

## Follow Me (I Will Follow You)

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# Follow Me (I Will Follow You)

by [STARSDidathing](#)

## Summary

In many centuries of life, Loki Liesmith has never had a follower like the other gods—until one day, he gains one. A mortal who is brash and bold and hardly believes in gods. He is someone who will change the course of Loki's life in more ways than Loki could have possibly imagined, because devotion can be a dangerous thing, especially when given not just by a mortal to a god, but by a god to his mortal, as well.

## Notes

Now, I have some good news! You have a long fic from me! Hooray! And I really hope you like it 😊

But on a slightly-not-so-good-news note, this is my second last Frostiron story. 😞 Yes, I'm afraid the time is fast approaching for my final fic! My aim is to post it on the 30th of December in preparation for wrapping everything (comment replies, etc) up by the 31st/end of the year.

So, this is some advanced warning about that. I'll be sure to gush more about FI in the notes of that fic, so I'll leave that until then.

For now, enjoy this fic! The formatting in it is a bit... unusual, but I needed a distinction between the present and the past. I hope it will still read okay!

Enjoy! And Happy Holidays! 💚💚

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

“Brother, brother!”

Thor’s shout could be heard even with the doors to Loki’s chambers shut—in fact, it probably carried to most of Asgard. Loki sighed tiredly and put down his quill, knowing he would get no further work done until his brother had said his piece.

The door to his outer chambers flew open with a loud bang. His eye twitched and for a moment he almost wanted to flick seidr at the man, remind him why entering the space of a mage uninvited was *not* a wise decision.

“Loki!” Thor called, oblivious to his considerations. “You must come! Have you not heard?”

Seeing no point in delaying the inevitable, nor rising from his desk, Loki merely pitched his voice to carry, “Heard what, Thor?”

“They have done it!” he exclaimed. “A mortal has done it!”

*Mortal.*

Loki’s breast immediately ached, sorrow rising up sharp and intense. He only just managed to repress it; his hand trembling around the quill for a brief moment.

While years had passed, talk of the mortals, followers and *Midgard* forever highlighted the constant weight over his heart, and although it tore at him, he knew better than to let anyone see it.

“Done what, Thor?” He asked tiredly.

The Thunderer entered his bedchamber. Loki glanced over from the corner of his eye. Thor was wearing his battle armour and beaming. An unusual sight, not because Thor didn’t dress that way often, but because the man had mentioned *mortals*. He rarely cared for them beyond tallying his prayers for the day.

“They have died for honour and glory, Loki, but unlike so many before him the Norns have blessed them. They have deemed him a *true hero*, brother.”

Loki’s eyes widened in genuine shock. He turned to face the other entirely.

“Impossible,” he said. “The Norns have not seen fit to give Godhood to a mortal in an age.”

“Today, they *have*,” Thor insisted, his eyes bright with excitement. “He is on his way to Asgard. Everyone is going to be there to greet him, even father. There will be a feast of honour.” Thor’s expression gained a touch of smugness. “And the god of his choice will be as honoured as the hero.”

Loki’s expression tightened. Where once those words would have made him bitter or spiteful—to hear how one more mortal praised *Thor* above all others—they now just... *hurt*. They tore at his heart in ways that Thor would never understand.

And as much as he wished to spurn the whole situation... it truly had been an age, and no one would forgive him his absence from the festivities.

“Then I suppose I shall come to see this grand hero, and the lucky god.”

Thor closed the space to clap him on the shoulder, still remaining oblivious to his mood.

“Hurry, brother. We do not want to miss the arrival.”

Loki rose slowly, but Thor was already striding out of his rooms, expecting him to follow. Loki sighed and for a moment, he almost turned his mind to Midgard, but he stopped himself before he could complete it. Looking at that realm, even briefly, would only make the pain worse.

*Perhaps this former mortal will be a distraction?*

Loki smiled without humour. He doubted even a glowing, godly former mortal would be able to hold his attention for long. *Nothing* had been able to hold his attention, not for a decade, not since he'd given up the one thing he'd ever truly wanted—ever truly *loved*.

But, to love a mortal was the greatest folly and after the last fifteen years, none knew it better than him.

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He had always been considered an unusual god. He had dominion over an odd array of titles; lies, mischief and chaos. He was the god no mortal welcomed into their home. He was the god with *no* followers.

Oh, he got the occasional prayer now and then from a mortal; a warrior hoping for chaos to spread and allow him to slip into an enemy city undetected. The hope of a mischievous child that didn't want to be caught by their parents. They were absent whispers and hopes of benevolence. That was normal. *Every* god had those.

But a follower who wore your tokens, gave you offerings and chose *you* as their patron? Well, for Loki the Liesmith, a follower was impossible to find.

The other gods would speak at length of their hordes of mortals and tease him about his lack of disciples. To the crowded room of Aesir he would always crow, “*Why boast of one or twenty with a particular perchant? All mortals are prone to lies, mischief and chaos. I am woven into their very hearts.*”

It was easy to shrug off their taunting and smugness with disinterest and declare he had no interest in paying attention to a supplicant eager for gifts and favours. In front of all of Asgard he could be dismissive and mocking... and yet, a part of him had still *wanted* a follower. He sought someone to appreciate his dominion and seek guidance from *him*. Someone who would hold pride in lies and chaos and see his influence and tricks for the beauty and genius they were.

And one day, someone *did*.

When the prayer struck him, he was in his rooms. He gasped and almost fell over at feeling an *offering*. He could hear the coins hitting the shrine and could feel in his bones that the *shrine* and all its tokens were handmade by the one who was praying to him. His *seidr* surged through him and Loki was appearing in the room before he'd fully thought the notion through.

He was shrouded from the eyes of the mortal as he stood behind the man's shrine. It was coated in green fabric with carvings of wolves, horned helmets, snakes and daggers. All items he was associated with. His *name* was scrawled in the centre, the coins half covering the lettering.

When the mortal looked up, Loki caught mischievous brown eyes and saw a sly smirk curl lips surrounded by facial hair. Loki looked at the mortal. *His mortal. His follower*

"From one liar to another," the mortal said. "Thanks for all the times I've gotten away with more than I should have."

And just like that, he nodded to his shrine and left the room. The mortal didn't ask for anything. He didn't plead or request assistance, he merely *thanked* him for actions Loki had not had any sway over.

Loki reached down and took one of the coins. He got an instant impression: *Smith. Disbelieving. Amusement. Anthony Stark.*

A creator of weapons amid a room full of chaos. A man who disbelieved the influence and interest of the gods. Someone who had decided of any of the gods to pray to a talented liar with a fondness for fire was his favourite.

*Anthony Stark.*

Loki closed his hand tightly around the coin and grinned.

*From one liar to another, he thought. You have my attention, Anthony Stark.*

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He took to visiting the mortal in the guise of shadows or the eye of the raven perched on the smith's windowsill. Anthony Stark was oblivious but chattered to himself while working at his forge.

He also tossed coins and tokens on the shrine every few weeks. If he noticed the occasional item disappearing, the mortal made no comment.

Loki watched him and *learned* him. His follower was intelligent and talented. He far outshone the mortals around him. He was young, perhaps thirty Midgardian years, but bright beyond his race. Loki was quickly impressed and often amused. It took the course of a few months for him to become *charmed*.

A thousand mortals the other gods had to their name. A thousand useless, mindless souls with little to offer but pitiful prayers. *Anthony* was far greater. He was a *curiosity* and

Loki was so rarely ensnared by anyone, mortal or god.

In fact, he often played with the first coin he took, running it over his knuckles or twirling it between his fingers as he sat in his rooms upon Asgard, or at a dinner that had long grown boring.

Only his mother noticed the trinket, but made no comment, merely offering a raised eyebrow—but Loki did not explain. This mortal, this *Anthony Stark*, was his and he did not want another god, even his mother, turning their gaze to him.

And it was because he was keeping such a sharp eye on the mortal, that he felt the moment something changed—or rather, *someone* tried to hurt what was *his*.

Loki stilled upon Asgard, freezing in the middle of a corridor, his mind turning quickly to Midgard and his *seidr* swiftly taking him to the mortal realm. He found himself in a forest, a well-worn path for merchant travellers, but right now, his mortal was with another. The darker-skinned man was sporting a cut above his eye. Anthony was in front of him, equally bruised and bloodied, but they were outnumbered, and the men—rough looking and undoubtedly bandits—had knives.

They were criminals intent on their prize, yes, but Loki also felt a distinct, pointed anger from them—more than likely, his mortal had used his sharp wit and refused to concede his coin. But regardless of the man's taunting words, Loki did not intend to let *his* follower come to harm.

It was the act of a moment to offer a silent whistle; to give furred feet a burst of speed and come to the edge of the road, growling low and hungry. The mortals all spun to address the approaching wolves, but Loki gave them the blessing of agility. They avoided the knives, they cornered the bandits, *ignored* the two mortals.

The darker male grabbed his friend, trying to get him to run, but Anthony hesitated; he stared at the wolves, only to flick his gaze around the space as if searching for something else. Loki watched his mortal as he was pulled away; running to the safety of the sunlight and his village. Loki stayed until Anthony was out of sight before departing Midgard and leaving the wolves to their unexpected feast.

