

The Enemy of My Enemy

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/1037081) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/1037081>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Major Character Death
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Thor (Movies) , The Avengers (Marvel Movies)
Relationships:	Loki/Tony Stark , Jane Foster/Thor , Angrboða/Sigyn
Characters:	Loki (Marvel) , Thor (Marvel) , Tony Stark , Steve Rogers , Natasha Romanov , Bruce Banner , Clint Barton , Nick Fury , Jane Foster (Marvel) , Sigyn , Angrboða Angerboda
Additional Tags:	Spoilers , Thor 2 Spoilers , Loki Angst , Odin's A+ Parenting , Depression , near rape , BAMF Loki , Loki's resistance , Asgardian Hegemony , Except for Loki , Loki wasn't the bad guy in The Avengers
Language:	English
Collections:	Personal Favorites of Ianzgirl , Marvel Universe Suggested Stories , KYsFrostIron , Maria Nelson's Favourites , Favourite Loki Fanfics , MyHeartAdores , My Favourite Fanfics , Fuck Thor , Favorite Loki Fics , Cast pearls before swine , for eternity i share my life with you (i share mine with you) , From Ghibli to Star Wars , Loki Tony , BAMF Loki
Stats:	Published: 2013-11-09 Completed: 2013-12-08 Words: 67,747 Chapters: 35/35

The Enemy of My Enemy

by [Kadorienne](#)

Summary

After the defeat of the Dark Elves, Asgard resumes enforcing its ancient hegemony over the other realms - including Midgard. To defend itself from Asgardian tyranny, Earth must seek alliance with its former enemy: Loki.

“Always remember that the crowd that applauds your coronation is the same crowd that will applaud your beheading. People like a show.” - Terry Pratchett

Notes

This fic, extrapolating from canon, depicts Odin as tyrannical and Thor as the killer we saw on Jotunheim. Sif and the Warriors Three are also not depicted favorably. Don't like, don't read.

This fic contains SPOILERS for *Thor: The Dark World*. Do not read it if you haven't seen the movie and don't want to be spoiled.

More notes at the end.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Thor was even more of a fool than Loki had always believed.

Loki thought this numbly as he sat on the floor of his cell. His not-brother's words still tore his soul apart. *"I know you seek vengeance as much as I do. Help me escape Asgard and I will give you that. And afterwards, this cell. ...When we fought each other in the past I did so with a glimmer of hope that my brother was still in there somewhere. That hope no longer exists to protect you."* But a detached corner of his mind was critiquing Thor, as if Loki were still playing the role of counselor to the future king.

Even without Loki speaking into his ear, Thor should have realized that a word of affection *now*, now when Loki had lost everything, would have bound Loki to him eternally. Loki's not-father had disowned and imprisoned him, Loki's not-mother was dead. Thor was all he had left. If allowed to, he would have clung to Thor forever, been loyal to him to death and beyond. And did Thor really imagine anyone would serve him if all he offered in return was eternity in a box? Thor should at least have lied. Promised him freedom and then slapped him back in the cell anyway once the mission was done.

Vengeance was all Loki had to live for now, but he would have that. After, he would contrive to escape (to what?), or Thor would have to kill him trying to drag him back to this.

"When do we start?" he asked dully.

Loki did not trouble to object to the shackles. He followed Thor cooperatively to where his brainless friends were waiting.

Fandral made the first threat.

He stood in front of Loki and put the point of his dagger to Loki's heart. "If you betray Thor," he snarled, "I'll kill you."

Loki looked at him. Fandral might as well have been a thousand miles away. Thor continued ahead, indifferent.

There had been a time when Thor had made a token effort to blunt the worst of his friends' bullying. Loki had always resented that Thor did not do more. Now, had he had any emotion left to care about anything, he would have wished to have even that half-hearted defense back.

After a moment, Fandral lowered his dagger, puzzled. Loki continued in Thor's wake.

Hogun was next, swinging his mace and stopping it an inch from Loki's skull. "Betray Thor... and die."

Loki gazed at him, vaguely curious. Hogun had always struck Loki as smarter than the rest of them, not that that was saying much. Did he really imagine this was an effective tactic?

After a moment, blinking and uncertain, Hogun lowered his mace. Thor glanced back, irritated. “Come *on*,” he ordered.

Loki came on. Until Volstagg stopped him with a hand on his chest. Volstagg knew Loki didn’t like being touched (by most people, anyway); likely he was doing it for that very reason. “You even *think* about betraying Thor and I’ll gut you like a fish,” he blustered.

Loki looked at him. Some tiny spark of curiosity made him ask, “What makes you think I care?”

He had tried to kill himself just two years before. His father and brother hated him, his mother was dead. He was a *frost giant*. He had nothing left to live for. Why did they imagine this was a threat? They were even stupider than he had always believed.

After a moment Volstagg dropped his hand, his expression suggesting that something had awakened within his seldom-used head.

Loki was not even able to take one more step before a sword appeared at his throat. Sif was holding it. “Betray Thor and I’ll kill you,” she said with a glittering smile. Hope gleamed in her eyes that Loki would give her the excuse. She always had taken great pleasure in killing things. And this must be the moment she had dreamed of all her life, the chance to eliminate the one person who had once rivaled her in Thor’s affections.

Loki did not bother to move his head. He felt the blade make a fine scratch along his neck, felt a few drops of blood trickle down. Swiftly Sif lowered her weapon, looking shocked. And worried; what if she had killed him before they were finished using him? Loki would have been amused had he the energy for it.

Thor was returning to them, with company. Loki recognized her at once: the human Thor had dallied with during his exile. He had wondered, then, what she could possibly see in Thor. She had an excellent mind. Then again, some brilliant men wanted nothing but beauty in their women; no reason a brilliant woman could not be the same.

When the mortal saw him, she stared in astonishment. “You’re-“ She stopped there. Loki supposed seeing him must be frightening for a mortal, after the Chitauri.

Then she hit him.

Some residual instinct of self-preservation made him roll with the blow. Had he held still, she would have broken her hand against his dense Asgardian flesh, and the warriors surrounding him would have been delighted at the excuse to batter him senseless.

“That’s for New York!” she declared.

Loki stared at her for a second.

And then began to laugh.

Loki had learned he was a member of a monstrous and hated race. He had fallen through a wormhole, expecting to die, and instead fallen into the hands of Thanos. Thanos had subjected him to tortures a human mind could not even conceive of. He had been smashed by the Hulk. His father and brother, who had always claimed to love him, fully intended to lock him alone in a box for eternity and would consider themselves generous if they granted him a bed to lie upon and two or three books to fill the millennia.

And this girl had *slapped* him. Slapped him for invading her planet.

The laughter bubbled out of him, more and more hysterical.

What did she imagine her lover had been doing, all these centuries? Loki tried to imagine her reaction if she had seen Thor on Jotunheim, Nidavellir, Alfheim, Vanaheim - oh, most of all, on Utgard. Covered in blood and laughing aloud in joy as he slaughtered enemies by the hundred. Did she imagine he carried his hammer and sword because they were pretty? Did she imagine his armor was designed to accentuate his muscles? Just who did she think she was lying with?

All of them stared at him, now uncertain what to do. They all thought him mad. None of them could see the joke.

Chapter End Notes

I plotted this fic before *Thor: The Dark World* was released, spurred by the clip they released a month before of Thor's horrific words to Loki while Loki was in prison, as well as the spoilers from the junior novelization. This fic is completely compliant with the trailers and clips that we got up until then, except that I changed Loki's reaction to the W4's threats. (It bothered me that Loki was willing to put up a front for the Oathbreakers Four in that scene. I've written a more logical version of his reaction based on his likely state of mind at that time.) It is not necessarily compliant with any trailers that were released after that, and not with the movie as a whole. Unlike the movie, this fic shows what logically would have followed that prison conversation.

Friends whose judgment I trust have tried to excuse Thor's behavior in this scene to me. I wish they had been able to convince me. They weren't. Further attempts to defend Thor to me will be ignored. I'm sorry, I'm just tired of explaining that only a very nasty person can threaten anyone - *anyone* - with four thousand years of solitary confinement.

I've extrapolated a lot about the characters based on what we actually see in the first two movies about Thor and Loki. For example, Thor's and Odin's war records are deduced from what little we're told in canon. Odin did not get to be the King of Everything by asking nicely. Odin got every item in the weapons vault by killing many, many people to get them; Loki refers to them as "stolen relics", meaning Odin seized them rather than making them himself or receiving them as gifts, and they are such powerful items that whoever had them would have sacrificed millions of their own people to keep them.

Asgard's war with Jotunheim is spun to look good to an Earth audience with the implication that it was a selfless crusade to rescue the helpless humans, but while it was to our benefit that Asgard kicked the frost giants off Earth, he didn't do it for us. He did it to prevent Jotunheim from extending its power base. And if Odin did that to Jotunheim, it's unlikely this was a unique adventure. Most likely he's been putting down the ~~competition~~ imperial aspirations of other realms for millennia.

If we assume that Thor's attack on Jotunheim was the way their battles usually went, Thor must have an impressive body count indeed. That is, unless the only three battles he's ever been in were his ill-fated expedition to Jotunheim, the Chitauri invasion of New York, and whatever happened in Nornheim. This is highly unlikely; Thor and his friends are too good at fighting and work together too well, plus they wear armor all the damn time. The Warriors Three didn't get called that from playing a mean game of checkers, and Sif did not become "one of the fiercest warriors this realm has ever known" by sitting around Asgard's palace. Also, both Loki and Fandral's reactions when the frost giant calls Thor a "little princess" show that they know exactly how Thor is going to react, even though they are hugely outnumbered and on the verge of getting home alive (thanks to Loki trying to talk some sense into Thor). So for centuries Thor, our "hero", has been happily committing mass murder with joyful laughter every time someone calls him a name, while Loki, our "villain", has been trying to keep Thor, Thor's friends, and whatever foreigners insult Thor alive for all these years. Somewhere, Marvel just didn't think things through.

This fic is also not compliant with the ending of Iron Man 3. Ending? What ending?
fingers in ears LALALALALA I CAN'T HEAR YOU.
ETA: Actually, I'm not sure it's compliant with IM3 at all.

Also, a lot of my ideas about how Asgardian politics and magic work came from or were influenced by the fascinating blog [Exploring MCU Asgard](#).

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Like every paradise, Asgard is full of serpents. Jane Foster is finding that out.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: in this chapter Thor takes some convincing that No means No. He does get convinced, though. Nothing is at all graphic.

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

Asgard was amazing. It was like Jane's daydreams about the lost city of Atlantis, when she had read the legend as a child: as beautiful as the ancient monuments of Greece and Rome, and at the same time technologically advanced centuries ahead of Earth.

Like every paradise, it hid a serpent. A great many serpents, as it turned out.

The disturbing things piled up steadily. Odin's unconcealed contempt for humans, him comparing her to a goat right in front of her. The way the prodigal son was paraded about in chains, leash and collar like something out of *The Story of O*. The increasingly troubling zeal with which Thor and virtually every other upper-class Asgardian killed.

Sitting around the literal or metaphorical campfires each night, Thor and the others told stories. Volstagg started the stories the first evening over supper. "Odin in his wisdom realized that the Twilight Sword was too dangerous to allow the fire giant Surtur to keep it."

"How did Surtur get it?" Jane asked. The others glanced at her in vague irritation. Maybe they were annoyed that a "goat" had spoken without permission. Well, they could deal with it.

Volstagg waved a chicken leg dismissively. "He wrought it from the explosion of the Korbinite galaxy. So Odin charged us--"

"Wait, this Surtur guy made the sword himself?"

"Yes." Volstagg's impatience was clearer now. "Odin charged us--"

"And Odin just decided to take it from him? When he's the one who made it?"

Thor and his friends were all looking at her like she was an idiot. Loki was gazing at the wall, but she thought she could discern semi-concealed bitter amusement on his face. “The Twilight Sword was a font of fire,” Volstagg told her. “No weapon so dangerous could have been left in the hands of a creature like Surtur.”

“Creature.”

None of the Asgardians seemed to see anything wrong with referring to a fellow sentient being that way. Or with Odin taking it upon himself to seize the possessions of other worlds.

“Odin charged us with claiming it. Heimdall sent us and a dozen more warriors to Muspelheim, right on the steps of Surtur’s palace. Thor marched in demanding the sword. Surtur refused to surrender it, and that was when the fun began.”

“I began by striking the nearest guard with a mighty blow from Mjölfnir,” Thor said with the sunny smile that had first won Jane’s heart. “Then the other three who stood between me and Surtur.”

“We engaged the rest of the guards,” Sif put in proudly, “so that Thor was free to demolish the army.”

“Fire giants came pouring into the throne room,” Thor said. “I flung my hammer and slew twenty of them with one blow! Again and again I flung it until two hundred Muspels lay dead. More marched in at a run, so I summoned lightning and brought Mjölfnir down, shattering Surtur’s castle. We continued to fight them among the rubble until Surtur had to flee. I took the Twilight Sword and laid it at my father’s feet.” Thor glowed with pride. They all glowed with pride, except for Loki.

The stories were told every evening, and over every meal. All of them were for the most part the same. Thor and his warrior band went to some other realm, dropping out of the sky via the Bifrost. They killed a few hundred or thousand people. They grabbed any magical doohickeys that happened to be lying around, and then back to Asgard for feasting and boasting.

Loki always looked as if he were having exceedingly sarcastic thoughts during these recitations. He never said a word, only gazed morosely into space, occasionally circling his shoulders to try to ease the cramps caused by the tight manacles on his wrists.

The first few nights, Jane was able to tell herself that Thor must have had good reasons for these battles. She even asked about those reasons. The answers were not reassuring. The battles were all either expeditions to seize powerful magical artifacts or reprisals for slights to the House of Odin, slights so trivial Jane had trouble seeing some of them at all. She had to ask several times to be certain she understood correctly: Thor had killed several hundred frost giants because *one* of them had called him a “little princess”. He and his friends did not seem to understand what she was asking them, and again and again impatiently brushed off her questions. The *why* was irrelevant; they wished only to boast of their valor in the *what*. And the *what*, was killing people.

Not humans, mostly. Frost giants, fire giants, rock giants, elves, dwarves, Vanir. But *people*, sentient beings.

After a few days, Jane couldn't hide the truth from herself any longer. What Loki had done in Manhattan? Her hot god-alien boyfriend had done hundreds of times on who knew how many worlds. Loki's Manhattan adventure, by Asgardian standards, was a fun weekend.

Which led to the question of why Loki had been thrown into a dungeon while every other Asgardian warrior aristocrat continued to roam free. A question she eventually asked Thor, one day when he was giving her a tour of Asgard's physics-defying golden buildings.

"How can you ask that after what he did to Earth?" Thor asked, genuinely appalled.

"I know! If he were facing a tribunal on Earth I'd be saying, Lock him up! But you did the same exact thing to Alfheim--"

"That was hardly the same thing!" Thor's expression was, suitably, thunderous. And the bottom dropped out of her stomach as Jane abruptly remembered just how helpless she would be if this man chose to harm her. Even a human man of his size would overpower her with ease. Asgardians were several orders of magnitude stronger than humans, and Thor had his magic hammer and the power of summoning thunder besides.

He stood looming over her, glowering.

"Maybe I don't understand," she said in a small voice, hating herself for it. "Maybe since I'm not royalty I don't have the background to see the distinction."

Jane Foster, who didn't hesitate to yell at the Men In Black when they invaded her lab, who had never been cowed by human men twice her size, who had a doctorate in a hard science men still viewed as their exclusive domain, who wasn't afraid of anything on Earth, being this meek. Even if it was to the god of thunder, she would never forgive herself. But at this moment, she was too frightened to do anything else.

Thor seemed placated, however. "I went to Alfheim at the express command of my father and king. The elves had Gáe Derg, a spear which could slay even those protected by seiðr. Of course my father could not allow so dangerous a weapon to roam the Nine Realms."

"I see." She was trying to speak calmly. "And what about when you went to Jotunheim?"

"Father was very angry, and rightly so," Thor said, somber now. "I disobeyed him by going there."

"So, the problem wasn't that you made war on Jotunheim, but that you did it without his permission?"

"Maintaining the peace among the realms is a delicate business. I did not fully understand the reasons that I should have let Jotunheim be."

"What reasons?"

His tone was dismissive. “The Jotuns were no more threat to us. Father took their Casket a thousand years ago. There was no need to make war upon them.”

“So why didn’t your father turn Loki mortal and send him to Earth or somewhere like he did you?”

“The Allfather is wise. No doubt he knows that Loki would not learn from the experience as I did.”

Jane licked her lips. “Maybe he could give Loki the chance.”

“Do you *want* Loki on Midgard?”

“No! Just - he’ll probably live another four thousand years, right? And your father plans to keep him in prison for all that time? Even for what he did, that seems like kind of a lot. Isn’t there any possibility of parole or anything?”

Thor smiled at her fondly, shaking his head. “There is a purpose to everything my father does, Jane. Put your mind at rest.”

Jane didn’t.

Enough stories of recreational mass murder had piled up that even Thor’s ripped arms couldn’t make up for it, and she declined his company that night.

He did take no for an answer.

Eventually.

But it took several minutes of telling him, of ineffectual struggling. He told her she was just being foolish, clearly thought the entire problem was her silly notions and that the solution was for her to discard them. Which, apparently, could be accomplished if she only let him demonstrate again how good he was between the sheets.

Only her increasing and very vocal distress, and her persistent fighting even though it was plainly useless, finally induced him to desist before actually raping her. He stomped out and remained sulky for the rest of her time with him, and left her with yet more questions about his past exploits. Questions she had neither the nerve or the stomach to ask.

In the aftermath of the final battle against the Dark Elves, Thor and his friends seemed genuinely shocked to discover that Loki had taken advantage of the chaos to make his escape, rather than waiting meekly to be taken back to the dungeons of Asgard.

Despite what he had done to Earth, Jane could not be sorry he had escaped. Of all Asgard’s noblemen, Loki was, by her tally, the one least deserving of prison.

We all realize that Thor and his warrior band probably committed rape after a battle. That's why there's so many Thorki AUs where Loki is a thrall captured when Thor conquers Jotunheim and Thor claims Loki as his sex slave. I thought about making this scene more detailed but figured the scene, and the movie, are trigger enough.

The Asgardians kept calling Dark Elves "creatures" in TDW, so at least their racism is being consistently depicted, if not condemned by the narrative.

The Gáe Derg is [a real artifact of legend](#).

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Loki is on the run, until someone finds a use for the stolen relic.

Chapter Notes

I felt like the second chapter was a little too much of a downer, so here's the third, which at least has a note of hope. (Later in the fic there will be much hope.)

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

The places Loki could go were limited. There was a price on his head in three realms. His family had disowned him. He did not imagine that what friends he had in Asgard remained loyal to him. And if they did, he could hardly endanger them by asking them to harbor him.

There was nowhere he especially wanted to go. And so simple practicality dictated his choice. In order to hide, he had to use magic to alter his appearance and conceal his presence from Hlidskjalf. With no other means, he also needed magic to conjure money and false documents. And so prudence dictated that he choose the least magical realm in the Nine, the one whose few sorcerers were so weak that they would never detect him, even if he were under their very noses.

There was nowhere for Loki now but Earth.

He first went to one of the large cities - not New York. It was easy to hide with so many people about. He cast a glamour to alter his coloring and features and no one took any notice of him. But he could not endure the crowds pressing in on him. His craving to see the sky, to feel the breeze on his skin after over a year in Asgard's lowest dungeon, drew him to the seaside.

It was winter on Midgard, but of course the cold did not much bother him. It did keep most of the humans away. He found a room to rent for a trifling amount of conjured money. The mattress sagged. At some point, it seemed that a previous occupant had changed a motorcycle's oil on the carpet, and another had sweated copiously on the chintz loveseat, making it permanently reek. There was a sink and a tiny stove with two burners, ancient by Midgardian standards. His immediate neighbors were a couple who tended to have long, loud

fights late at night. The room was dismal, but it suited his mood, and all he needed was a place to sleep and bathe.

He spent nearly all day every day on the beach. He would walk for hours, or lie on the sand, his eyes always drinking in how far away the horizon was. No one who had not been imprisoned could appreciate how important that was. If Thor had only promised him a cell with a window he would have allowed himself to be taken back to Valaskjálf in chains rather than face the risks of flight.

Sometimes dolphins came close enough to the shore that Loki and the few humans who wandered by could watch the grace of their playing. They only did this, a passing mortal who insisted on engaging Loki in conversation explained, in the winter months when humans stayed out of the water.

