logan just likes to pretend the motorcycle is his baby, like how Sleipnir, Fenrir, Hel and Jormungand pretend they're Loki's Monster Family, where Sleipnir is Loki's baby even though Loki's not a horse

Professor X still reminds Sleipnir of Loki. He can talk in Sleipnir's head like only Loki can, and sometimes Sleipnir wonders if Professor X really is Loki, just different-looking like when he's Tony. But Professor X says he's not Loki and maybe he's really not. Loki actually knows Professor X, though, unlike Logan or Hank or Jean.

Sometimes, when Sleipnir imagines Logan as Tony and Professor X as Loki. Hank is like Bruce, calm and kind and big, but blue instead of green. Jean could be Pepper, and Rogue is Hel, because Hel never touches anyone either.

Sleipnir's new world is better than The Dark, even with Thor showing up, but Thor took the Dark away. Sleipnir's mostly grateful- he hadn't liked it.

In The Dark, even when he couldn't talk to Loki without Loki getting hurt, Sleipnir had seen Thor do countless cruel things to Loki. Sleipnir always expects Thor to hit someone, probably him, especially when Sleipnir kicked Thor in his really tender areas. But Thor just grimaced and backed away, hands over his crotch.
It wasn't the first time Sleipnir kicked him either, but Thor never hits, like he hit Loki. Sleipnir was positive Thor would hate him, but he doesn't seem to.

Thor doesn't seem quite as mean as he used to be.

Sleipnir's eight legs tremble terribly on his walk with Logan after the man shows him the baby motorcycle. Sleipnir's really little again now, so when he almost collapses, Logan just scoops him up onto his back, like he's the horse and Sleipnir's the rider, but Logan's still on just two legs.

It's really funny, Sleipnir thinks from Logan's back, and he's glad nobody's riding him. Logan even picks up Sleipnir's can opener from the ground, and says Sleipnir is doing better, which makes Sleipnir proud. He'd managed to walk just a bit longer before his legs gave out.

Even though his stomach doesn't beg for food anymore and he has Logan and Professor X, Hank and Jean, Sleipnir sometimes wishes Thor hadn't taken away The Dark.

He hadn't liked it there at all, and being back there would mean he wouldn't have Logan. But at least he had Loki, whereas the chaos in this new world makes him lose his Loki.

He doesn't know how long Loki's been gone, only that it's been too long.

"You're beautiful." Loki coos at the mare whose nose he's currently petting. He's in the stables, where the familiar scents of horses, leather and manure greet his nose like an old friend. The smell of manure never really bothered him, and this all smells so much more real than the city, or even their tower.

Oddly enough, he's pretty sure he'd seen these stables briefly, when Lila and Cooper were playing that weird car and bike game on the screen a few days ago, when the Avengers were fighting Doom. And again in his dream about the clawed man. Loki doesn't mention this, though. They'd think he was crazy. Does Professor X know Loki somehow saw these stables? He said he knows the claw man, Logan.

Loki's head still feels... weird, from when Professor X went into it.

The professor had said he can help rebuild the wall to fix what's wrong with Loki in general, although he'd also told Loki not to say it like that, because he said Loki isn't wrong for being how he is. That it's not his fault for getting hurt, even though Loki knows it is. Professor X never even used the word broken either, or stupid, pathetic, worthless or any of the other countless words they used in Asgard. Loki never liked those words, even though they're right.

The professor had said that you don't refer to people as broken- or rather, that some people do, but they really shouldn't, and that includes the Asgardians. Loki's pretty sure even Professor X can't do anything to fix stupidity. Tony says Loki isn't even stupid, though. It's a really hard concept to grasp, but Loki knows Tony doesn't say that to many people.

Loki briefly plops onto the ground, and Tony sends him a look. "I hope that outer space coat is machine washable, buddy. If someone's doing it by hand, it's certainly not me."

Loki's pretty sure he could just get dirt off with magic, though. He accidentally did that once when the servants were making him clean, and even though it made things faster, they still acted like he did something wrong, even though they seemed to like that there was less to clean.

There were young people cleaning bits of this barn earlier until Professor X told them to let Loki
and the others have a little privacy. Loki wondered if they were servants, but Professor X said they were students and that part of having horses is caring for them.

Thor never cleaned out the palace stables. Loki wouldn't have minded much, since it'd mean he'd get to be with horses more. He'd started to clean up here, but Tony and Professor X said he doesn't have to, that he can greet the horses instead.

The mare Loki's petting right now strongly resembles Rain, the mare in *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron* that's Spirit's friend and Little Creek's horse. She's a medium shade of brown, with white patches in almost the exact same places as Rain, and a white mane.

Lilo had started naming all the horses, like she does with all of Jumba's experiments that she and Stitch turn good and find a one true place for, but Hank and Professor X say these horses already have names. The mare he's petting right now isn't named Rain, she's named Melody. The black mare in the stall next to Melody is actually named Baccara, not Inky, like Lilo decided.

Melody, and most of the other horses, seem scared of Jormungand, though, so he's necklace-size again, hidden under Loki's shirt with his head right against Loki's heart.

Loki relishes the feel of petting Melody, the warmth, the feeling of her fur under his fingers. Horses are soft, but strong at the same time. Loki hums slightly under his breath.

He hasn't seen any real horses since being in Midgard, and he'd almost decided maybe he never would, because he lives in a tower and that doesn't seem like a great horse place. Even Tony's other house, with the awesome yard and the beach, didn't have horses.

The one thing Loki misses from Asgard is the horses, and the field, but of course he never would have wanted to go back just for those.

This place, Professor X's school, has both horses and a field. There's real grass like in Tony's other house. Loki had made a hula skirt with his magic when he was outside, which he's still wearing, along with the leaf bands around his ankles, wrists and head. Lilo and Stitch are wearing hula stuff as well, obviously, and so are Loki's little Timon and Pumbaa figurines, because they danced the hula to distract hyenas.

Loki and his toys had danced outside before coming here, although Loki doesn't actually know how to hula.

He'd also climbed one of the awesome trees, almost as awesome as Willow-Willowy at Tony's other house with the great yard, beach and sea. He'd nestled his Tinker Bell figurine in the branches. She looked a lot more at home in nature than in the tower, and she has a leaf dress that's more like a hula skirt than a lot of clothes, but not quite the same.

Loki had watched two of Tinker Bell's movies with Lila yesterday, but Cooper said they were for girls and didn't watch it with them, although apparently both he and Clint have watched them with Lila before, so they can't only be for girls.

Tink looked 3D in that, like Rapunzel and Elsa, though she looked like a drawing in *Peter Pan*. She actually talked instead of just chiming, although Loki actually liked the tinkling bell sound more. Peter and Wendy weren't around, and Tink was a lot nicer.

In those movies, Tinker Bell was a Tinker Talent fairy, which is definitely what Tony would be if he was a fairy. There are a lot of other fairies aside from just Tink and Periwinkle, who Loki only saw through a hologram through Jarvis.
Loki would really like to be an Animal Talent, but he's almost positive he'd be a Frost Talent, because they do stuff with ice. Tink's twin, Periwinkle, is a Frost Talent and looks like Elsa, at least with the colors, but she hadn't been in the movie at all. Lila said Periwinkle doesn't show up until the fourth movie, *Secret of the Wings*.

Tink didn't like being a Tinker Talent, though, because they didn't get to go to the mainland, so she'd tried to change her talent. Tink had failed at every other talent, including Light, Water, Garden, and Fast-flying (but she didn't even try being a Frost Talent). She failed at teaching a baby bird how to fly when trying to learn to be an Animal-Talent from Fawn (who's Lila's favorite fairy), but the bird was stupid because he was scared of flying. He wasn't even a flightless bird like a penguin, so how could he be scared of flying?

Loki would love it if Tink had taught *him* how to fly. His Tink figurine had actually sprinkled him with Pixie Dust in the tree, and it hadn't been Jarvis because he's not here.

When Loki jumped from the tree he'd climbed out in the yard, though, he hadn't flown and instead crashed to the ground like when Buzz tried to fly over the stairs at Sid's house.

His arm hadn't fallen off like Buzz's, but it had definitely broken. Broken bones are nothing new to Loki, and it's healed already, but he'd still gotten scolded by a concerned Bruce and an incredulous Tony who said he *knew* Loki knows he can't fly.

Maybe the Pixie Dust had been one of Loki's own illusions, because it sure hadn't done what it was supposed to (but Tink probably wouldn't have been the best teacher anyways.)

Tony and Bruce shouldn't have been so concerned. Bruce had insisted on looking over Loki's arm in every possible way even as he told Loki not to jump out of trees. But Loki had healed Tony's leg before, so they surely knew he'd get better quickly, but he secretly kind of liked that they showed concern.

Tony had seemed impatient about something, and after they'd finished telling Loki not to jump from trees, Tony had said Loki was going to love what was coming. Instead of leaving to go back to the tower, they came to this barn with stables, instead.

Tony was right, as he almost always is. Loki does love this, a lot, but Tony still seems impatient about something.

Because there's a field and stables with horses here, Loki doesn't even have to miss the field in Asgard anymore, which had real horses he could actually feel (unlike pretend horses like Sleipnir that he can't touch).

This place is a million times better than Asgard. There are blue people here, like Kurt and Hank, and people with things that are sort of magic, like him.

But still no Sleipnir.

Professor X said Loki could meet Sleipnir again, but Loki still hasn't found Sleipnir in his head. He misses Sleipnir a ton, and Sleipnir's the best, smartest horse ever, but these other horses are still great. Before Sleipnir, he had the horses in the Asgardian royal stables as friends. They didn't hate him, even if their owners did. The palace horses had been even nicer once he had Sleipnir as a friend, treating them both as if they were their own, and they had stayed his friends after his Monster Family had to go away in Asgard.

These Midgardian horses aren't quite like Loki's horse friends in the Asgardian royal stables,
though. The Asgardian horses were like Maximus and Bullseye—they could clearly understand everything he said, and could reply with body language, but couldn't actually tell him stuff like his Sleipnir can because they didn't use any words.

Neither the Asgardian horses nor these Midgardian horses are as good at talking as Sleipnir. He can't actually hear Melody's thoughts in words like with Sleipnir or Fenrir, or how he reads Snoopy's thoughts (but he doesn't hear Snoopy's thoughts in the movies with the beagle, which is odd). Spirit actually narrated his own story, but was also silent a lot of the time. But he had thought stuff back to Little Creek sometimes, except Little Creek didn't seem to hear.

Still, Loki's absolutely loving seeing these horses, even if he probably won't be allowed to ride them. He never was allowed to in Asgard, but sometimes he'd climb on their backs at night. They didn't mind, but they couldn't leave the stables, so he only ever got to ride when they were in the field, except usually they were sleeping.

He dashes up and down the aisle, practically skipping. Some of the stalls are empty, and Loki isn't sure if they don't have as many horses as stalls, or if the horses normally in those stalls are outside.

Loki doesn't have any apples to feed them, but they all have hay, like they should. He wishes he could somehow get some to go to his brain, for Sleipnir. He'd tried eating it several times, but it hadn't worked. Oddly enough, the first time he'd eaten it, he almost felt like he'd eaten it before.

He's moved on to petting a white stallion, and holds up Maximus for them to meet each other. They don't look quite the same, but Maximus and the stallion look at each other, neither speaking or thinking in words, but the stallion seems curious about Maximus, who looks a little like him.

"Hey, Horse-whisperer, I know you love these horses, but c'mon over here for a sec." Tony says maybe to Loki, or maybe one of the horses is named Whisperer? Loki had almost forgotten it's not just him and the horses. Tony, Bruce, Hank and Professor X are here, too.

"Do we haves to go?" Loki asks sadly, giggling slightly as the stallion nibbles at the end of Loki's hair. After all, they live in the tower, not here, so they're obviously going to have to go sometime, probably soon. As much as Loki loves this, he'd rather be in the tower with his Tony than here without him. "Little bit mores, please, Tony?"

Loki's a little surprised he actually asked that. Surely he shouldn't get too greedy. But they hadn't even had horses in the zoo, just zebras, and he wasn't allowed to pet them.

"Loki, look." Tony just gently grabs Loki's shoulder and turns him around, so he's facing the rest of the stalls instead of the stallion that's now nibbling his hair.

Loki blinks and tilts his head, dropping Maximus as Simba tries to climb up his long coat. There's a figure standing in the barn doorway, almost silhouetted from the sunlight.

It's the claw man from his dream, Logan. Wait, hadn't Professor X said that Logan was that... Wolverine guy he mentioned a few times?

"You're Loki?" Logan asks, raising an eyebrow. "I've heard about you, from someone who's been missing you a lot. I wasn't expecting the coat, though. Or the hula stuff- you seem in touch with your feminine side." Tony gives Logan a look for that, although Logan reminds Loki a lot of Tony. "I did hear about the army of Disney character toys."

"Where's your claws?" Loki blurts out to Logan, folding in his thumbs pinky fingers so his three remaining fingers stick out like this man's claws in his dream. Loki can't even see Logan's hands,
they're behind his back. "Are they re...re-trac... they go in, like cat claws? My Fenrir has claws, but they can't scratch. Stitch's neither, his are reals soft."

Fenrir appears by Loki's side, and Loki feels fur, as is usual lately, although his hand still goes through.

"Where'd you hear about that?" Logan asks him with narrowed eyes before looking at Professor X, who's in his chair. "Did you tell him, Chuck?"

Loki's doesn't hear Professor X's response, his attention drawn to the figure clinging to Logan's back, in the way Stitch does to Loki's, but without straps.

Logan's holding a tiny foal on his back. Loki can't see the whole foal, since Logan's body is in the way and the foal is so small, but he sees a small, gray horse head sticking over Logan's shoulder, cocked to the side. And there are definitely more than four legs poking out behind Logan's back. The legs look kind of skinny, even for a foal.

"...Sleipnir...?" Loki whispers in disbelief, eyes going wide, wondering if he's dreaming. When he rubs his eyes, Sleipnir's still there.

Loki would know his Sleipnir anywhere. He's the only eight-legged horse- the only one Loki knows of, anyways. All the other horses he's seen only have four legs. Even if there was another eight-legged grey horse, Loki would have been certain he'd be able to pick out his Sleipnir from that one. After all, he can tell all the four-legged horses apart from each other.

Sleipnir wasn't this small before. His mane, which is exactly the same color as Loki's own black hair, is a lot longer, too, longer than Loki's hair, maybe. Loki briefly wonders what horses would look like with lion manes and what lions would look like with horse manes. Or what he'd look like with either of those. He giggles slightly at the thought, and it turns into hysterical laughter at his happiness of finding Sleipnir again.

Loki could never pick Sleipnir up, so why can this Logan guy do it? Then again, Logan had been in Loki's dream. But hadn't Professor X said he knows Logan?

If Logan is here, is this a dream? He's dreamt about Sleipnir since he left, but Sleipnir hasn't come back yet.

"Loki...?" Sleipnir sounds almost as disbelieving as Loki. He doesn't speak aloud, like he has since he started showing up visibly as an illusion, which really only happened since Loki came to Midgard. Instead, Loki just hears the voice in his head, and Sleipnir's mouth doesn't even move. Technically, even when Sleipnir speaks aloud to Tony or Bruce, he still speaks in Loki's head at the same time.

Loki wonders why Sleipnir's not actually talking like he always has in front of Tony and Bruce. And he's definitely in front of them now, so why's he just talking in Loki's head?

Loki bounces up and down, flapping and laughing excitedly as his heart soars. "Sleipnir, my Sleipnir. Sleip, Sleip Sleip-niiiiiiir!"

"Sleipnir, you backs? How... you went, why?" Loki groans. It's hard to get words out right now.

"Are you here, really?" Sleipnir asks mentally, sounding confused. He glances to Logan and his eyes ask "Do you see my Loki, Logan?"

"Yeah, I see 'em. He's here. You're not hallucinating or anything." Logan answers, some weird
smoking stick thing poking out between his teeth. Maybe it's a wand, like Harry uses?

"So you're really not Tony?" Sleipnir asks Logan with his gaze, but it seems like he already knew that.

"Uh, no, I'm right here..." Tony says, raising a hand. "How'd you think he was me? I'm much more handsome."

Logan scoffs at that, and Tony says. "It's good to have you back, Sleipnir."

"Really really really really really good!" Loki says. "I miss-ed you a whole lots, Sleipnir!"

Everyone else seems to see Logan and Sleipnir, too, so maybe they really are here, not only in Loki's head. Like illusions?

Sleipnir's an illusion, right, just like all the others. So maybe this Logan man's an illusion, so that's why he can pick Sleipnir up?

Loki blinks, still half convinced this is a dream. If it is, he wants to stay in it, and Sleipnir is still here. Wouldn't he have woken up by now?

He pinches himself and feels the sting, which means this can't be just a dream. It's not a dream, so it's real, right? He doesn't remember falling asleep anyways.

This is real!

Professor X really had helped open the door, it seems. Or is Professor X making him see Sleipnir? Could he do that? But Loki can feel Sleipnir in his mind again.

Loki smiles so wide his face hurts. "You are back! Can't leave never 'gain... why you back... Why 'd you left?" Loki's still stumbling over the words. His mouth isn't working right- not that it ever does, but it's worse now. "Why'd you shuts me out like Elsa? You're not gonna leave again, are you?" Loki asks anxiously, fiddling with his fingers as Simba crawls into his arms.

What if he disappears again? His friends used to disappear from sight like all his other illusions whenever anyone touched them.

Loki slowly draws his hand back, where it finds Fenrir's fur. Fenrir doesn't go away, but he hadn't gone away the past several days when Sleipnir was gone.

Loki really doesn't want that to lose his horse again, like when Sleipnir and the rest of his Monster Family had to go away for a long time when Loki was in Asgard because Odin was always enraged whenever he talked to or about them.

Sleipnir hadn't even been gone a week this time, and it's not just Loki and his pretend Monster Family against everyone else here on Midgard, since he has his Tony and his Bruce, and Jarvis, Pepper, Dum-E, Simba, Stitch. Clint was always nice, even after accidentally pointing an arrow at Loki, and now he lives with them. Laura, Cooper and Lila are all really nice, too.

So it hadn't been nearly as bad this time as in Asgard, but he'd still really missed his horse. Sleipnir was his first friend. Well, he had the Asgardian horses before and after Sleipnir, but Sleipnir was his first friend that could actually talk with him, even if it was in his head and made him stupid and crazy.

""Loki? You came?... I knew you'd come." Sleipnir's eyes are only on Loki as his voice echos
Loki's mind. But he sounds like he'd been starting to worry he wouldn't see him again. Just like Loki was really scared that Sleipnir might have decided to go away for a really long time, maybe forever. "Professor X said you would. And I have a can opener."

Now Loki's confused. Sleipnir's the one who came back, not him. "...'m heres. Not a dream? I feel it." But Professor X told Loki he'd meet Sleipnir again, but since Sleipnir's in Loki's head, maybe he kind of told Sleipnir, too? Was the door open then?

"Tony an' Bruce says maybe you'd come back. And 'Fessor X said I could meet you 'gain. Thoughts maybe I couldn't ever open your door... but 's open now!" Loki grins. They were right!

"You gotta stays nows, Sleipnir." Loki tells his horse. "You can't leave, never ever again! Can't, 'cause you're family, and ohana means family, family means nobody gets left behind, or forgotten. I didn't forgets you, but I thought you were gone for always!"

"You never heard me." Sleipnir's eyes say. But Loki almost never saw or heard Sleipnir, either, except in his dreams. "I couldn't find you."

"I found you nows! C'mon, let's play! Look, my Tony gots me Bullseye!" Loki says as Bullseye trots up next to him. Apparently they don't have to be in Toy Mode here. "He's Woody's horse, but kinda Jessie's too, and Lil-"

Loki cuts himself off. He almost mentioned Lila, and Tony said people weren't supposed to know that Laura and the kids are in the tower. He hopes Professor X hadn't found out in his brain. He said he wouldn't look into Loki's secrets.

"You have another horse?" Sleipnir looks a little jealous, like Woody when he thought Andy didn't love him anymore. Sleipnir never cared that Loki had Maximus, although Maximus didn't move before. Maybe it's because Loki got Bullseye after Sleipnir disappeared, so he thinks he got replaced?

Hopefully he doesn't turn evil like Lotso when Daisy replaced him.

"I didn't replace you!" Loki insists. "You're stills the best horse in all the Nine!"

Hopefully Bullseye, Maximus and all these horses aren't mad at Loki for saying that.

Sleipnir really needs to watch the Toy Story movies, Loki thinks as he sings part of the song that was in all three of them. It says what he wants to, anyways.

"Some other folks might be
A little bit smarter than I am,
Bigger and stronger too, maybe.
But none of them will ever love you
The way I do, it's you and me, boy.
And as the years go by
Our friendship will never die."

Stitch spits out Loki's horse mask, and Loki pulls it over his head, holding Bullseye and Maximus, trotting around and neighing. "Look Sleipnir! I'm a horse!" Loki laughs.
Maybe he can grow horse legs again, like that time with Bruce! It would be really great, to be a horse with Sleipnir, like he sometimes is in his dreams. Loki lets out his best whinny, although there's a laugh mixed in.

Sleipnir isn't running, though, and Loki pauses, pulling off his mask. Sleipnir always loves playing with him, so why is he still on Logan's back instead of running around with Loki? Even though Loki had Lila and Cooper to play with ever since Sleipnir went away, he's still really missed playing with Sleipnir.

As Logan takes Sleipnir off from his back and carries him to a stall, Loki realizes that Sleipnir is really skinny, skinnier than any of the other horses both here or on Asgard. He's too thin.

"Sleipnir, why alls skinny? You looks like Hel, you do, you do... but all, not half, an'-" Loki asks worriedly as he follows Logan and Sleipnir into the stall, frowning. Sleipnir never looked like this, and he definitely didn't look this bad when he disappeared several days ago.

Sleipnir doesn't look quite as dead or skinny as Hel's dead half, but he looks like he was starving once. He lays tiredly on the ground, not even standing up like a lot of horses.

Logan mutters that this is nothing compared to before. Tony voices his agreement, telling Sleipnir he looks a lot better, and Loki's really confused. Sleipnir didn't look this bad before he went away.

Sleipnir sends an extremely relieved look over to the stack of hay and the water in the other corner of the stall. Sleipnir acts like he's guarding them, as he bites the side of the open stall door, arching his neck and grunting. Cribbing. Loki saw some of the horses in Asgard do it.

Even though none of the Asgardian horses were starving when they did it, and really just bored or nervous, he can't help but imagine it's because Sleipnir's so hungry he's trying to eat the door. But Sleipnir can never eat the food Loki offers him, so he can't actually eat the hay or drink the water here, and it makes Loki want to cry even more.

Loki can never feed Sleipnir.

Given how skinny he is, Sleipnir always being hungry makes even more sense. It's all Loki's fault. He tried to feed Sleipnir, but it never worked and now Sleipnir's like this! He didn't even think of water the last bunch of times he tried to feed him. Idiot!

Loki rocks back and forth anxiously, not even paying attention to Simba as the lion climbs around his lap.

He couldn't get it to work, but he should have tried harder instead of just being a useless idiot who dangled food in front of Sleipnir when he was starving! When he eats, he tries to get food to go to his head for Sleipnir and Fenrir, but it never really seemed to work and it's all his fault!

My fault my fault my fault my fault! Can't do anything right it's all my fault he's hungry and hurting... No wonder he wanted to leave me, all my fault... Stupid, worthless freak MONSTER! BAD MONSER BAD MONSTER! I HURT HIM! ALL MY FAULT!

A scream tears through Loki's throat as his hand flies through the air, smacking his cheek hard enough to make his head snap to the side and scratching deep enough to draw blood, again and again.

He only vaguely hears the faint sound of horses whinnying and pawing the ground with hoofs, and the voices of his Monster Family and Professor X echo through his head.
Someone grabs his arm, but then it's like Asgard and he screams even more because surely it's the guards grabbing him, but he deserves a beating anyways. He deserves to be punished, for what he did to Sleipnir.

He thinks he hears someone, Professor X, say you're making it worse, and he is, he made it horrible for Sleipnir and that means he's probably hurting Fenrir too and-

"No, stop." Sleipnir's mental voice says, breaking through all the other noise in Loki's brain and the screaming. "Don't hit yourself, please. It makes me sad."

Loki was only sort of aware of he was the one actually hitting himself, because at one point he thought it was the guards.

Great. He was already broken enough, and he just broke himself even more. No matter what Tony and the others say, Loki really is an idiot.

"Loki!" Professor X says, and Loki's pretty sure he's talking in his mind instead of out loud. "None of this had anything to do with you. You are not to give yourself any of the blame."

He should get all the blame, because he didn't feed Sleipnir, so it's all his fault.

"No. No Loki, it's not. You're the best pretend mother ever." Sleipnir says in Loki's head, referring to their little Monster Family game, and that stupid, crazy dream Loki has sometimes where he's a mare and Sleipnir comes out of him. It hurts in his dream, but at the same time there's an overwhelming joy at seeing Sleipnir emerge in the moonlight.

But that's pretend, like when Lila, after realizing Loki is a prince, pretended to be a princess and said they were going to get married (and what do rings have to do with anything?). Except Clint put a stop to their pretend wedding, saying that he doesn't even want Lila thinking about marrying someone even a hundreth of Loki's age. So someone who's only ten years old is too old in Clint's eyes, even though that's nothing.

Loki feels Jormungand grow and wrap himself around Loki's arms, pinning them to his sides, but hugging him at the same time.

A fuzzy head gently bumps itself against Loki's own head, and it takes Loki a second to realize it's outside him. It's bigger than Simba's head, and it feels different anyways. It feels like Melody's head, with warmth and a skull underneath, except it's smaller and the skull feels a little harder.

Loki opens his eyes and sees Sleipnir's face inches away from his own, concern filling his eyes. "Don't." Sleipnir's eyes say. "You're hurt." As if he's the one they should be worried about.

"You hurts more, Sleipnir!" Loki exclaims.

"You're healing already." Logan says in a tone Loki doesn't quite understand, but he does feel his skin knitting itself back together.

Fenrir is somewhat angrily demanding, in Loki's head, how he's supposed to protect Loki if he does that to himself, but the wolf gives a little whine in the back of his throat. He's never really furious at Loki, like so many people in Asgard were.

It's not like Loki can even hit himself now, when Jormungand's wrapped around his arms, but maybe that's why Jormungand's like this?

Tony and Logan are squatting near Loki, and it might have been their hands that grabbed his arms
earlier, rather than guards.

"You really did a number on your face, Snoopy." Tony groans. "What did I say about hitting yourself? What did they just tell you with their super sentient animal gazes?" Tony nods at Sleipnir and Fenrir.

Loki tries to reach up to feel his face, but Jormungand's still wrapped around his arms.

"But 'tis-alls-m'fault." Loki sobs, out loud, he thinks. His cries muddle up the words even more than his mouth normally.

"No, it wasn't." Tony, Logan and Bruce all say at the same time. All three of them- especially Logan- practically growl the words, but Bruce's eyes aren't green. Loki wishes Hulk would come out.

"Don't think that for a second." Tony tells him.

"You tried to feed me." Sleipnir thinks. "You just couldn't when I was in The Dark. It's not your fault." There's no way he could actually think that. Loki failed him, he couldn't feed him, why in the Nine Realms doesn't Sleipnir hate him? Fenrir, too?

Sleipnir said Loki's head was dark, cold and squishy and that he never got enough food so it's still him that didn't feed him enough!

Like when Sleipnir was still gone, Fenrir tells Loki that they're not mad about the food, echoing what Sleipnir just said.

Sleipnir rubs his face against Loki's own, nickering softly as his voice repeats in Loki's mind. "It's not your fault. It's not your fault."

Loki stares in shock- not at the words, but at the fact he feels Sleipnir's head, and somehow, Sleipnir's head isn't going through Loki, like it always does!

It really feels like he's touching skin, more so than how he can feel Fenrir's fur even though his hand still passes through him. Fenrir's not solid, but Sleipnir is, although, Fenrir somehow managed to knock Stitch down when the alien backpack stole Bruce's snow globe.

This is like touching Jormungand. Jormungand is solid, too, the only solid one of his friends before now. And that had only been after Loki went to Midgard. It definitely feels like Sleipnir has a skeleton (which is really noticeable because he's really skinny), and skin and, but not many muscles.

"Sleipnir, you... gots a body of your own now, same as Jormungand. I feels it." Loki gasps, and his eyes grow wide with realization. "That why's Logan could hold you!" Loki glances at Logan, who he supposes is tangible, too, although he'd never actually touched Logan. Also, Sleipnir had just been biting the wooden stall door.

Logan had gotten to hold Sleipnir before even Loki had. He's jealous, because he always wished he could hold Sleipnir for real. He could never really hold Sleipnir before, and someone else had gotten to do it first!

Well, he can now. Loki gathers Sleipnir into his lap. Sleipnir's long mane feels really nice when Loki runs his hands through it. Sleipnir doesn't go away as Loki cards his fingers through Sleipnir's mane.
It's as if Sleipnir's really real...

So the Blue Fairy really had granted Loki's wish upon a star!

*Maybe, if...*

Loki reaches out for Fenrir again, but his fingers still pass through the wolf, much to his disappointment. He certainly hadn't found Genie or his lamp, so Genie hadn't helped Loki, because he hadn't gotten those wishes. He still had Asgard, and Fenrir and Hel don't have bodies, so they're not real.

Even if he had found Genie, Aladdin probably already freed him (unless he got stuck in a lamp again, but then Loki would free him again). But why in the Nine Realms would Genie grant Loki wishes unless he had to?

So it was the Blue Fairy, then. But the Blue Fairy made it seem like she granted Gepetto's wish because he brought happiness to others, even though the song says it doesn't matter who you are if you wish upon a star. Loki hasn't been kind- he's been starving his Sleipnir!

"*Not your fault not your fault not your fault.*" Sleipnir chants in Loki's head, as Jormungand wraps himself around Loki's arms again, as if to ensure he won't hit himself, although he gives Loki enough maneuverability to still stroke Sleipnir. "*I get food here.*"

"You eat?" Loki asks. Stitch has a tangible body, and he eats toys. And Loki's pretty sure Jormungand ate at the zoo. So, if Sleipnir's tangible, maybe he really *can* eat? He feels real.