Loki would have expected that to be the end of it, but merely an hour or-so later, Loki felt something far more potent than *coins* on his shrine. He felt blood—*Anthony's* blood. He appeared in a blink, standing invisible behind the shrine, but looking into the slightly battered form of his mortal.

“Wolves, huh?” Anthony said. “Funny how they appeared out of nowhere, at a time of year they don't hunt, and ignored me and Rhodey.”

Anthony's thumb moved from his carved name to one of the designs upon the cloth—a *wolf*.

“*Funny*, that I'm about to die and I think, ‘*It would be good to have a little help right now*’. I didn't say your name, but I probably should have been more specific. So, should

I say, *thank you*, Loki? Or do you prefer a different offering? What do you get a trickster who saved your life? It's not in any of the scriptures I've read."

He flashed a smile, pulling at the cut on his lip. He didn't seem to notice. He reached into his pocket, pulled out some new coins, he rubbed one, further smearing his blood. He flicked it, toward the shrine, but Loki reached out, unable to help it, unable to *resist*.

The coin was caught in his hand, invisible to the mortal, seeming to disappear in mid-air.

Anthony's eyes widened and his mouth dropped open ever-so-slightly, before abruptly, he huffed a laugh. His brown eyes, so sharp and *mischievous*, filled with a smug glee that Loki could not help *adoring*.

"Well, what do you know, I picked the god who gives house calls. Always knew you were the best out of the whole bunch."

Loki felt his own smug delight burn through him at being chosen—openly *preferred* over all the others in the Golden Realm.

And while it was not the done thing, certainly not something to be given so *simply*, Loki could not resist.

Normally, it took grand feats for any god to show themselves even *slightly* to a follower—and usually only to temple priests and priestesses, but Loki had never done what he was *meant* to do.

And this was his follower, his *devotee*. A mortal who only barely believed in gods, but believed enough to give his time to *him*. The mortal who was now flicking his gaze over the space Loki occupied as if trying to see some hint of him—some other glimmer that he was *present* beyond plucking the bloodied coin from mid-air.

Loki could not show his form—to do so would be deadly to the mortal, but he allowed the shadows in the room to draw to him, to give him the rough outline of a shape. The mortal didn't back away, didn't look *afraid*, he looked fascinated.

He projected to the mortal's mind, "*I would so hate for an interesting mortal to be killed so soon.*"

Anthony grinned, looking so charmingly *arrogant* at his compliment and as much as Loki wanted to stay and see what else this mortal might do, he knew he had already done far more than he should—so, he let the shadows disperse and took the light of all the candles with him. He saw Anthony scramble for a fresh match, but he left the room and the mortal.

But he would be back, he was far too intrigued to leave the man, especially with Anthony now aware of his attention—because, knowing what he did now, how would Anthony address him and his shrine in the future?

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Thor was waiting for him in the hallway when he came out of his chambers. The Thunderer remained energetic with glee. His battle armour seeming to glow under the light of the torches.

“Are you not excited, brother? A true mortal hero.” Thor slapped his back. “Father intends to grant him dominion over a gift of his choosing. There are still many not held by any of us.” Thor laughed loudly. “It must be a great honour, to become a god to be prayed to. Why, only days before he was praying to someone upon Asgard!”

Loki tried to force a smile, but it was a bitter grimace. His hand twitched, wanting to go to his neck, but he did not wish to give away the cause of his heartache.

“I’m sure it will be a spectacle,” Loki said blandly.

Thor rolled his eyes and gently shook him. “I know you care little for the mortals, Loki, but this is not some new follower to add to the hundreds. Even *you* must be excited by this.”

*Hundreds*, he thought bitterly. *To you they are but interchangeable trinkets. To me, I would give it all to have the one I want back.*

But for all the words sat on his tongue, poisonous and agonised... Thor knew nothing of his feelings or of what he had done. Only Frigga knew the extent of his mistakes and the consequences that weighed upon his breast.

Thor was merely... Thor; full of jubilation over someone who had proven himself in the only way Thor would care about; in battle, might and honour. A *true hero*, was a new brother to add to his revolving group of godly friends.

It would be one more face at the table until he either grew bored, or the new god did something to irritate him. The shine would wear off and the former-mortal would become part of the ever-golden scenery upon Asgard.

But to *him*, the former-mortal would be a new reminder of Midgard—a face that would always hurt.

And yet, despite all he could say, all he *wanted* to say, Loki didn’t. He merely indulged the Thunderer, the way he was expected to.

“Do you intend to wait here arguing when there is a new hero to meet?”

It galvanised Thor who started tugging him down the hallway. Thor also started to recount all he had heard of the grand deeds the mortal had performed—saving countless villagers, avoiding temptation, battling beasts of legend, wearing armour that was rumoured to be forged with more than just metal.

Loki only listened with half an ear as he reached carefully into his shirt, grasping the leather cord and drawing his hand down to clasp the trinket he had never taken off in a decade—a golden coin with a single hole to thread it through the leather.

The first coin that his Anthony had ever given to him.



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After saving his mortal and revealing his presence, Loki continued to visit him, only now, Anthony eyed every creature near his abode with a deep suspicion. He also spoke as if Loki was present, whether he was there or not.

At first, Loki had thought the mortal had an unnerving knack for sensing him, but it became obvious that it wasn't the case. For when he appeared one afternoon, it was to find the mortal halfway through a conversation with no one. It seemed the man simply spoke that way regardless—as if he had decided that, if he could not depict that Loki was present, he would just assume that he was.

It was, once again, *charming*.

The mortal also continued to leave offerings, moving from the traditional to the utterly *bizarre*. He received a leather cord around a group of sticks at one point, along with a note.

*“From the trees near our first meeting, where you saved my life by feeding bandits to wolves. Was that chaotic or just because you wanted to? I’m not saying I approve of murder by wolf, but at least they weren’t hungry and I wasn’t dead.”*

Loki took the leather tie and left the twigs to spell out ‘*wanted*’. He was rewarded by Anthony finding it in the morning and laughing loudly. He also nailed the distorted wood to the wall above the shrine. Loki shook his head but smiled every time he saw it.

Truthfully, Loki had not had any real plans on revealing himself again, but it was nearly a month after saving the mortal that he could not resist talking to him once more.

Anthony had been in his workshop with a patron and Loki had been hovering nearby, observing the conversation and seeing Anthony’s growing frustration.

The man—a boorish and utterly tedious individual—was attempting to swindle him.

Loki did not have to peer very hard to see the patron’s fondness for food and liquor; it made a follower of Volstagg’s easy to spot.

He stepped directly behind his mortal and whispered into his mind, ‘*A follower of Volstagg should not cheat thusly. Why, did that god not denounce all those who lie? Saying they to be as low and fiendish as Loki the Liesmith? The one whom has tricked him far too frequently?*’

Anthony briefly tensed and there was a beat before he remarked, completely forgoing subtlety, “Do you recall the tale of when the god Volstagg was cheated and denounced all those who behave in a similar fashion?”

The man immediately flushed red and spluttered, making Loki smirk. And while it still took another ten minutes of blustering, the patron did finally settle on a price that was fair and equal. He then scurried out the door and, Loki was sure, to his shrine to offer penance.

“See,” Anthony said into the silence that fell, “this is why, if you’re going to lie, you pick a *liar* for a god. At least then you have someone to aspire to and admire.”

Loki chuckled, and rather than hide it, he let the sound reach Anthony’s ears, showing his amusement and pleasure. Anthony grinned and turned, managing by accident to end up facing him directly. In fact, had the mortal been any taller, they would have been staring into each other’s eyes.

‘*Do you believe flattery will garner more of my favour?*’ Loki questioned.

“Hasn’t it already?” Anthony rebutted, that same sly smirk curling his lips.

‘*You are bold for a mortal,*’ Loki remarked, stepping closer and circling him.

Anthony could not see him, but he gave the man an impression of his movements. Anthony, whether through boldness or foolish trust, didn’t turn to track him.

“I think you *like* that I’m bold.”

‘*Perhaps.*’ He stopped behind him. ‘*But perhaps I may grow tired of a Midgardian who does not know his place?*’

Anthony finally looked over his shoulder, managing again to meet Loki’s gaze.

“The myths about you would say otherwise.”

‘*Myths are not always accurate.*’

“Well, prove them wrong.” He turned to face him directly. “You’re here, I’m listening. Tell me how to keep *my god* happy.”

Loki’s breath caught, the weight of that phrase hitting hard—because, despite having a shrine, despite giving him offerings and praying, Anthony had never called him that. Never, specifically said, *my god*.

It was as intoxicating as the rush he gained from performing a complex spell for the first time; seidr and success coursing through his veins, filling him with power and pride.

Loki’s hand itched and before he could think—before he realised the *danger* of the action, Loki extended his hand and curled his fingers around the mortal’s chin. Anthony’s breath caught and his eyes widened.

Loki could feel such warmth, such *life* under his fingers. It was different to touching another on Asgard; they were strong, powerful, *familiar*. They were all the same and didn’t electrify him like this. The mortal was just that, *mortal*, but so filled with energy, and *fire*.