Loki tried not to think.

The painful memories were numb now. They flowed through his mind often, but he seemed at last to have used up his supply of tears.

He had no plans. For the first time in his life, he was without a dozen schemes for the future. He had failed, utterly and irrevocably failed, to get everything he had ever wanted. How did one continue to live after that?

Perhaps he would not. Perhaps he should have attempted to betray Thor and let him and his brainless friends end his pointless existence. But as it was, he did not even care enough to seek death. He rose every day at dawn. He wandered the beach. Occasionally he bought food and ate it without interest. He returned to his room and slept.

After several months of this, Loki grew bored enough to read what Earth documents crossed his path. Mostly he read whatever newspapers and magazines humans discarded in the spots he frequented. He was indifferent to most of what was reported there. He did find some mild amusement in observing the inept efforts of human men and human women to comprehend each other; some problems, it seemed, were universal.

One day, the papers were full of Thor's announcement that Asgard had neglected its place as leader of the Nine Realms for too long. From henceforth, Midgard would enjoy the benefit of Odin's benign guidance, administered by Thor.

The humans did not seem to take this proclamation terribly seriously. Loki tossed the paper aside, too weary to even finish reading. Soon, he reflected indifferently, the humans were going to think that perhaps he, Loki, had been the better bargain.

Events unfolded just as Loki anticipated. Thor visited Midgard with Asgardian warriors at his back and asserted his will. The first thing they did was take away the most dangerous weapons the humans had, such as the nuclear missiles like the one SHIELD had launched at New York during the Chitauri invasion. Thor gave a grand speech or two about how he was protecting the humans from each other. The newspapers were not slow to point out that Thor was also protecting Asgardians, and any other invading aliens, from humans.

One newspaper in particular, the *New York Times*, denounced Thor and Asgard without restraint.

Loki sighed when he read the paper that day. He had picked up enough of current human attitudes to have predicted this reaction. Thor and Odin could have benefited from his counsel in this matter. So, for that matter, could the *Times*. He could have warned them about what kind of people they were dealing with. They had no idea what they brought upon themselves.

Sure enough, the next newspapers Loki saw were far less critical of Asgard. Thor and his friends had made an example of the *Times*. The building in which that paper had been written was rubble and several of the journalists were dead, many more horribly injured. Humans had learned the hard way how Asgardians reacted to insult. Thor had massacred hundreds of frost giants - and nearly gotten his friends and his (not)brother killed - because one of them called him a princess. Odin had depowered and banished his own son (his only son) because Thor had called him an old man and a fool.

Midgard's soldiers and the Avengers had tried to stop Asgard's attack on the *Times*, futilely. Many brave warriors were dead. Except for Banner, all of the Avengers had been injured. Only the green berserker had emerged unscathed. Agent Barton was in critical condition in a Midgardian hospital.

That last bit of information niggled at Loki's mind for the rest of the day. He had regretted the necessity of the black magic he had used upon Barton and his other thralls. He now had no energy for regret, but some vestigial sense of obligation awoke in him.

For the first time since his escape, Loki summoned more magic than was necessary to conceal his features or conjure money. He made a journey and a theft, and shortly after midnight strolled into Barton's room.

He had thought Barton might panic at the sight of him when Loki dropped the glamour that made him look like one of the hospital's employees (the man was outside partaking of a forbidden cigarette) and revealed himself. Fortunately, the opiates they had given Barton had him too dazed for fear.

"I mean you no harm, Agent Barton," Loki said.

Barton gazed at him, bleary. "Why're you here?"

"To pay a debt." Loki powdered a healing stone over Barton's midriff, torn open by Sif's sword. Barton blinked, too drunk to really be surprised, as his stomach mended itself.

"This room is under surveillance, is it not?" Loki spoke to the room in general. "I have no plans to make further mischief in your world. I suggest you conceal my visit from Asgard unless you wish for Thor to tear your realm apart seeking me. I will be on another world before he has any chance of hearing of this, but he will not be deterred. And a word of advice to Midgard: do not be impertinent to Asgard. Asgard is kind to its pets when they are docile and merciless when they snap back." Loki looked at Barton, who lay blinking at him. "I have secreted several more stones like this one close by. They should be enough to treat the

casualties of this incident.” Loki gave the address, an empty office a few blocks away, and then cast a fresh illusion on himself and walked out of the room.

He changed the illusion five more times before leaving the building. From there, he returned to his dingy room and went to sleep with the window open, letting the sound of the waves lull him.

Two days later, Loki had just stepped out of the shower when he heard a knock on the door. He was mildly surprised, as humans rarely bothered him here, but opened the door, expecting to find some mortal trying to sell something.

He did not expect to find Iron Man standing there, in full armor with his faceplate flipped back. Bruce Banner stood beside him, in his unthreatening human form.

Instantly Loki threw up a force field, but when Banner said, “We come in peace,” Loki waited instead of attacking.

Iron Man smirked. “Come with me if you want to live.”

From Stark’s tone, Loki suspected the words had significance beyond their literal meaning - a quotation from some Midgardian classic, perhaps? Loki stood, staring at the humans numbly.

The cocksure smirk faded from Stark’s face. “Know what, scratch that. Just come with me, full stop. Maybe we can *make* you want to live.”

Loki had no real prospects elsewhere. He let his force field and his glamour dissolve and followed where the humans led.

Chapter End Notes

The use of healing stones is based on a deleted scene from *Thor* where Selvig was injured by the Destroyer and Thor healed him with a healing stone by crushing it to powder over the wound.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

SHIELD and the Avengers find out Asgard's true nature, and seek an unlikely ally against it.

The Avengers were all shell-shocked after the attack on the *Times*. One thing they had never anticipated was one of the team going rogue. After the event, Tony blamed himself. Where was his much-noted cynicism? Why had he been so sure they could trust an alien warrior who had tried to kill Tony and Steve the minute he laid eyes on them? They knew nothing about Thor's world. They knew nothing about what Thor had spent the thousand years of his life doing.

But still, Thor had fought the Chitauri with them, and like idiots they had assumed he was defending the innocent from invaders. They really should've realized that what he was after from start to finish was the cube. Daddy wanted it, Daddy sent his favorite son for it, the favorite son brought it back. The prodigal son in chains was just a side dish.

So when Asgard had started flexing its muscles on Earth, they had naively assumed that Thor was their buddy and could be reasoned with. And wouldn't actually hurt them. In retrospect, Tony really couldn't figure out where they'd gotten that idea from.

They tried to talk to Thor during the *Times* attack. Thor and two dozen Asgardian warriors, including the ones who had come for him in New Mexico, mowing down human civilians. They kept screaming things like, "For Asgard!" and "For the honor of the House of Odin!"

Within a couple of minutes the police were there, and shortly afterwards the military and the Avengers. Thor's face lit up like it was Christmas; now he had opponents who hit back. He laughed joyfully as he reduced dozens of soldiers to bloody pulp with his hammer while his armor deflected the soldiers' bullets.

When Tony got close and tried to remind Thor that they were friends, he got hammered again.

The Hulk engaged Thor in single combat while the other Avengers tried to keep the rest busy. None of the other Asgardians seemed able to kill dozens of people in a matter of seconds like Thor could, but they were also functionally bulletproof - a bullet or a blast from Tony's suit could knock them over, but they hopped right back up for more. And they were enjoying the fight as much as Thor was. Tony would never forget Sif's beautiful face, lit with a triumphant smile as she sliced Clint's stomach open.

It was Tony who told the others through the suit's comm what they had to do. And it was Tony who lowered himself to the ground right in front of Thor's trio of friends and ordered his suit to fold up, leaving him in his sweatpants and Dark Sabbath T-shirt. His soft underbelly all ready for ripping open.

"We surrender," Tony said, holding his empty hands up. "Okay? You win. We surrender. Stop killing our puny soldiers. Please."

He promised himself that he would make Asgard regret making him say those words. Someday.

The soldiers were dropping their guns, holding their hands up. Tony hoped hard that Asgardians understood about surrender.

They did. The blond Errol Flynn knockoff held his blade to Tony's neck, grinning saucily. Tony didn't move; he didn't think the guy actually intended to use it now. "Remember this the next time you are tempted to insult the honor of Asgard!" Errol declared in ringing tones.

Oh, Tony would remember all right.

The wounded, including Clint, were already being carried away. Thor and the Hulk duked it out for a while longer. Thor actually looked like he was enjoying it. Well, who else could give him a good fight? Eventually Thor's magic hammer knocked even the Hulk out, and he promptly started shrinking down to Bruce size. Tony and Cap hurried over to make sure Thor didn't keep hammering him.

"It was a good fight, my friends," Thor told them with a radiant smile. "You all acquitted yourselves with honor."

Tony kept his mouth shut. If he didn't, he would say something that would get the entire Earth liquefied.

It was Steve who spoke. Tony could tell it was taking all of his self-control to speak civilly to the man who'd just murdered a few hundred humans. "I think that the leaders of Earth will want to talk to you, Thor. They're going to want to understand exactly what Asgard expects of us."

"I thought I had made that clear! The Earth is now under our protection."

"I still think they would like to talk to you, if you don't mind." Steve's voice was soothing, like he was trying to calm an angry dog.

Thor had shrugged cheerfully and promised to come back a week hence. Then the rainbow bridge magicked all of the space Vikings away, leaving several buildings reduced to rubble, several hundred soldiers and civilians dead, and a hell of a lot of work for every hospital in New York.

They all sat in the waiting room at the hospital for hours while the best specialists in the country - Tony had gotten Pepper to find them and fling money at them until they came -

labored to keep Clint alive.

When Clint was out of immediate danger, they all went back to the Tower and ate junk food in the common room until they passed out. Except for Natasha, who stayed by Clint's side even though there was absolutely nothing she could do.

They spent the next day lying around recuperating from the battle, eating almost nonstop, and watching back-to-back *Star Trek* so they wouldn't have to talk. Or think. Every hour on the hour Coulson called them to say that Clint's condition was stable. Tony had Pepper putting Stark money where it could make a dent in the damage Thor&co had done.

In the evening Natasha joined them, all but marched home by Maria Hill. "Make sure she eats and sleeps," Hill ordered them, and Steve obligingly ordered some healthy food - vegetables and everything - for all of them. Natasha was in a daze and probably would have eaten anything they put in front of her. After dinner Steve walked her to her bedroom, and Tony was in such a funk that he missed the golden opportunity to tease the Last American Virgin about it. The rest of them eventually fell asleep watching Kirk and Spock save the whales.

They woke up to their very own red-headed Valkyrie passing out carryout breakfasts and telling them to get themselves together. "Fury wants to see us."

"How's Clint?" Steve asked, trying to smooth down his hair, which was sticking up at an angle Tony normally would have found hilarious.

"Alive."

Tony groaned. "Fury does realize his timing sucks, right?"

"No. Things have changed more than we realized. We need to strategize, the sooner the better."

Then she shoved a glass containing a hair of the dog into his hand, so he didn't complain further. He knocked it back, they ate their breakfasts mechanically, and then it was off to the helicarrier to confer.

Fury, Coulson and Hill were there, which they had expected. Jane Foster's presence was a surprise.

Tony felt old instincts awaken when he saw her. A beautiful woman *and* a first-class scientist. And shorter than him into the bargain. Too bad she had a thing for muscleheads. "Dr. Foster! Your work on Einstein-Rosen bridges is an inspiration to us all. I'm also a huge fan of your habit of hitting Norse gods in the face." Norse gods should be hit in the face. Often.

Bruce was smiling; he wasn't going to put himself forward, but he was an admirer of hers too. They had fanboyed over her paper on those bridges together.

"You brought Thor's girlfriend here?" Steve was giving Fury the same look he had when he found the Phase 2 weapons.

“I’m not his girlfriend!” Jane said, with considerable heat. “I dumped him.”

“About time.” Steve wasn’t budging. Residual chivalry made Tony feel like he should leap to the lady’s defense, but she had it well in hand.

“I didn’t dump him *yesterday*! I dumped him during the whole Dark Elf thing! I saw the way he is when he hasn’t been turned human and he’s a jerk! As soon as I got back to Earth I started telling SHIELD what Asgard was like, but they didn’t want to believe me.” She gave Fury a little glare.

“You’ve been thoroughly vindicated, Dr. Foster.” Fury was dour as always. “And now we need you to help SHIELD and the Avengers plan how we can defend ourselves from your ex.”

She reined herself in. “I’m not sure that you can,” she told them unhappily. “Maybe if we had another century of technological advances-“

“We don’t,” Fury cut in. “Everybody sit down. I’ve got dossiers for all of you with everything Dr. Foster told us about Thor and Asgard, but for now we’ve got a ten-minute summary for you to watch. Then we’re going to talk strategy.”

Even the Reader’s Digest condensed version was pretty upsetting. “So they’re serious about this whole hegemony thing,” Bruce said when it was over.

Steve’s jaw was set. Odin was not going to keep on being king of everything. Not on Captain America’s watch, buddy.

Fury stood in front of them. “Our current weapons are pretty much useless against Asgardians. And as Agent Coulson demonstrated, even a blast from a Phase 2 prototype gun won’t do more than knock one over.”

Tony looked at Jane. “I don’t suppose you learned enough about Asgardians to know how to kill them.”

“No. They *can* be killed. I saw Heimdall and others die. I just don’t know what the difference is between how the Dark Elves attacked them and what we’ve tried, but there has to be one.”

“What I’m proposing,” and from Fury’s utterly confident demeanour - a little *too* confident - Tony knew that this was the part he was worried about selling them, “is that we seek an alliance with someone who has extensive knowledge of Asgard, and reason to oppose it.”

It took all of them several seconds to realize what Fury was saying. “You have got to be joking,” Cap said.

“Do I look like I’m laughing, Captain?”

“You think we could trust *Loki*?” The loathing in Natasha’s voice was palpable.

“He’s no worse than any other Asgardian,” Jane piped up. “The only difference is, Loki did what he did to Earth. Thor and his father did the same thing to all the other realms. And now

they're doing it to Earth too.”

Bruce was taking deep, measured breaths. Tony gave him an appraising look, but he didn't think it was rage monster time just yet.

“Okay, it's a time-honored principle,” Tony said. “The enemy of my enemy is my friend. But even if Loki's willing to ally with us, and doesn't double-cross us, how - wait. Do you have him here?” Tony wouldn't put it past Fury to have Loki in an underground cave somewhere, doped or tortured to keep him from escaping.

“No. But he was on Earth last night.”

That was when Fury showed them the footage. All of them tensed at the sight of Loki approaching Clint's hospital bed, but Loki only cured Clint's wound and then spoke for the cameras.

“I have no plans to make further mischief in your world. I suggest you conceal my visit from Asgard unless you wish for Thor to tear your realm apart seeking me. I will be on another world before he has any chance of hearing of this, but he will not be deterred. And a word of advice to Midgard: do not be impertinent to Asgard. Asgard is kind to its pets when they are docile and merciless when they snap back. I have secreted several more stones like this one close by. They should be enough to treat the casualties of this incident.”

“We've been using the stones as he suggested. They work,” Coulson said.

Natasha was on her feet. “Agent Barton-“

Fury nodded at Hill, who went to the door and beckoned to someone outside. Clint came in, good as new. He and Natasha shared a look. Tony let them do that for a few seconds before getting up and clapping Clint on the shoulder. “What some people won't do to get out of the cleanup.”

“I knew you'd see through me.” Clint gave him a play-punch in the gut and looked around. “Sorry for the dramatics, but I figured it was best that Fury explained before I walked in.”

“Are you craving the blood of the living? I'm pretty sure mine's still poisonous,” Tony said.

“I'll bite your neck if I ever decide vodka's not strong enough.”

The meeting got a lot more optimistic after that. Clint was okay. Allying with Loki looked a lot more plausible now that he had done one good deed that they knew of. Steve asked Jane what she thought of the idea, based on the time she'd spent with Loki during the Dark Elf War.

“I really don't know. He hardly ever spoke. They weren't exactly making him welcome. He did the magic they needed him to do and basically acted like a docile prisoner, right up until he escaped.”

“Did he attack anyone?”

“He killed a couple of Dark Elves in self-defense, that was all.”

After they'd kicked the idea around a bit, Tony started arguing in its favor. It seemed like the best possibility they had. He was the one who suggested that they house Loki in Avengers Tower. “We know him better than anyone else on Earth. He can't put the mind whammy on me because of my arc reactor, Natasha's demonstrated that she can mess with his head, and I'm pretty sure he wouldn't want to antagonize Bruce again.” Right after he said that, Tony realized that Fury had been counting on Tony making the suggestion. Sneaky bastard.

“There's still the open question of whether we can find him at all,” Fury said.

Tony had already taken out his Starkpad to put Jarvis to work on that problem. “Jarvis still has the electromagnetic signature of Loki's aqueous nanostructure from his last visit. I just got him searching for it. If Loki's still on Earth, we can find him.”

And by the end of the following day, they had.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

SHIELD and Loki negotiate the terms of their alliance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Loki expected the humans to try to cage or shackle him again, but they made no gesture in that direction. “We put you in the toughest cage we’ve ever built and you got out of it,” Stark told him. “Either you’re going to cooperate with us or you’re not, there’s no point second-guessing. If you start killing people we’ll sic Bruce on you. If you don’t, there’s no reason to put you in handcuffs you can probably turn into Cheez Whiz or something.”

So Loki was permitted to sit down with the humans without being shackled like a thrall. Besides Stark’s warning about their berserker, they did not even trouble to waste his time with threats. Loki was no longer capable of feeling gladness, but he did feel some relief. All of the human Avengers were gathered, as well as Director Fury and Agent Hill. All of them gave him wary looks, but considering the circumstances of their previous meetings, did not seem as alarmed as they might.

Stark, reckless as always, sat on one side of him. Banner sat on the other. Loki’s stomach gave a twist at the sight of the man, but he really didn’t care that much if he got smashed into the floor again. It wasn’t the worst thing that had happened to him in the last few years, not by a long ways.

Fury stood before them all at the head of the large table, but it was Loki to whom he directed his words.

“So, Loki. What are you prepared to do for us?”

“What precisely is your objective?”

“Our objective is to get Asgard the hell off our backs. We didn’t take down one Asgardian Mussolini just to be lorded over by a different one.”

Loki had no idea what a “Mussolini” was, but he gathered enough from the context. “All you wish for is freedom from Asgard’s rule?”

“What else would we want?”

“To rule Asgard in your turn. To avenge yourselves upon it.”

Fury looked at him as if he were insane. “I wouldn’t mind a little bit of revenge, but ruling Asgard sounds like it would be asking for trouble, even if we wanted to do it.”

“Throwing off Asgard’s yoke is feasible, then. But you will have to kill many of their warriors. Possibly even Thor, who was your shield-brother for a time.”

“And your actual brother.”

“Foster brother,” Loki corrected, weary.

“You tried to kill your *foster brother* a couple of times already. He’s still kicking.” Fury was pinning him with his single eye. Loki wished that of all wounds, Fury had not had that one.

“I lacked conviction.” Numbly Loki remembered when he had been told that. Coulson had been a brave man. He had known that he was likely to die when he had approached Loki with that weapon, and done it anyway, offering himself as a sacrifice to save his people. Loki had taken no joy in what he had done to him. Then again, Loki had never understood the joy of killing. Other Asgardians had relished it and scorned him for his lack of enjoyment. Many times Thor’s berserker laugh had rung in Loki’s ears as Loki desperately tried to keep him and his brainless friends alive to fight another day.

“And now?”

Loki sighed. “Now I will do what is necessary.”

“Even killing your own brother.”

“He is not my brother. I was adopted and he has disowned me.” Once Loki would not have been able to say those words without a storm of angry tears. Now he said them dully, almost bored with them. He wearied of the topic. “I can tell you about Asgard’s defenses. Their tactics are straightforward, especially without me strategizing and casting spells for them.”

“What about their magic weapons? Can you counteract those?”

“Given resources, I can build weapons with which you can combat theirs.”

“What resources?”

“My sceptre. The remnants of the Destroyer you were working with. Some iridium. As many tektites as you can obtain. Especially moldavites.” He listed a few other items, substances whose potential Midgard had not yet grasped. “The rest I can supply myself.”

“We’ll have it all at the SHIELD installation in Arizona in the morning.” Fury looked at Hill as he spoke and she nodded and left the room. “We’ll send a chopper to Avengers Tower to pick you up at 0800 hours.”

For a second Loki thought he could not have heard correctly. “You’re just going to hand me access to these things? After I invaded your world?”