Loki leans towards the hay, and Logan says Loki's the first person to do that without getting kicked.

Sleipnir's eyes glint mischievously as he says something about kicking Thor. Loki likes that mental image, of Sleipnir kicking Thor. Except Sleipnir's really small- but then again, Loki can be really small, and so can Jormungand.

Loki holds a couple strands of hay in his teeth, showing Sleipnir how to bite it. If the Blue Fairy just turned him real, maybe he doesn't know?

With the rest of the hay still sticking out of his mouth, Loki watches Sleipnir with bated breath. This never works and it's always heartbreaking.

But Sleipnir's teeth and mouth don't simply pass through the hay like they always did. Sleipnir's teeth close around the other end of the hay, so it's between their mouths like Lady and Tramp eating spaghetti, except Loki simply bites off the bit on his end so Sleipnir can have the rest, instead of meeting him in the middle, even though that would have been funny.

"Did you just eat hay?" Tony stares at Loki incredulously, but Loki doesn't answer, too busy beaming as Sleipnir chews it, petting Sleipnir's back. Sleipnir snuggles closer, letting out a happy sigh.

Eyeing the water next to the hay in the corner, Loki realizes he hadn't even thought about offering water recently.

"You haves thirst?" He asks, probably sounding even stupider than normal. "You thirsty, Sleipnir?" If Sleipnir can eat, he can drink too, right?

Sleipnir nods, but looks really scared too. "Gotta drink. Water's 'important." Loki tells him, and
Bruce and Hank both nod in agreement. How could Loki have forgotten water before? *Stupid!*

"*It hurts.*" Sleipnir buries his face against Loki's chest.

Loki freezes, horror struck. What did he do?! Something horrible, obviously, or Sleipnir wouldn't have said that. Maybe just holding Sleipnir hurts him? "Just leave me be. Just leave me be." Loki rocks back and forth, feeling like Elsa when she hurt Anna. "Just stay away and you'll be safe from me."

Half of Loki wants to hide like Elsa, to put the stall door in between himself and Sleipnir. He hurt his Sleipnir! Elsa had hurt Anna, but trying to hide just hurt Anna more. So would hiding hurt Sleipnir more? Loki would hate to have to hide when he just got Sleipnir back, and Sleipnir doesn't seem to have missed Loki too.

True love thaws. Love fixes, love is an open door. His door's open again.

He loves Sleipnir. Sleipnir's the first person... animal he ever remembers loving.

"*You didn't hurt me.*" Sleipnir continues rubbing his face against Loki's chest.

"But you saids..." There's a can opener next to Sleipnir (Sleipnir said he had one) and Loki remembers the one he'd played with when he first was on Midgard, when he first met Tony. He liked it, but later, he'd turned it into his own action figure with his magic. Loki picks up this one and fiddles anxiously with the crank that spins the two little cutting wheels while he thinks.

"*It hurts when I pee.*" Sleipnir explains. Except that doesn't make any sense and Loki's never seen Sleipnir pee before, ever. Then again, he'd never gotten Sleipnir to eat before now.

Loki hears Hank murmur something about a swollen sheath, which Loki knows is the tube of skin covering a male horse's penis. There's a lot about Midgard Loki doesn't know, but he definitely knows horses.

"*Hank and Jean cleaned there. And put weird stuff on my feet. But it still hurts.*" Sleipnir says.

Loki peeks between Sleipnir's legs and is quickly horror-struck. His sheath is all swollen and a weird grey color. Not the beautiful grey of Sleipnir's coat, but a bad, sick-looking gray.

How did that happen? Was it him?

There's also smelly, gross black stuff on Sleipnir's hoofs, that Loki doesn't recognize but it looks bad and smells terrible.

Loki clutches his Sleipnir tight, rocking back and forth, head bent low so their faces are pressed together and his long hair brushes Sleipnir's mane, blurring together with his tears.

"*Heal what has been hurt, change the fates' design, save what has been lost, bring back what once was mine, what once was mine.*" Loki sings, over and over, although he occasionally switches to singing their lullaby about their field.

He'd healed his arm without even really thinking about it, just as he'd healed countless times in Asgard. He'd fixed Tony's leg, and Loki really hopes he can fix Sleipnir's hurts right now. Sleipnir said he hurt, and Loki doesn't want Sleipnir to be hurt. Ever.

A soft glow emanates from Loki's chest and his hands (but not his hair, like Rapunzel). He doesn't need Rapunzel's song, he doesn't think, since he never used it in Asgard. But healing other people
is different from healing himself. He still can't heal Professor X, which doesn't seem fair, since the
man's going to help make Loki's mind better and Loki can't even help him walk again.

The glow wraps around Sleipnir's body, glowing brightest at his sheath and his feet.

When the glow fades, Loki carefully checks Sleipnir over. His sheath is no longer swollen or the
sickly grey color, which is definitely a good sign. The black, smelly stuff on his hoofs is gone now.

Loki smiles slightly. "You feel better?"

Sleipnir sends him a grateful look. "Lots. Thank you, Loki."

"I made you betters?" Loki asks. It would make him feel a bit better himself, if he had. He's still
not entirely sure he hadn't hurt Sleipnir in the first place (although Sleipnir insists he hadn't).

"You always make me better. You never, ever hurt me." Sleipnir gives Loki a very pointed look.

"But-"

"No. You always help, never hurt." Sleipnir emphasizes, and then sends a happy "Loki made me
better!" to Logan, who Loki notices is watching them really closely.

"What, so you just sing, put on a little light show, and instantly everything's healed?" Logan asks
Loki, arching an eyebrow. He seems interested in healing, even though he sort of acts indifferent
now. "You're going to drive a lot of doctors out of business, kid."

Loki's not really sure what that means, but it kind of sounds bad for the doctors. Like Bruce. He
glances at Bruce, who mumbles that he's not that kind of Doctor anyways, and briefly explains
what driving out of business means.

"Can't make 'Fessor X walks, nope nope nope! Ands Dr. Doom an' Drakken shouldn't even be
workings, 'cause they're bad doctors." So if Loki made the stop, that would be good, right? Tony
says that Loki's help to get Doom to stop teleporting is good.

Loki frowns. There's one thing kind of dampening the moment of healing Sleipnir...

"You're still real real thin, Sleipnir." Loki tells his horse, who's still in his arms. That seems to be
the worst part, worse than the stuff he'd just fixed. Sleipnir has to be really hungry. "Why couldn't I
fix that?"

"That's not the kind of thing you can fix immediately." Professor X says gently. What if it's like the
man's legs, and Loki can't fix it at all.

"Sleipnir will get better. It will just take time." Hank explains. Loki sighs in relief.

Sleipnir needs to eat.

Hank is saying something about it being time for another feeding. Which is obvious, because it's
long overdue. Loki hasn't fed Sleipnir at all, he needs to feed Sleipnir.

Loki leans to grab more hay (in his hands this time, since Jormungand has loosened his hold around
Loki's arms), wondering if maybe he could find an apple to give his Sleipnir. He could never give
his Sleipnir apples before.

Does Sleipnir need Idunn's golden apples?
Loki’s thoughts are interrupted when Hank approaches them, holding a long sort of tube. It's thick and clear, and Loki stares at it apprehensively.

"What's that?" Loki doesn't take his eyes off the weird thing. Hank and Bruce are saying something about feeding, and noses, but Loki's not really listening.

Hank crouches down next to them, moving the tube towards Sleipnir's face. No! That could really hold someone's mouth shut, it looks a lot worse than a leather cord. It's thicker, for one.

Sleipnir's singing in his head. Their lullaby. "If you find the field where the horses roam, and you need a place to call your home..."

Loki sits there, curled up and clutching his Sleipnir tighter. His heart pounds in his chest as his ears roar, blocking out sound of Hank saying something.

"Don't be scared, Loki." Sleipnir tells him. "It doesn't hurt."

It can't not hurt, it's going to hold someone's mouth shut and that hurts more than anything!

Hank has backed up a bit, and he's no longer moving the thing towards them, but he had been before.

No, he's going to stitch Sleipnir's mouth shut! It hurts so much, more than anything, Loki is never going to let anybody hurt his Sleipnir like that! He already hurt Sleipnir enough.

Besides, Sleipnir can't eat if his mouth's stitched shut. Sleipnir needs to eat! He's too thin.

"Loki, it's okay. It makes me less hungry." Sleipnir tells him, lessening some of the panicked thoughts in Loki's mind.

How? It's not food.

"Loki, it's all right. It's a feeding tube. A nasogastric tube." Bruce quietly explains from outside the stall. For some reason, that makes Loki think of noses. Still speaking in his nice, quietly calm tone, Bruce starts explaining how the tube is going to feed Sleipnir.

But plastic tubes aren't edible! Especially not one this long.

"Sleipnir's not eating the tube." Bruce tells Loki gently. "It goes through his nose, all the way to his stomach to give him nutrients to help him get stronger."

"They feel weird as hell going in and out," Tony mutters, before quickly adding. "But they help. It'll help Sleipnir get strong. You want that, right?"

Loki vaguely recalls feeling an itchy, scratchy feeling in his nose and throat when Lila and Cooper were playing that driving game as the Avengers were out fighting Doom. It felt horrible.

"I've had it before. It's not that bad." Loki can tell Sleipnir doesn't really like it, despite what he just said, and he gives Sleipnir a disbelieving look. Sleipnir caves and admits. "It itches in my throat, but then I'm not hungry."

"It's gonna make him betters?" Loki asks quietly. He hates seeing Sleipnir look all weak like this.

Hank glances at him, before slowly moving the tube towards Sleipnir's face.

Even though they just told him what it was, Loki still freaks out, forgetting what they just said.
Panic starts to fill him again, overwhelming the voices of his Monster Family in his mind, as well as Professor X's.

The tube's getting closer to Sleipnir's face and what if it closes his mouth up?! It's going to hurt so much more than a hundred beatings and-

"No! Get it away!" Loki shrieks at the top of his lungs, clutching Sleipnir protectively. He bares his teeth at Hank, but Fenrir doesn't and normally he's the one to do that.

Loki shoves the tube away, and magic bursts out of him, throwing Hank and the tube out of their stall and slamming the stall door shut behind him.

When Hank stands up, he's holding a long strand of spaghetti in his blue hand now, instead of a tube. Loki must have changed it with his magic. The spaghetti wriggles like a snake, and Loki thinks about how he made Jormungand's body out of a tube, except Jormungand's body feels different than it once did. Kind of like how Sleipnir's body feels.

What he just did slowly sinks in. He's pathetic, he'd been scared of something cord-like just going near his mouth even though it was actually going to Sleipnir's.

"That reminded you of something else, didn't it?" Professor X asks, as if that's not a problem and Loki isn't pathetic. Tony's giving Loki a look and crouches down to put an arm on his shoulder.

Surely Hank is going to be really mad at him now.

Hank doesn't look mad, but he says they need to get another tube to feed Sleipnir.

But why? Loki doesn't need a tube to eat- he hasn't heard of anyone using a tube to eat. Is this some crazy Midgardian thing? But Tony and Bruce don't use tubes. So Sleipnir shouldn't either.

"Was the tube really gonna feeds him?" Loki asks. It's a really bizarre idea, it doesn't make sense.

Bruce nods. "It would bring liquid directly to his stomach. It's going down his nose, not in his mouth."

So the tube really was going to feed Sleipnir, but Loki freaked out like with the turkey baster, even though this was less like that than the turkey baster.

Now there isn't a tube and Sleipnir can't eat, and it's all his fault because he ruined it! He doesn't deserve Sleipnir! Sleipnir butts him gently with his head again, and in his mind, he says "Stop, Loki. I love you. We're family."

"Can't he, like, drink something instead?" Tony asks. "Either way, it's liquid going to his stomach... or is there like a swallowing problem or something?"

Hank says something about giving it to Sleipnir orally, and the big blue man goes to somewhere Loki can't see him from the stall he's in with Sleipnir.

Loki reaches for the hay again, but Bruce stops him. He scowls slightly at Bruce. Why is Bruce stopping him from feeding Sleipnir? Sleipnir needs to eat, he didn't feed him enough before.

"His stomach can't handle much solid food." Bruce explains, sounding sad.

"It comes back up." Sleipnir's eyes are sad, which makes Loki want to cry. Tony winces as if he's remembering something painful.
"Why do you sicks up?" Loki asks, frowning. Sleipnir already looks like he hasn't gotten enough food. It coming back up is the last thing he needs.

"I don't as much now, as before." Sleipnir's eyes add. "Not like the apple Thor gave me."

Loki's face crumples in confusion. Thor? Surely he'd heard that wrong. Thor always said Sleipnir wasn't real, and how could Thor have fed Sleipnir when Loki couldn't? Maybe Loki's just being stupid again, he thinks as Jormungand wraps around him again, hissing that he shouldn't hit himself. Not like he can, right now.

Loki notices Hank is back. In Hank's large blue hand is a bottle with a long teat, like on actual horses, although thankfully it doesn't look like they chopped off a horse's teat to make it. That would be barbaric. Loki had a teat in his dream, but he doesn't have one now because he's male, which is why the mare dreams are so crazy.

Tony says something that makes Logan snort and Bruce put his face in his hands. Professor X and Hank just look at Tony, seeming unamused.

"Try this." Hank says, handing him the bottle. There's barely anything in it, though. Sleipnir needs more.

"He's small right now." Hank tells him. "So his stomach's small. It can't hold much."

Loki unscrews the cap and takes a sniff, immediately scrunching his nose and face and turning away in disgust.

It smells like something vomited and then died in there. He can't give his Sleipnir this. He puts the teat back on the bottle and is about to toss it aside when Sleipnir grabs the teat in his mouth.

Loki stares down at Sleipnir suckling the horrid stuff inside, like he doesn't even care about how it smells. It probably tastes just as bad.

"Here I am. This is me.

I come into this world so wild and free."

Sleipnir sings the song from Spirit, Stallion of the Cimarron, in Loki's head. The same song that played when Spirit was born and drinking from his mother, when he first arrived in the world. Loki loves that scene.

Sleipnir changes the next set of lyrics.

"Here I am. Though I'm not strong.

But I'm with you now, where I belong."

"It's a new world, it's a new start..."

Sleipnir's world is no longer The Dark. His new world has Logan and food. Skies and stars and can openers. Professor X and Hank. It's loud and pounding all around him, especially when Thor comes.

Tony and Bruce are here now, but Logan and Hank still are, too, so they're really not them.

That's not important.
Loki’s light is back, the blue-green warmth that sets Sleipnir immediately at ease, as it always has. As it always will, Sleipnir knows. He hopes.

His Loki is finally here, and everything is right in the world. More right than The Dark ever was. The can opener really had worked.

Loki calms the storm raging around Sleipnir and inside him, shuts out the noise, the light, so that Sleipnir's whole world is reduced to Loki. Just Loki.

Loki had always been Sleipnir's world, even in The Dark. Especially in The Dark.

This is better than it ever was before, Sleipnir decides.

Loki's arms are wrapped around him, all tight and loving, and the hugs are even better than Sleipnir ever imagined. He can feel them, now. His Loki is right here, where he's meant to be.

Loki holds the bottle for Sleipnir to drink from. The bottle is a lot better than the tube- it doesn't itch or scratch. It's infinitely better than eating his own poop.

Sleipnir wishes it could stay like this forever, just him in Loki's arms. Now that he knows what it's like, he doesn't think he could go back to The Dark, where he could never feel Loki.

Instead of talking, Loki sings their special song softly, because it always works, no matter which one of them is the hurt one.

Sleipnir doesn't think he's hurt so much, anymore, not when his Loki is here. But Loki hurt himself, and he hates it when Loki does that. Sleipnir hopes Loki won't hit himself about The Dark again. He's not sure how much Loki knows about The Dark, but Professor X has said, lots of times, that The Dark wasn't Loki's head.

"If you find the field where the horses roam,
and you need a place to call your home,
the moon and the stars will give you light,
to sleep in the grass in peace tonight."

As Sleipnir drinks from the bottle, he gazes up at Loki. Sleipnir really wishes they could go to the field. There's a field outside the stables, but Sleipnir can't run, he still has a hard time walking.

He finishes the rest of their lullaby. It's even better than Spirit's song, which they just sang.

"The silver stallion gallops away,
his herd follows him and they start to neigh.
Their hoofs beat to the stars and moon above,
Just follow them to find the one you love."

Loki was the first person to love Sleipnir, the first Sleipnir loved in return. Sleipnir loves the rest of their Monster Family, too, but only Fenrir was in The Dark with him.

When Sleipnir finishes the last drop from the bottle, he tells Loki "See? You can feed me."
Loki nods slightly, but says Sleipnir needs more, but Hank tells Loki they need to moderate it.

Loki doesn't look too thrilled with that, saying Sleipnir needs to be fattened up, but Sleipnir's pretty sure he'd throw up if he had any more.

Loki sighs at not being able to give Sleipnir more, but he seems happy that he could feed Sleipnir. Sleipnir really doesn't blame Loki for their not being much food in The Dark, but Loki didn't seem to get that. Hopefully he does, now.

"Wanna play?" Loki asks, green eyes dancing as he flaps his hands and bounces excitedly.

There's ever only one answer to that. Yes. But Sleipnir can't run, he's still weak, he can barely walk.

"Our field?" Sleipnir asks hopefully.

"Our field." Loki grins.

Sleipnir closes his eyes, because it's easier to find Loki when it's dark.

_Oddly enough, it felt like he's going IN now, whereas in The Dark it felt like he was coming OUT. Like he really is outside Loki's head._

_And then, there Sleipnir is in their field, and the stars shine bright and dance around the sky._

_Sleipnir hasn't been to this part of Loki's mind in a long time. For a while, he just saw whatever Loki saw of the outside world._

_The town around the field is in ruins, but the field is just as it always was. But there are fixed bits, buildings that hadn't been there when the wall fell._

_Stark Tower is one of them. It glows nice and bright, and Sleipnir can't wait until he can join Loki there for real._

_He'd helped rebuild some, before the huge storm when The Dark squeezed harder, dragging him back to its depths. There's even more rebuilding to be done now, there's wreckage all around them as they walk through the town._

_Loki's head is hurt even more than it was before. Sleipnir had seen them hurt Loki and couldn't do anything about it. Was helpless when the storms and ravens raged around them, tearing everything to pieces, rivaling the storm inside Sleipnir and the storm Fenrir let out in The Dark._

_The storms have died down, though. There hasn't been one since Loki's world became Midgard, since Tony's glow made Loki's world safe._

_Loki tells Sleipnir how Professor X is going to help rebuild the wall._

_Fenrir, Hel, and Jormungand join them, as well as Simba and Stitch, and they all walk with Loki._

_One Loki. Singular. The only Loki there has ever been and will ever be, Sleipnir is sure. The only Loki Sleipnir needs._

_They run for a long time in the field, and Sleipnir's legs don't tremble or give out like they do when he walks with Logan. He never even gets even close to being short on breath._

_Sleipnir matches his stride, but then they start to race back and forth across the field. Loki's fast, but Sleipnir's faster. The fastest horse, Loki declares with a laugh._
Sleipnir always wins, until he lets Loki win, but Loki seems to know Sleipnir lost on purpose.

At one point, Loki grows legs like a horse. But only four, not eight, like Sleipnir. Loki says he only grew two horse legs last time. Sleipnir doesn't remember that, but apparently it when Loki hadn't found him yet, but when Loki was looking for him the first night they were apart.

Still, he's at least partly a horse. Like in his dreams, Loki says, galloping around on his four new hoofs.

Sleipnir wonders why Loki doesn't turn into a full horse, like the boys turning into donkeys, except for Pinocchio, who only grew ears and a tail. He'd liked watching that movie with Loki and Hulk, and he wonders if he's really real now.

A centaur, Loki tells him, is a person with four horse legs but a body and head of a person, Loki explains. Like Firenze. Sleipnir doesn't know who Firenze is, but Loki says he helped Harry later in the book they were reading.

Laughing, Loki says that he'd be a very good centaur. He already loves the stars, only Hagrid said they're "ruddy stargazers"

There's a centaur constellation, Centaurus, Loki says as the stars rearrange themselves. He hasn't seen it in the real sky, but Jarvis showed him.

As he tumbles around on the grass with Fenrir, Loki tells Sleipnir about what's happened to Harry in the book they were reading before The Dark became the new world.

Sleipnir only heard up to the zoo, when Harry was still getting locked in the cupboard, which Sleipnir hated hearing.

According to Loki, Harry made friends at school, Ron and Hermione, and flies on a broom. They play chess, which is like Hnefatafl but different. There's a stone, a Philosopher's Stone, that makes mortals immortal, like Idunn's Apples would. That it turns any metal into pure gold, too, except he's pretty sure Tony doesn't need any more money.

Loki pulls a red stone, the Philosopher's Stone, from his pocket, but says it's worthless in here, because it's not real.

At the edge of the field, Sleipnir sees other versions of himself. The other Sleipnir's aren't him, not really, just like the other Fenrir's aren't really Fenrir, who's padding along beside them, growling at the Asgardians lurking at the edge, like he used to growl in The Dark.

The Asgardians can't come on their field. They're not allowed.

Some of the other Sleipnir's are big, like he is sometimes, but right now, he's content to stay small and in Loki's arms. Unlike before, he can actually feel them, and it's glorious. Better than he ever imagined Loki's hugs to be. Better than even food, maybe.

There are cracks in the ground once the field ends and becomes the town. The big ones are yawning wide as if they'll swallow Sleipnir down into their back into The Dark at any moment.

Professor X says The Dark wasn't Loki's head, and Thor said he found Sleipnir in a dungeon. But The Dark seeps up from the cracks.

Don't be scared, Sleipnir. Loki whispers as his arms pull Sleipnir away, scoop him up because Sleipnir's decided to be small here, even though sometimes he's big. He's stronger right now,
though.

Loki's arms keep him safe from The Dark and bounce him up and down as they go back to the center of the field.

Sleipnir wonders where Fenrir went after he left The Dark.

Tiny glowing lights fly around, like the stars, but near the ground.

They're fairies, Loki explains, like in the movies he'd watched recently with Lila. Fairies live in nature and bring the change of the seasons, which means that sometimes it snows here on Midgard. It never snowed on Asgard, snow was only on Jotunheim. But here on Midgard it gets hotter and colder throughout the year. (Except, Loki says, Tony, who hadn't even watched the movies, had gone on a long rant about how fairies don't actually change the seasons, and that it's really due to the earth rotating around the sun on its axis).

One goes to land on Loki's finger, and Sleipnir sees it's Tinker Bell. She's holding a tiny scepter, certainly smaller than Loki's outstretched finger, with even tinier shards of blue that twinkle like stars of their own.

Tink, Loki tells him, was in charge of making a scepter with the moonstone for the autumn revelry. It would make special blue Pixie Dust, a good blue just like the moonstone. Just like Tony's arc reactor, the glow he casts over their world.

But Tink broke the moonstone, accidentally smashed it into tiny pieces that she couldn't put back together again. So she'd gone to look for a mirror that granted three wishes, like a genie, but it was three total for everyone, not per person.

Tink had found it with only one wish left, and accidentally blown the last one up on getting Blaze the firefly to shut up instead of fixing the moonstone, so it was still broken.

So then, Loki goes on, Tink used the pieces of the broken moonstone on the scepter, and it shone brighter than all the others before it, making even more blue pixie dust.

On Loki's finger, Tink holds the scepter up, and the blue shards shine bright like the stars.

Sleipnir snuggles up next to Loki in the grass. Loki still has four horse legs, so Sleipnir pretends they're a horse family and he's really Loki's baby.

The stars shine bright, and Sleipnir thinks he might finally be out of The Dark for good.

Chapter End Notes

Yay! No more Darkness :)

I know they didn't go into details about what really happened and that it wasn't really the Blue Fairy (originally they were going to in this chapter). But I wanted this to mostly focus on Loki and Sleipnir, and for it to end this on a happy note.

There's going to be more at Xavier's school next chapter, and things might not be nearly as fluffy. Uh, not that Loki hitting himself is very fluffy...
Hopefully this was good?
Chapter 43

Chapter Summary

Loki learns that he's been lied to yet again, and some new things are discovered.

Chapter Notes

I didn't even think about posting an April Fools day chapter like I did for ch 15 last year, where Tony and Loki (and the chauffeur) died in a car crash on the way to Dr. Carlisle's office. It probably would've been lame to repeat that, although it might not have ended in death this time. I'm not even sure what the gag would've been for this chapter.

Happy birthday to Robert Downey Jr.

Sorry if this chapter is heartbreaking again... things are going to get brighter and fluffier again soon. For example, Lila's party is coming up probably next chapter.

This chapter addresses a lot of stuff that last chapter didn't, so off we go! Keep in mind that Loki's confused, so his POV hopefully reflects that.

Tony can't help but smile at the sight of Loki and Sleipnir snuggling up together in the stall, the feeding bottle finished and laying on the ground next to Sleipnir. It's a very clean stall- either Sleipnir hasn't pooped much or someone cleans it out regularly, something that certainly hadn't been done in the dungeons.

There's a smile on Loki's lips, and although horses don't smile, it's clear Sleipnir is happy as well. It's frankly rather adorable, and he snaps a picture with his StarkPhone.

The image is slightly marred by the fact Loki still has blood, which is starting to dry, on his cheeks from when he'd scratched and hit himself. Well, that and Sleipnir's still very-underweight state.

On a brighter note, Sleipnir definitely looks better than he did only four and a half days, when Tony saw him in that video call with Thor, Jane and Darcy. Admittedly, Sleipnir still doesn't look too good, as he's very underweight and frail. Tony can't decide whether Sleipnir looks more frail now as a tiny horse, or when he'd appeared to be a full grown horse during the video call with Thor.

Off to the side, Bruce and Hank are discussing Sleipnir's medical condition, which has improved since Loki decided to be a magic medic, just like when the god had fixed Tony's leg.

Tony can't help noticing how similar Bruce and Hank are. They're both level-headed, calm and quiet. The two of them are scientists and doctors, although Tony wonders if Hank, like Bruce, is technically an unofficial version of that kind of doctor, more of a medic, really. Furthermore, Hank
is big and blue, while Bruce is big and green when he's Hulk.

"I ship you!" He calls to the two men, grinning widely when his comment earns him an exasperated face palm from Bruce. But he can no longer ship Clint and Natasha in his mind, considering Clint's previously secret family is living under his roof. It's almost a pity, because he was proud of coming up with 'Clintasha' as a shipping name. 'Claura' just doesn't work as well for Clint and Laura. Plus Clint and Natasha could've been Super Spy Significant Others.

"Seriously, you should form some kind of primary-colored doctors club. Actually, I'm pretty sure you'd be the only members, but maybe that's what you want." Tony wiggles his eyebrows suggestively. "Come on, you'd made a great couple if you swung that way. Do you? I still ship it even if you don't. Maybe your shipping name should be 'Hulking Beasts' or something. Should I get t-shirts? One would need to be Hulk-sized, though."

Bruce chooses to ignore Tony, which is so lame. "To heal Thrush like Loki just did requires actually killing bacteria, not merely mending a bone. Well, not that healing bones as quickly as Loki can isn't remarkable itself, but I wonder if he needs to think specifically about healing bacteria. Or if Loki even knew he was killing bacteria."

Apparently, the disgusting, smelly black stuff on Sleipnir's hooves was called Thrush, a result of being in an unsanitary environment, and it's now gone, as is his inflated sheath, which just sounds horrible although human males don't actually have a sheath covering their most important body part like horses apparently do (something Tony didn't know horses had until today).

"So Loki can heal anyone?" Logan asks, puffing out some smoke from his cigar.

"He heals himself, too. He broke his arm jumping out of a tree earlier, it was healed like that." Tony snaps his fingers. "Didn't even really seem to notice it, certainly not as much as when I broke my ankle- actually, that's when we discovered he can heal others as well." Loki probably has way too much experience with broken bones and pain in general, though, and undoubtedly has a really high pain tolerance.

Off to the side, Bruce and Hank are now discussing whether or not Sleipnir still has a urinary track infection or if Loki had somehow cured that, too. Sleipnir had even said, with his way of projecting his thoughts or whatever it is he does, that it hurt to pee.

"Sleipnir's definitely looking better." Tony agrees. "Although he was a lot bigger when Thor called. What size is he, really?"

"I am not sure. We've seen him be both big and small." Charles remarks. Obviously, Sleipnir can become smaller like he is now, but so can Loki. Tony wonders if it works the other way around- if, as a kid, Loki could have turned into an adult. If he could, though, he could have just become a full-grown man and deterred child Thor from abusing him.

Somehow Tony doesn't think that ever happened.

Tony had actually been expecting Sleipnir's healing process would be considerably faster than a normal horse's- after all, Loki's body heals incredibly fast, as does Thor's, so it only makes sense. Loki had jumped out of a tree on the way to these stables and broke his arm, and it was healed in under a minute. Then again, Tony's leg healed almost that quickly when Loki used his magic on it.

Sleipnir's clearly not fully recuperated, but Tony's not as worried about Sleipnir dying. He'd looked like he could when he'd seen Sleipnir on that video call.
Right now, Sleipnir's eyes are closed, but Tony's not actually sure if he's asleep or not. Loki's eyes are open but quite unfocused, though there's a huge grin on his face. It's clear his mind is miles away from the actual stables as he murmurs stuff to Sleipnir.

Loki's uncharacteristically sitting in the same spot, when ordinarily he would have darted around any open space- like he'd done in these very stables earlier, running from horse to horse. Although he's remaining in the same place, he's still rocking side to side, mumbling.

It seems like he's talking about whatever's going on in his head, or the imaginary field they're in. Both Sleipnir and Loki had referred to "their field" before going off into Lala land. Probably the field in that song.

Back in Charles' office earlier, when Charles had gone into Loki's mind, things had seemed slightly similar to this. It was as if they'd both withdrawn to some world inside them. Loki had spoken aloud then, too, and when he talked to his friends back when they were invisible to Tony. Evidently, he actually voices what he says while converses with people in his head, and Loki most likely doesn't realize he's holding his half of the conversation aloud and in his head. Right now, he's telling Sleipnir about what Harry was up to in the first Harry Potter book since Sleipnir disappeared.