In that moment, all Loki wanted was to be *closer*, to get under this mortal’s skin, to *understand* him; the follower who chose *Loki* and called him *my god*.

*'Do as you are,'* Loki finally murmured, *'and you will keep my gaze upon you, Anthony Stark.'*

"But will that make you happy?" Anthony asked, sounding a little breathless.

His eyes were still wide, his pulse fluttering when Loki's thumb moved down to his throat, but it was not fear, no, this mortal—someone as easy to crush as an ant beneath his boot—was not afraid. He was... excited. The touch and attention of a god was *thrilling* to him.

*So arrogant, Loki thought. So thoroughly greedy for attention. What a prideful little mortal, you are.*

Loki's thumb absently travelled along his jaw.

*'Happiness is not what I ask of you,'* he admitted.

"What do you ask?"

*'A follower; mine alone. Give me that, Anthony Stark, and you will remain in what good graces a liar and trickster might have.'*

Anthony smiled brightly. "I never asked for *good* graces. Chaotic ones, though? Yeah, I'll happily stay in those."

*'Careful,'* Loki chastised. *'Do not honey your words too strongly to the Liesmith.'*

"Oh, I know to only tell the truth to *you*, Loki." His eyes danced. "I wouldn't be so foolish to compliment my god if I didn't mean it."

Loki huffed another laugh.

*'You will be a dangerous one, I think. Do you intend to make your own tongue silver to match your god's?'*

"If he doesn't mind a mortal fashioning himself in a liesmith's image?"

Loki tapped the mortal's chin, still smiling at his brashness.

*'You are lucky I am fond of you. Other gods might strike you where you stand.'*

Anthony, the fearless, *arrogant* mortal, only leant forward and *into* his touch.

"Other gods aren't worth the time and effort of emulating."

Loki finally shoved the mortal back; a gentle action that made him stumble but not enough to fall or hurt. Anthony frowned, the expression more of a pout as he darted his gaze, clearly trying to pinpoint Loki's location.

Although Loki's hand still tingled from the touch of Anthony's skin, he did not reach out again.

*'Away with you,'* he murmured.

"Actually, *you* came *here*," Anthony brazenly contradicted.

And although it was true, Loki did not intend to let the mortal know the extent of his interest.

*'And you are not my only reason to visit Midgard.'*

"But I'm the best one, clearly."

Loki rolled his eyes, but his fondness remained. It was enough for him to conjure the bloodied coin Anthony had presented him with a month prior. He flipped it through the air and Anthony caught it with a frown. The coin itself had a permanent stain of red, Loki had made sure the blood would remain and had also carved a subtle marker with seidr.

*'Consider it a blessing,'* Loki told him. *'A little luck any time you offer a lie.'*

It was also a powerful token, but Loki would not tell the mortal that. He already had a connection through the man's devotion, but this would sharpen it. No matter where he was, no matter if he was deep within the palace or in the middle of spellcasting; if Anthony needed him, *prayed* for him with that coin, he would hear it.

Loki could also, if he really tried, talk to the mortal as he did now but over a greater distance, even skywalk into his dreams.

Anthony ran his thumb over it and Loki shivered when it brushed his marking. The mortal looked up, meeting his gaze for the third time and making Loki believe it might not be as coincidental as he'd first assumed.

"With you on my side." Anthony flipped the coin, catching it in his palm and grinning. "I don't think I'm going to need luck."

Loki smiled back, and for the second time, he let the man see an impression of it; his amusement and fondness for a uniquely engaging mortal.

And perhaps, if he'd been sensible, that might have been the moment when Loki realised that he was in trouble, but instead, all he'd felt was the desire for *more*.

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Loki didn't understand the true risks he was flirting with, not then, and not in the months after—because, Anthony was merely a mortal. An intelligent, entertaining and engaging one, yes, but nothing dangerous.

He was just enjoying having a follower, a devotee who called him *my god* and left him gifts upon an altar. Who wore his token as a badge of pride, hanging from a necklace

and resting in the centre of his chest.

In the four months since bestowing his gift, he'd enjoyed the pleasure of more frequent thoughts slipping from Anthony to reach his mind. Absent little half prayers and conversations that he wished to share. Loki honestly took to visiting him far more often, and usually, to engage in discussions, but they were not the typical ones that might have been expected.

Anthony spoke of what he was making and creating, the annoyances of the people in the village, the friendship he had carved with a few specific mortals. Tales that amused him and washed over Loki like a balm to any frayed nerves he might be carrying.

Anthony also asked questions and Loki found himself answering; short responses at first, but soon turning into stories of the other gods. He would speak of what mischief he had created, grinning when he realised the only tales Anthony wished to know were the ones with *him* in a starring role.

The stories no others wanted were the ones that his mortal craved.

He knew it was not normal behaviour for a god and a follower—that no other god would *allow* someone to so shamelessly consider them *equal*—but when had he ever done what was *standard* or *right*?

It was not something that he had expected to be called on, but when his mother invited him to their weekly tea in her rooms, Frigga wasted no time in questioning him about his new habits.

“You have been quite distracted of late, Loki. One can barely find you in the palace these last months.”

Loki shrugged. “I have acquired a passing interest.”

“Oh?” She asked, pouring their tea. “It cannot be too fleeting; it has held you in its grips quite strongly.”

“My interests come and go.”

“Well, do tell me, what is so interesting about a Midgardian coin?”

Loki stilled, repressing the twitch in his fingers that made him want to pluck at the very item sitting within his pocket.

“Can't one have an item to utilise when they grow bored?”

“Of course, Loki,” she agreed, putting down the pot. “But that has long been occupied by your seidr. I'm surprised such a simple item could interest you. Unless of course, it has some greater significance?”

Loki shot her a look. “You are not being subtle.”

She smiled faintly, sipping her tea for a moment before lowering it.

“I learnt long ago that you much preferred the longer road if you were ever to offer me answers.”

“Answers, *I* learned long ago, you usually possessed already.”

It was a blessing and curse when talking to someone with foresight.

“Not everything is given to me, as you know. The future has many avenues and no one path is clear at any one point.”

Loki sighed. He picked up his cup but slumped back in his seat. He sipped it, collecting his thoughts before finally answering, “I have a follower. I suppose I am rather interested in the exchange considering it is my first one.”

Frigga’s expression did not lighten or grow pleased as he might have expected. She was the only one who knew much he had secretly longed for such a mortal. She *should* have been happy for him, but instead, she watched him with a thoughtful, weighted stare.

“I do hope you are not getting too invested in them, Loki.”

“I am well aware they are mortal and will not live long,” Loki replied, ignoring the twinge of displeasure it brought. “I have not forgotten the very aspect that defines them.”

But Frigga shook her head. “It is not that. Devotion can be a powerful thing, Loki, and to have a singular point for such focus? It might cloud your judgement.”

Loki scoffed. “I’m not *clouded* by anything. He is mortal, he is fallible. He merely has good taste and reasonable wit.” He smiled faintly. “He also has little care for any gifts I might bestow. He knows I am *real*, but considers me an amusement and source of pride. He does not *believe* as so many others do, and yet, he prays to me all the same. He is a puzzle, and I do enjoy unravelling those.”

“And what of when you solve the puzzle of him?”

Loki frowned, giving the matter actual thought. Right now, Anthony was entertaining and worth his time—if that changed, what then? He would still grant the man some manner of favouritism for being his first follower, certainly. But he doubted he would offer more. After all, he had discarded many pursuits in the past when they ceased to hold his focus.

“I will cease to pay close attention to him.”

“Truly?” Frigga persisted.

Loki raised an eyebrow. “You doubt it? I am hardly known for lingering long on something.”

“You have your seidr,” his mother insisted. “No one could doubt your commitment to it.”

“I hardly see how they are similar.”

“You may be surprised, Loki,” she murmured, her gaze distant and looking towards things he could not fathom. “Merely heed my warning. I would not wish to see you hurt.”

Loki repressed the urge to snort derisively. Rather, he inclined his head in respect for his mother’s words, but he truly did doubt their likelihood. For how, after all, could a mortal harm him?

There were numerous gods and goddesses with thousands of followers. They had not been harmed by a mortal's devotion, nor had they been hurt by the few they gave extra attention too—why would he be any different?

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Even now, a decade after that first conversation with Frigga, Loki didn’t know if he should have put greater stock in her warnings. Should he have stepped back from Anthony? Distanced himself from the mortal realm and never given into his curiosity?

But then he would have missed so many things—*memories* that although they hurt him now, he could not bring himself to wish away. He could not bring himself to regret the things that had changed his life so entirely.

Even when it hurt, how could he regret falling in love?

“Are you even listening, brother?” Thor demanded.

Loki blinked, letting his gaze and attention come back to Asgard and the Thunderer. They were at the doors to the palace, the courtyard empty but for a few restless Einherjar forced to remain on guard duty.

“Apologies,” Loki murmured. “I was merely wondering about this... hero.”

“Aye,” Thor agreed. “There is still much for us to know.” He laughed boisterously. “So let us hurry, we must get to the front of the crowd! I will be the first to congratulate him!”

Thor bounded down the stairs three at a time, but Loki followed at a more sedate pace. He plucked the cord from beneath his shirt, letting the coin rest in the palm of his hand.