“Banner will be with you the whole time. That’s our insurance policy. But I don’t think you get it.” Fury leaned over the table towards Loki. “Remember how desperate you made me? Your bugfuck family has made me a hell of a lot more so. We’ve been trying to fend Asgard off for a year now and the only result has been a lot of dead human soldiers. If we can’t fight Asgard off, we’re fucked. If we let you play with the toys you just listed, either you turn on us and we’re still fucked, or you play straight with us and we’re not. You’re our best hope.”

That was... rather horrifying. Loki glanced around at the others, and on all their faces saw the echo of Fury’s words. They were all brave people. All had faced death many times. But in their faces Loki saw fear.

Loki no longer much cared whether he lived or died, provided he did either outside of Asgard’s dungeon. But in the faces around the table, he saw that these humans wanted to live. They wanted their freedom. The rest of their species must want the same, else the Avengers would not be taking such drastic measures.

Loki did not much care if he himself lived, but they wanted to live and he could not turn away from that.

“At 0800 hours, then.”

Seeing the slight flickers of relief on the humans’ faces, Loki felt a distant trace of satisfaction himself.

“I’ve got a room set aside for you at the Tower, Blitzen,” Stark said. “Maybe not up to princely standards, but it’s better than that hole in the wall we found you in. And I’m guessing it beats your last room in Asgard.”

Loki managed not to shudder. “Just so long as it has windows.”

“The better to throw me out of? Yeah, it’s got windows.”

Chapter End Notes

Tektites are stones around which interesting legends have grown. Tektite lore is one thing I’m a nerd about, though I haven’t done more research on it in years. I like to put them in Loki fics, though.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

The night before Loki's work for SHIELD begins, Tony and Loki have a chat.

Stark Tower had become Avengers Tower and all of the human Avengers were now housed in it. Each had his or her own chambers, but apparently a great deal of their life was communal; they took many of their meals together, exercised together, and watched recorded performances together. As soon as they all reached the Tower, Stark said, “Guys, how about I order a bunch of pizzas and we all watch James Bond movies?”

“Which ones?”

“We’ll take a vote.”

Stark explained pizza to Loki and asked enough about Loki’s tastes to guess what toppings he might like before placing the order. Loki suspected that the questions were mostly an oblique way of making it clear that he was allowed to eat with the others. And eating while watching movies eliminated the necessity of attempting conversation between former enemies. It was neatly done, Loki thought. He sat on the edge of the group, speaking only when spoken to.

Pizza, it turned out, was good. Since his escape Loki had usually had little appetite. Perhaps something in him understood that he now had a measure of safety, because hunger overwhelmed him and he ate an amount of pizza that plainly amazed the humans.

The movies were a welcome distraction. Loki could not lose himself in them as he liked to do with tales, his mind was too dulled, but they occupied his attention.

Then they were over and he had to retire to his room.

Stark had spoken the truth. One entire wall of the room was a window. A word to “Jarvis”, the invisible servant who ran the Tower and Stark’s enchanted armor, would turn the windows black should Loki not wish to look out, but he needed to see the sky, the horizon.

Despite Stark’s deprecation, the room was very fine. Everything was comfortable and pleasing to the eye. The mattress was firm. Still Loki found himself lying staring at the ceiling, which reminded him of the months he had spent doing just that in Asgard’s dungeons, which reminded him of... everything.

Perhaps it was unsurprising that he could not sleep under the same roof as his former enemies.

He had been uselessly trying to sleep for over an hour when Jarvis spoke to him. “Excuse me, Mr. Odinson.”

Loki winced. “Friggasson, please.” His mother had gone along with her husband’s evil deeds, but at least she had loved him to the end. Her, he still would claim.

“Mr. Friggasson, then. Mr. Stark requested that, if you were still awake, I convey an invitation for you to share a drink with him in the common room.”

Boredom made Loki accept. Stark was at the bar stirring a glass pitcher full of a pale green liquid. “Ever try margaritas?” he asked as Loki entered the room.

“No.”

“Then you’ve been missing out.” Stark took out two oddly shaped goblets and filled both. Loki took one and tasted cautiously. Sour and sweet, not unpleasant. Stark took his own goblet and the pitcher to the low table in front of one of the couches and slumped down on it. “C’mon, I don’t bite. Well, unless you ask nicely.”

Slowly Loki came to sit beside Stark. “You do not mind sheltering your enemy?”

Dark brown eyes regarded Loki shrewdly. “Well, for one thing, you’re on our side now. Unless you’re going to double-cross us, but that’s no reason to be an asshole to you before you do it. And-“ Stark stopped and looked at Loki, who was laughing. Not very loudly, but he couldn’t stop, the chuckles shaking his body.

At length Loki composed himself. “Go on, please.”

Stark was looking at him a little warily, but he did. “When I first got out of - Clint told you about Afghanistan, right? You said he told you everything.”

“Yes.”

“Right. So yeah, when I first got home, I couldn’t sleep. I’m an insomniac anyway, but it was worse.” Stark paused to drain his goblet and refill it.

“And this is how you dealt with it.”

“It’s one way. That and building things until I pass out. And I never can sleep my first night in a strange place. Hotels make me crazy, especially if I’m alone in them.” He burrowed himself into the deep cushions of the sofa. “Lean back. This sofa’s great for passing out drunk on.”

“And that’s your plan?”

“Sure, why not? Jarvis, another movie. I want to see *Goldeneye* again and Clint gets too snarky about that one. We can drool over Famke Janssen. Or Pierce Brosnan. Or both.”

A little while into the movie, Loki asked, “So do you ‘drool over’ both of them?”

“Yep. I’m versatile. You?”

“You may have Miss Janssen. Brosnan is mine.”

Tony had enough alcohol in his system to crack up over that, especially the matter-of-fact way Loki said it. “Didn’t you get shit for that in Asgard?”

“For what?”

“Preferring men.”

Loki glanced at him. “I thought humans were over that notion.”

“We mostly are. I didn’t think Asgard would be.”

“No, it’s...” Loki considered his words. “In Asgard what matters is that you wed the person your family chooses for you, and produce heirs with that person.”

“Arranged marriages. Asgard just sounds better and better. So did Odin ever marry you and Thor off?”

“No. I assumed he was waiting to choose a bride for Thor so that the other realms would continue currying his favor. He used this to his own benefit; he would open marriage negotiations with the royal house of one realm, and all the other realms would fling gifts and princesses at him. But I don’t think he planned it that way.”

“Why not?”

“I think it was an unanticipated side benefit of not being able to betroth Thor without raising the question of why he did not also choose a bride for his younger son.”

“Well, why couldn’t he-“

“Blue babies.”

“...Oh.” Tony wasn’t sure that was even biologically possible, but Loki sounded flatly certain, and even Tony knew this was a subject best left alone for now.

“Also, it’s possible he intended to cement my claim to the Jotun throne by marrying me to some noble-born giantess.”

Tony was still trying to process a reply to that when Loki gestured at the screen. “I believe the actual plot is commencing.”

Loki had already seen enough Bond movies to realize that the plots weren’t exactly rocket surgery, but Tony could recognize code for “I don’t want to talk about it anymore” when he heard it.

“Yep. And your boyfriend’s going to take his shirt off in the next scene.”

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Loki's first day working with SHIELD.

Chapter Notes

Nemithine gave me the idea about how Asgardian invulnerability works - thanks, dear!

At 7:30 Jarvis awoke Tony and Loki, who had indeed spent the night passed out on the sofa with the dregs of the pitcher of margaritas between them. They ate a hurried breakfast - Loki accepted the sugary cereal offered to him without comment or complaint - and then the chopper took them to the Army base and from there they took a jet to the base in Arizona. They'd been offered accommodations near the base, but Tony wasn't having it. He felt safe in the Tower. The work had to take place out in the middle of nowhere, though, in case the weapons - or Loki - went bad. Limit the damage.

As promised, all of the materials Loki had requested were waiting, stacked up in a vast, dreary room of fluorescent lights and high grey ceilings. Tony and Bruce immediately pounced on the bits of the Destroyer. "What's this alloy? I can't place it."

Bruce's question had been directed at Tony, Tony being the engineer with more practical knowledge, but it was Loki who answered. "Uru. One of the few substances that can harm my kind."

"Hm. Too bad we don't have more of it."

"Which is why I requested the moldavites." Loki was opening the crates of moldavites: gemstones of a dull green tone.

"Moldavites are your kryptonite?"

"I do not know what kryptonite is, but tektites of all varieties have mystical properties. The black ones I have another purpose for. The moldavites are prized for jewelry and are rare throughout the Nine Realms." Loki took a handful of the stones and pocketed them. "In return for these, the dwarven craftsmen of Nidavellir should be willing to give us sufficient uru to arm Midgard."

"So how do you get to Nidavellir?"

Loki smiled. “One of the names humans gave me was ‘Skywalker’. I know of ways to travel between the realms without a Bifrost or a Tesseract.”

“Loki Skywalker?” That was perfect.

Loki shot him a suspicious look. He could see that he was being poked fun at even though neither human actually laughed. “Stand back. Unless you wish to hasten to Valhalla.”

With that, Loki held up his hands and shimmering light appeared between them. As they watched, the ball of light grew larger, brighter.

“What are you doing?”

“Summoning seiðr,” Loki said, as if it should have been obvious.

“Why didn’t you do that to escape from prison?”

“The prison blocked my magic. And I was watched. I would have been stopped. Now stop distracting me.”

It took several minutes for enough power to gather. And then Loki was just *gone*. Poof, a flash of light and no more Loki.

They looked at the spot for a minute. Then Tony and Bruce looked at each other.

“Spectrometers-“ Tony said, and at the same moment Bruce said, “Oscilloscopes-“

They laughed, and then Tony got on the phone and ordered every kind of sensor gadget he could think of. If the secrets of Loki’s magic could be cracked with Earthgardian technology, he was going to do it.

An hour later he and Bruce had all the gadgets set up, Jane Foster had joined them and lent a hand, and a hole opened in the air. Loki stepped through followed by two dwarfs. Actual dwarfs, short burly guys who looked... different, Tony wasn’t sure how, but different from short humans. The dwarfs didn’t even deign to glance their way, just went straight to the moldavites, spent several minutes scrutinizing the stones, and finally picked up the crates of them and carried them through the portal. A minute later more dwarfs came back with several pallets of uru. Tony guessed that there was at least half a ton of the stuff.

The dwarfs trudged back through the portal and Loki closed it just as Fury stalked in.

“Director Fury. And Dr. Foster. I hope you are well.”

“Um, yeah.” Jane all but shuffled her feet. She never had gotten past the awkward-geek thing.

“Um... I’m sorry I slapped you that time.”

“I’m sorry I invaded your world that time,” Loki answered, solemn.

Fury looked incredulous. “He blew up half of Manhattan and you’re sorry you *slapped* him?”

Ho boy. Tony and Bruce stepped back to enjoy the show as Jane seemed to swell up like a cat fluffing its fur. “That’s not the point! You didn’t *see*. It seemed okay when they first got him out of jail, but they dragged him around in chains for *days*, the whole time they were making him do magic for them. It was... creepy. It’s not that Loki doesn’t deserve to get smacked.” She shot Loki a little glare, and Loki replied with a weary half-smile. “But doing it like that, with him handcuffed and Thor’s friends just dying for an excuse to beat him up, it was... tacky.”

Fury looked unimpressed. Well, even less impressed than usual.

“Think no more of it. I don’t deny that I earned it, and doubtless more retribution is in my future.” Loki rubbed his forehead. “Where can I obtain food here? That sort of travel is very draining.”

Tony didn’t believe in traveling light. He opened one of his cases, full of assorted nourishment. “Help yourself. And then start telling us what to do with this uru stuff.”

Loki found the chocolate bars - of course he did - and wolfed one down. The second one he ate more slowly, talking in between bites.

“You have observed that Asgardians are hard to kill. The Aesir are pervaded with what we have come to call the Odinfence, though it really has nothing to do with Odin. We can be struck, flung about, even stabbed, but that force holds our bodies together. Only weapons imbued with appropriate magic can truly harm us. The reason the Jotnar are so feared is that the ice weapons they conjure are not merely ice, they are formed with magic which can counteract the Odinfence.”

“So this stuff,” Tony indicated the heap of ore, “will counteract it?”

“Not by itself. As we fashion the weapons, I will have to endow them with the appropriate magic. You still need me. For now.”

Loki said that with a crooked smile. Tony got the impression he was used to relying on people needing him. He shrugged, playing it casual. “I didn’t doubt it. So, these weapons. Do they have to be swords and spears? Would guns made out of it work?”

Whoops.

Loki turned even paler than usual, which Tony wouldn’t have thought was possible, and with horror Tony realized Loki was about to cry. Quickly he caught Bruce by the elbow.

“Oh, I just remembered there’s something important we need to show Fury over here. ‘Scuse us humans for a few minutes.”

Nobody was fooled by the gambit, but then, no one was supposed to be. The humans went into the next room (a long-disused office) so that Loki had some privacy for his breakdown.

“He still cares about Asgard,” Bruce said after a minute.

“It was his home for a thousand years.” Tony tried to imagine helping to arm aliens to fight other humans. Other Americans, maybe. Yeah, he could see how that would hurt. Even if it was the right thing to do. Even if he had to do it.

“He could back out at a crucial moment.”

“He could do a lot of things. Give him another ten minutes to get a grip on himself and then get him to work. And I’ll expect a report every two days.” With that, Fury left them.

They gave Loki a lot longer than ten minutes. When they finally filed back into the main room, Loki’s eyes were red but he was calmly drawing blueprints. Tony noticed that he was drawing perfectly straight lines without a ruler. Show-off.

As the humans drew near, Loki raised his head.

“Good, you’re back. I have treason to commit.”

Back in New York, Fury made sure all the audio surveillance in the communications room was turned off before contacting the World Council. “The Trickster Initiative is a go. Loki is willing to build us weapons that will kill Asgardians.”

“And have you changed your mind about what you’ll have to do once we have them?”

“No.” Fury shook his head once. “Loki is too dangerous. When he’s built enough of them, we’ll use one of them on him.”

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

SHIELD and the Avengers debrief Loki.

The next day, rather than return to Arizona to work on the weapons, SHIELD took Loki and the human Avengers to their New York headquarters for debriefing. They wanted to know all about Asgard.

Loki answered the humans' questions truthfully. Unfortunately, back in Viking days when the Aesir had made their visit to Earth, he had been dubbed the God of Lies, even though he lied no more than any other Asgardian. It was only that the point of a couple of his lies to them had been intended to be exposed as part of a prank - good heavens, what had he been, forty? It was only the high spirits of youth. He would have expected the humans to forget, but some mortal had written it down and now the living humans Loki had to actually deal with treated his every word with skepticism. It was most tiresome.

Humans were currently enamoured of democratic forms of government, though given the practical results of these over the last two centuries on Earth Loki could not discern why. Consequently they pinned a great deal of hope on the influence of the Thing, the body of all Asgardian-born adults, when Loki told them about it. He had to disillusion them: the Thing governed small areas and handled petty matters, but in great matters such as foreign policy all they could do was send a delegation to the palace and hope to be heard. Loki had spent hours every week of his adult life listening to their petitions and doing his best to satisfy them when he could, but ultimately the king of Asgard did as he liked. With the magic Asgard's throne commanded, no one could stop whoever sat upon it.

Loki spent hours that day telling them the history of Asgard. He did not embellish Thor's exploits in the slightest, but the humans seemed genuinely shocked as the body count grew. Really, what did they *think* Thor had been doing for the past thousand years? Loki told endless variations on the same story: some other realm defied or irritated Odin. Odin sent warriors - usually led by Thor, once Thor was about two hundred years old - to teach them a lesson. They dropped out of the sky via the Bifrost and killed whoever happened to be there. Thor would enter his berserker state, laughing in joy as he slaughtered hundreds with his hammer. On the sidelines, the rest of them would kill a few dozen each. When Thor in his rashness chose a battle they could not win by strength of arms, Loki would stop the fight before it started if he could with his silver tongue, and generally succeeded - so long as nobody called Thor any names. If not, Loki would summon magic of some sort to get them out alive.

"So, all the Vanir did was criticize Odin, and Thor and his buddies went and killed two thousand of them?" Fury sounded as if he could not believe it.

“Yes,” Loki said, patient. “Ask Thor yourselves, the next time he drops in.”

The humans exchanged looks. “We don’t have to. Jane Foster already told us that story. We weren’t sure if we should believe her.”

Loki recalled his own bleak amusement at Foster’s shock as she listened to the warrior boasting of Thor and his friends. None of them had understood what she found so troubling, or even seemed to believe that she truly was troubled.

“It is hardly a secret. Asgard wants all the realms to know what kind of consequences will follow any defiance.”

“Yeah. We’re starting to get that.”

Loki also warned them about Thanos. He wasn’t sure they believed him. “He might not come for another generation or two, but come he will. His intention, once I had conquered Earth, was to kill half of the human race, leaving me the other half to rule. Well, so he said. I believe he actually intended to kill me once he had the Tesseract.”

That made Stark ask about how Loki had fallen in with Thanos to begin with. Loki told the story hesitantly. He thought the humans unlikely to believe the truth. Still, he told them the whole story: his attempt at suicide, how instead the wormhole had taken him to the other side of the galaxy and into the clutches of an evil being in love with Death. Loki’s account of the tortures to which he had been subjected was brief and abridged, but even so the humans all looked queasy over it.

“Invulnerability is not an unmixed blessing,” Loki told them quietly.

Banner got up and hurried out to the “stadium” - a huge room that had been constructed for him when his transformation struck. It was filled with concrete things for him to smash so that his rage could run its course.

“Well, I’d say that’s progress,” Stark said.

“Is it?”

“Now he’s angry *for* you instead of *at* you. I’d say you’ve made a friend.”

Stark’s tone was teasing, and “friend” was doubtless too warm a word, but the news was welcome nonetheless.

“So you think he was going to kill you once you conquered Earth.” Romanoff looked at him coolly. “How did you plan to get out of that?”

“By not conquering Earth. Did you actually believe my clumsy gambit was supposed to *succeed*?”

“I didn’t,” Stark said.

“I wondered,” Rogers said.

“When I was... *working* for you,” Barton said, voice full of venom, “I kept trying to tell you that your plans were too risky.”

“I recall. You would be a valuable lieutenant for anyone. But as I think you all eventually realized, the plan all along was for you to stop me. It wasn’t until you,” he nodded at Romanoff, “tampered with the sceptre and broke Thanos’s connection to me that I was free of him.”

“So what was your plan, if Bruce hadn’t smashed you? We stop your army, bust the sceptre the Big Bad used to put his hooks in you, and you... what?”

“I was going to give the Tesseract to my - foster father.”

“Oh.” Tony’s fingers tapped on the table. “*Oh*. And then maybe he’d...”

“Yes. Maybe. Probably not.” Loki winced as he recalled his own desperate hope. Laying the Tesseract at Odin’s feet, bartering it for some forgiveness. He wondered if that gambit might have worked. Likely not. Odin had needed someone to blame. Loki was the obvious choice.

“I’m actually almost sorry now.” Stark gave a theatrical pause. “Almost.”

“Don’t be. It wouldn’t have been enough to placate him. And really, I knew it, but I wanted the satisfaction of having it confirmed.”

“So what did you expect him to do?”

“Execute me.”

“Your own father? Come on.”

“That is the entire point, isn’t it? He *isn’t* my father. And he announced that he would have executed me, but my foster mother pleaded for my life until he relented.”

“Fuck.”

“Indeed.”

“So you figured that Thanos would kill you if you gave him the Tesseract, and Odin would kill you if you gave it to *him*?”

“Well, yes.” At their gobsmacked expressions, Loki reminded them, “I fell into Thanos’s hands because of a suicide attempt. I had very little interest in living.”

“And now?”

Loki shrugged. “I still have very little, but actively killing oneself requires effort. It requires... conviction.” He laughed, mirthless.

Towards the end of the day, the questions turned to magic. After a couple of hours all the humans except Stark and Banner dispersed, while the scientists kept quizzing Loki as they

returned to the Tower and ordered Chinese food. The three of them stayed up late into the night, talking, the humans plying Loki with questions.