The lack of a brain to mouth filter (which many people accuse Tony of lacking one, too, when in reality he just doesn't care how most people react to what he says) probably contributed to the Asgardians thinking Loki was a crazy idiot for "talking to nobody" To be honest, when his friend were invisible, that was sort of what it had looked like.

Right now, Loki seems to be talking about Peeves from the *Harry Potter* books. Of course Loki had loved the poltergeist prankster who can fly (or float), and turn invisible. Loki had even taken a leaf out of Peeve's book and snuck up behind Tony once, invisible, and grabbed Tony's nose with a shout of "gots your conk!" and a fit of hysterical giggles.

Tony's not sure if Loki purposely became invisible for that, but the fact that Loki used being invisible to play a prank- even one he copied from a book- was a pretty big success when he would have panicked not long ago.

"I still don't get how he knew about my claws." Logan mutters through the cigar between his teeth, nodding at Sleipnir's stall, obviously referring to Loki.

"My guess would be that he and Sleipnir caught glimpses of each other's lives over the past several days, but couldn't consciously communicate with one another." Charles answers. "I know Sleipnir caught glimpses of Loki."

"Are they telepaths like you, Chuck?" Logan asks. "Sleipnir seems to talk in my head, but the kid's talkin' out loud..."

"Pretty sure they're telepaths, yeah." Tony nods. "And Loki's probably got at least a thousand years on you, so..."

Once Tony learned that Sleipnir wasn't imaginary, it seemed really obvious that they were telepathically communicating, and had probably always done so. Really, how else would Loki be talking to him if he was in the freaking dungeons?

Then, when Sleipnir was brought to Earth, there must have been something blocking the telepathic connection between Loki and Sleipnir and Loki had lost contact over the past several days. Maybe Sleipnir was overwhelmed by everything around him after spending who knows how long in a
freaking dark dungeon where probably the only stimulation was talking to Loki.

"I believe they were telepathically communicating even when Loki was here and Sleipnir was... elsewhere." Charles says, and Tony frowns. Had Charles been snooping around in his head?

"No, Mr. Stark, I have not." Charles tells him, which only makes it seem more like he had been. "I simply reached the same conclusions as you have."

"Wait, so even when they were on different worlds, they..."

"You know where Sleipnir was." Charles tells him sadly.

"But even you can't do that stuff over long distances without Cerebro, Chuck." Logan tells Charles. "How can he do it to another world?" Logan lifts an eyebrow slightly skeptically at the idea of Loki and Sleipnir communicating on other realms.

"It just goes to show you should never judge a book by its cover." Charles doesn't really sound like he's lecturing Logan, but there is a bit of a reminder in his tone. "Loki's quite powerful, just like Thor, but in different ways, with his gifts."

"Actually, he's really freaking strong, too, just not as strong as all the others were." Tony mutters. Loki could easily overpower Tony (assuming Tony wasn't in his Iron Man suit), although he's not sure how aware of that Loki is. "But yeah, his gifts are even better than that." Tony snorts humorlessly. "Of course, he doesn't see it that way."

Tony remembers some conversation he'd had with Loki where he'd used a cliché but accurate line about Loki's powers being a gift, even though they were treated like a curse in Asgard. He has no doubt the same treatment has befallen many mutants, and he hates that thought.

He can tell that Hank had been slightly surprised, but pleased, that Tony, Bruce and Loki hadn't even really batted an eye at his blue fur. It would be kind of hypocritical if Loki or Bruce did, but it's obvious mutants don't get that kind of acceptance much.

"Sleipnir was constantly asking where Loki was, and why Thor was showing up instead." Charles remarks. "He said he could see Loki sometimes, too. But he couldn't really connect most likely because his environment is much more... stimulating now. He seemed to think I was Loki since I can communicate telepathically, like Loki almost certainly was. I never actually did get to see if there really was a door or some sort of passageway connecting them."

Whatever's connecting them, it's a really good thing it's there.

Tony has a feeling that both Loki and Sleipnir would have been far worse off without each other. Loki's mentioned numerous times that Sleipnir and the others had to go away, or that Loki himself had to stop talking to them, but they seem to have helped each other a lot.

"Do you have any idea why he won't put that can opener down?" Sleipnir still has the can opener that Tony had seen him with in the video call with Thor days ago.

"Actually, Loki was playing around with a can opener when I first brought him into my tower." Tony says, now almost positive that Sleipnir associates it with Loki. "He turned it into an action figure of himself a while ago."

"Then I can see why he's so attached to it." Charles says. Huh, so maybe he hadn't gone into Sleipnir's mind to figure out why.
"I can't believe he still thought I was you." Logan says to Tony, probably referring to Sleipnir. "I told him I wasn't."

"Yeah. I mean, I'll admit that you're not bad looking, you're pulling off the devilish rogue look pretty well, but you're still not America's most desirable bachelor." Tony grins.

"I'm Canadian." Logan answers. "What's Loki's story? Was he locked down there, too?"

"No, not that I know of." Tony says, although now that he thinks about it, he really wouldn't put that past them. "The Ass-Guardians just abused the shit out of him, for no reason except-" Tony stops when something catches his eye. Or, rather, someone.

Jormungand is slithering across the floor, slowly and silently, his tongue flicking out to do the weird smelling thing snakes do with their tongues.

Some of the horses seem really nervous about Loki's snake. Granted, Jormungand's pretty big, although some of the snakes at the zoo were a lot bigger. Do snakes prey on horses or something? Well, there's no way a snake would be able to eat a horse, but maybe horses have to worry about snakebites or something?

Then, quick as a snake (which is an apt description for, well, a snake) Jormungand lunges, grabbing the rat and squeezing it in his coils. The rat struggles uselessly as Jormungand slowly strangles it.

"Okay, that is not one of his hugs." Tony states, pointing. Honestly, whenever he sees Jormungand hug Loki, part of him still thinks it looks like the snake's trying to squeeze the god to death like it's doing with this rat right now.

Once the rat stops struggling, Sleipnir eats in one bite by growing a bit and then detaching his jaw and eating it in one bite. Tony's pretty sure the jaw unhinging part is natural for snakes, although growing isn't. Then again, Jormungand is a necklace Loki made out of a rubber hose.

"I really hope he doesn't spit them out somewhere in my tower." Tony mutters as Jormungand eats another rat. Stitch spits out toys, only the rats are alive, and would probably scurry around leaving droppings. And maybe reproduce and then he'd have a whole army of baby rats or something.

"Do not worry, Sssssstark." Jormungand says. "I have no planssss on letting them out."

Well, this whole thing is weird. Is Loki telling Jormungand to eat or something? He never did before, even when worrying about Sleipnir eating. Also, he's still off in lala land with Sleipnir, so is he even aware this is going on?

"Hey, can I talk to you?" Tony asks Charles. "Alone?"

Charles nods, and sends his wheelchair gliding out the barn door alongside Tony. They stop a little ways away from the barn. It's rather chilly, since it's December, but they're both wearing coats.

"So what was it like?" Tony asks Charles eagerly, hiding his wariness behind his usual flippancy.

He's been incredibly curious what going into a mind is like, but had held off on the questions until after Loki was reunited with Sleipnir, but now he's about to burst with questions.

Since Loki's an alien, is his mind even the same as a human's? Well, Tony's always known there was something different about Loki's mind. But Loki's physiology doesn't seem too different from a human's, aside from the whole blue skin thing- and Hank and Kurt make the blue skin part a bit
of a moot point, since they're humans. Or mutants, which are apparently a step up in evolution from humanity.

Certainly Asgardians, or Jotuns, are a lot more like people than the Chitauri were. The Chitauri actually seemed like the aliens you'd see in a sci-fi movie.

Tony wonders if he should clarify that he was asking what it was like in Loki's mind. But then again, couldn't Charles just pop into his mind and know what he meant, anyways? The thought of that happening makes Tony really uneasy. He doesn't need anyone digging around in his head, thank you very much.

Actually, Tony wouldn't need to clarify even if Charles stays out of his mind (he really hopes the telepathic guy doesn't peek into his head) because Tony's rambling a mile a minute as usual. "Was it like Disney World in there? I could totally see that, I mean, he loves Disney movies. You know, I really should take him to one of Disneyland or Disney World sometime."

Tony pauses, wondering if that could be a good Christmas present for the god. Heck, he could buy out the park for a few days, ensuring privacy and absolutely no wait on the rides. Although he's not sure if Loki would die of happiness or not.

Even as he's thinking this, Tony's still letting words fly out of his mouth. "Plus, you know, he's kinda like an overexcited kid, so I could totally see it being Disney World in there." Well, he could see it being like that most of the time, Tony thinks to himself, but not when Loki's having nightmares or flashbacks.

"Actually, there were a lot of Disney characters in his head." Charles says, smiling slightly. "But there was an even greater number of versions of you in there. You're very important to him, you know."

"I know." Tony nods, smiling slightly yet still more serious than normal. When he first took Loki in, he had no idea how important he'd be to the god, or how important Loki would become to him in turn. This isn't the first time he's wondered this by any means, but when did he get so sentimental?

"Well, what was I doing in there?" Tony asks on behalf of his doubles or whatever they were in Loki's head. Of course, he knows that he himself hadn't actually been in Loki's head, just like how the supposed Disney characters hadn't been in there. Well, actually, maybe Simba, Stitch and Lilo had, since Loki pretty much made them sentient.

"I mean, obviously I was being awesome, but I want details. Wait, please don't tell me I was doing some kind of song and dance number like in a Disney movie, or that I was dressed in drag." Tony's thinking about Loki's hula skirt and leafy bands around his ankles, wrists and head that the god's still wearing as Tony speaks right now. He'd made them with his magic on the walk over to the stables, before breaking his arm jumping out of a tree, and Lilo and Stitch are wearing hula garb too.

The hula stuff clashes horribly with Loki's long coat, although admittedly the night sky design clashes horribly with pretty much everything. Actually, Tony could totally pull some of Loki's weirder wardrobe choices, like hula garb and starry coats mixed with brightly colored shirts. Tony's kind of surprised Loki doesn't go for dark clothes with a bit of leather, like he'd been wearing when he landed on Tony's roof, but maybe wearing totally different clothes is one of Loki's ways of reassuring himself he's far away from Asgard, of distancing himself from that hellhole.
"You were fighting Asgardians." Charles answers. "Along with the other Avengers and Loki's friends- or, as I believe he calls them, his Monster Family."

"So, how were we doing?" Tony asks, hoping they were pummeling the Ass-Guardians to a pulp.

"Asgard still takes up a great deal of his head and casts a shadow over everything." Charles starts.

Well, that makes sense. Almost all of Loki's ridiculously long life was spent in that hell- he's only been here a few days over two months.

It's really obvious- and perfectly understandable- that Asgard is still affecting Loki. He's had nightmares basically every single night he's been here and he has flashbacks on a fairly regular basis too- not that Tony can blame him after all the shit he went through. Tony's spent a lot of time the past two months trying to make Loki unlearn all the lies he was taught in Asgard about being a worthless, monster freak.

"However, your tower practically glows in there." Charles adds.

"It glows in real life." Tony points out. Well, at least the 'A' that used to be the middle letter of 'STARK' glows, as does some of the trim around the huge deck. He's really glad that apparently the tower is represented as a safe haven in there. That's kinda what Tony's been going for this whole time.

"To answer your earlier question, you were beating some of the Asgardians. Hulk seemed to be smashing an old man with an eyepatch... Odin, I believe."

"I'd pay good money to see that. Really good money." Odin deserves to be smashed until he's nothing more than a smear on the floor.

"I could show you." Charles offers. "I wouldn't even insist you pay what I'm sure would be an incredibly impressive sum."

Suddenly, Tony sees a crowd in his mind's eye, flitting by quickly. Despite being extremely chaotic and cacophonous, it's still easy to pick out the Avengers- especially Hulk- fighting the throngs of Asgardians.

Tony grins at the sight of one Hulk smashing an Odin into the ground, the roar of "PUNY GOD!" audible over the general din of the crowd. Tony wishes he could take a picture of that and frame it somehow.

This must be Loki's brain. It's quite fast and extremely jumbled.

Charles was right, there are a lot of Tony's. Some of the him's are brawling with Asgardians without Iron Man armor, although there are plenty of Iron Man suits flying around and blasting repulsors.

Loki's Monster Family is also fighting in the battle against the Asgardians. One of the many Fenrir's sinks his teeth into a random Asgardian warrior's leg- biting through the armor he's wearing- and the warrior falls, screaming in rage. A stronger-looking Sleipnir stomps on the body, while another Sleipnir mule-kicks a blond Asgardian- not Thor, though- in the chest. Jormungand's wrap themselves around warriors' and guards' legs, tripping them and squeezing them much to tightly to be one of the hugs he gives Loki. Hel is also holding her own quite well, despite being a pre-teen girl and therefore being dwarfed by the tall, muscular Asgardians.

There are also a lot of Disney characters and random animals in the crowd. Stitch, much like
**Fenrir, is delighting in biting people.**

However, the Asgardians just keep coming, clearly outnumbering the Avengers and Loki's Monster Family. There are a lot of Asgardians that aren't even being attacked right now, and the jeer the insults Loki must have heard his whole life.

The stars twinkle in rearrange themselves in an oddly mesmerizing way, and Tony can see why Loki likes stars so much. He also sees the floating lanterns that Mother Gothel tried to tell Rapunzel were merely stars floating high in the sky.

The town itself is largely wrecked, with rubble strewn around, and there are fissures running through the scorched ground. Tony wonders if, before, it had looked like the set of some zombie apocalypse movie or something, but it's clear that there's been reconstruction. Some of the buildings, like Elsa's ice castle, are definitely recent additions.

Just as Charles said, there's what must be the Asgardian palace- a huge, bizarre golden building that looks like a ton of pipes clustered together standing on end. It looms over the town, and casts a shadow over the landscape.

Tony's pleased that Stark Tower's light is chasing away some of the shadows, though.

The image fades, and Tony realizes he's still in yard at Xavier's School.

"He really did get hurt bad up there." Tony says, completely seriously. He's had his suspicions all along, of course. It's really impossible to not notice there's something different about Loki.

Laura had asked, a few days ago, whether Loki maybe has some undiagnosed disorder, possibly autism or Asperger's Syndrome. Tony had never really considered it, but he doesn't think so. Admittedly, some things, like Loki's hand flapping and rocking back and forth, are commonly associated with autism.

But autism is something people are born with, and the brain works differently. Autism doesn't involve brain damage, and Loki's condition is evidently something he'd acquired, given the damage Tony's just seen. Jarvis had of course done research, and Loki's missing the hyper-sensitivity often found in the disorder, and the meltdowns caused by said hyper-sensitivity.

Loki's meltdowns are PTSD related, Tony's certain.

Seeing the damage was just proof, though, since Tony had basically known Loki's brain had been harmed already. There have been numerous clues- Loki saying on multiple occasions that he 'got stupider' (as he says the Ass-Guardians told him), and the way he covered his head when he expected a beating both tell volumes about him getting hit in the head a lot. Couple those facts with some offhand comments, including one around Halloween where Loki said he'd once gotten hit in the head with a frying pan like Flynn/Eugene from *Tangled*, and there was already really no doubt that he'd suffered some head injuries that had lasting effects on his brain.

Bruce had brought up the idea of getting a MRI of Loki's brain using one of the tower's medical floors, but he and Tony had both nixed the idea. For one reason, there's no way Loki would consent to laying still for a while inside an incredibly noisy machine, and two, Loki's magic would probably have screwed something up with the process and made the whole ordeal worthless as well as traumatic. Maybe Loki would've even blown up the MRI machine or something. Besides, who's to say MRI's would even work on Jotuns?

"Can you heal him?" Tony asks Charles quietly. He's not sure if the man's telepathic powers even
include healing, but he did seem to help Loki out telepathically during flashbacks when he was in Loki's vicinity.

Charles doesn't answer right away. "Honestly, I am not sure. I can try my best, and I offered to help him rebuild the wall he talked about, but I am unsure as to how an alien mind will respond to my help, and how much I'll be able to fix."

Of course Charles isn't going to make promises that he might not be able to keep, Tony thinks.

"Loki did say that his friends and family have been helping him rebuild the wall." Charles adds. "Though I suspect that such help is more psychological than neurological, but both are obviously important."

Tony's an engineer and an inventor. His passion and life involve not only creating new things, but fixing broken things and making things work better. So, naturally, he wants to make Loki better.

Yet, he doesn't actually think of Loki as broken, despite the fact Loki's mind is undeniably damaged. Despite what Loki probably thinks about himself, what he'd probably been told by the jerks in Ass-Guard, Loki isn't broken. Broken implies something is useless and doesn't work until it's fixed, and that doesn't describe Loki. Loki is in no ways less than other people, and he's not like a broken machine, just one that doesn't work the same way.

So far, it's been more about fixing Loki's situation, fixing the god's warped view of himself after his life at the hands of the Asgardians.

Tony wonders how much of Loki is because of that damage. Probably the weird language quirks and All-Tongue glitches (Tony's not sure what the ratio of Loki using All-Tongue to not using it is).

Loki's understandable most of the time, but Tony's pretty sure that the god's thoughts are a lot more coherent and loquacious than his speech. Loki would probably like having whatever that glitch with his mouth is fixed.

While it'd be great if they can heal more of the damage in Loki's head, if it turns out they can't, Loki wouldn't be a tragedy or something.

The enthusiastic, excitably childish, caring, intelligent man who Tony's grown to love platonically and consider family- isn't wrong or bad right now. Tony doesn't suddenly think less of him.

It would have been nice to see Loki fighting the Asgardians himself in his own mind, but at maybe they can work up to that.

"Hopefully we keep beating the Ass-Guardians in his head, and kick their asses so hard it'll hurt to sit down for the rest of their miserable lives." Tony mutters, wishing they could do that to them in real life as well as in Loki's brain.

Loki actually has made progress in real life, much to Tony's delight. He even showed his Jotun form to Kurt when the blue mutant picked them up earlier today, and seemed just a little more comfortable in his blue form, although he's been in his pale, green-eyed disguise body basically the whole time they've been here at Xavier's School.

"I believe there is a fair chance of you overpowering them eventually, or at least muting them in his mind." Tony notices that Charles doesn't give a definitive answer, though.

"It didn't seem like total chaos back there." Tony tosses his head back towards the barn. "They said
something about their field."

"There was a field, too." Charles nods.

The image shifts to Loki standing in a field with horses. Of course that'd be somewhere, considering Loki's lullaby that he uses to calm down, and it really does seem like his happy place. The field is, unlike the town, unharmed, with only horses and little glowing lights like stars travelling near the ground. The war with the Asgardians doesn't move into the field, and there are no cracks in the ground.

Fenrir is sticking close to Loki, who looks basically the same as in real life, and the huge wolf has an air of a bodyguard around him. Loki has one hand wrapped in Fenrir's fur and the other is tightly clutching Hel's dead hand. Jormungand is around Loki's shoulders, just like the necklace is always around the god's shoulders or waist, but Sleipnir is nowhere to be seen.

"Wait, so are you actually taking me into Loki's head?" Tony asks when the scene fades. After all, didn't Loki and Sleipnir say they were playing in Loki's field now? Except Sleipnir wasn't there. In the first part, with the battle, Loki was nowhere to be seen, so maybe Charles just took him to different parts of Loki's mind.

"No, I am merely projecting my memories of entering his mind to you." Charles says, and adds reassuringly

"Oh. Gotcha. So this was before the big reunion." Tony nods. "Wait, if you're putting those memories in my head-"

"That does not require going into your mind. I still have not entered your mind, Mr. Stark, as I know you do not want me to. I promise I will not without your permission."

Tony's not sure if there's really any way of verifying that Charles hasn't been in his mind, and supposes he'll have to trust Charles with that.

Tony's not good at trusting people.

Partly to ease his own uneasiness, Tony smirks and makes Charles perform a pinky promise, because it's funny. Loki and Bruce will probably get a kick out of hearing Charles made a pinky swear later. To his credit, Charles doesn't roll his eyes as he does it.

"Could you take me into his mind?" Tony asks both out of sheer scientific curiosity- he wants to know how this all works- and because it could be useful. Maybe it would help with Loki's flashbacks if Tony could somehow be in the scene, telling Loki that whatever the Ass-Guardians are doing is wrong, or just that the flashback isn't real. He knows from firsthand experience how easy it is to forget that, to believe you're really reliving the traumatic events.

He wouldn't really want to see most of what Loki went through, but then again, he kind of has. When Loki flashed back to the lip sewing incident, he'd unconsciously made it look like his lips were sewn shut, which was horrible to look at.

They still haven't really addressed Loki's PTSD in their sessions with Charles. Granted, this is only their second one, but still.

Loki freaking out about the feeding tube, even after they explained what it was, is also noteworthy. It wasn't as bad as when Tony accidentally set Loki off by pointing a turkey baster at him when they were watching Pinocchio after the first session with Charles (Tony still feels guilty about that), but a tube isn't quite the same as a turkey baster.
Still, Loki had panicked even when they explained what the feeding tube was and that it wasn’t going to be used for something horrible like stitching lips shut. Tony has a feeling Loki’s reaction would have been worse if Sleipnir wasn't there, and it seemed like Charles briefly had a mental conversation with the god as well.

Tony's not exactly one to mention PTSD- people in glass houses shouldn't throw stones, and all that, but Loki freaking out about anything vaguely needle-like or cord like coming anywhere near his face (or even just watching the cleaner prepare to sew on Woody's arm in *Toy Story 2*) is probably something they should work on decreasing.

Not that he blames Loki, of course not, but he definitely needs help. It's really unhealthy, having nightmares every night. Not even Tony has nightmares every night, al least not anymore. They had been a nightly occurrence after Afghanistan, and later the Chitauri invasion (that is, when Tony actually bothered sleeping after those incidents).

Loki's been through more shit than anybody on Earth, partly because of the simple fact that, at over a thousand years old, he's been alive about ten times longer than pretty much everyone on this planet, and had been horrifically abused all that time.

"No, I'm afraid the most I can do is project my memories of what's in his mind." Charles says. That might have been too much to hope for anyways, but there's got to be a way to go into someone's memories with technology.

Tony might be jumping the gun with this. Would Loki even want Tony in his head?

They head back into the barn, and Tony honestly isn't sure whether he should share what he and Charles just discussed with Bruce or not. Well, Bruce has been present for all but Loki’s first therapy session (although there have only been four total- two with Dr. Carlisle and two with Charles).

"By the way, you're way better than the previous person Loki talked to." Tony tells Charles. "I can give you a raise or something, although I get the feeling you'd do this for free."

"I would." Charles says. "Extra money is always appreciated to help the students, but as you can see from this place, I'm rather well off myself." It's true, he owns a mansion, and with all the tech on the lower floors, this school clearly isn't lacking in funds. They have their own plane.

Granted, this place still hasn't reached the level of Tony's houses, but that's kind of impossible.

"Well, you can always be more well off." Tony shrugs. "Don't be surprised if SI donates a few million to your cause." It's not just what Charles is doing with Loki. The whole concept of a school for mutants, a place where they're accepted, is definitely worth donating a few million to.

Bruce and Hank are currently talking about the school, and every so often Logan offers a comment as well. The man's eyes occasionally drift to where Sleipnir and Loki are, and Tony has a feeling that Logan's been playing a similar role in Sleipnir's life that he himself has in Loki's.

Loki's technically not a mutant, but he'd fit in here. Then again, so would Bruce, who had been a professor at Culver University before the whole Hulk incident, though Tony knows Bruce's passion is most likely science first and teaching second. Tony can kind of picture Bruce teaching science here, perhaps part time. He understand what mutants go through, especially the hate from the general public, more than most.

"Maybe I should invite your students on my next zoo trip or something." Tony says to the three
mutants, although he's not sure if Hank and Logan are teachers here or not. Well, the next charity event isn't going to be a zoo trip, he's not sure what it's going to be, but maybe he can branch out to helping abused kids and mutants. Actually, he has a feeling a lot of mutants don't come from great home lives, so it's kind of killing two birds with one stone.

Loki, still seemingly off in his imaginary field, is muttering something, presumably to Sleipnir, out loud. Something about Tinker Bell and a broken moonstone that couldn't be fixed.

"Can he not telepathically communicate silently?" Logan asks as he raises an eyebrow at Loki's current topic of conversation. True, Tinker Bell's movies are aimed at six-year-old girls, not grown men. But theoretically Loki has Lila as an excuse now, although the god probably wouldn't feel embarrassed or need an excuse like that to watch Tinker Bell movies.

"I guess not." Bruce answers. "So he mentioned 'his field' and -"

"Yep, it's like in his song." Tony interrupts.

"It's like young Cosette's castle on a cloud, isn't it?" Bruce murmurs. Logan looks like he has no idea what Bruce is talking about.

Tony nods. From what he can tell, the starlit field with horses is sort of like young Cosette's castle on a cloud that she sings a song about in *Les Misérables*. Yes, Tony's seen it, he went with Pepper way back in 2006, as friends, because she claimed he owed her after a disastrous PR incident. According to Pepper, he was to 'show the paparazzi he could behave this time', since previously, when Obadiah Stane of all people had dragged him to see *Rent*, Tony may have been rather drunk and stumbled onstage in the middle of a scene to belt out his own rendition of one of the songs.

Under Pepper's tight leash, *Les Mis* had gone much better, and Cosette had mentioned that in her imaginary castle, nobody shouted or yelled, and as a child Tony definitely shared that wish, thanks to Howard.

Anyways, Loki's field and Cosette's castle are both imaginary wonderful places used to escape their crappy lives, and both Loki and Cosette have a song about it (although since *Les Mis* is a musical, basically everything was a song). Actually, they had fields and horses in Asgard, Tony is sure, so maybe it was partly real for Loki.

From what Tony saw, the field literally is a happy place, a safe haven in Loki's head. He's pretty sure Bruce had suggested Loki go there when meditating, though Tony's certain the field's been around long before Loki came to Midgard.

Tony really wants to do something about the dried blood on the side of Loki's face, from the god scratching himself about not feeding Sleipnir. Tony has seen Loki try to feed Sleipnir and Fenrir multiple times, and it never works. There's that saying that insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results, but that doesn't exactly fit here.

It's probably not even really insane that Loki thought it would work, since he thought they were imaginary friends, right?

Loki has apparently been under the impression that Sleipnir's current condition of being very underweight is his fault, since he hadn't gotten food to Sleipnir just by eating it himself. The god harming himself is really a problem, though. Granted, Loki's self-injurious behaviors could be a lot worse than just hitting and scratching himself, but they're still not good.

They're going to have to convince Loki that it wasn't his fault, or he'll just keep blaming- and
hitting himself. It wasn't his fault. It was the damn Ass-Guardians.

But Loki probably won't believe them unless he knows the truth about where Sleipnir was and why he wasn't getting food.

Ugh, this is not going to be a fun conversation at all, telling Loki that his horse friend went through hell, too.

For now, they let Loki and Sleipnir play in their make-believe happy place.

Loki eventually comes back to the present, in the stables at Professor Xavier's school, and is delighted to still feel Sleipnir in his lap. He'd almost been worried Sleipnir would get lost in his brain again, and clutches Sleipnir even more to ensure he's still there.

He can hear Bruce and Hank quietly talking, and Tony though it seems like he's having his own conversation. Loki shifts around but doesn't go out of the stall, and they don't seem to hear him.

Sleipnir's cribbing on the wooden stall door, arching his neck and grunting as he grabs it in his teeth, and Loki hands him the can opener, which was by Sleipnir's hoof. Sleipnir takes that in his mouth, sucking on it slightly even though Loki's pretty sure he knows it's not food.

"Can't eat that Sleipnir." Loki says. He wonders where Sleipnir got it, but it makes him smile. He likes can openers.

Loki's not even holding Simba right now, clutching Sleipnir instead. Simba has wedged himself into Loki's lap between Loki and Sleipnir, seeming a little jealous at all the attention Sleipnir is getting. But Simba's seen the Toy Story movies, so he should know how it works and that he's not being replaced by Sleipnir. Besides, Simba's really the newer friend, not Sleipnir. If anything, Simba is Buzz with his Man of Iron suit and Sleipnir is Woody.

Sleipnir was really Loki's first friend, ever, his only friend until Fenrir showed up later, followed by Jormungand and finally Hel. But he had to stop talking to them until he came to Midgard, because back there he got hurt for it when people heard.

Loki's still grinning about how Sleipnir is with him now, although he hates that he can feel all the bones in Sleipnir's body. He can't feel all his own bones, or Tony's, but Sleipnir's a lot skinnier than Tony or even Loki himself, Sleipnir's too skinny and Loki needs to feed him to make up for all the times he hadn't.

He goes to grab the empty bottle to ask if they can put more in it. He'd made spaghetti out of the tube thing, but he doesn't think eating it would be a good idea, because what if it turns back into the tube? So he can't use magic to fill up the bottle or anything.

Loki notices a distinct lack of snake around his shoulders, neck or waist. Jormungand's gone!

Worriedly, he gathers Sleipnir to his chest and stands up. Sleipnir's a lot bigger than Simba, but he's still small enough that Loki can hold and carry him. He's also really lightweight- almost lighter than Simba is in his Man of Iron suit is, despite the fact Simba's a lot smaller.

"Jormungand?" Loki calls out, walking out of the stall. He sees Tony, Charles and Logan discussing something a little ways down the aisle in the barn, while Bruce and Hank are having their own conversation almost right outside the stall Loki and Sleipnir had been in.

Loki just got his missing Monster Family member back, he doesn't want to lose another! Is this
how it's going to be, now, that one of them is always gone? He paces anxiously, hugging Sleipnir to his front tightly, desperately hoping he doesn't disappear again.

"Where?!" Loki asks, pacing anxiously. Before he can get too worried, Jormungand slithers out of a corner, and Melody still seems scared of him.

Good. Loki sighs in relief. Jormungand didn't go away, and while Sleipnir had been away the past several days, he's back now.

He hopes Sleipnir never goes away again.

Why did Sleipnir go away? Loki's been wondering that ever since Sleipnir left, and he still hasn't been able to figure it out. Fenrir is adamant that it wasn't because of Loki's utter failure to feed them, and even Sleipnir says it wasn't Loki's fault even though it was.