He allowed himself what he rarely did—he thought of Anthony.

His sly smirk after he’d boldly quipped some new tease. His brown eyes brightening with laughter and affection over Loki’s response. The soft feel of his hair as Loki carded his fingers through it—the weight of the mortal against his chest.

Longing crested in his chest and oh, he *wanted* him—he wanted to reach out and touch, to drag the mortal close and kiss him; to feel that scrape of facial hair, to hear the mortal’s sigh

of pleasure. He wanted to do what he'd sworn he would never do again; go to Midgard, seek out Anthony and see what he was doing, who he was with—if he had gained a loving mortal family; forgotten about him the way he'd insisted the mortal did.

But what would be worse? Knowing that Anthony had gained a life without him or finding that he'd never moved on?

And *that* was the sole cause of any regret Loki might feel, that in doing what he had, he'd ruined the life of Anthony Stark. He'd taken the attention and affection that should have gone to mortal woman and woven it around himself. He'd interfered the way gods were not meant to and done untold damage to the man's heart.

But perhaps this former mortal would be the push he needed? The reason to turn his gaze to the mortals—to ask, perhaps, how the mortal realm had been in the last decade? He doubted this new hero knew of his Anthony, but then, maybe he did?

Thor mentioned some finely crafted armour and Anthony was a talented weaponsmith, in fact, with all the blessings Loki had bestowed over him, it would be little wonder that his craft would outshine all but the gods.

It left him with a twist to his gut, something neither excited nor nervous. Instead, it bordered on dread over what he might see or hear.

Loki squeezed the coin tighter, the shape cutting into his palm until he forcibly let it go and slid it back beneath his shirt. He continued out of the palace despite every step feeling difficult. The celebrations were already in full swing; garlands hanging from every house; each man, woman and child in their finery.

It was as if the Norns themselves had come to visit not a former mortal—but, this was a rare feat and everyone would want to provide the best impression. This mortal might be a god now, but the Midgardian had prayed to them in the years before and they had to show their *best* to him. Many Aesir would want a spot at his side; to hear his tales, and boast if they were so fortunate as to be his chosen god or goddess. For what greater honour then to have been the one to inspire a mortal to become a true hero? What greater *pleasure* than to be able to laud such a thing before the realms? But Loki could think of many things that were better, and they all centred around having one person beside him.

Loki sighed and for a moment, he closed his eyes. He envisioned his mortal as he'd last seen him; not the last moments, no, that pain was too great—but when he had last appeared in Anthony's abode and was gifted his smile and his touch.

That was the moment Loki thought of as the realm celebrated around him, pushing him ever closer to the bifrost where the former mortal would appear and be welcomed. The hero would face Odin, Thor, Frigga—all the gods most beloved by the mortals, and he would have to be there too, standing in the shadows and observing it all unfold. Loki the Liesmith; god of lies, mischief and chaos. Despised by many but beloved and followed by one.

And as much as Loki wished it, he did not let himself linger on Anthony's prayers—because that was the other thing he had long done. He had severed the bond that allowed him to hear



his mortal; for how else would he have been able to give him up?

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Months passed with further conversations, but also the bolstered prayers from Anthony's token.

Loki knew that other gods would dislike a mortal's words sliding into their ears. They would be annoyed at the presumption and irritated by the interruption. Loki, by comparison, adored having Anthony's thoughts when he couldn't be on Midgard to hear them in person.

He enjoyed the way even absent phrases would be whispered to him. No longer would he miss conversations because he was not around, but rather, any time Anthony directed something at him, his *seidr* allowed it to traverse the realms to reach him.

It meant he heard him multiple times a day. The inanest things were said, making him feel as if the man was by his side, prattling about everything and nothing. It allowed Loki to visit, already knowing the turn of the man's mood—already knowing the gifts he might be bestowed before they ever landed on his shrine.

It was why Loki breathed his own blessings in turn; speaking to the fire of his forge, encouraging it to blaze strongly and twine deftly around the man's metal. It was the only true way he could help the man in his craft—but he also added protection runes to the man's home, scratching them into the wood of his doorway while the mortal slept.

It seemed to take little time at all before over a year had passed in conversations and visits. The mortal smiled whenever he advised of his appearance, chuckled when he told a story, used any hints Loki gave to aid in conversing with his customers.

Loki found the whole affair to be a pleasant way to spend his time—a place to go when things became too frustrating upon Asgard. His mortal could always be counted on to lift his spirits, encourage his good mood and make him forget all that Asgard had done to him.

It was why, when Odin belittled him in front of half the court, taking Thor's *foolish* side and making him wish to *rage*, Loki had disappeared to Midgard.

He'd been hoping for a distracting conversation, but unfortunately, he had not checked the difference in time. He found the house dark and his mortal asleep.

For a moment, Loki was unsure what to do. He was frozen in the man's darkened forge, but rather than venture to the man's room to wake him or return to Asgard or another realm, he looked around and sat atop a desk in the man's forge. It was a spot he had often stood beside; listening to Anthony and observing his many sketches.

This time, he pushed back some items and placed his back to the wall. Loki closed his eyes and breathed in the lingering scent of metal and flame. Sitting here, he could even feel his mortal; the room was infused with his passion and personality. The messy parchments and tools were chaotic, the banked flames still sparked, needing only a

moment to reignite. There was nothing to call upon him in mischief and lies—and yet, Loki knew the man could incite them as easily as breathing.

This space, *Anthony's* space, was as welcoming to him as it was to the mortal.

And so, he sat in silence, letting the home of his follower soothe his frayed nerves and angered mind. Loki didn't realise he had drifted—losing himself to the calming nature of the place—until, “I don't think I'm imagining that.”

Loki's eyes opened, his gaze immediately finding Anthony in the doorway, a candle in hand. The mortal was in a sleep tunic and pants, his hair was messy from rest and he was looking directly at him—or rather, at the table.

Loki had shoved aside most of the items but there were at least two rolls of parchment leaning against him—leaning against *nothing* as far as Anthony could see.

“Am I to assume I have a visitor?” Anthony asked, he quirked a smile and reached under his tunic, pulling at a leather cord and revealing the coin—the *token*. He curled his fist around it and Loki felt a rush of warmth. “Arriving before dawn, Loki? Whatever will my neighbours say!”

*‘That you are a liar, and not to invoke the wrath of Loki Liesmith.’*

Loki drawled the words, endeavouring to present his usual aloofness, but the solitude had softened him, allowing them to fall flat. Anthony frowned, a flicker of concern on his face. He also stepped closer.

“*Did* someone invoke your wrath?” Anthony asked gently. “You don't seem to be in high spirits.”

Loki scoffed. *‘I am rarely in ‘high spirits’.’*

“I like to think you are in *wonderful* spirits after talking to me,” Anthony teased.

Loki almost wanted to smile, but he couldn't quite manage it. Instead, he sighed and let his head tip back further against the wall. It meant his gaze went from the mortal to the roof.

*‘Not even your brashness will incite my good mood tonight, Anthony Stark.’*

And yet, even as he said the words, Loki knew there was a hint of a lie in them. After all, he *had* come here. Of all the places in the Nine Realms he could have retreated to, he chose a place on the mortal realm where someone *would* find him with little effort.

He chose his follower, rather than the privacy of his rooms or the calmness of his mother.

The mortal stopped before him and he shifted his head just enough to see Anthony. He'd put down the candle holder and was continuing to frown; the pucker to his brow deepening.

“I think you’re underestimating me,” Anthony said.

He then glanced at his desk, seeing through Loki before hesitantly raising his hand. Loki’s eyes widened a moment before Anthony brought it down. His palm rested just above Loki’s knee. Loki’s breath caught, but so too did the mortal’s. Anthony’s gaze also jerked up, managing once again to find his.

He *knew* Anthony could not see him, that all that was before him was a wall—and yet, in that moment, Loki so desperately *wanted* to be seen by him. All the mortal had was crude Midgardian drawings to depict what he looked like, and they were rarely accurate—but how could he change it? To glimpse a god, even one sitting at rest on his desk would kill the man. They were not *meant* to look upon those of the Golden Realm.

But then again... there were other ways to *see* someone.

‘*Have you ever fought with your father?*’ Loki enquired.

“All the time,” Anthony murmured. “He hated me, and the feeling was mutual.”

‘*Mine prefers my brother,*’ Loki admitted quietly. ‘*Whom I also I fight with frequently—or rather, I argue and they both dismiss me for I am not but a selfish manipulator intent on gaining nothing but that which benefits me.*’

“I get it,” Anthony said. “It’s hard to make arrogant idiots realise they’re wrong and you’re right.”

It was so unexpected it startled a rough laugh from him.

‘*You insult the Allfather.*’

“I speak the truth.” He quirked a smile. “But, sorry, it’s going against your namesake to do that. I should lie instead, right? Say they know what they’re talking about and you’re totally wrong.”

Another fond smile tugged at his lips and this time; Loki let it form.

‘*You know nothing of what we were speaking.*’

“I know they were going up against my god, and that automatically makes me think you were right and they were wrong.”