The human scientists - the closest mortals could come to being sorcerers - surprised Loki. He had paid no attention to Midgard for centuries until Thor's banishment, and then when he had observed Thor in exile, he had seen that humans had advanced far more than anyone had ever expected. It seemed the other realms had underestimated Midgard. As he talked with them, he realized just how much. They would make some reference to a factor of their science - relativity, quantum particles, electromagnetic fields. Loki would ask them to define their terms and they would, and Loki would realize - at first with pleased surprise, and soon with actual fear - that even without the help of longer-lived species, without magic flowing through their bodies, these short-lived, unmagical little creatures were still well on their way to grasping the true nature of the universe.

Within a century humans - *humans* - would be a force to be reckoned with. The other realms would have to either ally with them or destroy them.

Destroying enemies had never worked out very well for Asgard. See: Jotunheim, Svartalfheim. Midgard had been ready to accept Odin and Thor as allies and Asgard had responded to the offer with subjugation. Had driven the humans to seek help from their former enemy. Did Odin remember nothing of what he himself had taught his sons?

Thank you, dear father and brother, for handing me allies on a platter.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Tony gives Loki a neck rub.

Chapter Notes

Plumadesatada helped me with the massage description here - thank you, dear!

The following day Loki and the scientists made another trip to Arizona and the work of building their weapons began in earnest. As they worked, they continued to discuss science and sorcery. The conversation sparked Loki's lifelong curiosity, curiosity he had thought long dead. In prison he had barely been able to summon the interest to occasionally read the handful of books his mother had managed to smuggle to him. But the humans talked and Loki listened and found himself asking questions and speculating with them about how human science and Asgardian sorcery fitted together.

In the evening, food was ordered and consumed back at Avengers Tower and Stark decreed that Loki needed to be educated about what "kryptonite" was. The entire group sat down to watch two movies about a hero of Midgardian lore known as "Superman". Movies were, Loki began to suspect, an excellent way of whiling away boredom when one lacked the energy to care enough to actually do anything.

After everyone else had gone to bed, Loki lingered in the common room out of inertia. Stark did as well, either because that was where most of the liquor was or because he wanted to chat with Loki.

"So listen, Loki, any night you can't sleep, ask Jarvis and if I'm awake he'll hit me up and we'll get drunk watching stupid movies again."

Loki frowned at him, bemused. "Why are you being so kind to me? I nearly killed you."

Tony started mixing a couple of gin martinis as he answered. "I could say that it's because you're on our side now and it behooves me to encourage your good behavior by making nice. But the truth is that I'm just not cold-blooded enough to do anything else. I've done the PTSD thing and I'm just not mean enough to sit around knowing someone else is going through that and not try to make it easier. Even if my opinion of you were a lot worse than it is."

Loki accepted a martini, took a cautious sip, then knocked back the whole drink without a wince. “Your people value mercy, then.”

Stark poured vermouth over the ice in the mixer, shook it, and poured it out. “Some of us do. I gather Asgardians don’t.”

“Well. You’ve met Thor.”

“Yeah.” He poured gin into the mixer and began stirring, very gently. “Is he a typical Asgardian?”

“He is the ideal Asgardian. The standard to which all others aspire.”

“In other words, we’re fucked.”

“No. I will help you to arm yourselves.” Stark paused in his pouring, looking unassured, so Loki changed the subject. “How did you find me?”

Stark smiled, more than a little smug. “We traced your aqueous nanostructure. They put out electromagnetic signals, and yours is different from a terrestrial one.”

Loki accepted a second martini and went to the sofa with it. He had not entirely understood Stark’s answer, but clearly humans had advanced further than anyone had ever expected them to. That would bear examining. Later. Aside from when he had delivered healing stones to that Midgardian hospital, this was the first day in a year that he had done actual work. He was tired and his neck ached from bending over his blueprints. He reached up to rub some of the tension out of it.

A pair of warm hands descending onto the back of his neck startled him. “Here, let me,” Stark said, and started massaging Loki’s neck.

“What are you-“

“Chill, I happen to be good at this.”

Loki forced himself to hold still, fighting down the panic at having someone in such close proximity. “If I ‘chilled’, I would freeze your hands off.”

Stark’s fingers paused for a second, then resumed their work. He was, in fact, good at this. And stronger than Loki would have expected, for a human without bulging muscles like the captain’s. “Seriously?”

Loki waved a hand. “Jotuns can inflict frostbite on warmblooded beings. I don’t know if it’s something they - we - do on purpose or if any contact will freeze people.”

“You haven’t experimented?”

“Would you like me to transform right now and see if you get frostbite?”

Stark removed his hands.

Loki glanced up at him and spoke, surprised at how awkward he felt. "I was joking. I can't actually transform at will."

"Want me to keep on, then?"

"If you don't mind." Loki felt obscurely embarrassed. But his neck already hurt less from Stark's ministrations, and the warm hands against his own skin felt... pleasant. Loki had always disliked being touched, but perhaps the years of isolation had changed that.

Then again, Loki had never objected to being touched by handsome men, and Stark was certainly that. Warm brown eyes and sardonic smile and lean muscles. Had Loki not been so utterly numb, he would already have bedded the man, or tried to. As it was, Stark's attraction was something he noted clinically, as if it were an unfamiliar species of plant.

"'Chill' means 'calm down' in human, if you didn't know," Stark commented, resuming the impromptu massage. Loki's neck was full of knots - like he carried the weight of the Nine Realms.

"I have heard the usage." Loki let out a soft exhale, his eyes closing. "I had forgotten it." As he had forgotten what it felt like to be touched and not hurt.

"So," Stark dug his fingers a little deeper, as if to make up for what he was about to bring up, "I know this is a sore subject, but you really don't know anything about how frost giants work?"

Loki sighed. "No."

"That's too bad." Stark seemed to notice Loki had tensed up and turned his digging into more of an apologetic kneading, moving to the base of Loki's neck. "I had a ton of questions. So how do you transform?"

"I have taken that form three times since Odin transformed me as an infant," Loki answered, his voice too even to be real. "The first was when a Jotun grabbed my arm and tried to give me frostbite." He smiled bitterly, glad Stark could not see his face. He remembered his confusion, his innocence at thinking himself simply cursed. "The other two were when I touched the Casket of Ancient Winters."

"So what's the deal with this Casket?" Stark asked, forgetting himself and pressing a little too hard on a painful spot. "What's it do?"

Loki hissed in pain, rolling his shoulder to dislodge Stark's thumb. He pointedly did not move away, though. "It can be used to freeze things," he began, relaxing into the now gentler massage. "They brought it here to Midgard a thousand years ago. Odin claimed they intended to use the Casket to make this world as cold as Jotunheim. That may be true." He shook his head at how easily he had swallowed every one of Odin's lies.

"I have to say," Stark commented absently, "I'm glad he didn't let the Jotuns take my planet." His hands paused for a moment before resuming again, and he huffed. "But then, he wasn't

exactly being altruistic, was he?" Loki thought he might be grinning ruefully, from the sound of his voice.

"Hardly. Odin fought them back to their own world rather than allow another realm to have the strategic advantage of a second base of population." Loki noticed he was tensing at the thought of his foster father and forced himself to relax under Stark's ministrations. "He has always been most conscientious about nipping potential threats to Asgard's power in the bud."

"What a sweetheart. So what exactly were you in prison for?" Again Stark's fingers pressed into his shoulders harder as he brought up a painful subject. "I don't think it was for killing frost giants. Odin obviously didn't much like them, and Thor killed a few hundred of 'em by his own account and his sentence was three days in New Mexico. How come *you* get locked up forever?" A brief squeeze punctuated the question.

The question surprised Loki, coming from a human. "After what I did to your world, you have to ask?"

"Yes. Because I would have locked you up, but that's because it's *my* world you invaded." At least Stark was honest. The man surprised him by adding, "And I wouldn't have sentenced you to thousands of years in solitary, by the way, that's too much even for what you did." His touch became more rhythmic, lulling Loki into relaxing more. "But Odin obviously doesn't care about us mere mortals - Jane says he called her a goat to her face - and he's invaded every inhabited planet in the Nine Realms. Right?"

"Yes."

"So what were you put in the dungeon for?"

"For ruining Odin's plans to make use of me." Loki closed his eyes, his body moving slightly with Stark's massaging. He had had far too much time to think about this. He had seen most of Odin's plan for him the moment he had learned that he was Laufey's son, and deceived himself that he could make Odin love him - value him - enough to grant him a different destiny. It had, of course, been a hopeless quest. In his inmost heart, he suspected that he had known it all along.

Stark said nothing, and the movement of his hands remained even and soothing. Eventually Loki continued.

"He invested a thousand years in grooming his puppet king of Jotunheim, and I damaged Jotunheim to the point that it is no longer worth the enslaving, and guaranteed that even Odin could not compel them to accept me as his viceroy." He chuckled, bitter. "Had I not stopped Thor's coronation, I too would have been a king shortly thereafter. King of a dying ball of ice." But a better fate than the one he had lived.

"But would Jotunheim have taken you? A runt raised on a different planet?"

Loki gave a little shrug, too slight to dislodge Stark's hands. "Odin would have sent warriors to enforce my rule, and perhaps allowed the Jotuns to use the Casket sometimes. They would

have had little choice. And I would have done as he wished. I can think of few fates less appealing than life on Jotunheim, but I would have gone, and would have governed Jotunheim for Asgard's benefit rather than its own."

"That's... brutal."

"That is Odin Allfather."

"So this Casket, it just makes things cold?" Stark's hands seemed to slacken now as they continued their work, moving slowly from Loki's shoulders back up his neck.

"Oh, no. It is the heart of Jotunheim. The source of its power. Without it, their world is slowly dying." Loki recalled thinking, before his life had changed utterly, that one day the Jotnar would all be dead from Odin's deed and none would need to fear them ever again. "In another thousand years there will be no life on Jotunheim."

"So Odin was committing genocide on the installment plan?" Stark sounded freshly horrified. Humans were such idealistic creatures, even if this one did think himself a cynic. "Letting them die slowly instead of getting it over with quick like you?"

"I suppose one could argue that I was more merciful." Loki mulled that over for a moment as Stark's hands continued their rhythmic motion. "I wish I had not done it."

"Glad to hear it." Stark hesitated. "When Thor was here a while back to inform us that we were now a protectorate of Asgard, I asked him if Asgard had done anything to help Jotunheim after what you did to it."

Loki could not help laughing at that. "And what did he say?"

"He looked at me like I was crazy."

"Of course. Asgard did not help Midgard to repair the damage done by the Chitauri I brought here either, did it? Odin only cares about other races when it gives him a chance to condemn an inconvenient prince."

"Yeah, I'm getting that impression. I assume Odin still has the Casket."

"No. When I unleashed the Bifrost on Jotunheim, I placed the Casket on top of the Bifrost mechanism to freeze it in place. When Thor destroyed the Bifrost, the Casket was lost in the Void."

"So Jotunheim's shit out of luck, then."

"I fear so." Abruptly gloom swept through Loki. What had he done to his own people, trying to win the love of a man incapable of the feeling? Thor had stopped the Bifrost but the Jotnar were still dying. Slowly and painfully instead of with merciful swiftness.

An idea came to Loki then. A possibility, albeit a remote one. Something might be done to help Jotunheim. His mind raced, turning over ways and means. He would need more seiðr than he himself contained. He would require access to a relic. Stealing one from Asgard's

vault seemed impossible even for him now, and the ones on Midgard were not powerful enough. Or perhaps the aid of other sorcerers. But where could he find any willing to work with him? Perhaps if Vanaheim became angry enough at Asgard, without being too afraid of it to help him....

“Whoa, where’d you go?”

Innate caution always stopped Loki from revealing his plans when he did not have to. Especially since at this moment, he saw no way of implementing this one. “An idea that showed itself unworkable after a moment’s reflection.” He stood. “Thank you, the discomfort in my neck is much alleviated. You have, again, been most kind. I will see you in the morning.”

“Sure thing.”

Loki left Stark alone with another martini. He fell asleep without having yet solved the dilemma of where to obtain the power he needed for the working he must do. Still, having a practical question to ponder again was a pleasant feeling. It made him feel almost like himself again.

Almost.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Thor makes a diplomatic visit to Midgard, and Tony has an idea about how best to deal with Loki.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The day of Thor's planned return, Loki was shipped off to Arizona alone. SHIELD had weighed everything and decided that on balance, it was more important to have the Avengers forming an honor guard for Thor while he met with the UN than supervising Loki.

That is, if Thor felt like going on another killing spree, they wanted the Avengers on hand to fight him. Thor was officially more dangerous than Loki now.

Loki tried to prepare SHIELD so that they in turn could prepare the UN. "Thor has never had the patience for diplomacy," he informed them, rather unnecessarily. "He is prince of Asgard, the doted-upon son of the most powerful man in the Nine Realms. He expects to march in, state his wishes, and have everyone accede to them. If you wish to avoid bloodshed, you will do so."

"Isn't there any way to talk him out of all this?" Steve didn't sound very hopeful. More like he felt obliged to ask.

Loki looked at him, weary. "If you find one, do let me know. I've been trying for a thousand years."

So SHIELD did its best to convince the assorted diplomats that for now, they had best go along with what Asgard wanted. Tony's guess was that every government in the world was secretly plotting, developing weapons. But only SHIELD had an Asgardian consultant on retainer, as it were. It was down to them.

Tony made sure he was well fortified with vodka before Thor arrived. There was no other way he was going to get through the day without telling Thor exactly what he thought of him.

Thor arrived in Central Park in a flash of rainbow light. The Avengers managed smiles for his hearty greetings and back-slappings. Natasha did a lot of the talking; she was a spy, she was better at faking things than the rest of them. Cap and Tony both kept their (literal) masks on. Luckily, Clint's natural expression was so dour that Thor did not notice anything amiss with him.

Aside from Natasha, their attempts at pretending they still liked Thor struck Tony as unconvincing. Maybe this was just because he knew the truth so well. If not, then Asgard had better dread the day when Thor became king, if he was this oblivious to people hating his guts.

You'd think the brother of Loki Silvertongue would have learned more perception in simple self-defense.

The UN meeting went as well as could be expected. Most of the ambassadors had fobbed the job off onto their subordinates, so that they wouldn't have kissing Thor's ass on their record when (if) Earth ran Asgard off. And the careers of those subordinates would be haunted by having shouldered this duty.

Loki would have made sure he knew the first grade teacher of every ambassador of every country on the globe and would have known in an instant if any had dared to send an underling. Thor just assumed that of course only the highest ranking officials would be presented to the son of Odin.

"He is accustomed to having me to worry about these things for him," Loki had told them. "Perhaps I should have neglected to do it, for his own good. Too late now. You may be able to take some small advantage of that."

A few of the dignitaries did try to "negotiate" with Thor. Very tactfully they tried to tell him that they wished to retain more independence. And more weapons. Thor dismissed their words with a shrug. "We cannot allow the people of Midgard to continue to make war upon each other."

"And if people from some other planet attack us?" one of them demanded.

"Then Asgard shall defend you," Thor assured them.

"That seems like an awfully big burden for Asgard."

"And one we have happily shouldered for thousands of years."

That was pretty much how the whole meeting went, aside from some random bootlicking that Thor seemed to take at face value. Loki had warned them to keep it short so that Thor wouldn't get cranky, so after about an hour and a half of this the meeting adjourned and Thor was free to get drunk.

Which he did, back at Avengers Tower. The Avengers had checked a hundred times to make sure all traces of Loki's presence had been eradicated. Even the few possessions in Loki's room - a few changes of clothing, toiletries - had been sent to Arizona with him.

Once Thor had a few drinks in him, Natasha started asking him for war stories. Thor needed little encouragement to boast, and his account of various past battles tallied closely with Loki's and Jane's.

Thor, it seemed, had killed an awful lot of people over the years.

They let him talk until he passed out. He spent the last hour that he was conscious decrying the inconstancy of Woman in increasingly slurred tones. He even recited what was apparently an Asgardian poem.

The speech of a maiden should no man trust
nor the words which a woman says;
for their hearts were shaped on a whirling wheel
and falsehood fixed in their breasts.

Thor recited this, seemingly unaware that Natasha belonged to that category. Maybe warrior women didn't count, who knew. Natasha had let worse than that roll off her back; she listened as imperturbably as if he had been railing against small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri.

It was pretty clear that by "women" Thor meant "Jane", even though he never said her name. *You dodged that bullet, Foster*, Tony thought.

Jarvis, of course, recorded everything Thor said and would deliver the data to SHIELD. The Avengers all sat around watching him snore for a few minutes before going to their separate beds without a word.

In the morning, Thor ate a staggering number of pancakes and then got himself beamed back up to Asgard.

When Thor was safely gone, Tony insisted on having another Avengers meeting before they brought Loki back from Arizona. He even asked Fury to sit in on it. Fury agreed, probably because Tony actually wanting to include him in anything was pretty much unprecedented.

"Well?" Fury demanded once they were all gathered.

"Loki's depressed. We need to do something about this."

Fury's lip curled. "Not our department."

"If it concerns Loki it's our department, Nick, you know that."

The older man shrugged. "Being depressed might make him easier to keep in line."

Tony looked at him. Fury must not know what it was like. Lucky bastard. "You really don't understand how depression works, do you, Nick?"

"No. He really doesn't." That was Bruce. Bruce understood, hell yes. "From what we know of how Loki copes with misery, I'm thinking that miserable is something we don't want him to be."

Fury's dislike of Tony made him reluctant to listen even when Tony was obviously right, but he respected Bruce's opinion. "Fine. What do you propose to do about it?"

Tony sighed. No one was going to like this. “I think we should try to give him emotional support.”

“Somehow this isn’t what I envisioned when I launched the Avengers Initiative.”

“Hitting doesn’t solve everything, Nick. Some problems can’t be handled by beating somebody up.”

That started an argument that took... okay, it took a couple of hours, but it felt like days. Tony had to spend a lot of time reiterating that he hadn’t forgiven Loki for the Chitauri thing and clarifying what he meant by “emotional support”. “I’m not saying you guys have to make friends with him, for chrissake. I’m not saying we have to sing Kumbayas at him. I’m saying that we should just *listen* to him with basic respect. And let him join in our reindeer games. He spent his whole life being the only nerd on the Planet of the Jocks. His whole family’s turned on him. He’s a fugitive. He doesn’t *need* to be reminded that he’s been a bad boy. He needs to be reminded that he can be a good boy. And that maybe we’ll notice it if he is.”

At first Bruce was the only one on his side. Natasha didn’t speak at all for the first hour, but that was standard. She frequently sat back quietly, watching everyone else and getting the lay of the land. When she did join in, she was on Tony’s side, for completely pragmatic reasons: she knew Tony was right, that they needed Loki’s cooperation and that suicidally depressed people weren’t very reliable. Steve came around after they’d all talked it over some, which didn’t surprise him; Steve was a basically kind person, he just wasn’t naive. He was innocent; not the same thing. Clint and Fury came around when Bruce offered some practical suggestions that weren’t even a little bit touchy-feely.

So Tony won in the end. Like he almost always did.

When they got Loki back from Arizona that night, he was even gloomier than he’d been when they first found him in that rathole by the sea. Knowing Big Brother was in town had to be stirring up all kinds of emotions for him. From Foster’s report, though, his behavior had been completely unobjectionable.

Operation Un-depress Loki would be underway in the morning. For now, Tony resorted to more short-term measures: rum and Pirates of the Caribbean.

It seemed efficacious.

Chapter End Notes

"Small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri" is a reference to an immortal line from The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy: “In those days spirits were brave, the stakes were high, men were REAL men, women were REAL women, and small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri were REAL small furry creatures from Aplha Centauri.”

"Hitting doesn't solve everything" was one of Loki's lines in the trailers for TDW. I don't think it made it into the actual movie.

Thor's lament about women is from the [Elder Edda](#). Whoever wrote it apparently had a Hel of a breakup story.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Operation Un-Depress Loki commences.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

After Loki had been with SHIELD for one week, Fury demanded his presence. Loki thought of refusing, just on principle, but indifference and a vague curiosity about what Fury wanted took him to Fury's office anyway. Banner accompanied him; Fury did not believe that Loki was not dangerous, so at least he was not a fool.

“The Avengers say you're depressed.”

“Finding out that you're the bogeyman will do that.” Loki had heard the word from the humans.

“You're a superpowered alien wizard. You've already shown that you're dangerous when you're unhappy. This means we can't let you stay depressed.”

Loki let his lip curl. “And now you are suggesting I seek ‘therapy’. Which will solve everything.”

“No.”

That word, very simply and firmly stated, got Loki's attention.

Banner rubbed his forehead before speaking up. “Look, I'm mostly pretty skeptical about therapy. There's not much evidence that it actually helps, even though for some reason everybody believes that it does. Although in your case, I think it might actually have something to offer you.”