It's not like anyone beats Loki for talking to his Monster Family here, which is what the Asgardians did. The warriors, including Thor, and guards would mostly just shove him around and hit him, which wasn't very different from normal, but it was a lot worse when Odin heard him doing it. Sometimes Odin even had the guards whip Loki for it when he found out, or Loki would be personally punished by the Allfather himself with whips or just a normal beating. Sometimes both, one after the other.

The Allfather would tell him that he wasn't supposed to be crazy and talk to made up things inside his head. Odin sometimes got so angry that he'd roar sounds instead of words, like "Huuuaargh!" which was sometimes even worse than when Loki was told his friends weren't real, because he'd never have real friends. After all, they had jeered, nobody would ever want to be his friend.

They were wrong, though, weren't they? He has his Tony now, as well as Jarvis, Bruce, Hulk, Pepper, and Dum-E. He has them not only as friends, but as family too. And he has the Barton's, maybe, although they don't know what he really is yet, at least not Laura, Cooper and Lila. Maybe even Steve and Natasha- Steve saw Loki's true form on Halloween with Tony, Bruce and Pepper, and just like them, Steve doesn't hate him for it.

Here on Midgard, Loki hasn't even been mocked for talking to his Monster Family. Not even Dr. Car-something made fun of him, and she clearly knew his friends really aren't real, only in his imagination, like everyone on Asgard said. But Tony and Bruce talk to Loki's Monster Family like they're real, and Professor Xavier talked about them like they were, too.

So what made Sleipnir disappear this time?

It's probably something messed-up about Loki's stupid brain that made Sleipnir go away for the past several days. But Sleipnir actually has a body now, although his body clearly needs more food.

Obviously, things have changed from before.

"You have my thanks you, 'Fessor X," Loki bows in gratitude, realizing he merged 'you have my thanks' with 'thank you', but nobody comments. Then again, he's an idiot and sounds like one normally, so they're probably not surprised. "For getting the door open 'gain here. Helpings me find my Sleipnir!" He claps his hands, wriggling happily.

"I can't take credit for Sleipnir being here." Professor Xavier says tells him.

Oh. Wait, it had been Logan who brought Sleipnir in. Loki would hug him, except his arms are still full with Sleipnir and Simba. Instead he grins at the man and tries to lean against him, but Logan backs away.
"I don't do that, kid." Logan says, although he does run a hand down Sleipnir's neck. Logan doesn't have claws now.

"Logan doesn't hug," Sleipnir confirms with his eyes. "Or sing. But he's still really nice. Like Tony. I thought he was Tony sometimes."

"Tony, my Sleipnir's got a body now." He hadn't had a body before.

"Yep, he's tangible, just like Jormungand and your toys-" Tony starts to say, and even reaches out and gently strokes Sleipnir, who Loki is still holding. Not only is Loki able to touch Sleipnir, but Tony can too! Well, Logan had been carrying Sleipnir before, Loki supposes. "-but Sleipnir here... well, he's not a toy, like Simba and Stitch. He has a real, biological body and everything." Tony trades a glance with the others in the room.

Loki's face crumples in confusion. The Asgardians, especially Odin, made it very clear in Asgard that his Monster Family was just in his head, because he's stupid and crazy. Even when they showed up as illusions they were still in his head and he couldn't touch them. Jormungand's body used to be a rubber tube, but he doesn't feel like that anymore. He feels real, too, but nobody else has said anything so surely Loki's going crazy.

Besides, he always got in a lot of trouble when he said they were real, because that's crazy talk.

"No, not real."

"Well, Sleipnir has a biological body, right? Having a biological body means he's real- as real as you and me with, y'know, organs and bones and blood and everything. That's really more Bruce's area." Tony says after a bit, and Loki's still not sure if Tony's really a mind-reader or not.

"Real?" Loki asks, though Sleipnir having a body does make him seem real. Nobody hits him for saying it, or sneers and tells him he's an idiot.

This is almost too good to be true, if he ignores the fact that he failed at feeding Sleipnir and now Sleipnir's really skinny.

But he can't exactly argue with the body fact, can he? He pinches himself. He's awake.

"You are real..." Loki says to Sleipnir. "Real real real real, 'cause I wished upon a star, like Gepetto an' Lilo! 'Xcept Lilo's falling star was Stitch's ship, but she stills got Stitch as a friend and Ohana anyways."

He really shouldn't be greedy when his wish about Sleipnir came true, but Loki finds himself wishing that he'd made his three Genie wishes to the Blue Fairy instead of just wishing that Sleipnir would come, because then all of them would be real. Or would they? Wouldn't that count as three wishes for the Blue Fairy, too? Does she grant multiple wishes?

Well, he's still not sure why the Blue Fairy would have granted his wish when he'd been bad (despite the song saying "makes no difference who you are," the Blue Fairy commented first on how Gepetto deserved his wish because he'd brought so much happiness to others. Loki hasn't brought happiness to anyone, though).

But he can't think of how Sleipnir's real, otherwise. He hadn't found Genie's lamp or Tink's mirror, but the mirror's worthless because all three wishes were used up.

Loki realizes he must have actually said some of this aloud when Logan snorts. "A fairy?" He asks, and Loki's pretty sure the snort was Logan laughing at him. Logan clearly doesn't believe it was
the Blue Fairy, given the look he's giving Loki.

"The Blue Fairy." Loki confirms. "She made Pinocchio so he could be reals, and he was... but he hads to be brave, truthful and unselfish first before he was real." Loki nods to Logan, before thinking of something else. Woody was a puppet with strings too, at one point, as were Jessie, Bullseye and Stinky Pete. They didn't have any color then, but now they're toys that most people think aren't real, even Cooper, despite the fact he's seen the movies.

"And Woody, I think?" Lila's toys move when he wants them to, and Simba came to life before Loki saw Toy Story. But all toys come to life. All of Loki's have at some point since the knew Loki now knows that, but some, like Simba, come alive a lot more than others. Baloo only came alive once for a few seconds.

"I don't think she made Woody real." Tony says.

"She must've makes my Sleipnir real." Loki says, rocking himself and Sleipnir side to side, bouncing slightly on his toes.

Tony, Bruce and Professor Xavier exchange a look, communicating without talking. Loki wishes he knew what they were thinking, but he quickly adds that he wouldn't use a real wish on that, in case the wish-granter is listening.

"Loki, it, uh, wasn't the Blue Fairy." Bruce says slowly.

"Fors Bullseye and Woody an' Jessie?" Loki asks, since they were all colorless puppets on the screen Woody watched in Tony's screen. Stinky Pete was, too but Loki doesn't like Stinky Pete.

"Um, yeah. But I meant she didn't make Sleipnir real either." Bruce fiddles with his glasses.

"She didn't?" Loki asks.

"I'm afraid not." Bruce is really smart, smarter than Loki (not that that's hard), so he's probably right. Besides, Jarvis would've seen the Blue Fairy, even if she only came after Loki was asleep, like when she granted Gepetto's wish for Pinocchio to be a real boy, and Jarvis hasn't said anything about her. The Blue Fairy only made Pinocchio alive but he was still a wooden puppet, and he had to earn his real body. Sleipnir's body is real, though, not wooden, and Sleipnir didn't even have a body for her to bring to life.

Loki's kind of disappointed it wasn't the Blue Fairy. Cooper would undoubtedly say she's ot real, but he says Simba, Stitch, Maximus, Bullseye, and Lila's Toy Story toys aren't real either. He's wrong about them, big time!

"But... my wish... my Sleipnir's backs an' he's even real now! That's what I wished upon a star, ands it came true even though I don't d'serve it."

"What do you mean you don't deserve this?" Tony asks. "You deserve to have your friends."

"But I didn't take cares of 'em!" Loki protests, realizing he should now. "Sleipnir, are you hungry?"

"I'm full." Sleipnir says in Loki's head, because he doesn't talk out loud like he did since he started showing up in Midgard. Maybe having a body made it so he can't talk out loud now? That's even worse than Loki's mouth being stupid. "Full is nice, but being too full hurts and then I throw up, so I can't eat more now because then I'll be too full and throw up."

"Fenrir?" Loki glances back at his wolf, who doesn't have a real body. He really should've wished
for all his Monster Family to be real, even though he doesn't deserve it. "How do I feed you when you still in... int-angi-ble? Need a body... do you, 'cause I can't..." Loki frowns and points to his head. "How'd you get your body, Sleipnir?"

"I'm not hungry." Fenrir says, and Loki's not sure if he's telling the truth. Fenrir still looks really strong as always, not too skinny like Sleipnir, but Sleipnir hadn't looked anywhere near this skinny when he went away, which is kind of confusing because why did he suddenly lose a ton of weight?

"Loki, listen. It's not your fault you couldn't feed Sleipnir in your head. He always had a real body." Tony starts to say, and Loki cuts him off.

"No! He just has it now, just now! Tony, you're smarter'n this." Loki shakes his head, giggling slightly. Tony's almost never wrong, but this is obviously wrong. Or maybe he's joking? He does that a lot, but he doesn't sound like he's joking and he's not smirking either.

"No, he was real. Uh, it's like how Elliot was real. Everyone said he wasn't, but he was. That's pretty much the only reason we watched that movie, because frankly, I thought it was really annoying." But that's not the same. Well, both Sleipnir and Elliot were invisible a lot. But Elliot could lift Pete even when he was invisible, and Sleipnir was never tangible until now. He never had a body, he was just in Loki's head. So he should've been able to feed him.

Loki doesn't want to talk about Pete or Elliot, though.

Jormungand squeezes Loki just a little tighter. Jormungand had never asked for food, even before Loki gave him a body.

Loki blinks and grins slowly, the pieces fitting together in his mind like a puzzle. He'd given Jormungand a body! He knows how Sleipnir's real now!

He had given Jormungand a body, with the necklace he'd made from the rubber tube. Somehow, he must have made Jormungand's body feel more real, too, because it doesn't feel rubbery. It hasn't for some time, actually, but he can feel Fenrir's fur even if he's intangible so maybe he got better at illusions.

Loki doesn't have to think about Jormungand hugging him anymore, he just does it by himself.

At one point Loki thought he'd made Simba real during Pinocchio, like how he'd watched the Blue Fairy do it, and that he made Stitch, Lilo and his other toys real, later. But he was wrong, because toys come to life anyways like in Toy Story, but Loki's toys (and Lila's) don't seem to think moving around him breaks the rules.

Mickey made brooms come to life, though, and Loki's pretty sure that brooms don't come alive when nobody's looking. But they have flying brooms at Hogwarts, so maybe? Tony doesn't even have brooms, just those Roomba robot things.

"They all hads a body already." Loki mutters. Pinocchio Simba, the brooms, the toys. Sleipnir didn't have a tangible body, so maybe it's not the same. Loki had transfigured Jormungand's body from a hose, but he still started out with a hose.

Loki had tried to give Sleipnir a body like he'd done with Jormungand, only with the hologram and origami rather than a rubber tube, but it hadn't worked. Or had it? Sleipnir has a body now, so maybe it had worked?

"Dids I made you? Like Jormungand?" Loki asks aloud. "Like Elsa?"
Elsa made Olaf and Marshmallow, like Loki made Jormungand's body out of a rubber hose, but Elsa just made Elsa and Marshmallow out of snow, not transforming or transfiguring their bodies into something else like Professor McGonagall.

Maybe it's like that, he made Sleipnir from thin air instead of transfiguring? But Olaf hadn't started out looking like a baby, and neither did Jormungand when Loki made his body out of a rubber hose, so why is Sleipnir even smaller than normal? He normally doesn't look *this* young.

That's a dumb thought, so what if Sleipnir looks like a foal? Loki can make himself into a child, and sometimes Sleipnir looked bigger in the pool.

"I made Jormungand, so maybe... you too?"

Jormungand gives Loki a look and hisses "*You didn't make thissss me.*" It doesn't make sense, but sometimes Jormungand can say confusing things.

"But you didn't have a body, 'til I made it. Used 'ta be's my arms for hugs an' loves. Or rope" Loki tells him. In Asgard, he had a piece of rope and pretended it was a snake. He carried the rope around, like he does with Simba and his Jormungand necklace-belt now.

He would've gotten in Big Trouble in Asgard if he'd made that rope look like a snake like he'd done with the hose (except Jormungand just said he didn't for some reason). He also just turned the weird tube food for Sleipnir into spaghetti and Hank wasn't mad but they would've been furious there if he did that, or if he'd brought the rope to life.

"I can vouch for Loki, I saw him make you." Tony raises a hand, but is looking at Jormungand intently, as if trying to work something out.

"That wasssssn't me." Jormungand says. "The necklacccce Loki made issss under the ssssssea, where I came from."

Loki cocks his head to the side. "The sea?" Jormungand had often talked about swimming, even in Asgard, and he swam with him in the sea outside Tony's other house.

"I came to you when you were playing in the ssssssea." Jormungand hisses as if he's not sure how they don't know this already. "Outsssside Tonyssss other housssssse in Malibu."

"Wait a sec, so you're really real, too?" Tony asks, pointing a finger at Jormungand quizzically, who hisses and nods yes.

"But where did you come from?" Tony seems puzzled.

"The occccean, asssss I ssaid." Jormungand hisses slowly, making it quite clear he thinks Tony's being stupid right now.

"Yeah, you told me." Tony grumbles, clearly not liking Jormungand's condescending attitude. "But how the hell were you in the ocean?"

"I am the Midgard Sssssserpent." That doesn't explain much, though. "I have been on Midgard for a long time. I can cccccircle all the way around."

"Around what?" Loki asks, confused. "Life? The Circle of Life?" He laughs and grins at Simba, who's in his arms with Sleipnir, wedged between Sleipnir and the inside of Loki's elbow. "It's the cirrrcle of liiiiiife!"
Not life. I can circle around Midgard' Jormungand answers.

Loki giggles. Jormungand's being really silly.

Tony snorts. "Yeah- no, that's impossible. You can't just wrap yourself around the entire freaking planet Earth. I mean, if you suddenly became that big, you'd cause some major water displacement, probably cause a ton of floods. Nice joke, but you didn't fool me."

Jormungand simply grows, larger than he's ever been before, larger than the biggest snake at the zoo was. Maybe even bigger than the Brazilian Boa Constrictor that Harry talked to.

When he stops growing, he's as long as the aisle through the stables that they're standing in, and about as wide and tall as half the width of the aisle.

The other horses, including Paint, Melody and Baccara, are all panicking.

"Shh." Loki tries to soothe them. Sleipnir is the only horse that doesn't seem scared. "My Jormungand's not gonna bite. He's nice, see?" Loki laughs as Jormungand squeezes his legs. Even when he's only wrapped around Loki's legs once, he covers most of them because he's so big now.

The horses quiet down as Jormungand shrinks again, so he's now small enough to drape around Loki's shoulders, which he does. There's a bulge in his body now, as if he'd eaten something.

"So you're not the necklace, you're actually a real snake..." Bruce murmurs thoughtfully. Loki's still confused about that. "If Loki made that as a substitute body or something for you, why couldn't he make body substitutes for Sleipnir here, or the others?"

Loki had tried to make a hologram and an origami version of Sleipnir real, but it hadn't worked like Jormungand. Except the necklace wasn't exactly Jormungand, apparently.

"The necklace wasssssn't me." Jormungand repeats. "Ssssnakes are easssssy to fake and I wassss clossessst."

"Why on earth didn't you tell us you were real before now?" Tony demands incredulously. "You didn't have to play dead and trick us into thinking you were still the necklace or whatever it was you were doing. If we'd known, you could've gotten food the whole time instead of just now because we would've known to actually feed you." Tony almost guiltily glances at Sleipnir and adds "Uh, sorry, didn't mean to rub it in or anything."

"I can go a long time without food." Jormungand answers. "I alssssso ate a lot before coming to Loki. I wasssssss prepared."

Jormungand was always really good at planning, and being sneaky. He tried to help Loki avoid trouble, which sadly didn't always work. Loki used to be better at it, before Jormungand came.

"O-kay... so I've had a real snake living in my tower and thought you were some kind of toy." Tony mutters. "That's like Buzz in reverse, because he thought he was real when he really was a toy." Tony glances at Loki, and Loki giggles. "Don't fly down stairs!" Loki tells his Jormungand seriously. Snakes can't fly, although Jormungand couldn't lose an arm like Buzz did because he doesn't have any arms. Sadly, Loki can't fly either, and he'd broken his arm jumping out of a tree earlier today.

"Please tell me you haven't been taking dumps in my tower." Tony practically begs Jormungand. "I guess Jarvis would've seen you if you did. How did he not notice that you're biologically real,
though? Like, he should've realized Loki's necklace was suddenly a living snake. You are biologically real, right?"

Jormungand just gives him a look, and Tony sighs. "Right. I just saw you eat some rats not long ago. But, to be fair, Stitch eats toys and food, and he's a stuffed backpack- heh, he's like a cannibal. Well, no, not really because he spits them out. Anyways, I thought it was like that."

Jormungand's response is to spit out a dead rat- Tony says something about the rat being alive before- and then eat it again. "How would you have reacted to ssssssuddenly having a live ssnake? Not well, I imagine."

"You eat?" Loki gasps. "Sleipnir eats now... but couldn't before. Jormungand, you didn't eats b'fore now neither, nope nope nope!"

"Yesss I did. I ate even before your necklacce. Before your rope. I wassss elssssewhere, in the occccceans of Midgard. Hencccce why I did not asssssssk for food."

Well, that kind of makes sense, because Jormungand never did ask for food, but the idea of Jormungand always being real is so bizarre and impossible.

Loki's mind is still whirling, and Sleipnir didn't have a body or eat before now.

Loki would like it if he wasn't the one to blame for Sleipnir's emaciated state, because he's not sure why Sleipnir and Fenrir don't hate him. And why is Fenrir saying, nonverbally, that he's not hungry? He was before.

Then again, Jormungand and Hel never ask for food, and Loki never managed to feed them either. They even say they don't need food when he offers. But Jormungand just said he was in the ocean or something, which is really weird.

If Jormungand's really real, that means he got more than his star wish for Sleipnir to be real. It's like he got part of his first Genie wish granted. But not all of it because Fenrir and Hel still aren't real.

"How dids you come real?" Loki asks, hoping Fenrir and Hel can do whatever Sleipnir and Jormungand had done to be real.

"Loki... Sleipnir was always real...

"But my Sleipnir."

"Is real. Just like Jormungand, apparently." Tony interjects. "That's why you can't feed them from what you eat- because they were always real. You can't feed me just by eating either, right?" Tony spreads his hands as if that's final.

Tony's not in his head, though, and Sleipnir and Jormungand were! They didn't always have real bodies, certainly not Sleipnir.

This is making Loki's head hurt, all these ideas battling around and in him because this is the total opposite of Asgard, and even some of Midgard, probably. People here probably think they're not real. Like Dr. Car-something, and maybe Laura, because she asked if Jormungand was real.

"You wouldn't be able to feed me, either, even though I am in your head right now." Professor Xavier's voice floats through Loki's mind. "Trust me on this. You can't feed anybody in your head, it's just not possible." There's a bit of a pause, and then "I would not be able to feed you if you went
"Wouldn't feed you?" Loki asks, and thinks. "My Jormungand and Hel don't ask for food. Never ever, nope nope nope."

They don't ask for food, and now that he thinks about it, that's weird. Even Fenrir never seems nearly as hungry as Sleipnir.

Maybe all the food somehow went to them and Sleipnir was left with none, but Fenrir got the second smallest amount?

"I feds them, not Sleipnir?" Loki asks, confused. But Professor Xavier just said that nobody can feed others through their brains.

Professor Xavier's voice tells him, in his mind, that that's not how it works. Well, he never really managed to feed them, but somehow Jormungand, Hel, and maybe Fenrir got food anyways.

"You didn't feed me." Jormungand says. "I had to find my food becausssse I wassss on Midgard. The reason Sssssleipnir did not eat wasss not your fault."

"Always on Midgard?" Loki asks. But Jormungand had been in his head when he'd been in Asgard. "Bassssically." Jormungand hisses.

"B'fore me?" Loki asks, and his snake nods.

Loki has no idea what's going on anymore. How was Jormungand here before him? And if he was, why was Loki still on Asgard.

Jormungand must have started playing pretend without telling him. That makes the most sense out of any of this because most of this makes absolutely no sense.

"If I was on Midgard forever, I woulda gotten my Genie wish an' always lived withs my Tony!" Loki grins, before his face falls. "'xcept... Tony's younger'n me. Only forty three, that's nothing! Tony, we gotta get you gold apples! Bruce too! You can't die on me, can't leave!"

"I'm not planning on dying anytime soon." Tony tells him, pulling Loki close. But he still will! Or maybe Hel won't let him, but she doesn't really control who dies, just what happens to them after they do. And that's not even everyone.

"Need an apple." Loki repeats. But they're on Asgard. "Or the stone! It makes you immoral."

"Immortal."

"Immortal." Bruce corrects. Loki knew that, it's his dumb mouth, but Bruce doesn't seem to be making fun of him. Tony had snorted slightly, but Loki thinks it was at the idea of a stone actually corrupting someone, rather than laughing at Loki.

"Yeah, an' it's here on Midgard so we gotta find it! Jormungand, do you know wheres it is?" He had said he'd been on Midgard all this time, right?

Jormungand shakes his head. "Sssssorry."

They need to find it! Harry found it in a mirror, and Loki's going to have to find the mirror that shows him his deepest desire, the Mirror of Erised. Which isn't the wish-granting mirror that Tinker Bell used.

Loki already knows what he'd see in the Mirror of Erised, or what he'd ask the fairies' Mirror of...
Incanta if Tink hadn't used the last wish.

He'd see himself with all his friends and family and none of them would die. And he would've always been with them and never been in Asgard.

"Where were you, Sleipnir?" Loki asks his horse, still cuddling Sleipnir to his chest. He'd looked everywhere, but Sleipnir's door was still shut. "I losted you, like Daisy losted Lotso, Big Baby 'n Chuckles. 'Xcept I didn't r'place you likes Daisy did Lotso. Hologram you wasn't you, origami wasn't you! You aren't gonna turn bad 'n evils like Lotso, are you? Big Baby wasn't even replaced but he turned bad 'cause Lotso said they were all r'placed!"

"I was here." Sleipnir tells him simply as Loki continues to card his fingers through Sleipnir's mane. "I don't think I'm evil."

It makes sense that Sleipnir reappeared when Loki came here, though. After all, there are other horses here, and a field, just like in their special lullaby about their happy place that they'd just been to in Loki's head. The stars aren't out right now, of course. It's daytime, so they're hidden but still there. It hadn't been nighttime all the time when he visited the horses in Asgard, either. But nighttime had been the best, both because of the stars and because Loki was almost always alone with the horses instead of getting chased away by someone in the stables like what sometimes happened during the day.

But Sleipnir was never in their pretend field in his head these past several days, until they played in it just a little bit ago, but that was after Sleipnir already showed up here, in these stables.

Maybe Professor Xavier knew this place would make Sleipnir show up again, or maybe he'd opened the door in Loki's brain? How else would the man have known Sleipnir would show up?

"Here, right heres?" Loki asks, looking around the barn. "The whole time?" He's getting more confused by the minute.

Maybe he's pretending too?

"No. Just since everything got bright. I couldn't find you but you came. I've been with Logan, Professor Xavier and Hank but they're not Tony, you and Bruce, respectively. I guess." Sleipnir's eyes flick between them. "And Rogue isn't Hel, and Jean isn't Pepper... there are a lot of other people here."

"Ands here's Paint and Melody an' Ba-cra. Can't forget horses." Loki exclaims, because horses are important. At least talking about people and horses here isn't confusing, aside from that Loki doesn't know who Rogue and Jean are. Baccara is really hard to say, though, like Xavier and Carlisle.

"These horses don't talk much." Sleipnir says, which is true. They don't talk at all, actually. Well, neither did the ones in Asgard, they just acted like Maximus and Bullseye but they could understand speech, maybe better than the horses here. "They're a little dumb, I think."

"They're certainly not as smart as you." Tony grins at Sleipnir. "You're probably smarter than a lot of people, because most people are idiots."

"My Sleipnir's the bestest!" Loki claps his hands and grins, glad that Sleipnir's alive here and not in Asgard, because the Asgardians would have had a very different opinion about him "But Paint and them, they can't talks none but are still nice likes Maximus and Bullseye!"

Maximus and Bullseye run over to Loki on their plush legs (though Bullseye has plastic hoofs)
from one of the stalls, and Sleipnir looks at them. "You didn't see Bullseye on the screen, or Woody or Buzz or Jessie or Rex, right Sleipnir? They come real. That's where the song s from." Loki starts humming You've Got a Friend in Me, which he'd sang to Sleipnir earlier.

"But you're the bestest horse! Sleipnir, if you was just bigger I could ride you! Or if I was a real small boy likes at the zoo, I coulds!"

Sleipnir goes rigid in Loki's lap, eyes wide and chest heaving even more noticeably because he's so skinny. He seems to be having a flashback.

Odin is on top of him, the bit on the bridle digs painfully into his mouth when Odin yanks on the reins angrily. Still, he stubbornly doesn't move. He's whacked on the butt to get him moving, and Odin's heels dig painfully into his sides. He wants him off, get off! So he rams against the side of the stable, thrashing violently until he manages to knock Odin off his back, but now Odin's mad and he gets another beating.

Loki slowly returns from the flashback, as Tony stands behind him, rubbing circles on both Loki and Sleipnir's backs, because Sleipnir appears to have just had a flashback too.

That flashback is one of his recurring horse dreams, only it's not like the nice ones where he's in the field with the Asgardian horses as one of them, and they love him even more, or the ones where Sleipnir comes out of him.

"Not real not real no. No real, just a dream." Loki murmurs. Flashbacks are like nightmares during the day, and he wonders why he can never catch a break.

In that flashback and the bad horse dreams, it's like he's Sleipnir, not himself, which is really weird. But since Sleipnir has the dream more, it's like it's Sleipnir's dream, not Loki's, or he is Sleipnir. Loki briefly thinks it can't be his dream because he's always himself in his dreams, but then he remembers he's not himself in the horse dreams, either, because he's not a horse, as much as he would love to be one.

He'd grown horse legs around Bruce that first night they slept in the fort, but he wasn't a full horse, and he only had two, not four. He was a centaur in his head, but that was just his imagination.

Sleipnir still seems really scared, wide-eyed and trembling in Loki's lap.

"I h-hate that dream. I buck and twist and sometimes shake Odin off and he lands in poop." Sleipnir starts, and Tony says that's fitting for Odin. Loki giggles. Sleipnir's eyes briefly flash in amusement, but then become more serious and sad. "I like that, because he's like poop, but then he always got really mad and the guards grabbed me and then I always wake up in The Dark."

Sleipnir has always hated darkness, just like Jessie's scared of the dark, because she'd been in a box for a long time. Bullseye had too, but somehow he doesn't seem to share Jessie's fear of the dark and boxes. Fenrir doesn't like the dark much either, but Jormungand and Hel don't seem to mind it. Loki hadn't exactly liked creeping through the dark palace halls either- well, he'd liked that it was harder for people to see him and there weren't as many people awake during the night just guards. But it was harder for him to see them too and a few unfortunate times, he'd bumped into a guard when rounding a corner or when they were just plain hidden in the shadows.

"Just a dream flashin' back, Sleipnir." Loki murmurs, because that makes him feel better. "Not real. You're here, safe here. Safe." He cards his hand through Sleipnir's long mane, even plants a couple kisses on his head. Aren't parents, even pretend parents, supposed to do that? Loki never, ever saw Odin kiss Thor though. Or Frigga, for that matter.
"I'm not entirely sure that's just a dream." Charles says softly from the side. But it has to be a dream.

"Sometimes I can't shake him off. That's worse. I try and try but he stays on and hits me and then I'm in The Dark again anyways."

Loki remembers comforting Sleipnir after that nightmare numerous times, and he starts humming their lullaby. He'd never been able to hug Sleipnir before, though, and he hopes it helps.

Loki squeezes his horse tightly, thinking apologies as he hums and rocks Sleipnir, because he realizes that he'd brought up a topic Sleipnir really doesn't like, brought up being ridden. He caused Sleipnir's flashback.

It's because of what he said...

"What did you just say?!” Odin demands, looming over Loki, who's kneeling on the ground because that's what you do before the Allfather, or there are consequences.

Two guards hoist Loki to his feet, gripping biceps so tightly that Loki wonders if he'll have bruises there later, although they won't last long. Because of the guards holding him, he can't even rock or bounce to calm himself down just a little, and he starts breathing quickly, heart hammering in his chest even more than it already was.

He'd just been comforting Sleipnir, who was scared from Odin being in Loki's face. Sleipnir was remembering one of Loki's nightmares about being a horse. It's not one of his nice dreams where he's in the field by the royal stables with his horse friends, but he's actually a mare instead of a Jotun, and they love him even more and he belongs.

Nor was it the vaguely familiar and somewhat connected dream he had not too many nights ago where he was once again a mare and his Sleipnir came out of him. He thinks maybe he could pretend he really is Sleipnir's mother sometimes.

But what Sleipnir was just remembering was one of Loki's dreams where Odin was riding him. The bit on the bridle hurt his mouth, his butt stung from being whacked with a branch, and the Allfather's heels dug into his sides. But no matter how much he flailed, Odin stayed on the saddle on his back, even though he should be able to get him off.

In that dream, it's almost like he was Sleipnir because he had eight legs just like him.

Loki can't tell Odin that's what they were talking about, though, or even that he was talking to Sleipnir because Odin hates it. He stands there in the guards' grip, staring at down at his bare feet and curling his toes inwards, hoping Odin doesn't try to stomp on them. Boots make his feet feel like they're choking, because nothing feels real to his feet when they're in boots. Horses are lucky, their shoes aren't like boots. The horses are lucky because they're not here right now, with an angry Allfather in their faces, although that's what he and Sleipnir have nightmares about.

He hears his Monster Family, and oddly enough, another voice that sounds familiar and makes him think of baldness and wheels, chairs and striped shirts. But he can't place that voice, and...