Loki chuckled again, and relaxed a little more against the wall. He also realised that, perhaps by accident, the man’s thumb had started to gently stroke his thigh. His gaze flicked down and Loki felt the urge to cover it, to pull the mortal closer.

He did not get this—comfort, acceptance, *warmth* from anyone on Asgard, not even Frigga.

But here was a mortal, a *follower*, who reached for an invisible body to comfort, who always took his side of the story without a second glance or consideration.

Extending his hand, Loki gently touched his fingers to the mortal's chin. Anthony smiled and let him lightly tilt up his head, better meeting the mortal's gaze.

*'I think I am a very lucky god to have your favour, Anthony Stark.'*

Anthony smiled, wide, bright and full of pride. "Trying to make my ego even bigger, Loki?"

*'Perhaps,'* Loki allowed.

*Perhaps you would deserve it,* he also thought but didn't say. *And many other praises for giving your dedication to me.*

"And I thought being visited by a god was as high as I could go," Anthony teased. He also leaned closer, the gap between them shortening. His eyes danced with amusement. "Seems I underestimated how meaningful your compliments can be."

Their faces were so near that Loki swallowed, feeling a surge of something new. He'd always wanted more from the mortal—more attention, more devotion, more *understanding*—but now he craved to disappear the last bit of space between them.

Because if this was another god upon Asgard or any of the other realms, if they were looking at him and saying such sweet, coveted phrases—if they were saying it and he *believed* them, then Loki would have yanked them into his arms.

But this was a mortal.

And he couldn't... they couldn't...

"You know," Anthony murmured, "I get that Thor and Odin have their followers, I really do. Same with all the other gods. But it just seems like a waste of allegiance." He huffed a laugh. "But who am I to complain? The more people picking them means the less picking you. I'm also pretty selfish, I like having all my god's attention."

It was so arrogant, so insufferably *bold*, and Loki wanted it—*yearned* for it. The devotion, the *preference* and *praise*. A charming, smart, handsome mortal whispering words that soothed the pain of Asgard's dismissals and rejections.

Loki leant forward. He closed the distance and pressed his mouth to his mortal's—and in that moment it was *glorious*. It surged through him like a current; the passion and fascination burning within Anthony was right there for him to taste.

And his mortal, his *Anthony*, gasped—but then he kissed back. He pressed forward, hands coming to Loki's shoulders, curling around his armour as he drew himself nearer. Loki's own hand cupped the man's neck, fingers burying in the back of his hair and another palm cupping his waist.

*Mine*, a vicious, possessive part of Loki snarled.

He also pulled, using strength beyond anything of the mortal realm to get the man full against him. Anthony gasped and stumbled but still ended up entirely pressed to his front, his feet off the ground.

Anthony quickly groaned, low in the back of his throat. His fingers tangled in Loki's hair and tugged. Loki hissed out his pleasure, their mouths breaking apart.

"*Loki*," Anthony whispered, his mouth trailing along Loki's jawline. "My god."

Loki's breath caught and his eyes snapped open—the phrase should have been delightful, should have only increased the thrum of desire within his veins, but instead it brought him back to reality. This was a *mortal* in his arms—Anthony's eyes closed and his hands finding him through instinct, rather than an ability to see him. Because to *see* him would be to unravel, disappearing like golden stardust in his hands.

The *last* thing Loki wanted was to see his mortal harmed especially not because of his own selfish desires.

'*Anthony*,' he said, his tone low and firm. '*Enough*.'

Anthony immediately frowned, but didn't pull back. "Enough? We've only just started."

'*No*,' Loki corrected quickly. '*This is ceasing now*.'

His confusion deepened. "Why?"

*Because it is foolish and unwise. You are mortal and I am not. Because I am more invested in you then I should have let myself become.*

'*Because I have said so*,' he said instead, gently pushing to make the man separate from him, but Anthony did not budge. '*Anthony-*'

"That's not a good enough answer," the mortal countered. "And aren't you the patron for doing whatever you want?"

'*This is different*.'

Anthony scoffed. "Hardly. I'm here, I'm willing. What's the problem?"

Loki sighed and gently raised his hand, brushing one fingertip over Anthony's still closed eyelid.

'*That you cannot even look at me?*'

"It's disconcerting to kiss something that isn't visually there. Otherwise, I'd be looking my fill."

'*You would not survive it*.'

"All the more reason to be grateful it's dark."

Loki sighed again, unable to quell all his fondness. ‘*You are being foolish.*’

“Just determined. How else do I get to kiss you again, Loki?”

He flashed a smile, the expression fully of *mischief* and *desire*—and Loki had not been so unashamedly *wanted* by another. The man could have chosen any god or goddess to give his attention, but he had chosen *him*. The mortal could also kiss any mortal whom he wanted—Loki had witnessed the man’s popularity with woman often enough. But, perhaps the man merely wanted to bed a god? And yet, even as he thought it, Loki could not believe it—every touch, every *look*, did not speak of a lie. It spoke of attraction and affection (something that if he was honest, had been there for some time). It meant Loki was powerless to resist it.

*Devotion can be a powerful thing*, he heard his mother’s voice whisper, but it was not enough to sway him. Instead, he gently cupped the mortal’s cheek and tugged him back down.

Their next kiss was softer, but no less intense—and even as Loki gave into the rush of desire and need pulsing through him, a small part of him had to wonder if he was not making a mistake, but it was too late to stop it now.

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He did not actually sleep with the mortal that would be... difficult. It would also expend a large amount of seidr, something that would draw attention to them.

Instead, he took the mortal to his bed chamber, closed the windows and doors, darkened the space with shadows and whispered in his ear. It was easier, after all, to visit a mortal’s dreams.

Anthony accepted willingly, letting words and spellwork sweep him away to a place of half-memories and sensations. Loki too, let his mind skywalk to a different plane; a space where he could still touch, taste and *feel* but without the danger of being seen or of hurting the mortal.

He could also let the mortal see glimmers of him; half-remembered images of midnight dark hair, pale skin, a sharp smirk and the emerald green of his eyes.

But for him? He felt and *remembered* it all. Including the moment in the aftermath, the man panting against his chest, head resting gently near his collarbone as Loki carded his fingers through sweaty brunet locks.

“Definitely silvertongue,” Anthony mumbled against his chest, making Loki huff a laugh.

“Definitely praise worthy,” Loki whispered back.

Anthony had laughed and wrapped an arm around his waist, pulling their bodies even closer—he’d then kissed Loki’s chest, full of affection and familiarity, and Loki’s heart

had raced—his body flooding with pure affection and he'd *wanted*; not just in that moment but for hundreds more to come. A realisation that had frozen him in place.

When he'd been able to move, he'd used quick spellwork to slip out of the mortal's mind, hearing his sleepy protest, but silencing it with further magic. He'd returned to the mortal's home, kneeling upon his bed and seeing him spent and sleeping in the centre.

He'd swallowed hard and scrambled away from the man. He'd then run a hasty hand through his hair before leaving in a brief flash of green—because he had done something very few had ever done

He'd bedded a mortal, a *follower*, and he not only wanted to do it again, but more damning of all, he wanted to stay tucked up against the mortal. He wanted Anthony to *see* him, and not just in his dreams.

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Guilt ate at Loki. He could not bare to be in the same room as Frigga, fearing his mother would see the truth of what he had done within moments of looking at his face.

He stayed in his rooms, the library—or any far forgotten place on Asgard.

But just because he was able to avoid those on the Golden Realm, it didn't mean he was able to avoid Anthony and the countless, *insistent* prayers the man hurled at him.

The mortal, while initially unfazed by his absence, was soon to grow perturbed, angry and even upset. None of which he had wanted to inspire. But what else could he do? Their association was twisted and unwise; wrapped within a dynamic that he should not have tampered with.

Anthony might have never truly treated him as a god deserving adoration and respect—he was too brash, too disrespectful and too prone to treating him like an equal—but the truth of their differences remained.

He was a god from the Golden Realm, and Anthony Stark was a mortal with a shrine dedicated to him. Just because he had been feeling frustrated, lonely and unwanted, it didn't mean he should have involved the mortal.

He should never have gone to his home so consistently, never confided in him, never *yearned* to taste and take him; to steal a part of this fascinating and passionate mortal all for himself.

(He should never have allowed himself to *like* him, far more than a simple follower or devotee—no, if Loki was being truly honest, he liked him greater than any other he had met, any other he had *bedded*.)

But for all that he knew he had done the wrong thing, that he should not return to the mortal realm, Anthony remained persistent and *loud*. It wasn't just the prayers asking where he was, why he'd left, why he was *hiding* and if he was going to *show his Hel damned face*.

It was the items on the shrine; not just items meant for him, but ones that were a blatant dare. Items typically bestowed to *other* gods. As if Anthony was flirting with the notion of looking elsewhere—and yet, each item still hit *his* name, *his* shrine.

They were all actions to gain his attention.

And who was he to ignore his disciple? Who was *he* to shy away from what he had done?

The man deserved his answers and his accusations.

It was why, a little over a Midgardian week from their coupling, Loki ventured to the mortal plain and Anthony's workshop; the place where they had kissed.

He found the man bent over his forge, hammering at a sword without the gentle delight of creation, but rather the simmering fires of *anger*.