“And what's that?”

“Far as I can tell, no one in Asgard ever listened to you, or treated your point of view like it had any validity. That makes you worse off than almost all the humans alive. With us, if our families don't treat us with any credibility, we can find someone, somewhere who does. But your realm has this rigid class system and your dad was literally the king of everything, so you couldn't really turn elsewhere to get that.”

“And I could get it in ‘therapy’.”

“Well, yeah. Any halfway decent therapist will at least listen to you and not tell you that you’re wrong to think or feel how you do. I’m guessing that would be a novel experience for you.”

Loki just lifted an unimpressed eyebrow.

Fury cut in. “But that isn’t what we’re going to do. Well, you can get a therapist to listen to your sob stories if you want, we don’t give a fuck. What we’re going to do is two things.

“First, we don’t know enough about Asgardian physiology to risk putting you on antidepressants. Last thing we need is to find out that you’re one of the special people who Prozac turns psychotic instead of happy. However. Nutrition can make a big difference in depression. Stark had Jarvis work up a supplement for you.”

Banner explained, “We used humans as a baseline - we don’t know much about Asgardians but you guys don’t seem all that different - and basically quadrupled everything. And added a lot of sugar to make it taste okay.” With his folded glasses he pointed to a canister on Fury’s desk. “So here, mix this powder with water and drink it once every day, it should help. At least some.”

Loki looked at the canister. “If you’re right, I should be using the Jotun diet as my guide.”

Fury glared. “So what do Jotuns eat?”

“Naughty Asgardian children.”

“They really made sure you would see yourself as a monster, didn’t they?” Banner actually looked sympathetic.

Then again, Banner knew what being a monster was like.

“The Jotnar are carnivorous. The stories say that they eat the bodies of their slain foes, but the last war with them occurred when I was a baby so I do not know if there is any truth to that.”

“Hm.” Banner was clearly turning this over in his mind. “Well, we humans have a time-honored tradition of telling lies about our enemies. Doesn’t sound like Asgardians are much different. I don’t think loading up on the protein would hurt, but my theory is that in your Asgardian form, you have Asgardian physiology. Do you get cold like this?” Banner made a vague gesture at Loki, Loki in his warm-blooded pink-skinned form.

“Yes. I always had a higher tolerance for cold than most Asgardians, but Jotunheim was still freezing to me.”

“So the transformation happens at the cellular level.” Curiosity lit in Banner’s eyes.

Before Banner could ask Loki to transform while monitored by Midgardian sorcerous instruments, Fury went on. “And you’re going to see Banner’s shrink.”

“You just said you didn’t believe in therapy.”

“Dr. Katzenbach doesn’t do therapy,” Banner explained. “She teaches meditation techniques, self-hypnosis, that kind of thing, uses biofeedback and EEGs. The supplement we made for you was partly based on what she prescribes for her clients. She’s done a lot to help me get the Other Guy under control.”

“She must be a saint.”

“Nope. She’s a total basket case. Why do you think she’s spent her life studying this stuff?”

“You have an appointment with her tomorrow morning,” Fury announced. “This is a non-negotiable term of your contract with us.”

“Is it.” Loki was not the son of Odin, but for a thousand years he had believed that he was. For a thousand years, only three people in the entire cosmos had outranked him. And now some random mortal expected him to take orders. As if.

“You want to make Earth a safe place for you to hide from your psycho family, you’ll take the supplement and see Banner’s guru. Or you can leave and take your chances on your own.”

Loki pretended to mull that over. “Very well. I shall take my chances on my own. Good luck building anti-Asgardian weapons without my help.” He turned and walked to the door.

Really, he ought to meekly give in. Lull the humans into a false sense of security. Let them think him tamed. But Loki did not care enough to play that game now.

He was several paces down the hall before Fury called after him from the doorway. “All right, you called my bluff. Get back here. If you please, your majesty.”

The title was the wrong one, and Fury said it as if it were the nastiest of insults. Loki didn’t care. Let the mortal save a little face. Loki stopped and turned to face him, saying nothing.

Fury glowered at him. “Okay then. We need you. Is that what you wanted to hear? We need you more than you need us. And you’re right, we can’t make you do shit. Take the supplement and go to the doctor if you want to, or don’t and stay depressed. I don’t give a rat’s ass.”

Charming expression. Loki let a moment pass before smiling coldly. “I will try your potion, and I am curious enough to consult your sorceress. But do not attempt to command me that way again.”

Seeing the cold glint in Fury’s eye, Loki knew that there would be a reckoning for this one day. But then, he had known that from the start. When the day came, Loki would evade whatever the humans came up with to do to him.

If he happened to feel like evading it that day.

Nutrition can make a major difference in depression or other mood disorders. I highly recommend *The Mood Cure* by Julia Ross if you want to learn more about this.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Loki has nightmares. So does Steve.

Chapter Notes

The scene quoted at the beginning of this chapter gave me, no exaggeration, a week of nightmares. I'm sure it gave Loki way more.

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

“And afterwards, this cell.”

Loki sat up gasping in his bed. His heart seemed to be trying to break out of his chest. Loki looked around his safe bedroom on Stark Tower with wide eyes, reassuring himself. He was no longer in Asgard, no longer in the dungeon. Thor was far away.

Throwing the sweaty sheets aside, Loki rose and went to look out over the city. One entire wall of his room was glass. He could see Midgard's amazing towers, the sky. He wished he could sleep with his eyes open, so that he would never have to let the sky out of his sight.

A few years ago, Loki had thought that frost giants were the most frightening things in the universe. Then he had believed Thanos and The Other were.

Now, nothing terrified him more than his not-brother saying those words. Even months after his escape, he still woke from nightmares about that moment every few nights. It had been the worst moment of his life. Worse than when he had learned he was a Jotun. Worse than when his not-father had told him *No* and Loki had sought death. Worse than when Loki realized what had found him instead of death. Worse than when his not-father disowned him again for his efforts to win the man's love and locked him away.

No, one moment had been worse: when he had learned his mother was dead.

He would not try to go back to sleep tonight. Too often the same dreams awaited him. He thought of taking up Stark's offer and asking Jarvis if Stark were awake, but just now the man's too-perceptive, sardonic gaze would be anything but soothing.

Still needing some sort of distraction, Loki wandered out to the common room. He would have a drink and ask Jarvis to choose a movie for him to watch.

Loki found that someone else had already had the same idea. Rogers was sipping a drink and watching people singing and dancing on the screen.

Rogers looked up at him. "Pause," he instructed the movie, and it did. "Hi."

"I thought you couldn't get drunk." As he spoke, Loki chose a decanter he had seen Stark pour from more than once.

"I can't. Sometimes I try anyway."

Loki looked at the soldier's boyish face. His eyes were not those of a boy.

"Bad dreams?" Loki asked quietly. "Bad memories?"

"Yes." Rogers' voice was terse, so Loki did not ask. After a moment, Rogers said, "Want to watch with me?"

"Thank you." Loki came to sit beside him.

"I'm the only one here besides Bruce who likes these old musicals, so I mostly watch them when I can't sleep. Resume."

The movie did. The music was cheerful and the jokes pleasantly silly. Loki could imagine that Stark would have little patience with such light-hearted fare. The central problem of the story was that the heroine was engaged to the wrong man. At the end, she decided instead to marry her fiance's best friend and her former fiance married the heroine's sister, an arrangement that made all concerned parties so happy that they celebrated it with yet another spontaneous song and dance.

When it was over, Rogers said, "I never thought *you* would have nightmares."

Loki smiled bitterly. "Why, because I *am* a nightmare?" *I am the monster parents tell their children about at night.* And no doubt now he haunted the dreams of Midgardians as well. Now he truly *was* a monster.

"I dream about when I lost my best friend." There was challenge in Rogers' gaze as he made the admission. Loki knew he was being tested.

"I'm sorry," Loki said quietly. "Will you tell me what happened?"

"The war. I couldn't save him."

"I'm sorry." Loki wanted to say, *I lost my best friend too.* But it was different; Thor had not died, only stopped loving him. Loki found himself wishing that Thor had died still loyal to him, rather than turning into the coldly threatening fiend of his nightmares, and at once rose to pour himself another drink. Odin's games had played out so that now Loki wished his own foster brother dead. Even when Loki had made his panicked attack on Thor with the Destroyer, he had not felt this way towards him.

When Loki had hated Thor, he had still loved him. Now there was no hatred and no love, only grief.

Rogers' voice cut into Loki's brooding. "Do you want to talk about what you were dreaming about?"

Looking at the lad, Loki realized with surprise that Rogers was trying to be kind. It seemed to be a Midgardian tactic. A pity they hadn't been able to teach it to Thor.

Loki decided on an answer that was close to the truth. "When Thor told me I was no longer his brother."

"I'm sorry."

Such useless words, but it was all they had to offer each other.

Rogers rose and came to join him at the bar. "Pour one for me too?"

On Asgard those words would have required illusory snakes at the very least, and possibly a challenge to holmgang. But Rogers had no idea what an offense it was to ask a prince to serve him, and was clearly attempting to be friendly, so Loki simply poured a glass and pushed it towards the lad.

Rogers drank. "A thousand years is a long time. Maybe he'll come around."

Loki remembered the coldness in Thor's eyes when he had said those words. "*And afterwards, this cell.*" Had Thor been angry when he said it, Loki would have forgiven him long since. People did and said all sorts of things in the grip of emotion. But Thor had been absolutely calm when he had sentenced Loki. That was the worst of it.

"I don't believe that he will."

Thankfully, Rogers did not argue. And after a moment, he surprised Loki again by putting a hand on his shoulder. "It has to be hard for you, working against your own country. You're doing the right thing."

Loki was not accustomed to being touched by anyone but his family and his lovers, except in the sparring ring. One did not touch a member of the royal family without an invitation. But this was Midgard, and most humans these days had forgotten proper behavior. The soldier's eyes were sympathetic. They had been enemies, and Rogers was trying to be kind. In a deliberate and obviously calculated way, but after the last few years Loki would not disdain any kindness. And the contact, slight as it was, felt reassuring, something real to anchor him amidst his own swirling thoughts.

Loki gave a little shrug and Rogers let his hand fall. "I have a debt to Midgard." Casting about for another subject, he asked, "Was that movie from your own time? Before you fell into the ice?"

"Yeah. Most people these days don't like movies like that."

“I found it a pleasant distraction. If only the problems of real life could be solved so simply.”

“If only.” And abruptly Rogers was retreating into himself again, brooding, an expression at odds with the wholesome youth of his face.

“What was her name?” Loki asked abruptly.

“Peggy.” Rogers clearly answered automatically, and then his face was guarded again.

“You knew her before you fell into the ice?”

“Yes.”

“I am sorry.” Human lives were so short. It wasn’t right. They were every bit as worthy of long life as the other races of the Nine.

“Oh, she’s still alive. I’ve talked to her on the phone a few times. But she won’t let me see her in person.”

“No?”

Rogers smiled sadly. “She says she wants me to remember her the way she was. Doesn’t want me to see her old and grey. I can understand it, but I still wish she’d let me visit her.”

Loki poured them both more of Stark’s alcohol and tried to find something comforting to say. “It is kind of you to respect her wishes,” was the best he could do. He contemplated trying to sleep again, but the thought of returning to his empty room and trying to quiet his own bleak thoughts was too dismal. “Are you going to bed now, or would you care to watch another movie with me?”

Rogers hesitated, then smiled a little. “Jarvis, would you choose a Fred Astaire movie I haven’t seen for us?”

Chapter End Notes

The movie Loki and Steve are watching is *Moon Over Miami* starring Betty Grable. I’ve always loved how easily and cheerfully the problems in it were solved. “Hey, instead of you and me getting married, why don’t I marry your sister while you marry my best friend?” “Super! Let’s celebrate with another song and dance number!”

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Loki visits Banner's shrink.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Sit with your back straight. Cross your left ankle over your right.”

Loki obeyed Dr. Katzenbach’s instructions. Whenever anyone tried to teach Thor anything - even if it were a skilled warrior trying to teach him more about fighting - Thor always started by arguing. He couldn’t seem to help it. Loki’s approach had always been to wait and hear everything the instructor had to say, and later evaluate the entirety and decide if it was useful or not. Out of long habit he was doing the same with Dr. Katzenbach, though he doubted a human had anything to teach him about such matters.

Her explanation of how to clear and focus the mind was sound enough. Simple visualizations: each color in the spectrum, one after the other. A backwards count - counting backwards forced more concentration.

“Now place your right thumb in the center of your left palm, and your right forefinger on the back of your left hand. This is called a ‘mudra’; it closes the energy circuit of your body, keeping the energy inside.”

Loki could not help staring at the woman. “Excuse me; what is the source of this practice?”

She froze for a second, thrown by the question. Not because she didn’t know the answer, but because he had spoken to her. She was afraid of him.

She could hardly be blamed; his mission during his last visit had required that he make certain humans were as afraid of him as possible. Dr. Banner had accompanied Loki to her office without explanation, and Loki had not remarked. He quite understood that she would need the reassurance of an Avenger’s presence before allowing him into her office.

He had tried to put her at ease with a non-threatening stance and friendly facial expressions. These were not the tricks he had used the most often, but he had many at his disposal. None of that seemed to make any difference. She had hunched barricaded behind her desk, every muscle in her body taut. About once a minute he could see her consciously and deliberately relaxing her stance, but always she tensed up again after a few seconds.

That was, until she had launched into her discussion of the meditation and breathing techniques she taught her clients. At that point, enthusiasm for the subject made her seem to

forget that she was sitting across from a crazed alien invader with the blood of thousands on his hands.

Now she all but flinched at the sound of his voice, even though he had spoken softly, and had to visibly gather herself before answering. "India. Um, their culture has had meditation practices going back thousands of years. Since you're not human I don't know for sure that you'll have the same meridians and chakras as humans do, but your brain seems very similar to ours so we'll try it this way."

Loki had endured Dr. Katzenbach's scientific curiosity indifferently. She had hooked him up to a succession of Midgardian machines and, again forgetting her terror of him, speculated aloud to Dr. Banner about how Asgardian brains worked. Loki chose not to complicate matters further by pointing out that he had originally been a Jotun and the precise nature of his present body was open to debate. It wasn't as if she had other Aesir or Jotnar to compare him to in any case.

Once she thought she had a (very) rudimentary grasp of Loki's neurology, she started teaching her meditation methods.

Loki was not sure what he had been expecting. Not much, that was for certain. Not that humans would understand so much more than unmagical beings had any reason to about the flow of power through the body.

Again Loki followed her instructions, more apprehensive than he really should have been. So the humans had learned a few tricks. Loki had already observed that they had learned far more than they could have been expected to. As for this, perhaps beings from some more advanced realm had visited India aeons ago and taught them. Even if the humans had somehow worked it out for themselves, what difference did it make?

"Now gently press your tongue to the roof of your mouth," the doctor went on. "This closes the microcosmic orbit, allowing the chi to flow freely through--"

Loki was on his feet before he knew it. A few seconds later, perceiving the way she had jerked back, in a tiny corner of his mind he regretted having frightened her. "Pardon me," he forced himself to mutter, before striding out without another word. Even that small courtesy was driven by the guilty knowledge that from her perspective, she had every reason to fear him.

He strode out of the office and into its lobby. Banner glanced up. "Finished already?"

Loki waited to answer until Dr. Katzenbach had appeared in the doorway, lest Banner leap to the conclusion that Loki had suddenly gone mad, murdered an inoffensive physician for no particular reason, and fled. "I must go."

And he did, a glamour settling over him as he hurried out of the building. There were people everywhere. He wished to be alone, but losing himself in a crowd was almost as good.

He walked the streets randomly for a long while before entering an office building. The door was locked, but only a small effort of magic was required to make the knob turn. He walked

as if he belonged there and no one gave him a second glance. He chose a room that seemed rarely frequented and locked himself in it before beginning to gather seiðr between his hands.

He went to the lab in Arizona because there was nowhere else for him to go. At least, nowhere else that had any activity that might distract him from the memories welling up in his mind. Jane Foster was the only one there when he materialized. She greeted him after recovering from her surprise. He gave her a vague wave before throwing himself into the surprisingly difficult problem of bullets made of uru.

Foster seemed to understand that he wished to be left alone. She stayed on the other side of the vast room, absorbed in her own work as he resumed the previous day's task: testing the optimal proportion of uru to gunpowder.

Anything to stop himself from thinking of the day, a thousand years ago, that Frigga had taught him to quiet his mind and find the power that flowed through him. By the precise technique this human doctor had shown him today.

"It is all inside you, Loki." Frigga's voice had been soft, gentle. Never had that voice failed to soothe him. *"The power flows through everything in the universe, and you are one of those with the gift of harnessing it. Develop your will and the power will leap to obey you."*

He could have used the ability to quiet his mind now, but it had deserted him. No matter how he tried to stuff the memories down, they continued to bubble up as he smelted the uru for the prototype bullets.

His mother - Frigga would always be his mother, never mind that he had not grown in her belly - teaching him how to find that power, what to do with it. They had spent hours together, talking, learning.

She and she alone had loved him. Odin had seen him as a pawn. Thor had once felt a sort of affection - for the Loki of his imagination, the doting, ever-loyal, and above all subservient younger brother. The moment Loki had stopped playing that role, that affection had dried up and left nothing in its place. *"When we fought each other in the past, I did so with a glimmer of hope that my brother was still in there somewhere. That hope no longer exists to protect you."*

No, Thor, your brother is no longer in here anywhere. You just killed him.

But then, Frigga too had tried to tame him again, to make him again into the All-Father's loyal sycophant. Perhaps she had hoped that if she could make him accept the lie they all lived once more, then her husband would have mercy and let him out. Just as she had foolishly hoped that if Loki did a good job as regent of Asgard while Odin slept, Odin might come to love him. She had been blind to her husband's true nature.

On the other hand, Frigga had put Gungnir in his hand - Loki still wanted to weep whenever he remembered that, it had been such a *loving* thing to do, the best possible proof that she saw him as her true son no matter his birth, the ultimate proof of her faith in him. He knew now that there was *nothing* he could have done with the opportunity that would have won him Odin's approval. But Frigga had probably never imagined that he would use it to kill

another world and send the Destroyer after her other son. He had failed her just as she had failed him.

Still she had never stopped loving him. And he had not been there to protect her, and Thor and Odin had failed to.

After about an hour, Stark strolled in, casual as could be. Loki could not help dreading the inevitable conversation that would follow. Not that he feared any consequences the humans could inflict upon him. The only one who could truly harm him was Banner, and Loki would hardly be foolish enough to again linger in his presence should he take his monstrous form. What Loki dreaded was the embarrassment of having to admit that he had acted like a child and frightened a defenseless human.

Thor was never embarrassed over behaving like a spoiled child. It must be so nice to be Thor.

And then Loki would have to assure all of them that he was no longer a danger to humans, and of course they would not be able to believe him.

All Stark did, however, was don his safety goggles and thick gloves and take a place beside Loki to join in the work. As if nothing were wrong.

They created bullets together in silence for some time. When they were able to turn off the forge and remove their protective gear, Loki was sufficiently relieved not to have had to listen to a self-righteous and accusatory speech that he broached the subject himself. "I am sorry I frightened Dr. Katzenbach. I will not be doing any more harm to humans. You must know that."

Stark gave him an appraising look, then his mouth curled, amused. "You do realize Hep Cat isn't afraid of you because you're a supervillain, right?"

Loki only frowned at him.

"Don't tell Bruce I called her that, by the way, she hates it. She's afraid of you because you're a person."

"She is afraid of people?"

"Scared silly of 'em. Why do you think she's spent her life studying this stuff? She'd probably have been less scared of you if you'd come at her with your spear than if you tried to, you know, *talk* to her or something."

Loki tried to follow what Stark was saying. "What does 'Hep Cat' mean?"

"Outdated slang. Her first name is Hepzibah. Don't know what her parents were thinking. Then again, they produced a daughter who's smart as a whip and terrified of the social interaction involved in ordering a pizza, so their thought processes were probably a wee bit eccentric. By which I mean they were probably abusive assholes, but that's beside the point." Stark opened one of his cases - he had them freshly supplied every day, refusing to go without any of the comforts of home - and handed Loki a chocolate bar and a glass of

whiskey before taking the same for himself. “She told Bruce about the way you hightailed it out of there. She was worried about you. You think you’re the first person who’s been triggered in a session with a shrink?”