"Answer me!" Odin drowns out the kind voices as he grabs onto Loki's hair, pulling Loki's long black locks and shaking him by his hair so roughly that Loki's teeth rattle. He lets out a pained gasp and a sob. He can't help it. Tears stream down his cheeks no matter how hard he wishes they wouldn't and tries to blink them away.

The guards holding him sneer at how pathetic he is. He knows he always was, but he's even more
pathetic now. He used to be better at keeping it in, used to be able to not let out a sound even when they beat him so hard that they broke some of his bones.

He's already sagging, his legs, which are shaking in terror and pain like the rest of him, are now useless at supporting him. Loki would surely collapse on the floor without the two guards' large, decidedly ungentle hands around each of his arms.

Loki doesn't answer, he can't answer, both because he doesn't know what to say, and he's so terrified that he'll probably have an even harder time getting the words out than he normally does, nowadays. It's so much harder than it used to be, because he's gotten even stupider, as everyone loves to point out. The servants and slaves love pointing out that even they're infinitely smarter than him because they don't get dumber like him, just because they're hit in the head.

"I-I-I... that- just saids..." Loki stammers, heart pounding in his chest.

"Try to act like a civilized being, Jotun." One of the guards cuffs him in the ear before sneering, gloatingly and mockingly. "Use that Silver Tongue of yours. Oh, I forgot, you're a complete imbecile now."

"No..." Loki chokes out before he can stop himself.

"No back talk, you wretch! Now answer your King!" The other guard orders, cuffing Loki's other ear. Stars dance before his eyes and he wishes they'd stay there forever and block everything else out, so maybe he could just be away from here forever, alone with the stars.

But the stars fade, as the guards shake him roughly, and soon they disappear, leaving him in Asgard again.

They're probably messing his brain up even more because he can't take a few blows to the head like the slaves can.

"That-" Loki barely manages to get that word out.

He still doesn't know what to say, although his head clears a bit, thankfully. This was hard enough before his head started swimming.

The truth, which was that he was telling Sleipnir that Odin can't ride him, will get him in realms of trouble, because he knows he's not supposed to talk to his friends.

He could lie. He's really good at lying, or he used to be, but now he's so stupid that people seem to know when he's making something up. Also, this might be a rhetorical question and Odin already knows what he said, so he wouldn't get away with lying even if it came out really convincingly. Odin does that sometimes, tries to trick him making him think he doesn't know the answer when he does, to see if he'll lie.

No, Loki knows better than to lie, or Odin will once again take a needle and-

This time the guards shake him roughly, bringing even more tears as he tries not to think about the needle. The only reason that memory doesn't consume him is because his head's rattling as he's shaken.

That, and because in his head, Sleipnir sings their song, which makes Loki feel just a tiny bit better, although it's really hard to feel good right now.

Oddly enough, Loki sees a bald man in a chair with wheels. Professor Xavier? What's he doing
here? He's saying something about this not being real, just a memory, and that's the voice he hadn't identified earlier.

Fenrir growls, saying something in Loki's mind about how he's going to gelda them all with his claws, but not his teeth because he wouldn't want that part of them anywhere near his mouth.

"Gelda you's." Loki blurts out before he can stop himself.

The guards let out angry shouts, slamming him back against a wall so hard that Loki feels blood coming from the gash he's just acquired in the back of his head. His vision goes completely white for a bit, ears ringing, and when his senses return, the guards are in his face, saying that an argr freak like him shouldn't talk about taking away others' manliness when he doesn't have any of his own.

But that wasn't even really what it was!

It's funny because when he tries to lie now, most of the time people don't believe him like the used to- although even then they often decided to beat him up regardless of if they fell for his lies or not- but when he just says the wrong thing, like now, they think he's telling the truth.

Loki spies Professor Xavier behind the guards, which is weird because he was never in Asgard. But now he knows, the voice from earlier was that man's. Professor Xavier is telling him that this isn't real, but it feels real.

"He's probably talking about one of his freaky figments." One of the guards mutters.

Odin beckons the guards to get out of Loki's face. Once they do, the Allfather takes up their position in his face and stares at Loki with his terrifyingly cold fury.

"I heard him, telling something invisible that you couldn't be riding it, my king." One of the guards finally speaks up for Loki, except Loki didn't know he heard.

Odin looks at Loki like he can read Loki's mind. "You were talking about me riding your... eight-legged monstrosity of a horse."

Loki doesn't say anything, but he can tell Odin knows that's what it was somehow.

"You imbecile! I cannot ride something that doesn't exist! It's just a figment of your stupid brain." Odin tells him. The guards laugh. Loki knows Sleipnir and Fenrir aren't real, but they're a trillion times nicer than anybody here. He wishes they were real, because then Fenrir could make them stop hurting him.

"I think I need to teach you to stop spouting your insane ramblings in my palace." Odin mutters as Loki shakes in fear no matter how hard he tries to stop it.

The guards grin wickedly as they let go of Loki, and he falls to the floor like a sack of rocks. One of them pulls off Loki's shirt and then pulls his pants around his ankles, and Loki knows what this means. A whip cracks in the air, and Loki flinches, biting down on his lip before a scream escapes. It hasn't even started yet.

"What are your 'friends'?'" Odin growls.

"...Figments. Not reals." Loki only barely manages to force the words out through his fear, but he knows it'll be worse if he doesn't.
The whip cracks again and tears through Loki's bare back, leaving a bloody line. Loki tries to grit his teeth over a scream, but it comes out anyways.

He used to be able to be silent through the first several lashes, but he's gotten weaker, more pathetic.

"Good. You're learning. Again."

The next lash lands on Loki's equally bare butt. His world flares white in pain.

"N-not..." Loki gasps once the world returns, knowing what he's supposed to say. "... real."

The whip cracks again, leaving another bloody line through the back of his calves, and Loki screams.

Loki realizes he's now curled in a ball on his side, and for some reason Professor Xavier's voice is echoing in his mind even though he hadn't heard the man part of the time when he was being interrogated by Odin, but he had heard him some and seen him.

"Not real not real not reals! Figment!" He's screaming the words aloud as they pound in his head.

Jormungand's body is wrapped around him in a hug, and someone's on top of Loki. Sleipnir, he realizes after a bit. Sleipnir's almost sitting on Loki's curled body, nickering softly and nuzzling the bloody side of Loki's face.

He's in the stables, in Midgard, with his Sleipnir and Jormungand and Tony. And Simba, he realizes, feeling the familiar lion's armor and the little arc reactor. Simba puts an armored paw on Loki's chest.

He vaguely hears Professor Xavier saying that Sleipnir is real, and Loki thinks the man's voice is coming from outside his head now instead of inside, because Tony's saying the same thing along with him. Loki's pretty sure Tony can't go into his head, even if Tony sometimes seems to know what he's thinking.

"I can see why it's hard for you to believe all this." Professor Xavier says, not seeming quite as calm as usual.

Now everybody's looking at him. Tony's eyes are narrowed, and Bruce's eyes look just a bit greener than normal. Hank looks shocked and furious at the same time, and Logan might be trying to hide it but maybe he is too, Loki's not sure. Sleipnir seems to think Logan is, though, and whispers in Loki’s mind that Logan had the same look on his face when Sleipnir first arrived, which is a little confusing.

Loki nervously scoots away, and finds himself in a stall, under the body of one of the horses. Paint, he thinks his name is.

He's pretty sure Professor Xavier's question was rhetorical, because he just saw it, apparently, so he already knows the answer.

Loki would bury his head in his knees, except he's still clutching Sleipnir and Simba, so instead he buries his head into Sleipnir sniffling.

He used to be better at not crying, he could get through five lashes without even making a peep. But he's crying now and what he just went through wasn't even a real whipping, just remembering it. It felt real but he doesn't even have the lashes on his back, so it wasn't and he's still crying
"Okay, I can't hug you now, because I'm not sure if that horse is gonna kick me or not." Tony says, not as flippantly as usual. "I'm guessing since you're like an actual Dr. Doolittle, as shown here and at the zoo, you're safe from being kicked?"

Loki has no idea who that Doctor Tony just mentioned is, aside from the fact he doesn't do much. He nods, though. He never had to worry about the horses, they never kicked him even when he crawled around their legs like he just did to get here. It's the guards and warriors he has to worry about.

"If you want to talk about it..." Professor Xavier offers quietly. "I'm here, and I'm sure Mr. Stark and Dr. Banner are willing to listen too." Both Tony and Bruce nod, and they've listened to a lot of his problems, and they really care.

He has friends and family here, even Sleipnir with a body now, but Odin said...

"Used to... not cry." Loki mumbles, and his voice chokes up. It's a cruel irony, that he's starting to cry again when he talks about not crying. But he used to be stronger, braver, wouldn't cry during the first several lashes of real whippings, much less flashbacks of them. He's not actually whipped now.

"There's no shame in crying." Tony says, but Loki's pretty sure he thinks there is, because he almost never cries himself. "Especially with what you've been through. I'd probably cry."

"Figment, figment!" Loki's chanting as Tony talks, the words echoing through his head. "Figment, figmen', just figments you freak... Allfather Odin says-" Loki stops, and Sleipnir nickers softly.

Odin said he's not real but he feels real. But he always got in a lot of pain when he said they were real.

Tony scrubs a hand over his face, looking annoyed. Hopefully he's not annoyed at Loki. "Odin is a lying, despicable, stupid piece of shit, remember? I'd bet a million bucks he was lying through his teeth, and unlike most people I could actually pay that bet if I lost, not that I would."

"Loki, I know there's probably a huge war raging in your head, because we're once again telling you the opposite of everything you've ever known." Tony says, and Loki blinks. Can Tony read his mind or something? "I hope we're winning. Remember Odin lied about other stuff? He lied about Jotuns and magic and everything! You shouldn't believe a word that ever came out of that bastard's mouth."

Odin had lied about magic, because he had it all along too, but why would he lie about Sleipnir?

"He sounds like the biggest assholein Ass-Guard." Logan says, and Loki wonders if Tony shared that name with him sometime or if they both just came up with it. It's funny, because it actually sounds almost exactly like Asgard, but says that they're asses. Not like donkeys but like jerks.

"He's the Allfather of Dickheads." Tony acts as if he needs to say the last insult. He's probably going to keep saying them until Logan runs out. Not that Loki's complaining, he likes hearing them.

Then Professor Xavier talks before Logan can add another. "Odin was lying about Sleipnir not being real. I... saw him riding Sleipnir." He says quietly. But that was the first flashback and Loki hadn't seen Professor Xavier there like he had in the second.
"Odin didn't ride my Sleipnir really!" Loki almost shouts, bouncing and hoping Sleipnir doesn't get scared again. It's just a stupid dream like the dream where Sleipnir comes out of him, or that dream where Hans and Gaston killed Hulk, and Dr. Drakken and Shego hurt Tony and Fenrir. "cause he wouldn't ride a monster! B'sides, said... 'You imb'cile! I cannot ride something that doesn't exist. It's just a figment of your stupid brain!'"

"Loki, you're not crazy. You not hallucinating." Tony echoes Logan's earlier words to Sleipnir. "You were never hallucinating Sleipnir, or Jormungand. Odin was a bastard for telling you that, and I really wanna have a chat with him in the Hulk suit. Sleipnir's here, not in your head. I mean, you feel he has a body, right?" Tony gives him a bit of a weird look.

"Not makin' sense, Tony, nope nope nope! My Sleipnir is in heres!" Loki exclaims, pointing to his brain. Sleipnir's talking in Loki's head, and his door's open again because they were just playing in their field! Love is an open door, and Loki loves his Sleipnir!

It's like Sleipnir and Jormungand are in his head and outside it, when for a long time they were just in it. But anyways, they were always in his head since they first showed up.

"You know how the O- Hulk is in my head?" Bruce asks, fiddling with his glasses. Loki nods. He'd asked Bruce if he ever lost Hulk in there, the first night Sleipnir was missing, and apparently Bruce doesn't lose Hulk like Loki lost Sleipnir. "Well, he's real, isn't he?"

Loki grins and nods. He's really glad that Hulk's real. He wishes Hulk would come out sometime soon- he hasn't seen him since watching Pinocchio. Hank had told Bruce earlier that he could turn into Hulk if he wanted, but Bruce hasn't yet. Loki really hopes he does sometime.

Jormungand said he was always real, and Tony says Sleipnir was too. But how were they in his head then?

"You seem to be a bit of a telepath yourself, which is how you can hear Sleipnir's thoughts, and Fenrir's, and Jormungand's." Professor Xavier explains to Loki, as if he'd read Loki's mind. "That's why they seem to be in your head.

"I can hear what Sleipnir's thinking, too." Tony remarks. "And I'm pretty sure I'm no telepath."

"I know I'm not a telepath." Logan says.

"Yes, well, Sleipnir seems to be able to make his thoughts known to anybody he is around, Mr. Stark, Dr. Banner, Hank and Logan included." Professor Xavier nods at the four of them. Tony and Bruce have talked to Sleipnir before, but that was when he spoke out loud. They never heard him when he was invisible.

Professor Xavier continues, once again seeming to read Loki's thoughts. "What I meant was that you were able to hear him when nobody else was, from a remarkable distance."

Tony mutters something about you definitely got that right.

But Loki hadn't been able to hear Sleipnir for the past several days.

"I'm here now, Loki." Sleipnir replies in Loki's head, like he has the entire time today.

"And I'm here." Loki grins and bounces himself and Sleipnir slightly, but glances at Professor Xavier.

"You're tel'port... tel-eporth... you's that word too, 'Fessor X, 'cause you're in my head?" Loki asks.
The word Professor Xavier used is kind of like teleport, but different. Loki can teleport, but Professor Xavier probably can't teleport, because otherwise why would he use that wheeled chair of his? Can Sleipnir teleport?

"Yes, I am indeed a telepath." Professor Xavier says the word slowly and clearly, which is nice of him because it sounds so similar but now Loki can hear it ends differently than teleport. "That is why I could enter your head earlier. You hear Sleipnir in your head, correct?"

Loki nods, and Professor Xavier's voice suddenly switches from out loud to being in Loki's head. "Yet you can hear me in your head, too. I am not from your head, am I?"

"No?" Loki thinks. But that's different, right?

"I do not tell many people this," Professor Xavier's voice floats through Loki's mind. "But when I first started hearing voices, I thought I'd gone mad. It took a few years to realize I was hearing the thoughts of those around me."

Loki stares at him in surprise, and Professor Xavier is looking at him understandingly, sympathetically maybe.

"I don't..." Loki frowns, not sure how to put it into words. He doesn't hear Tony's thoughts, or Bruce's, or anybody's but his Monster Family. He doesn't even hear Simba's thoughts. So he's not really telepathic then, is he?

"You saw this barn before you came here, did you not?" Professor Xavier asks in Loki's head. He knows about that?! Of course he does, Loki thinks. He's been in Loki's head so he probably knows everything now. "And you saw Logan. The reason you saw them is because Sleipnir saw them. You weren't totally cut off from each other these past days."

He thought they'd think he was crazy for that. He hadn't really thought about it, maybe thinking the Norns gave him a vision. Don't they do that to Frigga sometimes?

"I saw ins my Sleipnir's head?"

Pacing, he accidentally walks into an open stall door and bumps Sleipnir. He freezes, noticing that Sleipnir's eyes are closed, and he looks a little pained.

"Sleipnir, are you hurts?" Loki asks, ready to start healing.

"No. Not anymore. You made my feet and sheath not hurt, and you have my thanks." Sleipnir snuggles closer to Loki. "It doesn't hurt as much here as The Dark, but it's louder and brighter."

He'd mentioned The Dark before, but Loki's still not sure what it is. Things being brighter than darkness makes a lot of sense.

"You're not in The Dark now?" Loki asks, hoping Sleipnir's not, because he hated it there. He'd almost fallen in a dark crack in Loki's head when they were playing just a bit ago, and was really scared and Loki hugged him like he's doing now.

"Thor made The Dark go away, with an orange rock that glowed like your hands. And then everything was bright and loud like now. And he held me but I didn't like that." Sleipnir's eyes say. "I love it when you hold me, though."

Loki loves hearing that Sleipnir likes being held by him, because he loves holding Sleipnir and doesn't want to put him down ever, even more than how he never wants to put Simba down.
"Thor?!” Loki cocks his head to the side, staring at Sleipnir his brain's being stupid, but he never has any problem understanding Sleipnir, so why would he misunderstand him now? Maybe it's because Loki hit himself and probably made himself even more of an idiot, and that's why he's hearing Thor's name when it makes no sense?

After all, Thor always made fun of Loki for talking to Sleipnir and the others.

"Thor." Sleipnir repeats, and there's no way Loki misunderstood it, even if he is stupid. Sleipnir always seems to hear what Loki wants to say, not what actually comes out.

Loki laughs, realizing what it is. Sleipnir's jesting, pulling a prank and he almost fell for it!

He's getting some weird looks for laughing though, and his giggles die down. "Are you not... not jesting?"

"He really did get me out. And he brought me to... Jane and Darcy."

"Jane... Thor's love?" Thor had talked a lot about Jane, and had definitely mentioned a Darcy too. And Erik Selvig. Odin hadn't been happy that Thor had fallen in love with a Midgardian like Jane, which means Odin would be really unhappy if he knew that Loki has Tony and the others as his family.

Of course, the Allfather would be absolutely furious about Sleipnir being real, too, probably, because that means he'd been wrong when he said Sleipnir wasn't real.

"Yeah, Jane's really nice, and she studies stars. Thor took me there, and I met them even though you haven't. Thor cleaned me too, because I was really icky and squishy from The Dark." That doesn't sound like something Thor would do, though."He gave me food too."

"What?!" Loki cries. Even Thor gave Sleipnir food before Loki?! But Thor always said Sleipnir wasn't real and it's not fair! It's not fair Logan got to hold Sleipnir first and Thor got to feed him first!

"It was an apple and I threw it up. I like it a lot more when you feed me." Sleipnir adds placatingly, nuzzling Loki again. "And when you hold me. You're so much better than Thor. He's not even in our family. Logan holds me sometimes, better than Thor. I like Logan a lot, but not as much as you."

"Nice to know I rank over Thor." Logan mutters. "Even if he did get you out."

"But how'd Thor feed you? Get you outta..."

"Professor Xavier says The Dark wasn't really your head, Loki." Sleipnir's eyes tell him.

For some reason, that information rings a bell in Loki's head, but it's a little bell, like how people hear Tinker Bell's voice, not a big one like the bells in Quasimodo's 's as if some part of Loki feels that it not being his head isn't entirely new information, like he'd known it before but forgot it, which is crazy because it is new information.

Plus the dark is in his head. It's in the cracks in the ground, and Sleipnir was scared of them when they were playing, but at least the cracks aren't in their field.

Why does everything contradict each other? It's still stupid that he thought he knew The Dark
"But it was! By our field, r'member?" Loki asks quietly. "I'm sorry I have The Dark..."

"Thor says it wasn't your mind too, because he found me there and took it away" Sleipnir says, but Tony says to not believe anything anyone in Asgard said, although that's really hard.

Loki glances at Tony, expecting him to tell him that he shouldn't believe that, except he doesn't.

If The Dark was Loki's head, Thor certainly couldn't have taken it away. So if he did take it away then it couldn't have been Loki's head because Thor can't go into heads.

Everyone here has been saying Sleipnir wasn't in his head. On the other hand, everyone in Asgard always told him he was- Thor especially, but now Sleipnir's saying that Thor changed his mind?

Loki squeezes his eyes shut and groans. His world's getting flipped over again, like when Tony first said he wouldn't hit Loki for doing magic or being blue underneath, or especially letting his blue skin show.

"Hey, kid, I don't know what your head's like, but the reason you couldn't feed Sleipnir is because he was being starved in a dungeon, got it?" Logan's scowling and Loki's kind of reminded of Fenrir with the way Logan's angry.

"Way to go about it subtly." Tony shoots his own scowl at Logan. "And I know that's weird coming from me, but come on!"

"It's like ripping off a bandaid." Logan shrugs. "Better to do it all at once. Not that I have much experience with that, I don't need 'em." Whatever that means.

"A... dungeon...?" Loki asks, mind reeling in total confusion, even though that vaguely rings a bell for some reason, too. An even tinier bell, but still.

Loki doesn't know Logan well enough, but when he glances at Tony, Bruce and even Sleipnir, he sees that they agree with Logan about the dungeon.

"Loki, I totally get it if you're gonna freak out now, I don't blame you at all, but... please don't." Tony wraps Loki in a hug, and Loki's breathing quickly, but he's surrounded by friends. Sleipnir, Tony, Jormungand, Fenrir (who's not tangible), Simba, Stitch, Lilo, Bruce.

Hel isn't here, though, but it's not like she's gone like Sleipnir was. Besides, she's not always there like Jormungand's been.

"Sleipnir...?"

"Fen and Hel and Jor weren't there. Well, Fen was, and we kept each other company, but then he almost got out and was really really angry. There was screaming when the bad men came, and then Fenrir was gone. I missed you Fen, but I'm glad you weren't stuck there anymore."

"I missed you too, Sleipnir." Fenrir's tries to nuzzle Sleipnir but his snout goes through Sleipnir's nose.

"Fenrir..." Loki frowns. Fenrir was there too?! "The Dark gots you in trouble?" Loki asks, although he really meant that The Dark is like a punishment, or Fenrir got in trouble in The Dark or something. He tries to think of a way to say it and blurts out "Cupboard under the stairs!"
It sounds like how the Dursley's locked Harry in his cupboard when he did things they didn't like, like magic or existing. Sleipnir hadn't disappeared yet when Loki read that part and he absolutely hated hearing about Harry's cupboard. He probably would hate seeing Mr. Potato Head being thrown in The Box at Sunnyside Daycare. That was punishment too.

Maybe Fenrir and Sleipnir were down there for existing? But Fenrir's not even real!

"It was like Harry's cupboard, kinda in a way." Tony agrees after a bit, looking really angry and sad at the same time. "Only..." He trails off.

"M'nacles?" Loki asks fearfully. Aladdin and Elsa were both manacled in the dungeons they were in (and Elsa's manacles covered her entire hands, kind of like Stitch's, except Stitch's locked his hands together whereas Elsa's were chained to the floor). Then Jafar, disguised as the creepy old guy, visited Aladdin, and Hans visited Elsa and then tried to execute her, but Elsa blew open the wall with her powers.

Loki had been manacled part of the time he was in the petri dish cell, and sometimes in Asgard, and he knows they're not fun at all, they make everything even worse.

"No manacles. Just The Dark." Sleipnir says, but Fenrir growls and thinks something about chains.

His Sleipnir and Fenrir were locked in a dungeon...

"That's why you couldn't feed them." Tony says, like Logan had. Loki doesn't know if Logan was telling the truth, but Tony doesn't lie. "So stop beating yourself up over not being able to feed them what you eat."

If Sleipnir was in a dungeon, maybe it really isn't Loki's fault that he couldn't get food through Loki's brain? Because apparently he wasn't in Loki's brain?

"Not my fault you's didn't eat?" Loki asks Sleipnir and Fenrir. He's still not sure how Fenrir can eat without a body though.

"It's not your fault." Sleipnir reassures him. "You just couldn't feed us. You're not bad."

"I'm not bad for not feedin' you?" Loki asks. He'd felt horrible about not being able to feed them. But maybe he really couldn't, and then he's not a horrible friend for letting them be hungry. He doesn't want to be a horrible friend.

"No, you're not bad at all. You're not bad at all. It's not your fault Sleipnir didn't get food." Tony insists. "It's the assholes who didn't feed him in the dungeon."

Loki feels really relieved that it really wasn't that he was just too stupid to feed them in his head. "I fed you now." Loki smiles slightly. He's glad he can feed Sleipnir finally.

But the relief isn't much relief, because not everything's good. They were still in a dungeon! Loki rocks back and forth anxiously, hugging Sleipnir tightly.

"I didn't hurt you. They did. Ass-Guardians. They hurt me, hurt you, they always hurt everyone!"

"Exactly. Nothing's your fault. It's the despicable scum who locked them in the dungeon who should pay for it."

"What dungeon?" Loki asks, even as he's already thinking it was below Asgard, although he doesn't know why he thinks that. It could be another realm, right?
"Below Ass-Guard. Did they ever shut you down there?" Tony asks quietly. "Because I wouldn't be surprised if they did."

The guards often voiced threats of dragging him down there because, as they said, he should either be locked away or preferably dead. Odin apparently said that wasn't supposed to happen because they never did take him down there, or kill him. Nobody killed him even though they killed any other Jotun as soon as looking at them, from the stories they told.

One time, Thor had shut Loki in the entrance of the dungeons and held the door so he couldn't escape once as a joke. Loki vaguely remembers feeling conflicting things. He was terrified but some part of him said he should go down because he had this weird feeling he'd find something there, but then it was almost like Sleipnir and Fenrir were telling him to not go any farther down, to stay away.

"I coulda gone down..." Loki mutters. "Coulda gone down to bring you foods for real. Gots you outta that bad, bad... horridible place!" Is that a word?

"Loki, no, don't even start that." Tony says. "Not everything's your fault. Actually, none of this is your fault. Blaming yourself isn't where we should be going with this."

"Coulda gone down!" It's still his fault! Loki raises a hand, angry at himself. He could have helped but he didn't!

Tony grabs Loki's wrists, not exactly gently but not harshly. It doesn't hurt. "Don't hit yourself either. I know I can't stop you from doing that, because you godly alien beings are freaking strong, but it's not your fault."

"How?" Loki demands. Letting them stay in the dungeon where they weren't fed is way worse than things he'd gotten beatings for in Asgard, so he'd deserve a really long beating, one that would end with broken bones and passing out. Sleipnir was right under him, hurting, and he wasn't there for him!

Jormungand tightens around Loki's arms, hugging him, but it's also probably to ensure he won't hit himself in the head again. Loki knows hitting himself in the head is stupid, because it only makes him even more of a broken idiot than he is already. Hitting himself in other places wouldn't mess up his head any more, but Tony and Sleipnir would probably be sad again if Loki did it more.

"Listen to me." Tony says seriously, with no hint of joking around in his tone or face like there often is. "I know twenty-twenty hindsight is a bitch, but you had no way of knowing they were down there."

Something about that statement seems wrong though, like he had had a way of knowing. He almost feels like he had known once, but he hadn't known that he knew, or he'd forgotten... that doesn't even make sense in his head, and certainly wouldn't if he tried to put it into words, because his mouth doesn't work.

He's probably being crazy, too.

He should have known, though. If he was more than a moron, he should have realized it was weird that Hel and Jormungand never asked for food but Sleipnir was always hungry and Fenrir sometimes was.

"Food coulds be there!" Loki meant to say that he could have taken food down for them.

"It usually wasn't." Sleipnir seems sad but matter-of-fact.
"If I'd went down there..."

"You would not have esssscape had you went down." Jormungand insists. "It'ssss good you did not."

"Right, what Jormungand said." Tony gives Loki a firm look. "If you had gone down there, you probably would've just gotten locked up as well, and then you would still be there now, probably. I never would've met you, and that would be horrible. I like you."

"But if Thor would help! Could brung food!" Loki blurts, surprising even himself. Where in the Nine did that come from?

"He did help." Bruce says. "He got Sleipnir out. He should have done it earlier, but he did it as soon as he found out. I guess 'better late than never' still applies to this, but it really should have been earlier."

"Nobody woulda hit us none." Loki says, not entirely sure where that came from. People always hit him, including Thor. Why would Thor have stopped anyone from hitting him, or his friends? That's even more ridiculous than Dudley standing up for Harry!

He really is being stupid today.

Loki laughs at himself even though it's not funny. "Idiot! You didn't know!" He can't hit himself because Jormungand is still hugging him.

"Didn't know..." Tony starts to say.

"No! Knew my Sleipnir hads no food! An' Fenrir!" Loki wails. He knew that, but didn't think maybe that meant they were real. Either way, Sleipnir never got food, but at least Fenrir doesn't seem as hungry now as he did before.

"It's good you weren't there. S" Sleipnir nudges Loki. "It's good you didn't come down. Stop saying you're bad."

"Really? You're not mads I didn't feed you none?"

"You couldn't get hurt by The Dark. I didn't get hurt like you did. You hurt more." His voice in Loki's head makes it sound like Loki had it worse than he did.

How in the Nine Realms can Sleipnir think Loki had it worse?! At least Loki wasn't starving, he got food although he often felt too scared to eat when the warriors were in the feast halls. Surely starving is worse than beatings!

"I'm sorry." Loki chokes out, starting to cry.

"You made The Dark dungeon go away." Sleipnir says, tongue flicking out to wipe Loki's tears away. "When we played and sang and talked, I almost forgot I was there. There's nothing to apologize for. You helped a lot."

Sometimes Loki forgot he was in Asgard when he was with his friends, too.

"You helped." Loki tells them. Was he really good? Was this really not his fault? "Wasn't so 'lone in Ass-Guard withs my Monster Family."

"You really helped me. Helped us. Don't ever be sorry." Sleipnir repeats.
"I didn't help 'nough." Loki says. Loki hadn't even talked to them for a while! So then they'd been alone, just like he'd been alone.

Were they as sad then as he was?

"Stop it. Stop blaming yourself. You did more than enough. It would've been bad if you went down to feed us." Fenrir gives him a firm look.

"I couldn't stop them when they hurt you. And they kept hurting you when we talked." Sleipnir counters sadly. "I really wanted to kick them whenever they gave you a beating, but I couldn't. I kick Thor now, sometimes. He doesn't even hit me for it or get angry..."

Loki is stunned silent right now.

Sleipnir had mentioned kicking Thor earlier today, too, but the idea of Thor not making someone pay dearly for that is almost unbelievable. Even when he sparred, he didn't just let people get away with hitting him, he always hit back, really hard.

Thor actually hasn't hit Loki since being banished to Midgard a year and a half ago, according to Tony, but surely he would have if Loki kicked him. He never got away with hitting anybody in Asgard, even though they hit him all the time, sometimes for fun. He'd learned that, like everything, the painful way, after lashing out a few times.

It was stupid to attack, really, because they were all stronger than him and it made things worse when they quickly overpowered him (especially when he was a child). A couple times, he'd managed to at least affect somebody with his magic, but he always paid a heavy price for that later.