Loki sighed softly and with resignation. He also wrapped the harshness around himself that he was well known for—the walls and shields that had kept him safe for many centuries.

*'I hardly took you to be lovestruck maiden.'*

Anthony stilled, his hammer halfway toward the blade. After a beat, he brought it down, continuing to pound the metal with every second word.

“And I never took you to be a selfish manipulator intent on gaining nothing but that which benefits you.”

Loki flinched at hearing his own words thrown back at him; hitting with enough force to nearly make him stagger.

Anthony doused the sword in water before laying it to the side. He turned around, pulling off his workwear but not looking in Loki's direction.

“I also never took you for a coward,” Anthony added. “But, apparently you're one of the two.”

Loki was silent. He knew that the *right* thing to do was to claim the former, to let seidr curl around his fists and strike fear into the heart of any mortal that thought to insult and defy a *god*.

But the more *honest* answer would be to acknowledge the latter. Not that it was cowardice, exactly, it was... guilt, discomfort and the thorough knowledge that what he had done was *wrong*.

*'There are other reasons I would leave,'* Loki finally murmured.

“And never come back? Never answer? You come more frequently than this, and after leaving without a word, a person draws a few conclusions. Was a mortal simply not a



good enough lover?”

‘No,’ Loki replied, stepping forward haltingly. ‘*This has nothing to do with your prowess in the bedchamber.*’

Anthony finally lifted his gaze, looking in his direction but missing him and only highlighting the problem.

“But it has something to do with me?”

Loki exhaled loudly and with frustration.

‘*You are mortal. You are my **follower.***’

“So?”

‘*We do not intermix with mortals.*’

“About a dozen myths would contest that.”

Loki scowled. ‘*That was many years ago. We learnt better.*’

“Unlearn it.”

‘*Anthony—*’

“No,” Anthony interrupted. He stepped forward, clear frustration on his face as his gaze darted around unseeingly. “All you’re giving me is half-hearted answers. I had fun, you had fun. I might have chosen you as the best god to pray to, but I’m willing to stop that if you—”

‘*Do **not**,*’ Loki commanded hoarsely, taking a half-step forward.

Anthony frowned and maybe it was coincidence, or maybe it was Loki’s seidr guiding him, but Anthony’s gaze met his despite the shrouding of his features.

“Then what do you want, Loki?” Anthony asked.

*You, Loki thought, in ways I did not think I would ever desire another. And yes, Anthony, it does terrify me, because you are mortal and I already know I will never be able to keep you.*

‘*What I want does not matter.*’

“Then what about me?” Anthony argued. He also stepped forward. “I’m here and I’m praying to a god I still don’t fully believe in—I just know he’s here, that he saved my life and makes me laugh. I want him to visit, miss him when he doesn’t. I want to kiss him again, hear about what he’s been up to when he’s gone. I want to go up to my room and have him do those things with his tongue that I’ve thought about every night since

he's been gone." Anthony flashed a smile, a little smaller than usual, but still so bold, so *unashamed* as he added, "So, I guess you could say, what I want is *you*."

Loki made a sound in the back of his throat, his body feeling the rush of those words. His very *skin* seemed to buzz and his hands ached to grab the mortal and draw him close.

*'You cannot ask for a god.'*

"Can I pray for one instead? You know I will. I've been doing it since you left."

Loki knew it, he'd *heard* it—but how could it be enough? Their desire didn't negate their differences or how unwise it would be to indulge this.

*'It would be the height of foolishness,'* he whispered.

"That's what people told me when I said I was going to pray to the Trickster God," Anthony murmured, still walking closer. "They said I was mad, that I'd only end up paying for it. But, what do you know? I proved them wrong."

*You will pay, he thought. We both will.*

But Loki didn't say it, he watched as Anthony kept walking closer, finding him by more than just instinct. Loki knew that, by this point, his *seidr* had to be guiding him. Anthony stopped directly in front of him. He hesitated, but raised his hand. Loki's arm jerked, but he lifted it as well, letting his fingers brush Anthony's.

The mortal pressed their palms flush together and Loki shut his eyes, simply letting each inch of skin send fire through his veins—not just the fire of desire, but of something deeper, a connection woven by devotion.

*Mutual* devotion.

Because, it was not just Anthony who brought him trinkets. He did the same for his mortal. He visited, spoke to him, treated him as more than just a pawn to be used and manipulated.

This was something different to what the others gods did—this was something *theirs*.

"This will be worth it, Loki," Anthony said, the words a quiet vow, a sweet temptation.

Loki wanted to believe him, to pretend they weren't both talented liars with tongues of silver.

He opened his eyes and looked into his mortal's gaze; full of hope and determination, affection and *want*.

And despite knowing it could not possibly end well, Loki still bent forward. He pressed his mouth to his mortal's while letting his fingers slide between Anthony's. The mortal kissed him back and squeezed his hand tightly.

For better or worse, Loki had made his choice.

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It did not hurt, at least, not at first.

To begin with, he continued to visit Anthony as he had always done, only, it now began with a kiss and ended with one too.

In the middle of his visits, he would often take the mortal to bed; sliding into his dreams and sharing moments of passion and affection.

He would also hold the mortal when he was awake; the room dark and his arms around Anthony. It was enough that they could both *almost* forget that Anthony could not see him.

The mortal continued to drop items on his shrine, but it held the touch of mischief, of *courtship* even—with flowers, sweet foods and even a ridiculous trinket for his hair. Loki had taken it with rolled eyes that he had projected to the man.

Anthony had just laughed before stepping closer, eyes closed and pulling him into a kiss. The trinket, in the end, he had taken to his rooms, fashioning it as a clasp for his cloak.

It was honestly nice. He had a lover, not conventionally and not in a way he could tell others but they were... together.

His mother worked it out with little prompting, merely catching his gaze one afternoon, then glancing to his cloak pin. She did not say anything, but she caught his hands later that day, squeezing them gently. If she had looked sad, he had done his best not to focus on it.

For a while, everything had been lovely. It was not perfect, no, but for a time—a few *years*, in fact, Loki felt happy and *loved*. He had someone whom he could confide in, hold close, and spend his most precious moments with; he also listened to his mortal, helping where he could and holding him where he couldn't.

But he had known from the start that it could not last, that he could not avoid the inevitable forever.

It was a simple thing that started it. He had been upon Asgard, sitting bored at a table as Thor and his brainless friends spoke about their latest conquests on a hunting trip that Loki had not attended.

Thor had crowed about bedding the most females only for Volstagg to shake his head and remark, “A fine tally, but they do not hold a candle to when one returns to the hearth and home of the one in your heart.”

Loki's gaze had flicked to the man, seeing his softened features as he thought of his wife and family—and he had silently *agreed*. Because, unlike the others, Loki *did* know that

feeling—his mind had gone immediately to Anthony and he had thought, *yes, there is nothing like it.*

But it had been *Fandral's* words that had truly discomfited him.

“Oh, yes,” he'd agreed. “I am sure you are quite right, and what a shame it shall be for the ladies I have bedded. Why, they must now be in ruinous heartbreak, having had a taste of me, but unable to stay in my arms!”

The table had laughed but Loki had been unable to do the same. Instead, his mind had gone once more to Anthony. Because for all that he had been happy... he was not ignorant.

For although he had Anthony now, Loki knew that their partnership would not—*could* not survive as Volstagg's had. Because Anthony was mortal while he would live for so many centuries longer than his lover.

*He* would be the one left in heartbreak, having had his time with Anthony end regardless of either of their wishes.

It sat in his stomach like a weight and in the end, he'd accused himself from them—gaining barely a glance and no request that he remain. So unlike Anthony who never wanted him to part, who asked him to stay a few minutes, a few *hours* longer.

And, feeling an itch under his skin from Volstagg and Fandral's words, he slipped from Asgard without delay, returning earlier than he'd intended to Midgard.

Anthony wasn't expecting him—as while his visits had started sporadically, he had made a point to try and be more frequent and consistent. He could not afford his father finding out, but he could at least tell Anthony when he intended to return so the mortal could be prepared for him.

It was only early afternoon and he found the man's forge empty, but his seidr was quick to pinpoint the man nearby. He used magic to walk through the door and follow the tug of their connection to find the man beside a market stall. He was not selling, but admiring the wares. The man beside him Loki recognised from the forest when he'd saved his mortal from wolves: James Rhodes. The childhood friend Anthony had often referenced in his many stories and conversations.

“I don't understand why you didn't accept her,” James insisted.

“Not my type,” Anthony dismissed, not looking up.

“It seems *no* one is your type lately.”

“And I thought you used to complain that I chased too many women?”

“I didn't think you'd stop all together,” his friend said, more rebuke than tease in his voice.

Anthony shot him a look, his gaze narrowed. “You’re not going to start again, are you?”

He held up his hands. “I’m not trying to make you do anything, Tones, but you’re not as sought after as you once were. You don’t come out any more. You stay in your forge and lock the door at odd hours.”

Anthony looked away and shrugged. “I have different things I want now.”

“Tones,” the man said gently.

He grabbed his arm and tugged. Anthony resisted for a moment before letting the other man lead him away from the stalls and the other browsing mortals. Loki felt a heavy knot in his stomach, but he followed the two silently, making sure to keep Anthony from realising he was nearby.