Loki was about to protest, but took a bite of chocolate instead. His particular “trigger” might be a bit unusually placed, but he supposed Stark was right. “I suppose Foster sent you a message that I was here.”

“Yep. I volunteered to be the one to come and tell you it was okay. You don’t have to go back to Bruce’s witch doctor if you don’t want to.” He had kept calling her this, apparently to tease Banner. “I think maybe you should, though, when you’ve dealt with whatever it is that upset you. There won’t be any problem.”

“I see.” Loki emptied the glass Stark had given him. It wasn’t nearly enough to make an Asgardian more than mildly relaxed, but Stark’s unwilling look of respect amused him.

Stark shrugged. “Give yourself time to process it. If you decide you want to learn more of her Jedi mind tricks, give her a call.” He gestured with his own glass, still half-full, at the newly created bullets. “For now, how about we make some things go bang?”

They made things go bang until long after Foster had left for the day. Loki could not deny the cathartic effect. When they eventually flew back to the Tower, they talked about the properties of uru for the entire flight and even after, scarcely pausing for Stark to greet his shield-brothers in the Tower. Most of the Avengers wandered away when it became clear that Stark and Loki were not going to stop with their technical jargon. Banner joined the discussion until it got late and he had to go to bed. Stark showed no interest in retiring, to Loki’s secret relief; Loki was in no hurry to face his empty bedchamber and try to sleep while memories plagued him.

They continued discussing science and sorcery, sitting on one of the sofas in the Tower’s common room. Stark couldn’t seem to get comfortable, circling his shoulders and groaning. “Next time I’m letting you do the heavy lifting. You’ve got Asgardian stamina and I’m a middle-aged man.”

Loki hesitated. “If you like, I could return the favor you rendered me?”

“What? Oh, you mean a neck rub? That would be wonderful. So long as you don’t squish me with your superstrength.”

Loki scoffed as he stood and moved to stand behind Stark. “I am capable of handling humans without damaging them.”

“Glad to hear it.” Stark leaned into Loki’s hands as Loki started carefully kneading the tight muscles of his neck. “So go on about how the Odinfence reacts to the uru? We need to come up with a better name for it, by the way.”

“The Asgard Force, perhaps.” Loki rubbed a little harder, testing, and continued when Stark only let out a relieved exhale. It was good to have a warm solid body under his hands again, more good than he would have expected.

Loki missed sex. It had been a long while since he had even thought about it. The numbness that had enveloped him almost since he was put in the dungeon seemed to be ebbing at last, allowing him to want things again. Just a little bit.

Naturally, those were things he could not have. Such as the favors of a man who he had once tried to kill.

Dragging his attention back to the subject at hand, Loki continued, “That force is controlled by whoever is sovereign of Asgard.”

“Which is why you couldn’t use it when you were temporary king. You were just the regent.”

“Yes.”

“Hard to imagine that Thor will be able to deal with it.” The words were followed by a swift inhale, as if Stark had thought better of bringing up Thor now that it was too late.

Loki continued working on Stark’s neck, making sure to keep his voice steady and impersonal. “When Odin dies, the Asgard Force will respond to Thor’s will. He did not study magic as Odin and I did, and so will not be able to wield it as deftly Odin does, but it will still give him tremendous power.”

“Goody.” Stark moved his head a fraction, as if to indicate that he was turning back to look at Loki without actually interrupting the massage. “Hey, isn’t telling me this stuff against the Prime Directive?”

Loki as usual drew an approximate understanding of Stark’s cultural references from the context rather than deign to ask. “It is a violation of Asgardian law to share this knowledge with humans, yes. But judging from the progress your people have made thus far, you would have uncovered everything I am telling you within a few generations without outside help. And there seems little reason for me to resume obeying Asgard’s laws *now*.”

“Hm.” Stark said nothing for a moment as Loki’s hands moved to his shoulders. “So if you were still an Odinson in good standing, what would you be advising Odin and Thor to do now?”

Loki froze, abruptly filled with hopeless wishes too painful to contemplate. His hopes of ever winning back any place in the family had died forever with Thor’s cold words to him in his cell, but the ghosts of those hopes still had the power to hurt him. He had spent too many centuries dreaming of the day when Odin would recognize his worth and smile upon him the way he did upon Thor. The day when Thor would admit that Loki’s “tricks” were useful to him. Those paths in his soul were well-worn and Stark’s words made him go down them again, for the first time in over a year. It was excruciating.

“Hey, rubbing went away.” A hint of nervousness lurked in Stark’s voice.

Loki forced himself back to the moment and resumed working the knots out of Stark’s shoulders. He still could not speak.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said it like that.” Stark sounded genuinely apologetic.

Loki dug his fingers into the man’s muscles a fraction harder and addressed the part of the question the man actually cared about. “Odin himself taught us that a successful conqueror must take into account the native culture of his vassals. Apparently he has forgotten this. I would advise him to at least make a show of listening to Earth’s wishes. He should give some pretense of caring for your opinions on your own destiny. If he sent ambassadors to spend days sitting in meetings and listening to speeches, and roused considerable public attention towards those who agree with his aims - those humans who oppose the very existence of nuclear weapons, for example - then humans would not feel so helpless and oppressed by him, and thus would be far less restive. I would also impress upon him that humans cherish their right to complain about their rulers, and yet most of the time continue to obey them. You seem to think that the right to complain about them is almost as good as the right to defy them. And so he should allow you to entertain yourselves by denouncing him and only take measures when you actually disobey.”

Stark thought that over for a while. “Then I guess we’re lucky he...”

“Disowned me. And yes, you are.”

“Lawful Evil, just like I thought. At least you admit it.”

Loki’s hands paused for a second, more wounded than he would have expected. “You think me evil?”

“No, actually. That’s kind of the point. It took a while to see it, but I think you do what you see as your duty. And thanks to Daddy Dearest’s behavior, your idea of what your duty is has changed.”

This time Loki stopped the massage entirely, stepping back. Stark turned to meet his gaze. “What, did you think I just did whatever I liked? That I just woke up and thought, ‘What can I do today that’s evil?’”

“Well.” Stark spread his hands. “Not the second, but the first, kinda.”

Loki sighed, weary. “I have always had a code. I have always adhered to it, however painful doing so proved to be. In the last few years I realized that my code was in need of revision, but I did have one.”

“What kind of revision?” There was a great deal in Stark’s eyes. Curiosity. Wariness.

Need. Hope.

Loki considered before answering. “In recent years I have been in great need of mercy, and have received very little. I have come to value mercy a great deal more than I used to.”

They looked at each other for a minute. Finally Stark rose and went to the bar, as he usually did when he needed something to ease a tense moment. “Does that mean I can hope you won’t try to conquer or destroy any more realms?”

Loki winced at the words. “I don’t think I *could* do those things now.” He followed Stark and accepted the glass he was given without comment. “Well, in the case of invading Midgard, making my showy and bloody entrance was the only way I could see of mobilizing Midgard’s forces to stop Thanos from seizing the Tesseract. And when Barton told me about the Avengers Initiative, I knew at once that you were my best hope. If attacking a world were the only way I had of saving it, I could still grit my teeth and do it. But it would be a great deal harder for me now than it was then.”

Stark studied him. Again, Loki could see a great deal of pain in the man’s large dark eyes. How anyone could dismiss this man as a conceited playboy was a mystery. Anyone would have to be blind not to see the fear, the courage, the guilt.

“I’m going to ask you something. If you don’t want to answer, we’ll just drop it. Okay?”

Loki inclined his head a little.

“When Thanos was holding you captive. Did you have any friends there? Any allies among your fellow prisoners?”

Loki gave a soft, derisive laugh. Besides The Other, there had only been Chitauri, vicious creatures trained to greater viciousness, barely intelligent enough to handle the weapons they were given.

“I’m sorry. I had... I had someone. It helped.”

Loki had not known that detail of the story. “What happened to your friend?” he asked, and when Stark looked away, said, “I’m sorry,” not making Stark put it into words.

Stark looked at his own hands for a moment. Remembering, Loki supposed.

“He and I actually met years before that. Sort of. I was so drunk I didn’t remember, but he said he came over and tried to talk to me. And later that same night - I used to be an asshole.”

Loki couldn’t help a snicker. Quickly he covered his mouth with his hand. “I am sorry. Just, the way you said that.”

Stark was grinning at him now. “I know, you’d hardly believe it about me now, right?” He let his expression turn more serious, toying with the drink he’d poured but not yet sipped. “My point is, I think I know what you mean about learning the value of mercy.”

Something abruptly fell into place. “You still blame yourself for Obadiah Stane’s deeds.”

Stark’s eyes snapped to meet Loki’s and his fingers tightened around his glass. “It happened on my watch.”

“He invested years in winning your trust. The crimes were his.” Loki tried to make the words gentle.

Something in Stark burst through his caution in a torrent of words. “I *saw* it, okay? I was there and I saw the weapons. I saw what people were doing with them. It was my father’s

company and my responsibility and I was running around having fun, getting drunk, getting laid, playing with my toys in my lab, so he could do whatever he wanted unsupervised. Because I didn't *want* to do the boring part. I just wanted the money and the chance to see my gadgets all over the world." He calmed a little, gesturing with his drink. "And I'm still doing that, only not as bad. Now someone who really is trustworthy is doing the boring parts, and some of the things I invent now don't kill people, and I'm fighting dangerous people personally. But never mind what Natasha says, red can't be wiped out of your ledger. It's there forever. You were right: the horrors are a part of you and they will never go away."

And suddenly Loki understood. He saw why Stark was so willing to take the chance of trusting Loki. Why Stark was so kind to him. Stark carried enormous guilt for what he had allowed to happen. Now right before him was someone whose sins were far graver. If Loki could redeem himself, if Loki could reform, then surely Stark's own crimes could also be expiated.

Loki let a moment pass before saying quietly, "I did the same."

"What?"

"Not the running around doing the fun things while others took the responsibility and did the boring parts. It was Thor who did that. But - it wasn't as if I was a fool. I knew, no matter how I hid it from myself, what my supposed father was. I knew he was a tyrant. But I loved him, and he had trained me well to yearn for his love in return, and he also taught me to be proud of being his son, and so I lied to myself. I told myself that his cruelties were the harsh necessities of ruling and keeping peace among the Nine Realms. I told myself that when I could not see the wisdom of his actions, the failing was in my understanding and not his judgment. I lied to myself up until the day he called me Laufeyson and threw me into his dungeon to rot forever."

Loki stopped himself. He had never intended to voice any of this. But Stark was looking at him in horrified understanding. And so Loki continued, even as his brain was telling him to be more cautious with what he revealed. He could not resist talking now that he had an audience which understood.

"I expected him to execute me when I was taken back. Or perhaps exile me to Jotunheim, which would have amounted to the same thing - the Jotuns would have killed me. I was resigned to that. I had no escape and was going to endure it as stoically as I could, to die like a warrior. But I thought - I had been his son." His throat tightened around the words. "I thought it wasn't impossible that he might have some mercy upon me. Perhaps after keeping me in a dungeon for a hundred years, he might allow me out on parole, as it were. And I swore to myself that if he offered me any chance at redemption, however humiliating or arduous the terms, that I would accept them humbly."

Stark smirked. He suppressed the smirk quickly, but Loki saw it.

"Yes, I knew that it would be a constant struggle against my own nature. But I did try to kill his son - who I loved too. And I had recovered enough from my madness to see that as dangerous as the Jotnar were to Asgard, killing every last one of them..." Loki shook his head. "Despite what Odin did to me, and even though he was the cause of all of it, I was quite

aware of my own guilt. I was willing - still - to do anything to win even the scraps of his favor. Once I had hoped to be Thor's equal in his eyes. Then for a few days I tried to displace Thor completely in his regard. But when I was taken back to Asgard after the Chitauri, I would have settled with gratitude for - for not being hated.

"But in time I would not have been able to continue to rein myself in. Much like how, had he made me viceroy of Jotunheim as he intended, there would have come a day when he would have broken my heart one time too many, and I would have freed myself and Jotunheim from Asgard's yoke. Most likely a war would have followed, certainly if my foster brother had his way. We might have razed the Nine Realms, all because Odin could not bring himself to look at me the way he looked at his son now and then." He sighed, suddenly feeling very tired. "I have tried and I cannot think of any way his gambit with me could have played out without a great deal of bloodshed, one way or another. He doomed me the moment he picked me up in that temple."

A silence stretched as Loki brooded and Stark thought. "Yeah, he did," Stark said eventually. "But you don't have to stay doomed, you know."

Loki lifted an eyebrow.

"I can't imagine any way he could have told you that you were a frost giant that wouldn't have made you freak out. And yeah, given that you're a prince from a warrior culture, and that his plan was to make you puppet king, I'm thinking that it was a given that when things went down, people would die. Odin isn't half as clever as he thinks he is. He set up a role for you, but it wasn't the one he thought.

"But now you *know* that you're a frost giant. You know that he's an incurable prick. You're out of the dungeon and out of Asgard. You don't have to keep playing out the role he laid out for you."

"Have you taken that advice yourself, Stark?" Loki immediately regretted the sharpness of his tone, but Stark did not take offense.

"No, I'm playing the role my dad laid out for me. But I stopped the part of that role that got people killed. Wait, that sounded really self-righteous. I'm not, I'm really pissed at myself for not paying enough attention to know what was being done with the weapons I made. I've got red in my ledger too. I'm just..." He stopped, frustrated. "Okay, I think what I'm doing is trying to say the things I wish someone had said to me a few years ago. Our stories are parallel in a lot of ways, you probably noticed. So if it's not helpful, um, I'm sorry. I think I'm saying this stuff more for my own sake than for yours anyway."

They drank in silence for a few minutes, and eventually Loki spoke. "It is helpful."

"Oh. Well, good. Glad to hear it."

Abruptly Loki felt very exhausted. What a wretched day. He knocked back the drink Stark had given him. "I propose that we drink and watch silly movies until we pass out."

Stark grabbed a bottle. “Second the motion. Let’s see, Conan might be a little too close to home for you. Jarvis? I think it’s time our guest made the acquaintance of King Kong.”

“Is he a ruler of your history?”

“Oh, I envy you. I can’t even imagine the glory of not knowing who King Kong is and being surprised in the middle of the movie. Jarvis? First, the original. Then, the 70’s one. And finally, the Peter Jackson one.”

Chapter End Notes

“Rubbing went away” was a complaint from an episode of *Buffy*. Of course, Loki wouldn’t get that reference.

Odin called Loki “Laufeyson” when he sentenced him in the prelude comic, though not in the actual movie.

Hepzibah Katzenbach is an OC of mine. I also used her in my fic [Out There](#) if you'd like to see more of her; she has a much bigger part in that story. One day she'll be in an original novel.

I got the meditation method Dr. Katzenbach teaches Loki from the very good book *Brain States*. The relevant pages are here: [1](#) [2](#) The other things Dr. Katzenbach teaches can be found in books such as *The Silva Mind Control Method* and *The Quest for Personal Power* by Phil Nuernberger.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

The Avengers observe Mother's Day.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The Avengers (a category which no longer included Thor, if you asked anyone in the Nine Realms with the exception of Thor) had now lived and fought together for long enough that a lot of things went without saying. Such as why, one Sunday afternoon in May, all of them gathered to watch movies whose plots could be summarized as “men kill each other” and started drinking. Heavily. Everyone except for Bruce, who never drank.

Loki, however, did not know them or their quaint Earth customs, so as the alcohol continued to disappear he looked around at them, bewildered. “Did some misfortune occur that I have not heard about?”

Tony sighed. They were going to have to spell it out. “It’s Mother’s Day.”

Loki stiffened, and they explained the nature of the holiday. “Thing is,” Tony said, “nobody in this room has a mother. Literally, every single person in this room.”

“So we prefer not to think about this day,” Clint said flatly.

Loki looked around at them all. “I am sorry, all of you,” he said, and sounded as if he meant it. Hesitantly he added, “I don’t know if Thor told you, but our - my foster mother died, shortly before he took me out of prison.”

Well, fuck. That explained kind of a lot.

Clint had been slouching into one of the sofas. Now he sat up straight. “No, he didn’t. Thor’s been here a few times, you know, but he hasn’t exactly been sitting around chatting with us. I’m sorry to hear that.”

“We’ve heard a lot about the rest of your family, but not about your mother.” That was Steve, rushing in where angels feared to tread. “You’ve been calling yourself Friggasson; I gather she was a better parent than Odin.”

Loki’s knuckles whitened on the arms of his chair. “Yes.”

Amazing how much could be packed into one syllable.

“Glad to hear there was one good person in your life.”

“She wasn’t.”

Loki’s voice was flat and they all stared at him, startled. He gave a rueful smile.

“She wasn’t a good person. She upheld everything her husband did, all his wars of conquest, all the realms he oppressed.” He set his jaw as if the words pained him. “She knew she was raising a frost giant but she never tried to tell us that Jotuns weren’t monsters, not a word to soften the blow when I inevitably learned the truth. When I pointed out to her, the last time we spoke,” he lowered his eyes for a moment at the memory, “that what I did on Earth was no different from what her husband has done hundreds of times throughout the Nine Realms, she dismissed my words without even trying to argue.” Loki’s green-blue eyes were now shiny with unshed tears, and his voice became rough. “But she never stopped loving me, even when I was in the dungeon and the rest of the family had disowned me. Odin would have executed me had she not begged him for my life. She defied the king to visit me in my cell. It was because of her that I had a few books and did not have to sleep on the floor. She loved me to the end of her life. I will love her to the end of mine.”

Tony didn’t doubt it. And this was the kind of loyalty Loki was capable of, warped as his ways of showing it were. Really, what said love like assassinating your biological father and trying to kill an entire world? This was the kind of devotion that had been Odin’s and Thor’s for the asking. And they had not only thrown it away, they had worked damn hard to destroy it.

Tony knew from brutal experience the value of loyalty. It was too precious a thing to throw away. He found himself envying these alien men who thought they could easily replace that devotion.

“Jarvis,” he murmured, “make sure I send Pepper and Rhodey presents this week. Extravagant ones.” Louder, and before he could think better of it, Tony asked Loki, “How did she die?”

Abruptly, and apparently to his own surprise, Loki burst into tears. “I don’t know,” he gasped out, before rising and hastening for the door.

Tony stood and took a step, not really sure if he should interfere, but Steve had already moved with supersoldier swiftness to block the doorway. The others watched, taken aback, as Steve, with only a little awkwardness, very firmly put his arms around Loki.

Tony had said they needed to try to give Loki a minimum of emotional support. Leave it to Captain America to go beyond the call of duty.

Loki tried to step away, but Steve held on. They all knew how strong Loki was, no question that Loki could have evaded him if he’d really wanted to, but he didn’t fight his way free. What he did was say in a strangled voice, “Let me go. I want to be alone.”

“I don’t think so.” Steve’s voice was very firm, the voice he used when he figured he had to be the grownup in the room. (Which was a lot of the time.) “You’ve been left to cope with

too many things alone the last few years. Nobody can deal with everything on their own.”

It was kind of slick, the way Steve had avoided mentioning that Loki’s method of dealing with things alone tended to involve sending giant mechas or alien armies to Earth. They all had a vested interest in keeping Loki un-miserable.

Tony and Bruce both moved to stand beside Steve and Loki, patting Loki’s back uncertainly. Clint and Tasha got up and came nearer, but stayed a few feet away. The next thing they knew Loki was sobbing his heart out on Steve’s shoulder, his hands on Steve’s chest like he was about to shove him away any minute, but he didn’t. Steve only looked a little bit freaked out at having an alien supervillain crying on his shoulder. About every ten seconds Loki would start to lift his head and make the kind of sounds people made when they were trying to stop crying, but the tears had started and weren’t ready to stop.

“It’s okay,” Bruce said softly. “I lost my mother too, I remember what it’s like.”

“He wouldn’t tell me,” Loki managed to gasp out after another minute. “When Thor came to get me out of prison, I asked him if she suffered. He wouldn’t tell me.” And there followed a fresh storm of wracking sobs.

Bruce’s face was incredulous. And angry. Not angry enough that they needed to worry just yet, but angry. “He wouldn’t even - now I wish the Other Guy had hit him harder.”

Loki managed a hysterical little laugh at that. And kept crying. Steve kept holding him, one hand soothingly on Loki’s glossy black head. Everyone else stood around watching awkwardly.

Eventually Loki managed to pull himself together. He straightened, wiped his face ineffectually with his sleeve, and tried to speak formally.