But if Thor ever does hit Sleipnir for kicking him, Loki decides he'll try to hit Thor with everything he has- fists, frying pan and magic- to pay for hurting his Sleipnir. Even though he'd inevitably be overpowered and get a beating, he'd still avenge Sleipnir. Like an Avenger, like Tony.

No, Tony would stop Thor from beating him, Loki's sure. He wouldn't even get a beating, although he'd do it even if he did. It's not like beatings are new.

"And Fenrir got really mad he couldn't either." Sleipnir adds. "He almost got out a few times."

Fenrir's looking absolutely murderous right now. "I wanted to tear them apart, slowly and painfully, every time they laid a hand on you." He snarls, and he'd often thought- since he never speaks aloud- the same things to Loki in Asgard after Loki got another beating.

Loki really wouldn't like to be the receiving end of that rage. He's never been scared of Fenrir, but he was scared of Hel at first because of her dead side (Hel says that's why she hasn't shown herself around Lila or Cooper yet).

"Gelda them." Loki blurs, like he had in the flashback he'd just gone through, and flinches. Saying that was what made the guards slam him into the wall and break the back of his head open.

"What's gelda?" Tony asks, whipping out his phone.

Jarvis, through the phone, says something about castrating, or maybe cats rating, and Tony's eyes go wide with horror.

Loki watches in confusion as Tony seems to almost unconsciously squeeze his legs together and blocks his private parts. Bruce does essentially the same, but not as dramatically as Tony. Logan doesn't even move, while Professor Xavier folds his hands over his lap, since he's sitting in his
"You'd actually just... tear someone's balls off?" Tony looks at Fenrir in shock.

"Not with his mouth, his claws." Loki explains, remembering what Fenrir had said in his flashback.

"I wouldn't want their balls anywhere near my mouth." Fenrir's eyes say, seeming slightly disgusted at the thought, though he raises a paw and slashes an intangible claw for emphasis.

"I'm gonna have to watch you! You're vicious, you know that?" Tony actually laughs almost approvingly, though, despite his reaction of covering his privates.

"Fenrir threatened to rip my throat out when I was in Loki's head." Charles says rather mildly, as if he's discussing the weather instead of being threatened. Loki remembers that, but it had only been a warning.

Fenrir can almost be scarier than Odin, in a way, because at least Odin doesn't bite people. Well, Fenrir can't, he's just air even if Loki can feel him, he's still intangible. Sleipnir has a body now, like Jormungand, but Fenrir still doesn't. Loki wishes he did, because while he can kind of feel Fenrir when he curls up next to him now, it'd be nice if he had a real body. Plus then he could bite anyone who tried to hurt Loki.

"Professor X, he can't. No body, 'member?" Loki says. He wishes Fenrir had a real body like Sleipnir and Jormungand do. He wishes Hel had a real body too.

But at the same time, if Sleipnir didn't have a body, he wouldn't have been starving...

"...I think Fenrir does have a body, Snoopy." Tony says.

But Fenrir still isn't tangible like Sleipnir and Jormungand. Loki strokes a hand over his huge wolf and confirms this as Tony adds "Not here. Somewhere else, I mean..."

But Fenrir's here, he just doesn't have a body! Loki paces anxiously. Fenrir's real too... This is so much, too much.

"Loki, I know this is a lot to take in." Professor Xavier says gently. "Especially all at once. You shouldn't have to take any of this in. None of this should have happened in the first place."

Loki's still not done processing everything that had apparently happened. He's still trying to wrap his head around the idea that Sleipnir and Jormungand always had bodies, and now all this stuff was dumped on top of that.

"If you want to rage, I totally understand the feeling." Bruce gives a smile that's sort of a grimace.

Getting mad only ever made things worse in Asgard, because sometimes he'd hit people and then they made sure to really put him in his place. Fenrir raged, though, a lot. Sleipnir even says so.

"Fenrir... where's your body?" Bruce asks. Loki can't speak right now but he's wondering the same thing. "Are you locked up in a dungeon somewhere?"

"I shall return." Fenrir disappears, and Loki would have started to panic at the sudden disappearance even though he's not always visible, but Fenrir said he would be back. Does he really have a body somewhere?

Loki rocks and strokes Sleipnir in his arms.
When Fenrir reappears, he seems almost hesitant. Eventually, his eyes say something in Loki's mind about chains and caves.

"You're... chained in a cave?" Tony asks slowly. Apparently he'd gotten the message too. He really sounds angry. Tony hates caves, Loki knows. "So you're not in a dungeon?"

Fenrir confirms this, but says "Caves are similar to dungeons. Dark, hard, cold, wet." which makes Loki really scared for him. Fenrir quickly sends Loki a look and tries to press up against him. He still goes through, although Loki can kind of feel his fur, although maybe it's his imagination. "It's not as bad here as the dungeon, really. I get more food here. I'm not hurt, Loki."

"Really?" Loki hopes he really means it. Don't chains hurt?

"Why couldn't I have gone where you were when you disappeared?" Sleipnir asks Fenrir. "You get food..."

"You get food now, too, Sleip." Fenrir reminds him.

"Don't worry about me. I'm tough." Fenrir seems to puff himself up a bit.

"Fenrir, we gotta finds you..." Loki says, still hugging Sleipnir and Simba and kneeling down by his wolf to bury his head against his intangible fur that kind of feels like fur anyways.

"Do you know where you are?" Tony asks. "Aside from...?"

Fenrir slowly shakes his head.

"Well, we're gonna find you." Tony declares. "You know, all those assholes would totally deserve having their balls torn off. Well, I guess they didn't have any balls to begin with. Bullies never do, picking on those who won't fight back. Abusers are the worst sorts of bullies."

"I bit one of their hands in The Dark- the dungeons." Fenrir growls wordlessly but his voice in Loki's head is both angry and proud. It's like he's reading Loki's mind, which of course he is, because he's in there except maybe he's not, too. "And when they chained me up, I bit Tyr's hand off."

"You never told me that." Loki frowns in confusion. Maybe it's like how Captain Hook's hand was eaten by the crocodile, except the crocodile didn't bite it off- Peter Pan cut it off and threw it to the crocodile.

"Yeah, why did none of you ever mention this stuff before?!" Tony demands.

This is so surreal that Loki wonders if maybe it's really a game, like fighting Scar and Gantu. If so, Loki wants to make it happier.

Loki decides he's going to find Fenrir.

He runs around the stables, still clutching Sleipnir and pretending one of the stalls is the cave Fenrir mentioned, with Simba and Stitch running beside him. They fight some imaginary foes, and finally make it to the cave... which is really Sleipnir's stall.

"Jormungand wraps around them. Loki yanks the door open and runs to his Fenrir, while Stitch and Simba pretend to bite through imaginary chains. Once he's free, Fenrir curls up beside Loki and snuggles both him and Sleipnir.
But Fenrir still doesn't have a body like they do.

Then, they pretend to beat up everybody who didn't feed Sleipnir (not Loki, but mean guards like the ones that beat Loki up) and everyone who hurt all of them. Stitch spits a frying pan into Loki's hands, which he swings in the air with one hand as he holds Sleipnir with his other arm.

Fenrir, Simba and Stitch pretend to bite their enemies. They're imaginary opponents, not even visible like Scar and his hyenas and Gantu, although Loki could probably make illusions of them. He doesn't though, so they stay invisible as they totally defeat them.

Loki imagines sending them to Helheim, and Hel makes them eternally sorry they'd ever hurt Loki or his family.

If only it was real...

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Thor sits in the kitchen in the school with a bottle of beer, a few long 'hero' sandwiches (aptly named, seeing as they're defeating his hunger in a glorious battle in Thor's stomach) consisting of long rolls of bread rather than small flat squares, as well as some pizza, and a box of the delicious Tarts of Pop. Midgard has amazing food, although their beer isn't as good as the mead in Asgard.

Midgardian liquor is much weaker than that in Asgard. Thor has yet to get drunk on Midgardian liquor, even the stuff known as vodka (Tony has tried to get him drunk at many Avengers feasts). Apparently Steve never gets drunk, either, but instead chooses not to drink.

Most of the students at this school are still in their lessons, some of which are quite odd from what he's heard of them while wandering the corridors over the past several days. Really, what is the point of reading a book- written not even two centuries ago, by a dead Midgardian- about the life of a Midgardian lady named Jane? At first, when Thor heard someone mention Jane, he thought they were talking about his beloved Jane, who he had visited before coming to this school. Then he'd realized her surname was Eyre.

He'd heard Storm, who teaches English and Midgardian history, and her students in the English class discussing how this Jane, as a child, was unloved and hurt verbally and physically, which had made Thor think of Loki. Similarly, both this Jane Eyre and Loki had taken solace in books, if what one of the students said about this Jane is to be believed. Only there was something about a Red Room for Jane. Natasha had vaguely mentioned a Red Room once, and Thor isn't sure if they're the same one or not.

Storm had apparently noticed him standing out in the hallway a few days ago, because she sought him out later, asking if he wanted to read it, adding that she could lend him the book. When he asked if there were any glorious battles in it, she said there weren't any battles, and Thor doesn't know what could be of interest if there aren't any fights. Furthermore, according to Storm, both Jane Eyre and the book are fictional.

Why do Midgardians make up such dull stories? Thor wonders once again as he munches on one of his heroic sandwiches.

All the children- as well as the adults- here seem to have powers like Storm, Logan and Charles, but they're all different. Some of these powers are the same things Thor and the others had beaten Loki up for using in Asgard.

It's quite a shock, and sometimes Thor still finds himself thinking bad things about them like anyone in Asgard would, but he tries really hard not to voice them. He needs to stay for Sleipnir,
even though Sleipnir doesn't seem to like his visits, and if he is not accepting of these mutants, he'll get kicked out.

Thor recently met a blue man here, who is not a Jotun, named Kurt. Kurt is capable of disappearing and reappearing elsewhere in the blink of an eye and a puff of smelly smoke. He would have been treated the same as Loki on Asgard, although perhaps he would have been able to evade their attacks for a time.

Hank is also blue, but he is quite muscular and Thor suspects he would be able to give a good fight against an Asgardian. Had he been in there, they may not have been able to treat him like a training post.

Hank and Kurt are... surprising. They are blue-skinned, yet seem perfectly civil. Not exactly what he had expected.

Thor had also had a conversation with a young boy named Bobby, who is capable of making ice just like a Jotun. Yet is not blue or a Jotun, just like the man, Frozone, who had fought a huge robot and is considered a hero in that movie, is not a Jotun.

Hadn't Loki mentioned someone else who can do that as well? He'd had a doll of a lady who apparently makes ice and was hated for it. It's quite strange and unmanly that he has so many toys, but Loki being strange and unmanly is nothing new.

While some of the mutants would not have been well-received in Asgard or by Thor himself, Storm is a mutant with powers much like Thor's own. Logan seems like he is a capable fighter and would not have been hated.

Yet, Storm and Logan stand among the others, even the blue ones, all proclaiming themselves mutants.

This school is a safe place for mutants, where they are accepted rather than hated and feared as they would be in Asgard and apparently are in much of Midgard as well.

Thor looks up as Logan and Tony Stark enter the kitchen together. He didn't even know that Tony was here.

Tony raises an eyebrow. "Who's paying for you eating everybody out of house and home, Pikachu? Or, more accurately, who's paying for you eating everybody out of Awesome Hogwarts-esque Mutant School and home? I guess since I'm a billionaire and a philanthropist I should just have them send the food bill my way so they can spend their money on education instead of countless boxes of Pop Tarts."

Logan barely acknowledges Thor's presence and gives Thor no sort of greeting whatsoever as he grabs a beer from the fridge.

"Logan, buddy, you've got to come to my tower sometime. I've got actual beer, not this sludge." Tony glances at a bottle of beer with a comical, over the top air of distaste. Yet, all the same, he pops off the top with a corkscrew and takes a sip from the bottle.

Logan sends Tony an unimpressed look as if to say this beer isn't sludge. Thor isn't sure if Logan would actually go to Stark Tower, but the man hadn't declined immediately like he probably would if Thor invited him anywhere.

Thor knows that Logan doesn't like him, and they've barely spoken after their initial conversation when Thor first brought Sleipnir to this 'school' place. Thor had tried to make conversation with
Logan once a few days ago when they'd crossed paths in the barn, but Logan had just told him to perform the rather impossible act of having sex with himself and he'd used some weird Midgardian word for it.

During his stay at this school, Thor has gotten the impression that Logan is not particularly social or welcoming. One of the students, a teenage girl named Rogue, hangs around Logan a lot, and he seems to like her rather than just barely tolerating her presence. Furthermore, Thor's seen the Professor, Charles, and Logan together on more than one occasion.

Sleipnir had seemed to like Logan immediately, something Thor still doesn't entirely understand, especially since the man had just sprouted those lengthy claws. Yet, oddly enough, Logan is almost...gentle with Sleipnir, despite seeming somewhat gruff and reclusive most of the time, with most people, aside from Rogue and the professor.

Thor's even seen Logan carrying Sleipnir on his back when Sleipnir is small, and offering support when he's big. When Thor brought him, Sleipnir didn't weight much more when he was large than when he was small, or rather, the weight difference between large and small would have been greater if he was a healthy weight rather than skin and bones.

"I've actually got a party going on tomorrow, although it's not really the kind of party that involves alcohol." Tony's apparently still talking about Logan going to the tower, and Thor is very surprised at the last part of the remark. When has Tony ever thrown a party without alcohol?

"Thor, I think you'd learn a lot." There's something in Tony's tone there that Thor hasn't quite worked out. The billionaire then adds "Actually, I'll need to confirm you're on the guest list first." Presumably, that means checking with Lady Potts, because she seems to plan a lot of Tony's events.

After taking a sip of beer, Tony fixes Thor with a much more serious look.

"Okay, so you said that you didn't know Sleipnir was in the dungeons, and I'm gonna take your word on that." Thor's glad he's not getting blamed for that. There are a ton of things he can and should be blamed for, but the dungeon is not one of them. "And you didn't know he was real. But tell me, when you went to my Malibu house, did you notice anything about Jormungand? Because he's apparently real too. I'm not exactly surprised at that, but the fact he was literally under my nose for a few weeks and I didn't notice is kind of shocking."

Thor frowns in confusion, and Tony sighs. "Loki's snake. He claims he can grow to the size of Earth, and he was here all along...?" He raises his eyebrows. "That doesn't ring a bell at all? He called himself the Midgard Serpent."

"I know not of what you speak." Thor says. A snake that encircles Midgard? That sounds insane. Besides, the snake Loki had was nowhere near that big, it was perhaps big enough to be a belt.

Tony's studying his reaction. "No myths about him or anything? I mean, you'd think he'd be there, you have like dwarves and stuff in them. Don't you have that Heimdall guy who sees everything? I take it he didn't mention anything about Jormungand when you saved Sleipnir?"

"I did not have time to ask Heimdall about the others, as Father was coming." Thor explains.

"Okay, well, he's here so I guess it doesn't really matter. What about Fenrir- the wolf." Tony takes another swig of beer. Anger swirls in his eyes. "He was apparently in your glorious realm's dark hellish dungeons with Sleipnir at one point, but-"
"I checked the other cells." Thor answers. "I did not see a wolf. Unless he was in another form..." Can Fenrir even shift forms?

Thor still needs to free the other poor souls who are trapped there. Nobody deserves that fate which is worse than death, not even enemy warriors, or those who committed treason against Asgard, or slaves. Thor knows he saw at least one slave down there, though he's not sure who the other people were.

What if Fenrir was one of them, and he'd rescued Sleipnir but not Fenrir?

"He says he's not there anymore. He got mad when Loki was having the shit beat out of him and almost escaped. So he was taken away and chained in a cave, and he bit off some dude named Tyr's hand." Tony scowls darkly, although he seems rather satisfied at the hand part.

"Tyr?" Thor asks. Tyr had mentioned getting his hand bitten off by a wolf, but was that really Loki's imaginary friend? Except apparently, like Sleipnir and Jormungand, Fenrir isn't imaginary.

"Yeah, so he's in a cave. Which narrows things down, but there are still a lot of caves even on Earth, and he could be in another freaking realm for all I know. Are there like any significant caves or anything. Like, some ritualistic spot with a sign saying 'chain victims here for all eternity just because they tried to escape our shitty dungeons and rescue their friend'?

"No. But I will ask Heimdall where he is." Thor says. Heimdall had told him about Sleipnir after all. Well, not specifically, he'd given him a map. Would he be able to answer Thor's question of where Fenrir is?

"Good. Because I don't care what it takes, he's going to be freed. I'm pretty sure he's in a worse place than Hel right now, although hopefully it's not worse than he's letting on. By the way, is Hel really ruler of the dead or whatever? That's what Loki says, but she didn't show up today. Maybe she was busy being your version of Satan or the Grim Reaper or whatever?"

This one, Thor actually has heard of.

"There have been recent rumors and tales of a new ruler in Helheim." Thor agrees, although of course he doesn't know for sure what the realm of the dead is like. "I believe Loki just decided to pretend she was his friend." It had always seemed really odd.

"Really, Point Break? We're three for four now and you're doubting the fourth? She seems sentient, I'm betting she's real. Although, if she rules the dead or whatever, she's not in any danger. Can you even visit the realm of the dead without, you know, dying?"

"Anyway, Fenrir's the one we need to focus on first." Tony says. "I'm hoping I can get your help on this, since you know a lot more realms and all shit that than I do."

Tony takes a sip of beer. "It'll help redeem you from being an abusive asshole." The man runs a hand over his face and through his hair, sighs and then starts to speak again.

"That... I was gonna stop dredging up the shit you did in your past. It doesn't do anybody any good. Look, over the phone, I kinda snapped at you." Tony stares into his beer bottle, looking like he'd rather not be saying this. "And, well, you did the right thing rescuing Sleipnir. Without you, Sleipnir would still be down there in that hell, or maybe dead. You could've just left him and we would have never known. But I still blamed you and took everything out on you as if you were the one who put him there."

Tony's just stating facts, but Thor wonders if this is supposed to be an apology.
"No, I could not have left Sleipnir, despite the fact I had to smuggle him out so nobody saw him." Thor declares. He truly would not have been capable of leaving Sleipnir down there, knowing what the conditions were like, without hating himself. "I would have never been able to forgive myself if I had turned and walked away."

He's not sure how whoever imprisoned Sleipnir and the others down there can live with themselves. Worst is that it was most likely Odin who ordered them to be imprisoned in such conditions.

"I wish you'd found him earlier. Because hopefully you would've been decent enough anytime in your life to rescue Sleipnir." Tony remarks. The even though you were an abusive asshole is unspoken this time, but Thor still gets the message.

"I wish I had found Sleipnir earlier, as well." Thor says completely honestly. "He did not deserve to be down there, nor did Fenrir."

Logan and Tony both give him looks that say you've moved up to stating the blatantly obvious. Of course they didn't deserve it.

"If what you say is true, Fenrir only bit off Tyr's hand after the dungeons." Thor continues. Which makes it seem like it was a reaction to the dungeons. Having been down there, Thor sympathizes more with Fenrir than Tyr now.

"He wouldn't have deserved that place even if he'd done it before." Tony tells him firmly.

"Of course." Thor agrees, and he really means it. "Not even Frost Giants deserve that."

The look Tony's giving Thor right now somehow that what he'd just said was both wrong and right.

"Not even Loki." Thor amends.

He'd shut Loki in the entrance to the dungeons, leading down to the general cells with energy as walls and actual light, not knowing back then that the horrific dungeons were below it.

Thor's pretty sure he would have freed even Loki, or a random Frost Giant warrior, from the dungeons had he found them there. He did not have time to free the other miserable wretches down there when he'd freed Sleipnir, but he should do it soon.

It will be difficult to free them, though, if Odin tries to stop him.

Thor is Prince, destined for the throne, but the Allfather is still a lot more powerful than he is. He could simply strip Thor of his powers once again like he'd did when banishing Thor to Midgard.

Tony's comment about Thor being decent enough to rescue Sleipnir falls very flat considering Thor had participated in Loki's mistreatment and abuse for the majority of their lives and had never thought about rescuing Loki from Asgard- and Thor himself- for a thousand years. Then, only a few short months ago, Thor and Frigga had decided that sending Loki to Midgard would be best. This was long overdue, but Thor has a feeling that his mother had wanted to send Loki away from Asgard since long before they did.

"So since you didn't know Sleipnir or Fenrir were in that hellhole, I take it you don't know why they were there, or for how long?" Tony frowns. "Actually, I'm not sure I want to know how long Sleipnir was down there. Or Fenrir, although he probably wasn't there nearly as long and claims the cave isn't as bad. I'm not sure if that's just bravado or not- Sleipnir's illusion didn't look or act like it was starving, and then you found him."
"It is as you said. I only just discovered he was there, or that dungeons so cruel existed in the first place. My only guess for why he was down there is that he was viewed as a monster."

"Do you see him as a monster?" Tony asks as though he already knows the answer.

"Nay, I do not." Thor answers solemnly. At least, not now. However, in his younger days- had he known Sleipnir was real, had Sleipnir been in Asgard's halls instead of the dungeons below it- Thor probably would have viewed him as a monster, too. He probably would have treated the horse just as horribly as he'd treated Loki.

It's good that hadn't happened, although even Loki's life would most likely have been preferable to the dungeons.

Coming to Midgard would have been much better than the time Loki had spent in Asgard, although Tony has been alive for only forty-some short years, so he would not have been alive, much less an adult. Thor can tell that Tony and Loki like each other a lot, which is odd since Tony is perhaps the brightest man on Midgard and Loki is now nothing but a simpleton. They really have nothing in common and Thor is shocked they became such strong friends.

Thor wonders what things would have been like had Loki been at this school. However, it has apparently only been around for about half a century, and was started by none other than Professor Xavier himself, as well as Hank, the more muscular blue mutant.

Furthermore, according to the mutants here, Loki might not have been accepted everywhere on Midgard, so perhaps it would not have been too different from his experience in Asgard. Even though he's significantly smaller than the average Jotun, Loki is still a Frost Giant and is therefore stronger than Midgardians. He would probably be able to overpower a Midgardian attacking him, assuming it was not Captain Rogers.

Half a century seems negligible considering the lifespans of Aesir and Jotun, but Loki's only been on Midgard about two months now, and Tony seems to have helped him a lot.

It's a pity Tony does not have the lifespan of an Asgardian, because he will die well before Loki and Sleipnir, and Thor himself. Thor is quite fond of his shield-brothers, his fellow Avengers, and the thought of them dying is quite disheartening, to put it mildly.

If he were to eat Idunn's apples, Tony would have the lifespan of an Asgardian, but the apples are not given out lightly, and are never given out to mortals as far as Thor knows. He sincerely doubts Odin would let him gift one to Tony, and he'd absolutely refused to gift one to Jane. To Thor's annoyance, Odin clearly does not think Jane is a suitable lady for Thor to court.

"I wish I could offer you one of Idunn's Golden Apples," Thor tells Tony.

"Why? Do you actually care about Loki being left alone?" Tony asks. "Actually, I'm assuming his friends will live as long as he does, right?"

"Aye, they will. But you will not, unless you get an apple." Thor answers.

Stealing just one to smuggle out would be difficult, and for a Midgardian, the apples need to be eaten about every century or so, or their effects would fade.

As one of Midgard's heroes, wouldn't Tony deserve one of the golden apples of youth? Would he want one?

"Or the Philosopher's Stone." Tony mutters, rolling his eyes. "Although, that's like actual legend,
like I thought you were. But Nicolas Flamel was an real historical person, Rowling didn't make him up. But alchemy isn't science... ugh, no, that can't be real." Tony groans and throws his head back. "But you couldn't either."

"What do you speak of?"

"It's a stone that grants immortality and turns any metal into pure gold." Tony answers. "Not that I need any more money, but... being immortal would be really weird. Like Cap, he outlived everybody."

"We were talkin' about Fenrir, right?" Logan interrupts. "Not some stone."

"Right. So, can I count on your help in finding Fenrir?" Tony asks, back on the most important topic. "Hell, I probably can't even get to another realm. Unless Dr. Foster's made an Einstein-Rosen Bridge yet?"

"I will lend my aid." Thor swears, dipping his head. "But do not expect it to be at all easy, Man of Iron."

"Yeah, I didn't think it would." Tony says. "So you're gonna ask Heimdall if he knows where Fenrir is."

"Aye. Friend Stark. Did Logan take you to see Sleipnir?" Thor asks, finding it a little surprising that Logan is with Tony. Although during that initial conversation Thor had with the clawed man, he was somewhat reminded of Tony.

"Technically no." Tony says. "Charles did. Loki was pretty shocked to see Sleipnir."

"Loki is here?" Thor asks, although he really shouldn't be surprised. Apparently Professor Xavier knew Loki before Thor even brought Sleipnir here, and of course if Tony was visiting Sleipnir, he'd bring Loki along.

Thor's glad he and Loki haven't crossed paths yet. He has no idea what he would say to Loki if he did see him.

"Yeah, in the stables with Sleipnir. We had to wait until Sleipnir didn't look like he was at Death's door..." Tony says as Thor churns with guilt. After all, Thor had constantly mocked Loki for talking to Sleipnir, believing he was merely a figment of Loki's imagination. He'd even beat Loki up over it, since it seemed weird and Father definitely hated it.

"Sleipnir has really missed Loki." Thor's unsure of what to say. The horse had made that quite obvious, although oddly enough he acted like Loki had suddenly disappeared once Thor brought Sleipnir to Midgard, even though Loki was not in the dungeons with Sleipnir and is closer to him now than when he'd been on Midgard and Sleipnir had still been in the dungeons.

"Loki missed Sleipnir a ton too." Tony says rather flippantly, giving a grin that doesn't quite reach his eyes. There's a lot of emotions playing through the man's brown eyes.

Suddenly, the man grins and completely changes the subject. "So, I've heard Sleipnir's been kicking you and you haven't hit him... which is good because you shouldn't be hitting him."

"I have not laid a finger on Sleipnir." Thor confirms truthfully. "Not even when he bit me, which hurt worse than his kick."

Tony and Logan both smirk at that. Logan's seen Sleipnir attack Thor a fair number of times and
always seems to like watching Thor get kicked.

Thor hadn't even considered hitting Sleipnir the first time he had been kicked (Sleipnir is so frail it's hard to think that anyone would hit him) nor any of the other times. Each time it's happened, Sleipnir was scared, as if worried Thor really would beat him, although he's been just a bit less scared with every time Thor hasn't hit him.

Thor's even promised to Sleipnir that he won't hit him, but Sleipnir's eyes have just accused "You hit Loki."

Despite his apparent fear of getting beaten, Sleipnir's still taken to trying to kick or bite Thor whenever he gets near, and had even kicked him in his most tender area once. He's still not strong enough for it to really hurt, though.

He has been gaining weight, to Thor's relief, but he is still underweight. Once he recovers, his kicks will probably hurt a lot more.

Thor deserves to be kicked.

"Oh yeah, Sleipnir mentioned something about Alldaddy Old-Man trying to ride him, and bucking him off so he landed in a pile of literal shit." Tony says but doesn't even pause to give Thor a chance to reply and instead just keeps talking, not that that's anything new. "I mean, I didn't see it, and I don't even know why I'm mentioning this, because you clearly think Loki's crazy like you did back there..."

Why in the Nine would Odin ride Sleipnir? Odin couldn't ride Sleipnir if he was in the dungeon all this time. Thor frowns in confusion. "Man of Iron, I know not of what you speak."

Tony studies Thor closely. "So Odin didn't try to turn Sleipnir into his steed?"

The idea seems ridiculous. If Odin wanted Sleipnir as his steed, he would not have been in the dungeon. This seems like just another weird Loki story. "I strongly doubt he ever considered riding Sleipnir." He tells Tony.

Still, Odin had locked Sleipnir and Fenrir up.

When he'd come to Tony's tower on the Midgardian holiday of Halloween, Thor had defended his father. Now, he just can't defend his actions anymore. Not only had Odin most likely been the one to lock Sleipnir in the dungeons, but he'd lied to Loki so many times. He'd gotten Thor to hate and torture Loki for his magic, even though Odin has magic himself.

Now it turns out he'd lied to Loki about Sleipnir not being real, and punished Loki for talking about or to Loki.

All that time, Loki had actually been talking to Sleipnir when Sleipnir was most likely alone in the horrid dungeons.

"Of course, nobody would ride a monster in Ass-Guard." Logan speaks up, to Thor's surprise, glaring at him with a very cold look as he says this. "They'd just lock the monster up instead."

"Right." Tony mutters equally darkly, and glances at Thor. "So... I guess it was just a dream? I mean, Sleipnir said it was but Charles doesn't seem sure. Plus you would've surely known if Odin was riding Sleipnir, since he's your father and you don't seem to have Daddy Issues or anything. Or, I dunno, you would've seen Sleipnir in the stables or something. Although I guess Loki would have, too."
"The Allfather's horses are in their own private set of stables. My horses, and the other horses, are elsewhere."

"Okay... so are you like banned from entering his stables? Have you never stepped foot in them?"

"I have only rarely been in Father's stables." Thor answers. "I never saw Sleipnir on any of the occasions I did enter."

"So pretty much he could've been there and you wouldn't know?" Tony sighs, running a hand through his hair. "Honestly I have no freaking clue, maybe it is just a dream."

"Are you sure this is not just Loki being weird?" Thor asks, since he still cannot imagine Odin riding Sleipnir. The Allfather always hated it when Loki talked about Sleipnir or the others. "He is a lot stranger than he used to be. Yet, at the same time, Loki used to be a lot stranger than he is now."

"First of all, don't phrase it like that." Tony tells him sharply. "And that seems kind of paradoxical, don't you think? 'He's weirder than he was, but he's not as weird as he was'."

Thor's not entirely sure he wants to go into how Loki changed with Tony. Tony wouldn't like it.

"Did you have words with Loki about Sleipnir?" Thor asks, meaning the dungeons. "Did he understand?"

"Yeah, we did." Tony then narrows his eyes a bit. "And what the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"Loki's rather slow." Thor blurts. Loki used to seem smarter, but now his eyes are dazed and he's a simpleton. He even cries.

Tony doesn't know Loki was smarter, though.

"He's not some kind of idiot kid, okay?!" Tony says hotly. Logan doesn't say anything, but Thor sees that it looks like he doubts that statement.