“Tones,” James said again once they were alone. His brow was puckered by a deep and worried frown. “I’m not going to ask what’s changed, because I know you won’t tell me. But I know you. You don’t want to be alone in your forge forever.”

Anthony’s expression was stony—but it also *wasn’t*. Loki knew his mortal; he could read him in a darkened room. Anthony looked *tired*, but worse than that, he looked wistful and sad.

“You’re my best friend,” Anthony said quietly, “But there are some things I just... can’t explain.” He placed his hand on James’ shoulder. “But trust me, I’ve made a choice and I’m not going to change my mind.”

“But will you regret it?” James persisted. “In a decade, Tony, are you going to look back and decide you should have listened and found a wife so you could have a family?”

“I’ve never been the family type,” Anthony drawled.

“*Tones*,” James insisted and Loki held his breath, wanting to know the answer as much as the man’s friend.

Anthony sighed.

“I don’t want a wife or kids,” he admitted. “A partner? In a way... I have one.” He smiled, faint and wry. “Although, that might be blasphemous to say.”

“What are you talking about?” James demanded, looking and sounding shocked. “You’re courting someone? Why haven’t you said?”

“Complicated,” Anthony said quickly. “Not something I want you telling *anyone*. But, yeah, it’s hard sometimes and I’d love to have them with me more often but... you make sacrifices for the ones you love, right? You always told me that.”

*Love.*

Loki's breath left him and where a part of him wanted to be ecstatic, to sweep the mortal into his arms and confess, '*yes, my Anthony; love, for I feel it for you too*'—another part overrode it, swiftly overwhelming him by a heart wrenching agony.

Because Anthony wanted what he could never give—was *sacrificing* for a relationship that could never be truly *real*. The mortal's dearest friend had never known, and *could* never know, nor could the other gods who would disapprove if not outright demand a cessation of their association.

But they could shout and demand it end from every corner of the realms and he would not truly care... but, he *did* care about what he was doing to Anthony, how he was *ruining* Anthony.

Ruining his chances for a normal life, a normal relationship and a chance to grow old with someone by his side. Someone who would *age* by his side—not a god whom he could not truly see, nor turn to at any given moment to speak of his day.

They had prayers, yes, but how could it be enough? How could it *remain* enough?

Already, the man was sacrificing for the barest amount of his time and touch—and what was he doing? Nothing. He could see the man, touch him, *bed* him and risk nothing but the pain of eventual loss.

He was making Anthony give up so much more.

*You make sacrifices for the ones you love.*

Anthony's words echoed in his mind. He looked at his lover, deflecting his friends many numerous inquiries with a tightness to his jaw and a crease to his brow—*lying* because it was what he had to do when he bedded a Trickster God.

*You have made all the sacrifices, Anthony,* he thought, his heart already breaking. *But I think it is high time I made one for you.*

Because, if a mortal continued to love a god, it would keep him from living his short life to the fullest.

And who was he to take away the one thing that truly defined a mortal?

Who was *he* to take what should never have belonged to him?

It was long past the time that he let his mortal go.

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Loki returned to the spot where he had first shown himself to the mortal; the shrine. His *room* in the man's home, filled with so many things now. Coins, flowers, the manipulated sticks, the cloths, even a dagger Anthony had made and hung upon the wall. The room *screamed* of Anthony's devotion.

Loki's fingers trailed over everything, feeling the man's love in every item. He also touched his name carved into the shrine, tracing each curve of every letter. He kneeled before it, feeling the pain acutely, tears already sliding down his cheeks as he looked at the space that had given him what he had always wanted.

A follower.

A friend.

A lover.

A *partner*.

He heard the door to Anthony's forge open, but didn't move. He listened to Anthony's footfalls, knowing the moment the mortal sensed he was present. His steps increased and he opened the door without delay.

"Lokes?" He asked, amusement in his voice. "Not your usual greeting place. Did you need an extra dose of prayer?"

Loki was silent and the mood in the room instantly changed.

"Loki?" Anthony asked quietly. "Is everything okay?" Anthony's hand came to his shoulder but Loki shrugged him off. "Loki?"

*'I have made very few genuine mistakes in my life,'* Loki said quietly. *'And even fewer which I genuinely regret.'* He smiled sadly. *'I would never, ever regret you, Anthony Stark.'*

His sharp, *perceptive* mortal quickly understood.

"But I'm a mistake?" he sounded hurt and confused.

*'One of the greatest mistakes is when a mortal falls in love with a god.'* Anthony sucked in a sharp breath, but Loki wasn't done. *'It is only surpassed by a god who falls in love with a mortal.'*

"Loki," Anthony breathed, sounding breathless with emotion. He touched his shoulder again, and this time, Loki was too weak to shove him away. "How is love a mistake?"

*'Because it will never be enough.'*

"You don't know that."

*'I do.'*

And with a deep breath, Loki extended his hand, letting seidr erupt from his fingers and attack first the shrine, then the other items in the room.

“Loki!” Anthony shouted, alarmed. He tried to move forward as if to halt him, but Loki extended his arm, keeping the mortal back. “Loki! What are you doing? Loki, *stop it.*”

But, Loki didn't.

He kept going until his magic had left everything in ruins, even his name he'd made sure to break in half. *Nothing* was safe or salvageable.

“Loki,” Anthony whispered, his voice choked with emotion. Loki turned his head, looking over at the mortal. His bold, brash, *smart* mortal who already knew the end before it had officially been said. “Please, don't do this.”

Loki rose to his feet, standing directly in front of his mortal, his *love*. He gently cupped the man's cheek. Anthony's eyes closed, but a tear still slid down. Loki brushed it aside gently.

*‘You are the brightest mortal on this world,’* Loki whispered. *‘You have given me more gifts than any other in my life.’*

“You don't have to do this,” Anthony insisted, fisting a hand in his tunic. “Why in *Hel* are you?”

*‘Because this will ruin us—will ruin **you**, and I want you protected, Anthony Stark. I want you to be untethered from a being you cannot see. Without me, you will ascend to new heights.’* He smiled sadly. *‘You will live your life, Anthony Stark, rather than have this pale mockery forever tainted by my shadow.’*

“That is a load of *rot*,” Anthony snarled. He pressed close, his head against Loki's chest. “This is not a mockery this is *great*, it's-”

*‘Tainted, and you would be a fool to deny it. And you are not that, Anthony. This will hold you back. Now, you can be all that you should have been before I started to interfere.’*

He started to pull away but Anthony held tight.

“No, no, Loki. Come on, no, *please*. I'm pleading here and I don't plead just, don't do this, don't leave, don't-”

Loki tilted up Anthony's head, silencing his words with a gentle, *loving* kiss, and as he did, he let the mortal feel him; all his passion, devotion and *love*. He let him feel the pain this caused, the heartbreak and regret, but the certainty of what Anthony could achieve if he was only left to his own devices. Left with *mortals*.

Loki did not breathe, *‘I love you’* but he made sure the mortal knew. He made sure Anthony knew he would always do so, that he would always keep a place for Anthony in his heart; never discard the tokens given to him, and forever be grateful for knowing and courting him.



When their kiss broke, both their cheeks were wet. Anthony opened watery eyes, meeting his gaze as he was so apt at doing.

“*Loki*,” he whispered.

And for the first time, Loki did something he had not done, he let his lips form the words, let them enter the mortal plain and allowed Anthony to truly hear his voice.

“Anthony.”

His mortal made a sound of pained distress and cupped his cheeks, dragging him back into a harsh and desperate kiss. Loki allowed it, holding the mortal against his body and kissing him with everything, memorising the moment and his mortal before he released his *seidr*, disappearing from Midgard and from his mortal’s arms. Fading, like an illusion or a half-remembered dream.

He left his follower beside the ruined remains of his shrine, and felt as if was his heart, not just objects that he had broken clean in two.

---

Loki stood at the beginning of the rainbow bridge, staring out toward the *bifrost*.

Already, people were swarming it. There was a virtual sea of Aesir clambering to look over shoulders and around bodies, all for a glimpse of the once mortal.

Foolish eagerness, as they would see him soon enough. They would have to stand to the side, creating a path and letting the Allfather, the mortal and his god pass on the way to the palace.

Everyone would get their look; their chance to survey and even talk to the famed former-mortal.

Loki sighed, and unbidden, his gaze flickered to the stars ahead and the void below—he was not quite desolate enough to throw himself into it in order to avoid the whole situation, but for a moment, the situation appealed.

It would be nice, after all, to forget all that he had loved and lost.

But not while Anthony lived—not while his mortal was still out there on Midgard.

And so, he started to navigate the crowd. They often turned and glared at him, but, prince and son of the Allfather as he was, they let him pass, let him make his way to the place he, and all the more well-known gods and goddesses would stand to greet the new god.

As he walked, he heard the chatter; everyone talking about who the mortal prayed to, a few mentioning arguments or frustrated whining by various gods because the hero did not seem to believe in any of them.

It might have been entertaining. Once, he might have thought to tease and gloat that no one could sway this supposed-mortal, but he could not find it in him to have more than a glimmer

of interest. Whoever this mortal prayed to; it would be discovered soon enough, and if he truly was apathetic to the gods well, Loki still did not care.