“Do excuse my outburst. I fear my grief has-“

Bruce cut in with an exasperated wave of his hand. “You don’t have to *apologize* for crying over *your mother’s death*. Especially when it’s only been a year. I don’t know if this is a royal thing or an Asgard thing, but either way, it’s messed up. If you *weren’t* still broken up about it, I’d think you just might be the monster you were pretending to be when you first came here. Hell, I still cry over my mother’s death now and then, and I was four when it happened.”

Hesitantly, Loki asked, “How... forgive me, I should not have asked.”

Bruce took two slow, measured breaths. “My father stabbed her to death. In front of me.”

Loki looked completely horrified. “By the Norns,” he whispered. “That’s terrible.”

“Yeah.”

“Was your father ever brought to justice?” Loki spoke hesitantly. Tony realized that this was an implicit offer to see to the matter if he hadn’t been.

“Yes.” Bruce’s answer was terse, and Loki sensibly dropped the subject.

“I am truly sorry you lost her,” he said softly.

Hoping to defuse the conversation a little, Tony said, “Both my parents died in a car accident when I was seventeen.” That had been painful, but it was an old wound now.

“That’s how I lost my folks too,” Clint said, “but I was younger.”

To everyone’s surprise, Natasha spoke. “I never knew my mother. I was taken from my parents to begin training when I was so small I don’t even remember them.”

Loki looked at her gravely. “I am sorry,” he said quietly. “It is... very wrong to use children that way.”

They all looked at Steve, who said evenly, “My mom was a nurse in a TB ward. Got hit, couldn’t shake it.”

“I am sorry, truly.” Loki looked around at them all in disbelief, his eyes red and his long black hair slightly disheveled. “Why are you all being so kind to me?”

As he so often did, Tony took refuge in sarcasm. “We’re fattening you up so we can eat you.”

“I was your enemy! I imperiled your world and your lives!”

“What the fuck is wrong with Asgard?” Clint burst out. “You keep being surprised when we show you the absolute minimum of decency. What do you expect us to do when you’re *mourning your mother*, throw rocks at you?”

Loki stared at him.

Clint sighed. “It has nothing to do with what you’ve done.” He took a step closer to Loki, scowling at him. “You’re an asshole. Yeah, I know your extenuating circumstances now, and it’s starting to sound like Odin set out to turn you into a monster on purpose. You’re still an asshole. I don’t hate you as much as I used to, but I haven’t forgiven you and I probably never will.

“But even if you were a total monster - which even I can admit you’re not - *we’re* not monsters. We don’t lock people up without a trial. We don’t put anyone in solitary confinement for a lifetime. And we would have to be monsters not to offer you a little bit of fucking sympathy because your mother died less than a year ago!”

The silence that followed felt long and heavy.

“Is mercy really so foreign to Asgard?” Bruce’s voice was gentle.

Loki drew a breath. “It is to the warrior class. Which the House of Odin belongs to. The lesser nobility, the sorcerers, the common people do not scorn it. It is reckoned their weakness.”

“If I hadn’t just given that ringing speech about not being monsters this would be a great time for a wry remark about dusting off the guillotines,” Clint muttered.

Loki looked puzzled at that. Tony didn’t figure that getting him thinking about decapitating everyone who’d ever stuffed him into a locker was a good idea, so he spoke before Loki could ask what Clint was talking about. “I propose we all take five to wash up and then reconvene for pizza and another movie with lots of explosions. Maybe something with Arnie this time.”

This met with general agreement. The break cleared the air of the intense emotions. Once the pizza arrived, the rising levels of calcium, caffeine and sugar in their bloodstreams combined with the catharsis of watching huge muscled guys throw grenades at each other to cheer them all up considerably.

By the time they all went to bed three movies later, they had almost forgotten what day it was.

Almost.

Chapter End Notes

After this updates will slow down a little. We're approaching to the end of what I had already written. I'll try to keep it going as briskly as I can; this is my NaNo project.

TDW ruined Frigga for us as well. Because she was the only kind person in Asgard, we fans built her up into a saint, so she was bound to disappoint us. This movie exposed her as having very corrupt morals, but at least she continued to love Loki. She’s still the best person in Asgard. Not that that’s saying a whole lot.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Loki makes a stealthy visit to Asgard, and takes Tony with him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The occupants of the Tower fell into a routine. Twice a week, Loki went to see Bruce's headshrink lady. According to Jarvis, he was diligently meditating by the techniques she taught him. He seemed slightly less morose, so maybe it was helping. Or maybe it was the vitamin supplement, which he also drank daily. Or maybe he had found a supply of naughty Asgardian children for his Jotun nutritional needs.

Six days a week, Loki, Bruce and Tony would take a SHIELD chopper out to Arizona to work on anti-Asgardian weapons with Jane. As they worked, they talked science. It was fascinating, listening to Loki opening up new vistas to them.

Besides the uru weapons which Loki infused with seiðr, they were also at work on ways of counteracting Thor's lightning. Loki assured them that it was just lightning, no seiðr mingled with it, so they set up static dischargers, lightning rockets to redirect Thor's bolts, and of course good old-fashioned lightning rods in the places they thought Thor might attack - the few missile silos Asgard hadn't gotten to yet, for instance.

Loki suggested that they make an Iron Man suit specifically for fighting Asgardians. Reinforced with uru, imbued with magic. Tony's first reaction had been a defensive one. He made his suits himself. Yinsen had helped him with the first; after that they were all completely his own work. But practicality won out, and the God-Buster was built. (Tony had wanted to call it "Ragno Rocks", but Loki insisted that would be bad luck.) Loki was even able to infuse its blasters with enough magic that it could harm an Asgardian - as they confirmed with a very cautious, very small test on Loki. Which left him with a little burn on his arm, the most damage they'd seen done to him yet.

"Speaking of suits," Tony said one day as they worked on the God-buster, "we should get you some more. You've got, what, three outfits? The last time you were here, when it wasn't leather and goat horns it was Dolce and Gabbana. Now you've been wearing the same three sweatsuits over and over for months. Let's get you something else before they fall apart. We'll get you kitted out in black and green leather with-

"No." Loki had been enduring Tony's rambling with weary patience, but now he spoke sharply. "No more green."

"I thought you liked green."

For a moment Loki frowned at the seiðr, building between his hands, as if in concentration. “I was dressed in green as a child. I grew to like it. For all my life it has been my color.”

“So what’s wrong with it now? Still looks good on you.”

Loki sighed. “When I visited Jotunheim... I discovered that frost giants wear very little. But what clothing and ornament they do wear, is green. The precise shade Odin dressed me in.”

“Ouch.”

“Yes. So I shall be wearing no more green.”

“Too bad. Guess we’ll have to find you another signature color.”

Loki had shown no interest in taking part in a shopping trip montage, so in the end Tony had Jarvis order a wardrobe for him, mostly black, charcoal grey and dark blue. In Tony’s opinion, those were the best colors for Loki now that green was out. And pleasing his own eyes was the highest priority here.

He and Loki were flirting a lot now, as Loki gradually emerged from the worst of his depression. It wasn’t very serious. Appreciative looks not averted. Sly little compliments. Like when Loki was depleting the chocolate supplies at the Arizona lab *again* and Tony said, “Leave some for me.”

“What kind?”

“I like my chocolate like I like my Norse gods. Dark and bittersweet.”

A sly smile spread across Loki’s face - his smiles were way too pretty - and after that Loki always left the dark bittersweet for Tony. Loki’s tastes actually ran to overly sweet anyhow, go figure.

In the evenings a lot of them would usually watch movies together. Loki discovered classic war movies and became addicted to them. He liked the bleak ones that glorified, not great prowess at killing the enemy, but the stoic endurance of the soldiers who suffered and waited to die. *The Great Escape*, *Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Stalag 17* - that was the kind of thing Loki liked. He watched them alone in his room or in the common room if the others wanted to see them as well. Which they often did, because they all figured Loki had spent too much time alone brooding already.

In a sense, the Avengers were still protecting the world from Loki. Just now, they were doing it by trying to help him out of his gloom instead of by beating him up.

Late one night Tony was considering actually trying to sleep when Jarvis said, “Excuse me, sir, but you wished to be notified if Mr. Friggasson was doing magic.”

“What’s he doing?”

“He appears to be preparing to ‘sky-walk’, sir.”

Tony didn't bother to knock, he just barged in. Loki was concentrating on the seiðr building between his hands; he glanced up, irritated.

“Where the hell do you think you're going?”

“Asgard.”

That actually made Tony's jaw drop. And god of lies or not, Loki sounded like he meant it.

“Are you fucking insane?”

Loki shrugged.

“No, really, have you thought about how dangerous it is? If you get caught-“

“An Asgardian noble was in need of assistance, the last time I was there. Also, we need news of the realm. I have put this off too long. I won't be long and the risk is slight.”

“It's still a risk, and my planet happens to be depending on you.”

“I cannot stay away from my friend when she requires my assistance.”

Tony looked at Loki with new interest. “Okay, there are two words in that sentence that merit closer attention. ‘Friend’ and ‘she’.”

Exasperated, Loki let his hands drop and the seiðr dissipated. “Stark, I am over a thousand years old. I only spent two of those years being a ‘supervillain’. I made friends.”

“Girlfriends?”

The exasperation intensified. “*Friends.*”

“And you're going to risk everything - your own skin, your alliance with Earth, your revenge on Asgard - just to help out this friend.”

And now those green-blue eyes showed frank incredulity. “*Revenge?* What in the world are you talking about?”

“That's why you're helping us, isn't it? To get back at the people who tried to put you in a dungeon and throw away the-“ Tony stopped. Loki really did look amazed. “Are you saying you're *not* after revenge?”

“Do you truly imagine I would - *could* enjoy killing my father and my brother?”

“You seemed to enjoy dropping Thor in the Hulk cage.”

“I wasn't going to drop him until he hit it with Mjölfnir and demonstrated that his hammer was able to smash him out of there. I knew he would escape. As for enjoying it - think about it, Stark. What do you imagine I was enjoying?”

It didn't take long for the penny to drop. "You were enjoying beating your big brother for a change."

Loki's mouth twisted.

"Okay, so if you're not after revenge, why are you arming us against your own realm?"

"Because I have a duty to Asgard. I cannot allow Asgard to do so much evil."

Loki said the words as if they were totally self-evident and Tony shouldn't have needed the explanation.

"Okay, fine. And this chick is worth risking our operation."

"Her work is vital to the people of Asgard. I know how to slip between realms without being caught. I have been doing it for centuries."

"Fine. I'm coming with you." When Loki seemed about to impatiently refuse, Tony plowed on. "I have a vested interest. I'm coming with you."

"Oh, very well. Don your armor."

"We going to fight?"

"I hope not, but put it on."

Tony suited up and stood beside Loki while Loki mustered enough magical energy to make the trip. To think he'd given up hope of ever being beamed up somewhere.

It wasn't like when Loki had traveled via the Tesseract. That had been a lot of flash and noise. This was more like... taking a step. When Loki had enough seiðr gathered, he took Tony's hand and took a step forward, and Tony took it with him, and then they were someplace else.

It was daytime on Asgard, and they were surrounded by trees. Loki closed the portal behind them and waved a hand, and abruptly he was wearing a different face. His hair was light brown and much shorter, and the charcoal grey Earth clothes he'd been wearing were replaced with what Tony assumed must be Asgardian fashion. Then Loki waved a hand at him, and Tony glanced down to find that he too had an illusion on him.

"Wait, did you just make me look taller?"

"An Asgardian your height would attract attention. I could make you appear to be an adolescent if you prefer."

"No thanks." Mentally Tony started marshaling jokes about tall people.

They weren't in the woods, just in a sort of park. Tony followed Loki through the streets, too busy eyeballing everything to slow them down with questions. Loki had been right: everybody was tall, except the children. They passed a garden full of children playing with

some sort of machine that emitted colored light; the children seemed to be shaping it with their hands into elaborate moving images. High-tech finger-painting.

Asgard looked like Jane had said it did: beautiful and gold. Some of the buildings were actually *floating*. And slowly rotating. Tony had a few guesses about what was holding them up, but he also knew Earth tech wasn't ready to do that for at least another century. Maybe more. They passed an aviary full of birds with brilliantly colored feathers, beautiful creatures, and there were no bars to keep them in, yet the ones in flight were staying in the boundaries. Peering closer, Tony saw a hint of sparkle in the air. He lifted a hand and gave Loki an inquiring look. At Loki's nod, Tony removed one gauntlet and touched. A force field of some sort, and he couldn't press his hand through it.

A shadow fell on him, and Tony looked up.

Flying cars. Naturally.

Okay, more like flying motorcycles. They left no trail of smoke behind them, made barely any noise, just swooped silently above everything.

Everything was clean and shiny. Whatever powered Asgard, it didn't pollute.

He was glad Loki's illusion was concealing him. He'd be embarrassed if anyone could see him gawking like this. There was just so much to gawk *at*.

Loki tapped on the door of a large gold building that looked like something Frank Lloyd Wright might have designed after doing some really good drugs. The door opened and Loki just went right in like he owned the place. Well, prince, right. Tony followed, craning his neck at everything. "I must speak with your mistress," he said to the servant who had opened the door. Not rudely, but certainly like he didn't expect to be disobeyed. Nor was he.

A tall woman with golden hair entered after a moment. "State your business," she ordered, crisp.

Loki dropped the glamour on them both.

After a swift intake of breath, the woman curtsied. "Your Highness!" she breathed. "How can I help you?"

Just when Tony thought nothing could surprise him anymore...

Loki looked a little surprised too. He took her hand and solemnly kissed it. "My most grateful thanks, my lady, but I came here to help you. Well, and to hear whatever news you can give me." He indicated Tony with a tilt of his head. "Allow me to present Tony Stark, son of Howard. He is one of Midgard's greatest warriors and wisest sorcerers." Tony stood there trying to look like a wise sorcerer as Loki continued. "Stark, the Lady Sigyn. Sigyn's house has charge of the manufacture of healing stones."

Tony perked up. Maybe he could learn something about how they were made.

"Have you been able to repair the apparatus?" Loki was asking.

Sigyn scowled. “No. I tried to, but they smashed them up again.”

Loki turned to Tony. “Much of the work in creating healing stones is done by a... machine, I suppose you could call it. Sigyn has several. Thor is trying to solidify his power by controlling Asgard’s supply of healing stones, among other things. This has always been the duty of Sigyn’s family. When she refused to simply hand over the apparatus, Thor and his friends smashed all but one of the machines.”

“Why not just seize them all? I mean, he’s the prince, he has the king’s approval....”

“Because only my house knows the secret of their manufacture.” Sigyn spoke with quiet pride. “They could not make them without our aid. And we have refused to reveal our secrets. The elder prince seized all of the healing stones we had and palace guards come every day to retrieve the new ones we make. People can still obtain them, but only by going to the palace and asking for them, not from us.”

Yeah, old move. Control the necessities and you control the populace.

“Thor seized them *all*?”

“He let us keep the supply for a time, but a few months ago someone managed to steal some of them and Thor refused to believe I had not been distributing them myself.”

“My apologies, my lady. It was I who stole them from you. Many humans were wounded when Thor attacked Midgard, including one of Stark’s shield-brothers, a man who served me during my last visit there. I owed Midgard a debt. Now I owe you a debt.”

“It was you?” Sigyn asked. When Loki nodded, she shrugged. “Then there is no debt. But you should have told me you were taking them.”

“I did not wish to endanger you, Sigyn.”

She pursed her mouth with annoyance. “Loki, I may not be of the warrior class but that hardly means I am too cowardly to shelter friends in need.”

Loki seemed about to protest further, but eventually inclined his head. “Forgive me, Sigyn. And you may forgive my debt, but even so, I came to help you repair the apparatus.”

“We were warned not to try to repair them again, and the guards check them every day.”

“Which is what you really need from me. I will create an illusion that makes them appear still broken. Do you have a place to hide a new stockpile?”

Sigyn only smiled. Loki returned it, and Tony thought it was the first time he’d seen Loki look actually happy for a minute. “Then let us get to work.”

“Can I help?” Tony asked.

“Thank you, but instructing you would take longer than doing it ourselves.”

“Can I watch?”

Loki looked to Sigyn, who nodded.

The machines looked like something out of *Metropolis*. They were all big and all made out of gold, or were at least gold-plated. Tony filed that away; maybe so much gold wasn't just for show, maybe its properties were simpatico with Asgardian magic. Loki took off his jacket and he and Sigyn got to work, both projecting glowing magic from their hands onto the machines. Tony watched and Sigyn brought Loki up to date on the gossip.

She began by saying, “Your Highness, forgive me for not mentioning this sooner, but I am so sorry for your loss.” Despite the formal address, she actually seemed entirely comfortable with Loki. Tony guessed people who hung out with the nobility got used to it.

“Thank you, my lady.”

“And Asgard has keenly felt the loss of you.”

Loki only smiled sadly, but Tony couldn't control his expression, and Sigyn noticed. “Do you really think we would not feel the lack of our prince?” Her voice was sharp.

Okay, Tony got it. Loki was her friend, mass murdering failed conqueror or not. He schooled his expression and tried to joke. “You have another.”

Sigyn smoothed her face very swiftly, but Tony got the picture: she wasn't too impressed with Thor. “Loki has served Asgard well since he first came of age. He has always discharged his royal duties well.”

“Royal duties? Like going to other planets and killing things?”

She shrugged. “Of course, but I was speaking of other duties. The elder prince has always been too... high-spirited to have the patience for sitting in judgment on disputes, for example.” Tony got the impression that “high-spirited” was her tactful way of saying that the king's favorite son was too busy getting drunk and fighting to do his job. “Loki was always conscientious in this tedious duty and was known for the fairness of his rulings.”

“You are too kind, my Lady.”

“Not one bit,” she almost snapped, and Loki smiled. “It was the younger prince who always met with delegations of craftsmen and farmers and heard their petitions.”

“Thor did that sometimes.”

“Sometimes.” From her tone, Tony gathered that by “sometimes” she meant “almost never”. “And Loki handled a great deal of Asgard's diplomacy with other realms.”

“Hm. I guess I can see that Thor wouldn't be too great at that,” Tony conceded.

“He has met my foster brother,” Loki told Sigyn.

“Yep. Trying to kill me was Thor’s way of saying Hello. At least Loki chatted for a while first.”

Sigyn looked from one of them to the other. Loki explained, “When I was staging my invasion of Midgard, to attract the attention of the authorities I killed a few people very publicly. Stark and another warrior were assigned by Midgard’s rulers to arrest me. I let them take me into custody and Thor stole me from them.”

“Didn’t even introduce himself,” Tony confirmed. “I’d never heard of this guy and he just barges onto the plane. He took one look at me and slammed me with his hammer.”

Sigyn’s eyes widened. “And you live?”

“I was surprised as well,” Loki said. “Stark’s armor is one of the wonders of Midgard.”

“Thor electrocuted me too, but the suit took it. And he hammered Cap - er, Captain America. The other ‘Midgardian warrior’ who arrested your prince here.”

“Thor killed him.” Sigyn did not sound as if she were in any doubt. Her expression was the kind of polite sympathy one gave to a total stranger who’d had a friend die.

“No, he has a special shield - my father made it, in fact - and it turned out to be powerful enough to protect him. Judging from Thor’s expression, he was pretty amazed that we survived.”

“My foster brother always did lack the patience for diplomacy.”

“Yeah, I noticed. Thing is, he could’ve told us that Loki was a citizen of his country, and that the cube was the property of his government. We wouldn’t have just handed them both over, but we could’ve talked about it.”

Loki snorted. And changed the subject. “My lady, how is Asgard in general faring? With my mother gone and Odin growing older, I cannot help but worry.”

“As well you should.”

“How goes the war with Muspelheim?”

“We were victorious.” Sigyn sounded indifferent. How long had it been since Asgard lost a war?

Loki appeared startled. “It is over?”

“For months now.”

“I thought the Muspels would give us more trouble than that.”

“Thor succeeded in taking the Eternal Flame from them. It is now in the weapons vault of Valaskjálf.”

Judging from Loki's expression, he hadn't expected that. He frowned over his work, brooding in silence for a while. Tony wanted to ask questions, but uncharacteristic caution made him save it for when they got back to Earth.

"And the repairs from the ravages of the Dark Elf War?"

"Abandoned."

"*What?*"

Sigyn huffed. "No one in the palace cares to organize the repairs, and Odin won't allow any of us to do it, so everyone has simply moved away from the damaged areas."

Tony almost laughed at Loki's expression. It wasn't surprised, or really angry, just disgusted. It was an "I'm surrounded by idiots" expression.

"And the rest of Asgard?"