Tony's eyes are only on Thor as he tells him. "He's almost certainly smarter than you, HammerTime. I've never seen you solve a Rubik's Cube, or read about animals, astronomy and circuits for fun. Or fold an origami Sleipnir without instructions."

Thor knew Loki liked reading, but he hadn't heard of the other stuff. He's not even sure what origami is.

"We just had to flip his world over and tell him the opposite of everything he's ever known!" Tony exclaims. "Of course it's gonna take a while for it to sink in that his best friend, who everyone said was fake, was really real and starving in a dungeon. He blamed himself for that, you know."

Why would Loki blame himself for Sleipnir being in the dungeon? It is not his fault in the slightest.

"You know, don't you?" Tony asks with narrowed eyes, staring at Thor. "You know what happened to his head. Well, I mean, even you're not that clueless."

"Aye, he is different. At one point, Loki had quite the silver tongue." Thor starts. That was one of the most obvious changes- well that and that he started crying when they beat him, but Thor doesn't really want to mention that.
He'd seemed to get stranger gradually for some things, although in retrospect some of that strangeness was him talking to a slowly increasing number of "imaginary" friends. He always seemed quite odd when he talked to thin air.

But there were a few times he seemed to get worse quicker, or forget things. Like after he'd been gone for a while and was asking where 'he' was... was he asking about Sleipnir? Heimdall had said something weird about Loki birthing him, which doesn't make sense. But Loki had stopped asking after a bit, and his eyes were slightly glazed, though not as glassy as they are now.

"He sure doesn't have a silver tongue now." Logan mutters.

"He once almost talked me into swearing an oath to never again lay a hand nor weapon on him." Thor tells them. Loki was weird then, but not to the point where it totally took away his silver tongue.

"Wait, he almost got you to promise not to beat the crap out of him?" Tony asks in shock, with some other emotions- awe and sadness, perhaps- in his tone as well.

"Aye, and to protect him from the others attempting to do him harm. At the time it is the last thing I would have wanted, but he made it sound... intriguing." Thor doesn't remember how Loki managed to spin that to make it sound like protecting him was something Thor wanted, but he had.

"And by getting you to protect him, all those jerk guards wouldn't bother him, because you're higher up than them. That's actually a great plan." Tony says, sounding impressed and mad at the same time.

There was something else about that incident. He remembers that Frigga was off in another realm, but there was something else Loki did, because Odin got really mad.

Thor hunts through his memory.

"Loki was also attempting to persuade me to help with something else..." He muses, and then he remembers. "A valiant quest to free those trapped in The Dark..." Thor's eyes suddenly go wide in realization.

That sounds a lot like Sleipnir and Fenrir, as if Loki had actually known about them being in the dungeons.

Tony seems to be thinking the same thing. "I take it you didn't, though? Help him, I mean? Well, they would've been out by now. But you just said you would have helped if you'd known. Did you lie to me?"

"I did not get the chance. Huginn and Muninn saw and reported to the Allfather." Thor answers. "I had no idea what he was talking about either, with The Dark. I thought him mad."

Odin had arrived, furious, and pulled Loki away, presumably to punish him. Frigga had been off in another realm at the time, and Thor suspects that was the only reason Loki had gone to him instead of Frigga, because Frigga liked Loki a lot more.

When Thor saw Loki after that, he was even odder than before, wandering around, dazed as if constantly lost. He barely said a coherent word for years afterwards as he dragged around a bit of rope with him everywhere.

No longer did Loki read books, which he did a lot before. He seemed to particularly like books about Hnefatafl, although he didn't own a board or pieces. Thor had sometimes found Loki playing
Hnefatafl by himself before the incident (although now he wonders if he was actually playing with one of his invisible friends), using rocks and lines drawn in the dirt by the stables (because the stables or the library had always been his favorite places, it seemed).

Thor never had the patience for strategy games despite Odin saying warriors needed to learn strategy. Thor never studied the positions of the rocks on Loki's dirt boards, instead just kicking the pieces (or Loki) for fun.

He's ashamed of himself.

But what Thor's just realized now is that Loki had seemed to totally forget the whole incident with trying to get Thor's help. Just like how he never once mentioned anything about the time when he was missing from Asgard earlier.

Had Odin done something to Loki's brain? Something more than just hit it?

Loki's improved since then, though Thor still always thought him odd.

"Yeah, but you could have gone down there and checked!" Tony says. "He told you about them, right?"

"I thought he was mad." Thor mutters Loki already seemed crazy, talking to nobody, and right after Loki left, the effect of his words seemed to fade.

"How did he even know about Sleipnir or the others if they were in totally different places?" Tony asks, still clearly annoyed.

"Heimdall said something odd about Loki birthing Sleipnir." Thor blurts out, much like how he'd let slip that Mother and Father use magic and seidr just like Loki does. By hating Loki's magic, Thor had essentially been hating his parents as well, and he's not sure why Odin taught him to view magic as extremely unmanly when he himself wields it.

Thor's statement is answered with the sound of Tony's beer bottle shattering on the floor.

Chapter End Notes

Well, this cleared up some things, like where Jormungand is, and left other things open, like where Fenrir is. Well, I gave you a bit :)

At least they've kinda gotten rid of some of Loki's self-blame... and poor Loki. So much was dumped on him, and like Tony said, it's kind of natural it hasn't totally sunken in yet.

I'm honestly not sure if Thor's gonna show up at Lila's party or not. It would be good for him to watch Frozen (I'm not going to do a whole movie synopsis, though, been there, done that) and asking Heimdall to look for Fenrir wouldn't take that long...

Wow, I'm STILL not done with the stuff at Xavier's School... sorry if it's taking too long.
Chapter Notes

This is a short update to let you know that I haven't abandoned this. I got caught up in some new stories, and I can't believe it's been four weeks since I updated this one. I feel really bad...

So this doesn't have the party, but it might be a bit brighter than the last few chapters? I dunno. If not, next chapter will certainly be fluffier.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"WHAT- no, you didn't just- ugh, run that by me again, Point Break." Tony groans, wishing his beer bottle was still in his hand instead of shattered on the floor, with beer seeping out of it. Thor can't have just said what Tony thinks he did.

"Heimdall said that Loki birthed Sleipnir, and the gatekeeper can see all." Thor repeats, sounding like he doesn't really know what Heimdall was talking about.

Logan snorts in disbelief, giving Thor a look that says 'Really? I would've left that one in your ass, where you obviously pulled it from.' Ordinarily, that's what Tony would be thinking too, except this isn't the first time he's heard this. Out loud, Logan just scoffs "That is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard."

Groaning and running a hand through his hair, Tony stands up and goes to grab another beer from the fridge and ignoring the puddle of beer on the floor. Thankfully, Logan doesn't seem annoyed that Tony's taking another beer from what is presumably Logan's stash. He should send Logan some of the actual good stuff sometime, even if the guy doesn't take Tony up on his invitation to the tower. Tony hopes Logan will come to the tower sometime, though, because he kind of likes the mutant. Maybe he should offer to spruce up Logan's motorcycle or something. Logan had told him a bit about his bike on their walk here.

"Yeah, I mean, that's kinda impossible." Tony says, putting on a flippant air. "First of all, people don't give birth to horses, and second, men don't give birth at all... especially not to horses. So, that's two strikes against that theory. I mean, even in your extremely screwed up viking land, that doesn't sound like something that would happen." Tony rambles. "Like, I don't even know how that would work. Would he have to be a horse or- and where would the baby-?"

Tony stops on his own. He remembers Loki telling him on the plane ride to Malibu after watching Lilo & Stitch, that he sometimes had a dream where he was a mare and Sleipnir came out of him. It had stuck with Tony because it was kind of funny, but now...

No. This is just too weird to think about, and it's impossible anyways, right? Really, Loki had even said it was a dream and that he made it up. So had Heimdall simply heard about Loki's dream? Maybe the gatekeeper was mentioning it to mock Loki, more subtly than Thor probably ever did?

Yet a lingering voice in the back of Tony's mind says that Loki thought he made Sleipnir and the others up, too, when he obviously hadn't.
But just the idea of Loki giving birth makes Tony's mind protest in so many ways.

Man, Tony thought his life was crazy in the past, but that was nothing compared to what his life has turned into these past couple months.

Thor frowns. "I am quite confused by Heimdall's tale as well."

"So you don't have people randomly turning into animals up there?" Tony arches a brow.

"Nay. We do not."

"Do any of you... mutants have this ability? I have seen you grow claws. Can you turn into the Wolverine that is your namesake?"

Logan just gives a vaguely dissenting grunt as Charles glides into the kitchen, his wheelchair making almost no sound and moving quite easily. As an engineer, Tony keeps noticing the wheelchair's design and scouring it for flaws, even though he's seen it before.

"I'd greatly appreciate it if whoever spilled this beer would clean it up."

"I'm not entirely sure how that would work,"

"But it would explain how they had a telepathic connection in the first place."

Tony nods slightly. After all, it seems a little weird in retrospect that Loki would form a random telepathic link with a horse he didn't even know existed down in the dungeons. Why would he have linked to Sleipnir when they were apparently totally separated, unless there was some kind of natural connection between them?

But still. Loki giving birth? Tony longs for his drink that he's cleaning up. This whole concept is just hurting his brain.

"Uh, did you see anything in Loki's head to confirm this?" Tony asks. "Or was Heimdall just repeating Loki's dream to mock him or something?"

"Heimdall is always serious."

"Thor says that Loki birthed Sleipnir."

"I'm not entirely sure how that would work," Charles replies slowly, thoughtfully, "But it would explain how they had a telepathic connection in the first place."

"Uh, did you see anything in Loki's head to confirm this?" Tony asks. "Or was Heimdall just repeating Loki's dream to mock him or something?"

"Heimdall is always serious." Thor answers. "I have never known him to jest, and he particularly
would not do so to me, as I am his prince."

"Well, that'd mean that the others could maybe be his family, too." Tony says. Loki even calls them his 'Monster Family.'

Except, he still can't wrap his head around the idea of Loki giving birth. And how the hell could Loki be related to a wolf and a snake? At least Hel is kind of the same species, Tony thinks, although she's part zombie or something.

"...So did Heimdall know Sleipnir was rotting away in a dungeon the whole time?" Tony asks, because that's actually the easier topic, instead of the weird idea of Loki giving birth.

"He can see all in the Nine Realms, but not all at once." Thor tells them.

"Then he's hardly all-seeing." Tony mutters, although he's really glad. Then again, Tony has Jarvis, who sees all in the tower as well as every one of Tony's houses, mansions, manors and properties in general, so he's not exactly one to talk about creepy Big Brother kinds of scenarios. Not that Jarvis is creepy (at least, not to Tony. A lot of other people definitely seem weirded out by him).

"I do not believe Heimdall looked in the dungeons particularly often, and I'm not entirely sure what made him turn his eye towards them to discover Sleipnir's whereabouts." Thor says, and hastens to add "I am glad he did, so I was able to get Sleipnir out of there, but there seems to be little point in him looking there."

"So do you think he already knows where Fenrir is?" Tony asks, trying not to get his hopes up. Granted, even if Heimdall does know, they're still going to have to get Fenrir from, if Fenrir's telling the truth, some sort of cave where he's chained up.

Tony hates the idea of Fenrir being trapped in a cave like that. It's too much like his own experience. He wasn't physically chained with metal chains (which is the mental image he's getting) and he's not sure if what he went through is worse or not. At least he could move, although he went through major surgery without antiseptic, torture, all that fun, painful stuff he still has nightmares about.

He really hopes Fenrir's not suffering any of that shit.

The conversation is abruptly put on hold when Loki himself gallops into the kitchen, clutching Simba and the empty bottle Sleipnir had drank from earlier. Had Charles known he was coming, with his mind powers? If so, he hadn't said anything.

Tony's kind of surprised Sleipnir isn't with Loki at the moment, since he'd been carrying his horse around much like he does with Simba and, over the past several days, Bullseye and Maximus (Loki's not carrying the two toy horses now). However, Jormungand is draped across Loki's shoulders, as always, and he's real.

Before anyone can stop him, Loki runs towards Tony... right into the sea of beer and bottle shards on the floor. Of course he's not wearing the sandals he'd been wearing outside. He'd probably ditched them as soon as he walked into the mansion from the barn. Normally it's not a problem to be barefoot indoors, except for times like these.

Loki's face crumble as he hisses in pain, sounding almost like a cat, as blood seeps into the puddle of alcohol. The fact that his now-cut feet are in alcohol probably makes the cuts burn something horrible, maybe worse than rubbing alcohol.

This is somewhat like when Loki had blown up Tony's alcohol collection behind the bar after the
turkey baster incident, except Loki had only barely pricked his fingers on the shards that time and probably hadn't hurt nearly as much. Well, that and Tony's the one who broke the bottle this time, not Loki.

Shit, at the rate Loki heals, they're going to have to get the glass out fast before his foot heals around it. They should start immediately, instead of waiting for Bruce or Hank, although Tony hopes Charles or someone will get them anyways. Tony abandons the paper towels he'd been using to sop up the beer to go to the god.

Loki, however, balks when he sees Thor sitting at the table (had he actually not noticed him before?) and scurries away from Tony over to the other side of the kitchen, thankfully away from the rest of the broken glass, but he might have just shoved the pieces in further.

As he tries to squeeze his tall frame between the countertop and the bottoms of the cabinets hanging from the ceiling, Loki tenses, staring at the thunderer and hugging Simba tighter. He seems like he's desperately trying not to cry in front of Thor, and at least right now, he's succeeding.

Fenrir's illusion pops into existence- Tony's actually surprised Fenrir hadn't been with Loki since he arrived in the kitchen, since the wolf had been with Loki in spirit, if not physically, in the barn. Or maybe he was still talking in Loki's head but just didn't show up as a visible illusion? Tony's actually not sure whether it's Fenrir or Loki projecting the illusions, but making an illusion obviously takes more energy for whichever one of them does it than just talking without an visual form.

Tony hurries over to Loki, gently grabbing his bare feet. Loki's hula anklet rubs against the back of Tony's hand, leaving a leafy feeling that Tony forces himself to ignore as he inspects the injured area. There are indeed shards of Tony's beer bottle in Loki's beer-soaked feet. Great.

Some of the cuts look like they're already beginning to heal, and they really need to get the glass out. Tony's not sure if Loki's feet would heal around the glass shards or if they'd force the glass out of them before healing, but he's not going to wait and find out, in case it's the former. Actually, part of Tony is sort of wondering why Loki can't just make the glass disappear with his powers, when he apparently can cure actual infections like he did on Sleipnir earlier. Surely getting rid of glass would be easier?

There's no time to call for Bruce to do this, and Tony says that he needs some tweezers, stat. Logan is already rooting through a junk drawer until he appears with a pair. Tony briefly turns away from Loki to grab the proffered tweezers from the man.

When Tony turns back to Loki's feet, he's pretty sure one of the shards is gone. Maybe Loki really can make them vanish? Tony has an eidetic memory and he knows there was a shard where there now isn't (well, and there's a cut there to prove it). But the missing shard hadn't dug into Loki's foot very far, so it probably could have just fallen out.

Loki squeezes his eyes shut, his hiss of pain rising to a low keening whine as Tony tries to gently pull out the shards with tweezers, and Tony finds himself whispering Loki's lullaby to try to calm him down a bit. As Tony pulls out that shard, Loki bites his lip, tensing, and kicking his legs slightly, which only makes Tony lose his grip on the shard with the tweezers.

"Snoopy, I know it hurts, but you've gotta stay still." Tony tries to hide his frustration. "This is why you wear shoes. Or check to see if there's glass on the floor." Okay, maybe Tony's not reacting well, but it's been a really weird day.
Bruce comes into the room even though nobody went and got him (maybe Charles sent out some telepathic message or something?). Hank isn't with Bruce, probably staying with Sleipnir. Tony doesn't think Sleipnir can feel Loki's pain because if he did, it would probably work in the reverse, too, and Loki would've constantly felt hungry.

Bruce takes the tweezers from Tony and gets to work. He's better at this than Tony is, although Tony has steady hands.

Loki just wriggles more, jerking his foot away with a sudden shout.

Tony barely even sees it happen, but he hears a sound, and apparently a shard actually shoots out of Loki's foot like a bullet. Tony tries to see where it went, and when he turns around, the brown bottle shard embedded in Logan's cheek, evidently having been shot into his face.

Loki stares wide-eyed at Logan in apprehension, but Logan just stands there, doing nothing more than exhaling slightly, not looking particularly pained or angry. The shard abruptly exits his cheek and falls to the floor with another clink, and Logan's cut heals before their eyes within seconds.

"Relax, kid, I'm not gonna hit you or anything." Logan says, holding up his hands in a universal gesture of peace. "I've been shot before at point-blank range with a gun, this is nothing."

"You too?" Loki asks, and Tony isn't sure if he's talking about Logan not hitting him or Logan also having healing powers. He can't be talking about the gun part, though, Asgard doesn't have guns like they do. Asgardians have swords and weird hammers. Tony's pretty sure Loki has experience being hurt by weapons, which shouldn't be the case since he's not a warrior.

"Do I need to pull these shards, or are they going to shoot out like that one did?" Bruce asks, even as he moves so he's standing beside Loki's foot instead of in front of it to avoid further glass projectiles.

Bruce seems slightly hesitant, probably thinking that a shard could fly out and embed itself in his hand when he's trying to pick it out. Would that make Hulk come out with loud roars and smashing fists?

Regardless, Bruce's medical services won't be needed if Loki keeps healing that way.

Logan sighs, strides forward, and starts pulling out some of the larger shards with his bare hands, even as a few more fly out of Loki's feet like tiny glass bullets. One of them goes into Logan's hand, but he barely pauses as it's forced out and his body heals just like before.

Tony's itching to know how his mutation lets him do that, and Bruce is probably even more curious about mutants, but they're not lab rats or anything.

"Where's Sleipnir?" Logan asks, probably trying to distract Loki.

"In the Great Hall, with Hank." Loki pouts slightly.

"I imagine Sleipnir was overjoyed to be in your company again." Up until now, Thor has stayed in the background for the entire ordeal, and Tony almost forgot the huge Asgardian is still here. Thor smiles a little awkwardly at Loki. Huh, who knew Thor could be awkward? Usually he blurts sometimes uncomfortable truths without any sense of shame. Also, Thor's remark kind of goes without saying.

"I wish he was here," Loki mumbles "but Hank said my Sleipnir can't come in heres, 'cos he's got weird germy somethings, I dunno. Said I might've taken them away, maybe." Bruce looks like he's
about to start telling Loki about germs and bacteria, and how generally those don't mix well with
food. But Loki had apparently cured Sleipnir's infected sheath with his magic, so maybe Sleipnir
isn't as bacteria-covered as before.

Soon, Loki's feet are free of glass and the cuts are almost healed. They rinse off the dried blood on
Loki's feet, and on his face from when he'd scratched himself earlier. He looks a lot better without
the streaks of red, and of course the cuts are healed. They probably healed minutes after Loki
inflicted them on himself.

"Did you beat Kurt or Hank up?" Loki asks Thor completely seriously, although he abruptly
switches topics before Thor can answer. "I was gonna get my Sleipnir more." Presumably more of
Sleipnir's milk or formula or whatever it was.

Loki looks around for the bottle he'd used to feed Sleipnir earlier, which he'd dropped sometime
during the whole stepping-on-glass incident. At least that bottle didn't break like the beer one. He
then looks between Thor and the spilt beer, which Tony hasn't quite finished cleaning.

"Tony, you gotta clean Thor's mess?" Oh, right, hadn't the servants and slaves apparently decided
to put Loki to work?

"This is mine, actually." Tony mutters. Loki blinks and hops off the counter. Thankfully, he avoids
the glass when going to pick up Sleipnir's bottle.

"Hank said it's in the fridge. I know what a fridge is!" Loki then stops dead in his tracks, like a deer
in the headlights, when he sees that Thor is basically sitting in front of it.

Jormungand hisses something in Loki's ear, and Fenrir stalks up in front of Loki, but the wolf is
still only an illusion and can't really protect Loki. Well, he's real somewhere but not here.

Thor blatantly stares at Fenrir and Jormungand.

"So you are truly real as well." Thor says to Jormungand, although there's just a bit of a question in
his tone. Admittedly, the Loki's-friends-and-Monster-Family-are-really-real ball was dropped just
as suddenly on Thor himself as on Tony and Loki- the news that Jormungand took the necklace's
place had been rather shocking. Except Thor has to deal with guilt for acting like they weren't real,
whereas Tony and Loki don't (although Loki clearly blamed himself earlier).

Loki looks at Thor in alarm, wrapping a hand protectively around Jormungand. Tony's pretty sure
the snake can fend for himself, but Jormungand doesn't protest, squeezing Loki slightly in a hug.

Thor continues, seeming oblivious. "Friend Tony says you were always on Midgard, so that means
I do not have to find you."

Really, it's pretty impressive that a snake can look as scornful as Jormungand does right now. "You
are not sssome knight in ssshining armor, Thor." Well, the fact Jormungand referred to knights
when there aren't knights on Asgard sort of indicates he's been on Earth for a while.

"...'m glad you got my Sleipnir outta the Dark." Loki says softly, and Tony realizes that Loki
technically hadn't actually thanked Thor with that statement. Honestly, that's the sort of remark
Tony sometimes makes, sounding like he's thanking someone without actually ever saying the
words. "The Dark...box? they says a dungeon. Bad place, but you got my Sleipnir out..."

"Truly, if I had known where he was, I would have gotten him out much earlier." Thor's voice isn't
quite as loud as usual. "He did not deserve to be where he was."
"As we've all said." Tony remarks. Loki thankfully seems to know that Sleipnir shouldn't have been down in that horrible place.

Thor glances at Fenrir's illusionary body and tells the wolf "I have promised Friend Stark that I will aid him in his quest to find you, and am planning on asking Heimdall to discover your location. Fenrir-" He glances quickly at Tony to confirm he got the wolf's name right. ",if you could tell us where you are, I may be able to get you as soon as tonight."

Wow, Thor just cut Tony out of it the second time. Rude.

Also, he already told Thor that they didn't have much information. Just that Fenrir's apparently chained in a freaking cave, but that he's at least putting on the facade that it's not that bad. Hopefully that's actually true, but Sleipnir never acted much like he was starving in a dungeon aside from wanting stuff to eat.

"You hate them. You say my Monster Family's not reals." Loki tells Thor slowly, as if trying to remind Thor how the universe works because it's so scrambled up right now. "You-"

"I was wrong." Thor admits, actually being quiet for once instead of booming out his words. He doesn't appear to like admitting to his faults and wrongdoings (then again, Tony hates admitting to being wrong, too). Presumably as prince, Thor's rarely questioned by his subjects, yet he's actually owning up to this. "They are real. I should have listened when you tried to tell me."

Loki stares at the ground blankly, rocking slightly. "But... I didn't-" He frowns. "... just learned today."

"You told me there was a quest, and almost persuaded me to-" Thor starts, and then looks as if he's not sure he should finish the sentence. "Instead, I scorned you and hurt you because I believed them fake when you talked to them."

When Thor told that story to Tony earlier, it had seemed like Loki had actually known his friends were real at one point. Yet, as Loki just said, he seemed to honestly not know his friends were real before today. What's up with that? Really, that seems like the kind of thing Loki would remember. Maybe he would've relished in the idea of almost bending Thor to his will, or he'd be disappointed that hadn't worked (as he very well should be, since that would've saved everyone a lot of pain). But just... forgetting it? Forgetting his friends were real?

"It does not make up for my past treatment, but I swear I will find Fenrir and bring him to you." Thor pauses. "I swear on Mjolnir." He doesn't actually have the hammer with him in the kitchen, which is probably a good thing. Tony's positive that Thor swearing an oath on his beloved hammer makes it a Big Deal.

Loki pinches himself, looking extremely lost, but at least he's not slapping himself to see if it's a dream or not. Clearly he never thought he'd hear that.

"You're gonna get my Fenrir for me? An' not hurt him even though you think he's a monster?" Loki asks before Tony can announce he's on the Fenrir rescue mission too. The god glances at his huge wolf friend, running his hand over Fenrir's back even though he's intangible.

"Aye. Just like I did with Sleipnir." Thor pauses and adds, after everyone but Loki sends him a look "I do not think Sleipnir is a monster. Or Fenrir, even though he bit off Tyr's hand." They're not just empty words, he really seems to mean what he's saying, as he had earlier in the conversation.

Loki twists his fingers together and looks away, rocking side to side. "Do I... does this mean I owe
you a debt?" His tone makes it clear he'd rather have his teeth pulled out than owe Thor anything. Tony's heard that Asgardian society places a heavy emphasis on oaths and debts. "For findin' my Sleipnir? And Fenrir, maybe?"

Tony's once again about to open his mouth and blurt that there's no way Loki owes Thor crap (seriously, how, in any way, would Loki owe Thor for this? If anyone, it'd be Sleipnir and Fenrir who owe Thor, but they really don't, either) when Thor beats him to it. Tony must be off his game right now, normally he's really good at making sure others never get a word in, but now he's that person.

"Nay, Loki. It is I who owes you, greatly. I have wronged you greatly, more than I could possibly apologize or be forgiven for." Thor says solemnly, and Loki looks at Thor as if he not only sprouted a second head, but as if that extra head was a pink unicorn head singing a ballad about how Loki is now the new Allfather of Asgard. Too bad, Loki would be a way better ruler than the current Allfather, Odick.

"... 's I who owes you greatly." Loki echos Thor's words blankly, and Tony actually manages to get a word in and start to clarify what Thor meant. For some inexplicable reason, Loki's apparently still thinking he owes Thor.

"I who owes you greatly?" Loki repeats.

"Nay, Loki, it is I who owe you. I owe you a great number of debts that I will never be able to pay. But if there is something..."

"You owes... me?" Loki asks slowly, clearly not daring to believe that Thor said that, and expecting someone to tell him he got it wrong.

Tony realizes this is probably what Loki really meant the first two times when he was echoing Thor's words, only now he's switched to the right pronouns.

"Aye. I have hurt you more than I can possibly be forgiven for." Thor reiterates, and surprisingly his tone isn't obnoxious or condescending, for someone who clearly hated Loki for most of his extremely long life. "I have not laid a hand on you since my banishment to Midgard, but I should have realized I needed to do more then. You should have gone to Midgard right after my exile, rather than merely two months ago."

But Thor didn't know about Tony back then. Of course Tony wishes Loki had gotten out of Asgard sooner, but if he'd been sent to Earth after Thor's banishment around two and a half years ago, where would he have ended up? Probably not with Tony.

And then, of course, Thor adds "Nay, you should have gone to Midgard centuries ago." Well, Tony definitely wouldn't've been around then, but this is definitely progress on Thor's part. Sadly, though, there's no changing the past.

Tony wonders if Loki's going to bring up Idunn's Apples, which Thor actually mentioned before, but Loki looks like he has no idea what to do with this information, so he changes the topic.

"Sleipnir saids you haven't hit him none." This is a lot like the conversation Tony had just had with Thor. "Says he kicks you too, and you still don't hit."

"I will never hit Sleipnir." Thor tells him seriously, while obviously thinking guiltily about how he hit Loki.

"Good. 'cos if you hits my Sleipnir, I hav'ta FREEZE you!" Loki blurts, flinging his hands out. A
Loki tenses, but doesn't actually back down or cower away like Tony expects, although he's clutching Simba and Jormungand very tightly. Jormungand doesn't seem bothered by the tight grip.

Thor blinks and rubs his mouth in surprise Tony goes to stand in front of Loki since Fenrir sadly can't provide actual protection right now. He's still somewhat shocked that Loki hasn't fled after hitting Thor with ice, but he's so incredibly proud right of Loki right now for not fleeing. He slings an arm around Loki's taller body, and as usual he sort of has to stand on his toes to do it.

"I don't care if you give me 'nother beating after. You don't get to hurt my family, never! Not my Monster Family an' not my Midgard one with my Tony an' Bruce and everyone!" By the end of this Loki's practically shouting at Thor.

Tony is so incredibly proud of Loki right now for standing up to Thor. Admittedly, Thor wasn't doing anything, but still. It certainly beats Loki cowering or fleeing.

"Good going, kid." Logan says, smirking. "And nobody lays a finger on Sleipnir without going through me first."

Loki stares at Logan. "But I hugged him, an' didn't have to go through you. Cans I go through you?" He frowns and reaches out towards Logan as if he's not actually sure if Logan's tangible or not, and Tony busts out laughing.

"I seriously do not believe Thor intends on harming Sleipnir." Charles speaks up in Thor's defense.

"The Professor is correct." Thor nods briefly at Charles.

"...Why?" Loki asks incredulously. "Why're you...?" He can't seem to decide on a question. Tony can almost see a ton of questions rushing thorough Loki. Charles probably can literally see them.

"Because it is right. I am an Avenger. I am supposed to help people, not hurt them."

"That includes you." Tony tells Loki.

Loki blinks at Tony but then tells Thor. "Swear you'll never hit me 'gain neither." Thor and Loki both look taken aback by Loki saying that.

If Tony hadn't just heard Thor's story about Loki almost talking him into promising to stop hitting him once, he would have thought the thunderer was shocked at the audacity of Loki asking such a thing. Even though it's a perfectly reasonable demand.

Sadly it hadn't worked then, but maybe it'll work now.

"I swear on Mjolnir I will never treat you as I once did." Thor's voice is still serious. "I should have sworn to do so earlier. You almost made me, somehow, but then... you got... hurt and stopped. You-"

Tony sends the thunder god a look telling him to shut up, because he's not sure if Thor bringing up Loki's brain damage is really the best way to go. To Thor's credit, at least he didn't say that Loki got stupider this time. Also, he should have never done it in the first place, although he's right about how he shouldn't have continued after Loki suffered apparently lasting head trauma.

Bruce looks rather suspicious, and Tony knows he's going to have to fill his Science Bro in, later. Well, he was never going to not tell Bruce, but would it warrant a visit from Hulk?
"I know not where Fenrir is at the moment." Thor intones, and glances at the wolf hopefully. Fenrir doesn't provide anything. Maybe he doesn't know where the cave he's apparently chained in actually is. "But I will go to Heimdall now and ask. He is the one who informed me about Sleipnir's..."