Whoever this new god was, he could never compare, never hold a *fraction* of the fascination Loki felt for his Anthony.

Loki had almost reached the bifrost when he saw the gears turn, the sound of it activating. He hesitated before the doorway, but the people around him all tried to push closer. Loki was almost knocked off the side and he glared heatedly at the one who had done it.

He was about to snap at them to be *more careful*, when something in his body jolted, his very *seidr* seemed to surge and he got a single moment of pure confusion before; “Woah, the Norns said that would be an interesting ride. They were right.”

Loki gasped, the sound stolen by the crowd but his body shook as he swivelled his head, trying to see, trying to *confirm* even though he would know it anywhere.

He shoved the people around him away and managed to get far enough inside to see a glimpse of burnet hair, of armour done in leather and gold. There was also the pelt of what looked to be a *wolf*—and then he turned. Lines of age were unable to detract from a handsome face, features that Loki would know in the dark. There were flickers of grey in the unchanged facial hair as well as the temples, showcasing a life lived and too many close calls. And in the centre of the glorious armour, a bloodied coin was permanently housed.

His coin.

His Anthony.

His *mortal*—now glowing gold with the newly bestowed role of *god*.

Anthony was grinning as people approached him, clasping arms easily and with charm—but his gaze was darting around the space and Loki... he instinctively shielded himself, automatically *hid* from the eyes of his mortal; because he could not see him, Anthony could not survive... Anthony... was looking in his direction.

Loki’s breath caught and Anthony frowned but there were still too many people between them to be able to catch his gaze—and a slap to his back from Thor made Anthony’s attention jerk to the Thunderer.

“Mighty hero,” Thor boomed. “Tell us of yourself! What name do you go by?”

“Oh, uh. Anthony. Anthony Stark.”

Thor slapped him again. “You have performed many grand feats, Anthony of Stark. Won great battles, broke prophecies and saved many.”

There was a chorus of cheers and Thor flashed everyone a smile before looking back at Anthony—Anthony who, *even now*, was looking around the room as if searching as if... seeking someone.

Loki's heart picked up and he slowly walked forward, he didn't take away his shroud, but he... he felt a nervous excitement, a *hope* even as his heart lodge in his throat.

"You are now a god!" Thor continued, roughly shaking him from side to side and drawing back Anthony's gaze. "You shall be prayed to by many mortals to come; people who will know of your strength and your story. So, now you must tell us what we all wish to know!" Thor grinned. He also puffed out his chest and brought a fist to it. "Who is the lucky one whom has had *your* prayers?"

And it was so obvious that Thor hoped—perhaps *expected* it to be him. For who else would a mighty, heroic warrior pray to?

"My prayers?" Anthony remarked, tilting his head as if he was thinking. "Yeah, you could say there was one god on my mind."

Loki swallowed hard, his body trembling finely—and then Anthony smirked, and oh, he *adored* that expression; his mischievous, *bold* mortal.

"He's still there, actually." Anthony said. "Never budged from my thoughts, not once over all the years. Because, I always figured that even when it hurt, I wasn't giving up. And why pray to someone else when there was only one god who mattered to me?" He laughed softly. "You know, I kind of became a hero for him, became everything I *am* for him." He gestured at his armour, at his *glow*. "Didn't know it would work, but I wanted to be the best follower he could ever have, to do everything I could to get closer to him." Anthony started looking around again, his gaze flying over the crowd. "I was hoping he'd be here."

"Who are they?" Thor demanded, and a dozen other voices repeated it, all trying to be heard, all trying to *know*.

And, just like a dozen times in the man's forge, Anthony's gaze skimmed the room and then stopped—it *found his*; despite magic, despite invisibility. Anthony looked him right in the eye and frowned small and thoughtful.

And Loki felt their connection, their *devotion* deep in his chest and he just... dropped his spell. The second he was visible Anthony smiled; immediate, bright and *soft*.

"Hey, Loki," he greeted.

Loki barely noticed the way everyone around them stopped talking, that the bifrost was unnaturally *quiet*.

"Anthony," he whispered.

"So, hey," Anthony said, his grin taking on that mischievous edge he loved so much. "I kind of made myself not mortal anymore."

Loki barked out a laugh; disbelieving, relieved and *longing*. "Yes, by being a *hero*."

"Oh, I was never that," Anthony countered. "*Far* too selfish to save the world just because it's the right thing to do."

Loki laughed again, but his own smile was soft. “I believe the Norns would contest that.”

“No, they wouldn’t,” Anthony boldly countered. “They knew why I signed up for this gig.” His gaze softened. “They also know that people will do a lot of things for love.” Loki’s breath caught, but Anthony wasn’t finished, “And, I mean, if they thought sacrificing for love was truly selfish, they wouldn’t have let me come here. Wouldn’t have let me *choose* to be here with you.” He held out his hand; welcoming, brave and *wonderful*. “If you still want me?”

Loki immediately stepped forward, closing the gap in moments and shoving aside anyone who *dared* to stand in his way. Anthony kept grinning; arrogant, self-assured but still so *loving* underneath it all. Loki lifted his hand, taking the mortal—*former* mortal’s hand.

“Do you think you need to ask me that?” He whispered, unable to disguise the raw emotions in his voice.

“I mean, I *would* like to hear it,” Anthony teased gently. “I’m not the one who broke a couple of hearts nearly ten years ago.”

Loki’s sorrow rose, but it was eclipsed by his lover’s still softened gaze. He cupped Anthony’s cheek with his free hand and promised, “Always. I will want you *always*.”

“Looks like you got it,” Anthony said. “Because, I’m here for the long haul, Lokes.”

Loki laughed, relived and ecstatic and *in love*—and a second later, Anthony’s mouth was on his.

Loki clasped the mortal to him. His eyes shut as the familiar scent of the forge and *Anthony* surrounded him.

His lover; the man he’d thought was lost to time and mortality was now his for the long eternity of the gods.

When Thor abruptly cheered, it was so Norns damn *loud* that they jolted and broke apart. Anthony with surprise, him with a glare at his brother—but soon enough Anthony laughed. Loki’s gaze immediately swung back to the former-mortal.

He met beautiful, bright brown eyes and Anthony said, “I love seeing that.”

Loki blinked. “My annoyance?”

“Your *everything*,” Anthony corrected. “Even better than I imagined, and *just* as good as I remembered.”

Loki’s features softened and he stroked his lover’s cheek.

“I promise I will show you everything,” he whispered. “Tell you all my secrets and tricks. Court you as I always wished I could and for the rest of our long lives, my Anthony.”

“Well, that only proves it,” Anthony teased, eyes twinkling. “We didn’t make a mistake starting this after all.”

And when Anthony bent in again, Loki met him in the middle, kissing him with all the love in his heart, something that not even two worlds and mortality could truly keep apart.

## End Notes

Annnnd there you have it, this long ass story that is *kind* of a Hercules!Disney AU; with a mortal becoming a true hero due to love 🥰 I'd also like to thank **tarot\_card** for all the help and patience they gave by reading over this for me. It was very, very appreciated!!

And, as an aside, please find some extra notes that didn't make it into the story!

**Anthony's side of things after Loki 'breaks up with him':** When that happens, Tony is distraught. Rhodey comes to see him and after a few heartbroken, drunken days, he confesses everything, shows Rhodey the shrine and just, is gutted as Rhodey tries to understand and comfort him.

After a week or so of no answers to his prayers, no *nothing*, Anthony gets angry but also determined. He comes out and tells Rhodey, he's going to do the opposite of what Loki said. He's not giving him up, he's going to be like one of the legends of old, the legends who *made* themselves into gods.

Rhodey thinks he is completely insane, tries to talk him out of it, but Tony won't budge and so, Rhodey ends up coming along with him, joining his mad quest for godhood/love.

And Rhodey stays with him, sees things that furthers to him that the gods are real, that Tony is getting blessings from gods he's flat out ignoring, and Rhodey just... stays for a good number of years, before he ends up settling down and getting a wife and kids and Tony thanks him, hugs him, wishes him all the absolute best and continues on alone.

Continues, achieves his goal, comes to Asgard and, after celebrating with the gods and with Loki, he goes and visits his best friend and breathes his first blessing and has Loki help him to make Rhodey know he succeeded, and Rhodey is *so fucking happy for him*—and he becomes an immediate 'disciple' of his best friend, and of Loki too.

He's also the one who talks the loudest and spreads the news far and wide of the brave hero Anthony Stark, who became a god out of determination, creativity and love.

**Second side note:** Odin does have a bit of a bitchfest at Loki after discovering he courted a mortal, but Loki basically yawns in his face, uncaring because "weren't you just praising this amazing mortal like five minutes ago? Can't complain now it's led to this." And that's when Odin realises he might have just gained a second problem child in the form of Anthony 'I want to pull it apart and see if it explodes' Stark.

**FINAL SIDE NOTE:** If you didn't read the beginning notes of this story and you're a frequent reader of my works, I implore you to check it out as it has information about my final FI fics. Thank you! 💙💜

AND OKAY, FINALLY DONE NOW. THANK YOU FOR READING!!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!