"A cave." Loki whispers in a choked voice. Fenrir tries to shoot him a reassuring look.

"Fenrir, are you hurt?" Thor asks, seeming to actually care about the wolf's wellbeing. "If anyone is hurting you, wherever you are-"

Fenrir snarls slightly, his expression saying "I bit off a hand before, you really don't have to worry about me sticking up for myself." But Tony gets the feeling there's something Fenrir isn't revealing. "If anyone tries to hurt me now, I'll up my game and gelda them. Unless they're female."

Tony snorts. It kinda only works for guys. Really, though, what is it with Fenrir and threatening to claw guys' balls off? It's both horrifying and kind of awesome, although thinking it's awesome might be because Tony's almost positive he's in no danger of having his own clawed off. Also, Fenrir's kind of hilarious for his earlier thought-projection-remark of using his claws because he doesn't want to put his mouth anywhere near people's balls.

But Fenrir said he was chained up. He can't exactly attack anyone like that. Is it just bravado? As if sensing what he's thinking (can he do that?) Fenrir sends Tony a look telling him he's fine.

Maybe he is relatively fine. Or maybe he just doesn't want Loki to worry about him. Tony really hopes it's the former.

"My Hel's in Helheim." Loki suddenly blurts out, eyes getting a bit more unfocused as he cocks his head to the side. "But she can't comes here, it's busy there."

Hel suddenly appears, and the only person who appears shocked by her appearance is Thor. Well, Tony, Bruce and obviously Loki have seen her, but Charles and Logan haven't. Actually, maybe Charles did in Loki's head?

"Sadly, I can't exactly come live on Midgard." Hel tells them. "I'm pretty busy."

"Ruling dead people." Tony grins. "What's that like? I mean, that's a pretty epic position to have. Seems like it'd corrupt a lot of people, but you seem decent. Is everyone there half-zombie?" Then, he's suddenly struck with an idea. "Hey, can you see everything, like Heimdall? I mean, if you choose who dies, then you can just tell us where Fenrir is and-"

"I don't see much aside from my realm." Hel answers. "I don't choose who dies, just what happens to them after. And not everybody comes to my realm when they die in the first place."

"Oh." Tony nods, deflating a tad. That's slightly less awesome.

"However, I can confirm that my brother is not at the brink of death." Hel replies.

"Your... wait, Fenrir?" Bruce asks. "Fenrir's your brother?"

"Well, we are a Monster Family." The non-zombified half of Hel's face grins at Loki, who claps his hands.

'Not on the brink of death'isn't the same as 'anywhere near fine' but at least that probably means that Fenrir isn't as bad off as Sleipnir was, which is a really freaking low bar.
According to Thor, Sleipnir wouldn't have died from starvation, but Loki's horse had certainly looked like death. Even more so than Hel, who literally is death.

It only now sinks into Tony that he's actually talking to a ruler of the dead. Before, he'd sort of just assumed it was one of Loki's games, but no, Hel literally controls part of the afterlife. Loki really is the ultimate Cassandra, isn't he?

"You mean-" Thor starts to say to Hel.

Wait, are they going to go into the whole Loki might have somehow given birth to Sleipnir even though that should be impossible thing now? Tony doesn't even understand that, or know if it's true. How the hell (no pun intended) would they explain that to Loki.

Also, Fenrir and Hel being siblings is sort of new information, Tony thinks.

Tony shakes his head at Thor. Thankfully, Thor doesn't blurt it out, but he doesn't remain silent either.

"I assumed that you simply heard the rumors and imagined she was your friend." Thor tells Loki guiltily. "But I did not know about the others. Now, I must be off to Heimdall."

The thunder god gets up and heads towards the door, but stops, turning to Tony but glancing pointedly at Loki. "I believe it would be best if I declined your invitation to the party, Friend Stark."

Loki looks extremely confused as Thor strides out of the room. "He was gonna come? He'd hate Elsa."

"Not necessarily. He didn't hate Violet and Frozone, remember?" Tony replies as Loki heads towards the fridge, pulling out a pitcher of the not-quite-white liquid that had been in Sleipnir's bottle earlier. Clearly it's not just ordinary milk. "You know, I'm really proud of you, Snoopy."

Loki shoots Tony a grin as he runs out the door with the bottle, shouting to Sleipnir- who almost certainly can't physically hear him but probably can hear him telepathically- that it's time for another feeding.

Chapter End Notes

I'm hoping to get the rest of the Xavier's School stuff up in the next few days... I have a lot of it written, and some of it should be really fun and fluffy. I can't guarantee it'll be all fluff though, but there should be a lot :)
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

Well, it's been exactly two years since I started this story (although obviously a lot less since I started posting it here), and almost eight months since I updated... this chapter is super short, but maybe it'll kick my muse back into writing this.

Needless to say, I had a hard time with this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Loki runs into the dining room and slides to a stop where Sleipnir is. Hank greets him, but Loki has eyes only for Sleipnir, and he blinks at the sight of his horse.

Sleipnir isn't the size of a foal anymore. He's almost the size of some of the full-grown horses in the barn. He's taller than Loki is, now, when Loki snuggles up to his side. "You're big now."

"Good thing you brought a lot." Sleipnir looks at the large bottle Loki's holding.

"Nobody hurt you?" Loki checks his horse over. Loki hadn't wanted to leave Sleipnir behind while he went to fetch another bottle of that disgusting stuff that he apparently has to drink to get better and gain weight, but Hank said it would be better to leave him behind. Loki had been really nervous to leave Sleipnir, because what if someone hurt him?

Bruce promised he'd look after Sleipnir. That was really reassuring, because Bruce is super nice and gentle, so he'd never hurt Sleipnir. And if anyone else tried to hurt Sleipnir, well, Bruce could become Hulk. Bruce, Hulk and Tony are the best protectors ever in all the nine realms. But then Bruce was where Loki was, so he couldn't have protected Sleipnir.

"I'm fine." Sleipnir lowers his head, nuzzling Loki's chest so the can opener in his mouth thumps softly against Loki. That's a lie, since he's definitely not fine. Loki strokes his back, feeling every single vertebrae in his spine, every single rib. He wants to just keep feeding his horse until he grows fat and Loki can never feel another rib again, but Sleipnir says he throws up if he eats too much.

At least it doesn't look like he's any worse off than before, so nobody came in and hurt him when Loki was getting another bottle. So far, nobody's hurt Sleipnir at this school. Logan said that nobody lays a finger on Sleipnir without going through him, and Sleipnir said he had claws, but Logan wasn't with Sleipnir either.

Loki brings the bottle's teat to Sleipnir's mouth, and the horse drops the can opener to suck at it. Now that Sleipnir doesn't look like a baby, it's really weird seeing him drink from a bottle, but he really wasn't a baby before, he just looked like one. Kind of like when Loki decided to look like a kid at the zoo.

Loki strokes his hands through Sleipnir's long mane, his mind is still reeling from everything that happened today. Meeting with Professor X and having him go inside his head, meeting Sleipnir, finding out his whole Monster Family is really real, and then all that stuff that just happened with Thor and the others in the kitchen.
Today has maybe been one of the most eventful and confusing days ever, maybe even more so than the day he woke up in Tony's living room after supposedly being dumped on his roof. And that was plenty confusing, because Stark Tower is about as different from Asgard as possible, from how it looks to how everyone acts.

Sleipnir gives Loki a look that says your feet smell.

Loki looks down at his bare feet, which still have a bit of alcohol on them and really do smell like alcohol, though all the cuts are healed, of course. He's a little surprised the shards cut his feet in the first place.

"He sssssstepped on glasssss." Jormungand hisses from Loki's shoulders. Loki still doesn't know how he didn't figure out Jormungand was real before he actually told them today, but apparently Tony, Bruce and Jarvis never knew, either, and they're probably the smartest people in all the nine realms.

"But now all betters, see?" Loki wiggles his toes. Sleipnir looks worried, but really, he should worry more about himself, when he's as skinny as he is and just got out of a horrible place. Besides, that was nothing compared to Loki's injuries in Asgard. Loki's not sure why he'd almost cried when he stepped on the shards, but it had been really embarrassing, especially in front of Thor. He used to not cry when he was younger, so he's gotten even more pathetic.

But Thor... hadn't scorned him, not even like on Halloween. He hadn't hit him for crying like a baby, even though it's pathetic and worthy of mockery. He'd hit Thor with ice, too, and Thor hadn't even beat him for using magic, especially against him. But he probably would have if Tony wasn't in the room, right.

"I told Thor that if he hurts you any, I'll hurts him back." Loki runs his fingers through Sleipnir's extremely long mane, which reminds him of Rapunzel's hair.

"He hasn't hurt me." Sleipnir's eyes say. "Just you. A lot. So I kick him sometimes."

"Thor says he owed me greatly, he swored on Mjolnir that he won't be all mean-like now." Loki can hear a bit of the disbelief in his own voice. Loki would have given anything for him to make that promise back when they were both children in Asgard.

Thor had actually apologized. Or, at least he seemed to, but it's so strange that Loki's not entirely sure he hadn't passed out in the hallway and dreamed it all up, except his alcohol scented and stained feet are proof that the whole glass fiasco happened. So the rest was probably real too, even if it seems impossible.

Loki pauses. "But..."

Loki's eyes widen when he realizes how stupid he's been. It probably is impossible. What if this is just a prank like the Warriors Three and that servant boy played when Loki was a kid, where they pretended they were his friends?

Except... Thor's never been one for mind games and almost always says what he thinks, though, and oaths swearing on Mjolnir is a really big deal. Besides, Tony, Bruce and Hulk haven't let Thor hurt him, anyways.

"Thor's not gonna protect me." Loki mumbles.

"You don't need hisssss protection. You have me, and Tony." Jormungand assures him, as if he can read minds like Professor X. "I believe Thor wassss telling the truth."
"But he prob'ly won't hurt you, Sleipnir, 'cos he already helped you." Without him, Sleipnir would still be in the dark, dirty dungeon without any food.

Sleipnir nods, still sucking on the bottle. "Thor has been kind to me."

"Even whens you kick him." Loki snickers.

It had been weird thanking Thor, but Loki is truly thankful that the prince brought Sleipnir to Midgard. Maybe Thor really is a bit better now?

But even if Thor saved Sleipnir and won't ever hurt Loki for using magic against him again, Odin certainly will, like he always has.

Loki's probably going to be whipped to within an inch of his life for shooting ice at Thor's beard. Maybe the Allfather will just go all-out and kill him now that he doesn't have a use for him on Midgard. He's going to be even madder that Sleipnir's here, and after he kills Loki, he's going to hurt Sleipnir or maybe kill him too.

Loki wishes Tony was hugging him right now, but even if he was, what could he really do against the Allfather? Odin's a lot more powerful than Thor, and probably a lot more powerful than Tony and Bruce or the Hulk. He could just strip them of their powers like he had with Thor, couldn't he? He could make Hulk weak and destroy all of the Man of Iron suits, and Tony isn't really good at punching without those.

They'll just die, if they try fighting Odin, and Loki doesn't want his family to die. Even if Thor would actually defend Loki against Odin- something that's never going to happen no matter what he says- Odin could just banish him and strip him of his powers again, before killing the rest of them.

Starting to hyperventilate, Loki does what he always did in Asgard. He goes to hide like the coward he is, pulling Sleipnir along with him. They can't be found! Sleipnir's too big to fit under a table right now, so Loki heads out of the dining room, helping Sleipnir lurch beside him.

Fenrir shows up, and he's bigger now, too, but he's also just an illusion, so his growl and murderous eyes really wouldn't stop Odin. Thor had said he's going to get Fenrir, like he saved Sleipnir, but what if Odin stops him?

Loki finds a closet in the hallway that should be big enough for the tangible members to hide in.

Only, Sleipnir starts to resist and pull away when Loki tries to go in. He makes a fearful sound, digging his feet into the ground.

"No! I won't go back in the dark!" The horses eyes are filled with fear, and all eight legs are trembling as he rears up. One hoof ends up clonking Loki's head, but Sleipnir's not strong enough to send him reeling back or anything. This briefly snaps Loki out of his panic about Odin materializing to punish them.

Loki freezes outside the closet, because he can't believe what he's just done, trying to pull Sleipnir in there. Trying to bring him back to the dark is almost as bad as not feeding him, even though they were saying that wasn't Loki's fault. He goes to smash his fist against his head for being an idiot, but Jormungand's wrapped around that arm, preventing him from doing so.

He slams the closet door shut so hard it breaks, and Loki falls to the floor along with the splinters, sobbing.
Chapter End Notes

Sorry for all the angst that's been happening in this story.
Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

It's the one-year anniversary of when I started posting this fic here on AO3, which is also when I started posting here overall.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Thor arrives in Heimdall's dome via the Bifrost, the gatekeeper gives the customary bow with a fist clenched over his heart and a deep murmur of "My prince". Thor notices that Heimdall looks much less stiff than usual.

"You must thank the Man of Iron for those spa vouchers on my behalf." Heimdall tells Thor once formalities are over. "It was quite a relaxing respite from standing here all day. Like Valhalla, almost, with the things their massages did to even my muscles." It's not unusual for the gatekeepers eyes to seem to be looking far away, since he can see all over the Nine Realms, but it seems more like he's reminiscing.

"Spas are very relaxing." Thor agrees. Tony had arranged for him to go once, in the Tower of Stark, although Thor isn't sure how much Tony actually uses the spa in his own tower.

"I was rebuked rather sternly but almost pityingly by my masseur for being that tense." Heimdall says, and Thor lets out a usual booming laugh. Heimdall should have spa vouchers more often, he decides.

Still, he's not here for idle conversation, and one thing has been weighing heavily on Thor's mind.

"Where did Sleipnir come from? You said he was Loki's, that Loki birthed him.." Thor still almost wonders if the gatekeeper was joking about that, but Heimdall is so stoic and serious all the time, and Thor outranks him as prince.

"Aye, Loki birthed him." Heimdall's voice and face are neutral as Thor's always seen them, but he thinks there's a bit of a disgusted tone to Heimdall's voice or posture.

"How?" Thor says slowly, still unable to really wrap his head around the concept, because that's just not something men do.

There's a bit of a pause, and for a brief moment, Thor almost thinks Heimdall is going to start telling him about how children are conceived.

"It started when the wall around Asgard was under construction." The gatekeeper answers.

Thor nods, not really understanding, but his stomach plummets in anticipation of whatever new horror story is about to unfold.

The wall around Asgard- which was built several centuries ago when Thor was an adolescent instead of a young man- has even fallen into the Midgardian stories of Asgard. Granted, they'd sort of spread it around on a trip to Midgard, but it's probably been warped some over the centuries.

Odin had made a wager with the giant smith who was building the wall for them. The smith had to
finish constructing the wall in just one winter, which should have been impossible, as he'd asked for three seasons to complete it.

Thor still has no idea how Freya's hand in marriage had ended up being part of the bet, but that had indeed happened, much to Freya's displeasure. Somehow the Midgardian myths have also thrown in wagering the sun and the moon, as if that is even possible.

Yet, the smith had almost finished the wall in just that one winter. His horse, Svadilfari, had been incredibly strong, hauling heavy stones by himself and doing most of the work for the smith.

"What does the wall have to do with Sleipnir or Loki?" Thor asks, confused.

"Odin magically turned Loki into a mare to distract Svadilfari." Heimdall informs him, and Thor's mind reels.

He thought Heimdall had perhaps been a bit mad when he said Loki had birthed Sleipnir. After all, how would a man give birth to a horse, as Tony had immediately pointed out during their conversation earlier. It's not like Thor hadn't been thinking exactly the same thing.

"He can do that?" Thor asks, even though he really doesn't want to think about how that would be possible. He especially doesn't want to think that Odin would do that.

It's still hard to imagine his father doing magic when he'd been so adamantly against the idea of men and boys doing magic for almost as long as Thor can remember. Of course Loki was the first male Thor had ever heard of using magic.

Then again, can't magic do anything? He'd seen Loki turn invisible several times over their lives (which made it easier to catch him if he knew where he started out), and Loki had appeared as another Tony Stark one time recently when Thor visited Midgard. So why couldn't magic be used to turn oneself or another into an animal?

"He should not have. Loki was still a boy." Heimdall fumes. Thor thinks back to the time. Loki had to have been at least a young adolescent.

"Odin let Svadalfari force himself upon Loki?" Thor asks, stomach churning at the thought.

In some ways, though, it's not all too different from when Asguardians use the slaves for their own pleasure, although now Thor thinks such an act is horrendous. Thor never forced himself on a slave. As prince, he had a great deal of willing partners and never needed an unwilling one.

Yet he knows some guards will drag slaves into secluded rooms, and have their way with them, and the slaves can do nothing to resist.

Yet, as far as Thor knows, no Asgardian would ever do that to a Jotun. At least Loki was spared that. And as Heimdall said, Loki was barely more than a child.

It's horribly wrong. Even though most of Asgard does not view slavery or forcing oneself on slaves as wrong in the same way Midgard does, the two realms at least share a hatred of people who force children to perform sexual acts.

Heimdall nods solemnly. "Aye. He thought Loki would provide a great distraction for the smith's stallion in the form of a mare. It worked."

"And Loki was impregnated?" Thor's eyes are wide.
He had of course noticed that he hadn't seen Loki in months, but for a while he had simply assumed that Loki had gotten better at avoiding him. The palace is very large, after all, and Loki would not have voluntarily gone near the training grounds where Thor spent much of his time. Thor had been busy with his own life, with boring lessons and more exciting sparring sessions with his friends.

Had Loki actually been a horse all that time? A female, pregnant horse? It makes sense, in a horrible way.

Thor finds this recent tale of Odin's atrocities just as horrifying as when Odin had left Sleipnir to rot in the dungeon, or when he'd sewn Loki's mouth shut, although Thor hadn't found that last one as horrifying at the time, which sickens him now.

The fact that such a strong horse had been reduced to Sleipnir's current condition greatly angers Thor. He'd always made sure his own horses were treated like royalty (they belonged to royalty, after all). He of course would have been furious if any horse was as maltreated as Sleipnir was, but Sleipnir being smarter makes it even worse.

This is making Thor all the more uncomfortable with the fact that, for most of his life, he'd viewed Loki as less than an animal. Loki was a thing to him, a thing he could take out his frustrations on whenever he wanted. Like a living training dummy he could bash just because he felt like it.

Suddenly being turned into an opposite-sex horse would be frightening enough, and then to add being impregnated- no, *raped*, on top of that... Thor can't even begin to fathom what that must have been like for Loki. And Odin had made it happen without care, just to prevent the smith from fulfilling his end of the bargain.

That alone could have messed with anybody's mind (Thor knows that all his fellow Avengers have been affected mentally by things in their pasts, and none of them are at all weak in Thor's opinion).

On top of that extremely traumatizing time, Loki had been routinely abused for much of his life. It would be impossible for him to not have mental scars because of how they'd treated him, and he undoubtedly suffered physical head injuries as well. A great deal of those injuries were Thor's fault.

"Where was he?"

"He was mostly in the Queen's stables and field." Heimdall answers, clearly thinking it is a good thing that Loki was in Frigga's stables instead of Odin's.

Something Thor hadn't really remembered until now surfaces in his head. He remembers a black mare, obviously pregnant at the time, with shocking green eyes for a horse. The mare had shied away from him when he approached it, and once cornered, had lashed out, driving him back with flying hoofs.

Thor had never considered that that mare was Loki, even though it had the same shade of green eyes. Of course he hadn't- who would have guessed he had been turned into a horse.

Loki, by that time, was usually resigned to his fate when Thor decided to pick on him, even if he still had his silver tongue to throw remarks Thor's way. They'd long since taught him that fighting back only made things worse for him, but just like how Loki had stood up to Thor at Xavier's School, he became a lot more fierce when protecting one he loved.

Loki had undoubtedly been worried that Thor would hurt the baby growing inside him... her? Loki the mare hadn't let Thor get near.
Thor now has the answer to where Loki had been when he was gone. It's worse than he imagined, and at one point he thought Odin had returned Loki to Jotunheim, or killed him.

Loki had changed a bit after he came back, demanding to know where 'he' was. It hits Thor hard, that that question had been a mother trying to find her baby. It's the same way Frigga would have reacted if Thor had gone missing, but then Loki had just... stopped.

He'd looked extremely lost and confused after that, wandering around as if in a daze.

When Thor and his friends demanded to know where he'd been all those months, Loki looked even more lost and confused, as if he hadn't realized he'd been anywhere.

And then, a while later, he'd started talking to someone who wasn't there, and everyone thought him mad.

It had been that time after Loki was trying to get Thor to help him, that he'd changed the most. Loki barely spoke a word for years. It seemed as if Loki was not mentally present- in fact, he seemed far from it. But had that really been Loki's fault? Thor's starting to think not.

He thought Loki's sharp tongue had all but disappeared over the years as he acted more and more cowardly. At one point, Loki never cried, but then he'd started to, again. Really, Loki being damaged badly should have been Thor's cue to start standing up for him, or at least to stop harassing him. But he had only teased Loki more, for being even stupider.

Thor shakes his head. The past, as bad as it was, is the past. He's made a vow to protect Loki (and his friends) now, and he will. It won't make up for what he's done, nothing will, but it's the right thing to do.

It had been rather odd when Loki threatened Thor in Professor Xavier's mutant school on Midgard. Not that Loki hadn't stood up to them before. He had, and apparently they hadn't totally beat the fight out of him, even after all these years. He'd actually hit Thor with Jotun ice, and Thor has a feeling Loki would do it again in a heartbeat. For centuries, he never would have dared do that.

"The Man of Iron inquired if Odin tried to make Sleipnir his steed."

"Aye." Heimdall confirms. "Sleipnir was the fastest, smartest, most powerful horse in all the Nine."

"Do you jest? He was the fastest and strongest in all the Nine? He does seem quite intelligent for a horse, but he is not strong..." Thor trails off, feeling stupid. The lower dungeons would leave even Thor emaciated and frail. Sleipnir being in poor shape now is undoubtedly a result of that.

"He was much much stronger then than he is now." Heimdall answers almost sadly.

"So Sleipnir was a magnificent horse, and Odin tried to ride him?" Thor asks, shaking his head slightly to get back on topic.

"Sleipnir refused to let Odin ride him, and fought him constantly, often winning." Heimdall continues. Thor can certainly believe that. Sleipnir had shown the same fighting spirit even when Thor was caring for him in Puente Antiguo, and at Xavier's School.

"So Father banished him to the dungeon for not submitting to being his steed." Thor growls, clenching a fist around Mjolnir's handle. Thunder crashes, and he quickly tries to reign in his temper. It won't do for all of Asgard to know he's angry about something.
Surely letting Odin ride him would be preferable to wasting away in the dark and filth, yet from how Sleipnir had acted towards Thor, the horse hadn't regretted bucking or kicking Odin. Or does Sleipnir even remember Odin riding him?

"Did you know that the serpent... Jormungand- was on Midgard, and real?" Thor asks. It wasn't as hard to learn that as when he'd discovered Sleipnir's reality in the dungeons, but it is slightly odd to think that nobody noticed the snake was more than a charmed necklace until today.

"I do not turn my gaze on Midgard often." Heimdall answers cryptically, and Thor's going to take that as a no. "I knew there was a giant serpent who could circle all of Midgard, but I did not know he was connected to Loki in any way until they found each other."

"Was Loki his mother, too?" Thor asks, remembering Loki described them as his Monster Family. Had he been turned into a snake and a wolf as well?

"I know not how the others came to be." Heimdall answers.

Thor's actually kind of glad. Yes, he'd asked, but in retrospect he's not sure he wants to know. Sleipnir's origin was bad enough. What if the others' are even worse? What further atrocities could his father have committed?

"Yet you know where they are?" Thor asks hopefully. Well, three of them are already accounted for. Hadn't Heimdall said earlier that Hel did indeed rule over Helheim? So it's only Fenrir who is unaccounted for.

Thor really hopes the wolf isn't suffering as much as Sleipnir had been, although he really wouldn't be surprised if he was.

"He was in the dungeons once, was he not?" Thor asks, but if Heimdall had known this, wouldn't he have said something earlier?

"I know not."

Thor recalls Tyr's tales of losing his hand to a huge wolf, who must have been Fenrir. Loki had demanded to know what happened to the wolf, but then Odin summoned him, and he'd stopped asking afterwards.

Thor gets the sinking suspicion that, like when he'd stopped asking where Sleipnir was, Odin had done something to Loki's mind.

"Do you know where Fenrir is now? I plan on getting him to Loki, as I did with Sleipnir." Thor says. "Tony Stark told me that he is in a cave." It's a good thing Thor remembered to say that.

"That is useful." Heimdall's golden eyes stare at some part of some realm that Thor cannot see. "How did the Man of Iron know this?"

"Fenrir told him." Thor says, and then realizes he should probably elaborate. "It seems he can communicate with Loki, even across vast distances. Sleipnir could, too."

"That requires a great deal of power." Heimdall muses.

"Where is he?" Thor asks, somewhat impatiently.

"I've been searching Midgard, but even that takes quite a while. I've determined he is not on the continent of Africa."
Since Jormungand was on Midgard, perhaps Fenrir is too? That probably wouldn't be as bad as some other places, except Tony said that Fenrir reported being chained up in the cave.

"Has Odin realized Sleipnir is no longer in the dungeons?" Thor hopes the answer is no. If he does know, will he try to go to Midgard and take Sleipnir back? What would he even do? Put him back in that terrible dungeon?

Thor isn't going to let his father get his hands back on the poor horse again. Thor will fight his father himself if he has to.

"The Allfather has been busy with other matters." Heimdall says, and his face doesn't change, but Thor swears there's satisfaction in the man's golden, all-seeing eyes. "I believe you already saw how people were reacting to the news you let slip."

Right. Thor had accidentally revealed to his closest friends that Odin is a magic-user, and of course the word had spread around the realm. Perhaps there have even been some attempted usurpations.

After all, most Aesir hadn't been impressed or pleased when they found out. Odin had deceived everyone about it for over a millennia. Thor has a feeling that not even Odin's status as Allfather had changed many people's minds about male-magic users any more than Loki had. After all, until recently, Thor had held the same view about men who used magic not being real men, that the were pathetic and cowardly.

It's still hard to believe that Odin is capable of seidr when he always told Thor that men don't use magic. Men don't use magic in Asgard, except for Loki and, apparently, the Allfather himself. Why had Odin punished and berated Loki severely for doing what he himself was capable of in secret?

Still, even though people are certainly displeased with Odin, Thor seriously doubts his father is getting beaten or whipped for using magic like Loki had been by Odin himself. Nobody's venting their general frustrations on Odin, either, although countless Aesir (including Thor) took out their displeasure on Loki, even when Loki was a small child, less than half the size of Odin or the Einherjar.

Thor realizes he never truly knew his father, any more than he really knew Loki. Both were around for a millennium, and he's still learning new things about them. He really wishes he wasn't learning these things about Odin.

"Are the citizens revolting?" Thor asks. Many of the Asgardian citizens had been quite displeased to learn that their leader performs magic and is therefore argr and not a real man, in their eyes.

"Not yet, but I believe many of them are considering it. They do not want a man who is argr on the throne." Heimdall answers, eyes still staring off into other realms. Or perhaps they're searching the corners of Asgard.

"Jotunheim." Heimdall says suddenly.

Thor frowns, confused. "What of it?"

"Fenrir is in Jotunheim."

"You found him that quickly?" Thor was expecting to have to wait a while, perhaps a few days. Even with all the gatekeeper can see, how had he managed to find the wolf within minutes?

Thor's first thought is to simply head to Jotunheim immediately, swinging Mjolnir and battling Jotuns until he frees Fenrir. After all, those monsters have the wolf chained up somewhere,
probably much like the horrible lower dungeons below these halls.

He reminds himself that it's not as if the Jotnar chained Fenrir up. Wouldn't that have been Odin, after Fenrir was in the dungeons? Isn't Odin the monster who forcibly had Loki impregnated, who had magic himself but made it so everyone tormented Loki relentlessly for the same thing?

"Is he starved, too?"

"He appears quite strong. It seems they've been feeding him. But he is indeed chained up."

Well, at least there's that.

Thor pauses just as he opens his mouth to command Heimdall to open the Bifrost and let him into Jotunheim.

The last time he'd gone to Jotunheim had been after the Jotuns invaded during what would have been his coronation. They'd just spoiled it, and he was out for revenge. He and his friends had knocked Loki unconscious and dragged him along, intending to dump their worthless prince there. At the time, Thor had been sure it was Loki who let the Frost Giants in to spoil his coronation.

Once in their realm, he'd started a huge battle after being called "princess" and Heimdall had apparently saved Loki from getting killed in the skirmish.

Odin had been furious with Thor after that and banished him to Midgard. Thor had wondered if any of that had something to do with the fact he'd tried to trade Loki away. That was the whole reason Father had taken Loki as a baby, after all, and there was no reason to keep him anymore. He'd become even more useless than usual, or so Thor thought.

If he goes to Jotunheim alone now, he definitely will not be welcomed, and will almost certainly be outnumbered. Fighting the Jotnar will not help rescue Fenrir.

Thor's next thought is to bring the Warriors Three and Sif, but they'd be just as unwelcome as he is.

"If I may make a suggestion, my liege, perhaps the Queen will assist you with distracting the Allfather, or perhaps even accompanying you. She holds no ill will towards the Jotnar." Heimdall says. "Furthermore, you may want to bring some of your fellow Avengers."

Chapter End Notes

I actually sort of liked Ragnarok's version of where Fenrir was better, but I had been setting this up before I saw that movie, and this is AU anyways. Also, I never pictured Fenrir as a black wolf like in the movie, but that was pretty awesome.

So I've delved into original fiction, and am writing a story about two single dads raising kids with autism and cerebral palsy. Considering you guys are reading this, I'm assuming you're at least mildly interested in disorders or disabilities? Or maybe not. Anyway, if that story sounds at all interesting to you, feel free to check out Fingers Fly. I'm hoping to write something for Valentine's Day in that universe, which means I'll have less time to work on this.
Works inspired by this one: [Sweet Child of Mine](#) by [Ardeejay](#)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!