A litany of complaints began. Nothing too dire, but basically Odin wasn't keeping the trains running on time, and people were getting fed up with the older prince and his friends throwing their weight around. Tony let his mind wander after a few minutes of it. He was getting a picture of what life for the princes must have been like before. Thor, their father's spoiled darling, running around waving his hammer, going to whatever realm Odin figured had people who needed killing. Loki, living in the golden prince's shadow, hoping to please Daddy by doing the boring jobs Big Brother couldn't be bothered with. If Thor had been made king as planned, Thor would have gone on making war and basking in the adoration of his fellow warriors, while Loki did all the actual work of governing with none of the power and none of the credit. It was the story of many a younger son, many an impoverished cousin, many a royal vizier.

Eventually Loki would have gotten tired of it. Maybe it would have taken a thousand years of sitting through boring meetings and filling out paperwork and trying to find the money to pay for Thor's parties and wars, but one day Loki would have had enough, and then... perhaps a dagger between Thor's ribs, or a drop of poison in his cup. If Thor had a child, Loki would have been the obvious regent, and the boy king could have been disposed of at leisure, or molded to Loki's design. If there was no child, Loki would have been next in the succession.

Yeah, there was no way things wouldn't have blown up sooner or later.

"Excuse me," Tony said into a lull in the conversation, "but - well, now you all know that Loki is, ah, adopted."

Sigyn looked at Loki as she answered, and Tony thought Loki had to be just drinking in that look. It wasn't affection, or fear, it was simple and very deep *respect*.

"Prince Loki may have been born a Jotun, but he has certainly shown where his loyalties lie."

Well, yes, attempted genocide would do that.

“The elder prince destroyed the peace that had existed between our realms for a thousand years for the sake of his own pride. The Jotuns might have invaded Asgard itself. Thanks to Loki, none of us need fear that.”

The ground tilted under Tony then. Because he could *see*. Here was an Asgardian civilian, not a warrior, not some idiot who loved killing things and was eager to get to Valhalla, afraid of one of the few species capable of harming Aesir. Centuries of horror stories and the logical deduction that what with being defeated and their Casket stolen, the frost giants must be eager to return the favor, to see Asgardians terrified, dying, maimed, starved. While the warrior aristocracy was licking their lips in anticipation of the glory to come, the rest of the Aesir were dreading it.

And then comes Loki, regent of Asgard, Loki with his plan to eliminate the threat once and for all. And despite Thor’s interference, Loki *had* damaged Jotunheim enough that it wasn’t going to threaten Asgard or anyone else for a very long time, if ever.

It was wrong. Tony *knew* it was wrong. But now he could see, whether he wanted to or not, why Loki would have thought it was right.

He stood up. “I need some air,” he said. Sigyn looked puzzled, but she directed him to a courtyard where there was a garden of night-blooming flowers. He stood, looking up at the unfamiliar constellations, inhaling the strange but beautiful perfume of the flowers, and tried to remember who he was and what he believed.

Loki’s intentions had been good. In the light of the scant value Asgard put on life, Tony could... not excuse, never, but understand, hell yes. And that was to Tony the most frightening thing about it all.

But maybe....

Maybe some of the paving stones to Loki’s hell could be pried up and put to better purpose.

Tony didn’t believe anyone was beyond redemption. That was, he had *chosen* to believe that. He didn’t spend too much time pondering what exactly “redemption” was, he just got on with seeking his.

Chapter End Notes

Classic war movies and classic Westerns got me through a really bad time several years ago. The good ones glorify, not war, but the humble courage and amazing endurance of the soldiers who fight it. Those movies were an inspiration to me, and they do a good job of putting your own problems in perspective.

A lot of my ideas about how Asgardian magic and politics work come from the awesome blog [Exploring MCU Asgard](#). At this point so many of the ideas there have become my own headcanon that I'm not sure which ones I got from there and which are entirely my own.

This Sigyn is my own, she's not based on Sigyn as she was in the comics - I haven't read that many of the comics.

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Sigyn makes a request.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

With Stark in the garden, Sigyn checked each door to make sure no one was listening. Then she came to stand before Loki, holding his gaze. Despite his surprise, Loki summoned magic.

“I have just summoned a shield which will prevent anyone from hearing your words, my lady.”

“Then you know what I am going to say.”

“I do not. Do you need some other help?”

“I do. *Asgard* does.”

“What...”

“Loki, I know how greatly you love your father and your brother.”

He sighed. “I have neither father nor brother. Just ask Odin and Thor.”

“Then can you save us from them?”

Loki’s first reaction was terror. Despite his own seiðr shielding them, he looked around in panic.

Sigyn only watched him, resolute.

He managed a rueful laugh. “My lady, I am a *frost giant*. Asgard will hardly overlook-“

“You *were* a frost giant. You were transformed as an infant. Do you think I am the only one who has suffered for your absence? The people mutter over their mead that things were better when you were here. The artisans say what a loss your counsel to the throne was. The sorcerers say that Asgard’s seiðr is out of balance. No one dares actually say what we are wishing, but all know. It is only the warriors who were glad to see the back of you. Return here in a few days and I will show you. You may *speak* with people, they will ask you what I have asked. So again I ask, can you help us?”

Without Loki's wishing it, his mind was already working on the problem. It was what his brain did, a long ingrained habit: playing out possibilities, making a mental exercise of what could overturn any situation. It was what had made him valuable as a counselor; he could always anticipate what cracks someone might find and exploit. But this was no mere hypothetical question, and the theoretical gambit would be his own.

"Sigyn," Loki said after a long silence, "do you have any grasp of what you are asking me to do?"

"I do."

"Have I not enough blood on my hands already?"

Gently she reached for his hands, clasped them in hers, held his gaze. "It is your duty as a prince of Asgard to wear that blood if the security of the realm requires it. I do not ask you if you *will*; your sense of duty has always been strong. I know that you will save Asgard if it is possible. So I ask you if you *can*."

Loki stared at her, seeing not her face, severe as a Valkyrie's, but an abyss opening before him.

"If you will not help us, who will?"

A heavy footfall sounded in the doorway. They glanced over to see Stark, who was demonstrating that he was, in fact, capable of looking embarrassed.

"Uh. 'Scuse me."

Loki released Sigyn's hands, still feeling their warmth, and the two of them stepped apart.

"We are almost finished." Loki turned back to the apparatus. He and Sigyn had it repaired in a few more minutes, and Loki created the illusion necessary to make it appear still broken. Then he turned back to Sigyn and spoke formally. "Thank you for your kind words, my lady. I shall bear them in mind."

"If you wish to visit Asgard again," she told him, holding his gaze, "you may materialize in my study. No one else will observe you there."

After a second he nodded. She curtsied as Loki spread his hands to summon seiðr, and watched until he was able to transport himself and Stark back to Avengers Tower.

Back in Loki's chambers, Stark said, "I think this calls for a drink."

"You think everything calls for a drink."

"Finally, someone understands. C'mon."

Loki was glad enough to be able to put off the moment when he would have to seriously contemplate Sigyn's words. He followed Stark into the main room and accepted the glass he

was soon handed, not bothering to ask what it was. It was strong as Midgardian spirits went and warmed him inside.

“So, sorry if I interrupted a tender moment there.”

Loki snorted. “The Lady Sigyn has a lover, Stark.”

“Is he bigger than you?”

“No, she is not.”

“...Oh.”

“And Angrboða knows that I have no more interest in women than she and Sigyn have in men.”

“I always figured life’s too short to limit myself.”

“If you belonged to a more long-lived species, Stark, you would figure life was too long to limit yourself.” And that started up another chain of thoughts Loki was not quite prepared to face.

“Probably. So what was your little *tête-à-tête* about, then?”

“She was asking for my help.”

“With what?”

“A personal matter.”

“Okay, I can take a hint.”

“Can you? It’s always pleasant to learn unsuspected things about one’s acquaintances.”

Stark laughed. “I guess I deserved that one.”

Loki emptied his glass and took a half-step back. “I suppose I should seek my bed.” And doubtless lie awake turning Sigyn’s words over in his head.

“Mm.” Stark finished his own drink. “Or you could seek mine.”

Loki looked at him. Stark met his eyes steadily, not nervous or coy or seductive. Just making the offer. Waiting.

“I would like that,” Loki said at last.

Tomorrow: smut!

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

“Don’t tell me. Asgardians don’t have a refractory period.”

“What is a refractory period?”

Chapter Notes

Thank you to krinard for betaing this chapter!

Tony closed the bedroom door once they were inside and turned to find Loki looking at him. Tony gave him a cocky little grin. “Okay, big guy, get down here.”

Loki complied, bending his head so that Tony could kiss him, cupping Tony’s face in his hands. Loki stopped with his lips just a breath away from Tony’s, allowing Tony to be the one to capture his mouth, to tease Loki’s lips apart with his tongue, and Loki accepted the invasion with an air of relief. Tony could feel the muscles of Loki’s back and arms relaxing under Tony’s hands as the kiss deepened.

Dark and bittersweet.

Tony took his time. He was going to show Loki how good humans could be at this, even without centuries of experience. Hey, the honor of Midgard depended on him. He’d been wanting to get his hands and mouth on Loki since... since he’d first seen him on the surveillance cameras in Stuttgart, really. When Loki had been only a dangerous beautiful stranger.

Everything Tony had later learned about Loki - his wiliness, his fierce intelligence, his pain, his terror, his twisted but powerful sense of duty, his heartbreakingly intense loyalty - had only made Tony want him more.

He’d been holding himself back since Loki had joined them for all kinds of reasons. But Loki had been coming back to life before his eyes for the past few weeks, and now - well. Now someone else had confirmed his own instincts about Loki, and maybe he should have examined that more critically - no, he definitely should have - but something in him had accepted what Sigyn had told him about Loki’s pre-supervillain life and there was no closing the floodgates now.

On the second kiss Loki's hands started to roam, and Tony let his do the same, sliding his hands down Loki's slim torso, cupping that nice little ass in his hands and enjoying the way Loki slightly bucked into him as he did.

When Loki broke the kiss, Tony was gratified to see that there was more light, more *life* in those green-blue eyes than there had been in all the weeks Loki had been living in the Tower. He wanted more of that. He wanted to see delight and desperation all over that sculpted face. He wanted to take apart Loki's self-possessed manner and watch him writhe and moan. Probably he wouldn't get long to play before Loki got impatient and flipped him over, so he would take the chance while he had it.

Tony was about to steer them towards the bed when Loki surprised him by dropping to his knees. He put a hand lightly on Tony's groin - which was already stirring even before Loki's hand got there - with simple confidence, watching Tony's face, enjoying the hitch in Tony's breath.

Tony thought of making a crack about kneeling, but his sense of self-preservation made a rare appearance and stopped him. Or maybe it was more that he sensed that this was a test. If he blew it (ha, ha), he would show that he couldn't even make out with someone for a few minutes without taking advantage of the chance to poke a vulnerable spot. And maybe he would still get laid, but it would be just that, just a couple of bodies seeking release. Meanwhile, Loki would have learned that one more person in the universe couldn't be trusted.

And *that* thought had all kinds of implications Tony was nowhere near prepared to face, so he told his brain to please shut up and enjoy the moment. And not get him killed with ill-timed humor. So all he said was "*Loki*" as the man's long-fingered hand gently pressed his dick through the cloth of his jeans.

Loki smiled, that wide, toothy smile which was in itself reason enough to call him the god of mischief. It was also a very *pretty* smile, Tony had noticed the few chances he'd had to see it. He wanted to see it again, and again. Wanted to be the one who'd inspired it.

Those long fingers were undoing his zipper, pulling down his briefs, and that glossy black head was bending over Tony's groin and oh. My. God.

It was always nice to have a warm wet mouth on your dick. But only a few seconds in, it became obvious that Loki knew what to *do* with that mouth. Knew how to rock his head, letting the head of Tony's cock hit the back of his throat, how to alternate sucking with caressing Tony's cock with his lips and tongue like it was an ice cream cone, even varying how hard he sucked from one moment to the next just to drive Tony even crazier.

Loki had been trained all his life to want to please. This might be the healthiest manifestation of that desire.

Tony tangled his fingers in Loki's long black hair but didn't try to direct his movements. Loki was doing too good a job on his own, closing his eyes in concentration, his pallid face flushing just slightly.

“*Fuck*,” Tony gasped out when Loki combined sucking, *hard*, with pressing the underside of Tony’s dick with his tongue. He couldn’t help tightening his grip on Loki’s hair. Loki’s eyes fluttered open and looked up at him in hazy triumph.

Oh, so that’s how it was? Okay then.

“You are so fucking good at this,” Tony gasped, and he could feel Loki’s startled intake of breath. “Oh, god no, don’t stop. Keep doing exactly that. Please. *Please*.” The plea fell from Tony’s mouth easily; begging between the sheets had never been an inhibition for him. He was rewarded; Loki teased him by sucking more gently, but only for a few seconds before resuming the harder pressure. “Oh, yes. Never thought I’d mean this literally but *oh my god*.”

Loki’s mouth couldn’t exactly smile just now, but the way his eyes crinkled as he stole another glance up at Tony showed his pleased amusement.

Tony could feel the pressure building and continued to babble encouragement. “Oh yes, like that, just like that, *please*.” And Loki seemed to be enjoying his reaction, but suddenly there was cold air on Tony’s cock and Loki was unfolding himself from his kneeling position.

“I am not wasting that,” Loki said, dropping his eyes to Tony’s hard-on. “I want that in me.”

Tony gasped for breath. A couple of times. Both because of the effect Loki’s mouth had had on him, and because of Loki’s words. He’d expected that it would take time to talk Loki into letting a “mortal” (or maybe anyone) stick it in him. If Loki ever did let him. And here he was, casually demanding it. Clearly Tony hadn’t been completely right about just what Loki’s issues were, but he wasn’t complaining. The only downside to this moment was that his dick was no longer in Loki’s very talented mouth.

Which was why he said, “Oh, you are going to pay for this.”

Loki did not look displeased with the threat.

He was backing slowly towards the bed, but Tony grabbed him and started pulling his clothes off. Loki moved to facilitate but didn’t undress himself, letting Tony do it. “I should’ve demanded you give me a striptease,” Tony said as Loki’s briefs hit the carpet.

“A what?”

Tony toed his sneakers off. “Made you undress yourself slowly and elegantly while I watched.” He made his own movement as he pulled his Metallica T-shirt over his head more graceful than was his wont in illustration. As he shucked his jeans and briefs, he said, “You’d be a natural. The way you pose all the time - don’t tell me you don’t know the effect you have on everyone who looks at you.” Tony moved closer, took Loki’s elbows and maneuvered him towards the bed. Loki’s face was a little guarded now, but he wasn’t annoyed. Not yet. “You eat it up. You know you’re the finest thing in the Nine Realms. People look at you and get hard or wet for you. And you love it.”

Loki swallowed. Tony could see the movement in that long pale neck. Tony only had to stretch a little to kiss that throat, putting a possessive hand on the back of Loki’s neck to hold

him in place. Tony's other hand went to Loki's hip and slowly moved to his cock.

"And by the way, don't think that while I was telling you how much I'd like to see you put on a show for me sometime, I didn't notice that you have a really huge dick."

Loki smirked, his fleeting unease gone. And it was true. If it weren't such a loaded subject Tony would have made a crack about giants right here. Because *damn*.

Loki let Tony urge him back onto the bed. Tony thought of making him turn over, but given that Loki's triggers were actually more of a minefield, it was best to keep it so he could watch Loki's expressions. Besides which, Loki's face was beautiful, all flushed with desire now and his lips red and glistening from kissing and sucking Tony's cock, his eyes dark and unfocused with want.

The rest of him was gorgeous too. Tony appreciated a variety of physical types, but Loki's was a favorite: lean whipcord muscles and ridiculously long legs and fair delicate skin, only a thin sprinkling of body hair.

Tony positioned himself on top of Loki, a little to the side so that Loki's cock wasn't getting any contact yet. Loki reached for his hips and tugged lightly. He was holding back, as usual - with his Asgardian strength he could have put Tony wherever he wanted him, but when Tony didn't go with that little tug, Loki didn't force it.

"Fuck me, Tony," Loki rasped, and damn if Tony didn't almost come just from hearing those words. "Please."

Tony couldn't resist the chance to tease a little. "Oh, I like hearing that word from you."

"*Please*, then. Fuck me until I can't think."

So that's what Loki wanted. Well, Tony could certainly supply it. Tony could use some not-thinking himself just now.

"Oh, I can do that. In fact, I'll make you stop thinking long before I put my dick in you."

"Then get on with-" Loki stopped when Tony firmly cupped his balls in one hand. Loki's whole body drew taut, waiting for what was coming next.

"Look at me," Tony growled. When Loki did, Tony just held his gaze, looking into those dazed green eyes, for a minute before kissing him. Letting go of Loki's balls, he wound the fingers of both his hands again in Loki's silky hair to hold his head in place while he kissed him deeply, thoroughly. He found himself drawing the kiss out, making it last, carefully breathing through his nose so he wouldn't have to release Loki's mouth, because the feeling of it yielding to his was intoxicating.

Tony found himself playing with the kiss. He plundered Loki's mouth with his tongue, his movements demanding, kissing hard enough that it made both their lips sore. Loki let him, shaking under these ministrations. When he started to kiss back just as fiercely, Tony abruptly became gentler, his lips moving tenderly as if to soothe the bruising he'd just left. And Loki

didn't seem to know how to react to that, freezing in shock for a second, before tremulously responding in kind. Tony repeated the cycle a few times, brutal kissing followed by tender, thrilled by Loki's acquiescence.

By the time Tony finally broke the kiss, Loki looked completely taken apart. It made Tony want to despoil him. Gently. Lavishing him with affection while he claimed him as his prize.

Oh, hell. Tony shivered. He hadn't realized what kind of reaction actually touching the god of mischief would set off in himself.

"What are you trying to do to me?" Loki murmured without inflection.

Tony was genuinely shocked at the answers that sprang to mind. He didn't dare to say any of them. At the same time, he knew it was too late to back out now. This had been set in motion, and even if they both put on their clothes now and went into the other room to watch movies and eat popcorn, this thing between them would go right on growing.

So he only said, "The same thing you're doing to me." And put his mouth on Loki's neck. He spent a long time kissing and nibbling his way down Loki's neck to his chest, then going to work on his nipples. And Loki just let him, arching his back under Tony's touch, twisting under him and biting his lips, but not trying to hurry him along, even though judging from the little whines escaping from him he was already desperate.

Tony looked at Loki's flushed face, eyes closed and features drawn, and concluded that it was a safe bet that Loki wasn't thinking anymore.

"Tony," Loki groaned, and there was more than a bit of a plea in his voice.

"I suppose it might be time to start getting you ready," Tony said judiciously. He started to move away, in the direction of his nightstand, but Loki held on to him, using his Asgardian strength at last. "I was just getting lube."

Loki replied with some words Tony didn't understand, then looked at Tony expectantly. Not sure what else to do, Tony ran a hand up Loki's thigh, and discovered that Loki was now thoroughly slicked.

"Now that's a useful trick." He gently pressed a finger in, smiling at the way Loki tilted his head back.

"Fuck me now, Tony," Loki ordered between clenched teeth. "I don't need preparation, I don't need to be coddled."

"I beg to differ. If ever anyone needed coddling, I would say it's you." Tony added a second finger and worked them both in and out rhythmically.

Loki spread his thighs wider, groaning in frustration. "Asgardians are not breakable, Stark. You won't hurt me."

Tony continued, unhurried despite his own eagerness. He was enjoying teasing Loki and didn't even try to hide it. It was well worth a bit of frustration of his own. "That's not the

only concern here, you know. You can't possibly enjoy being fucked to the utmost if you haven't been thoroughly prepared."

That was when Tony felt the abrupt relaxation of the muscles around his fingers, allowing him to easily add a third. Loki's whole body just seemed to melt under him. Tony had succeeded in driving Loki to new heights of need, of surrender. The thought made his own cock throb even harder.

Loki's hands were fisting in the sheets now. "Tony. *Please.*" His voice was almost a whisper.

And still Loki was letting him control this, not seizing Tony and throwing him onto his back and impaling himself on Tony. Not throwing Tony onto his stomach and thrusting into him. He was just lying under Tony, pleading, and waiting.

That was the world's most incredible turn-on.

Tony couldn't resist for one more instant. "Well, since you asked so nicely," he said, not able to prevent his voice from shaking. He positioned himself and slid right in, easily. He tried to give Loki's body time to adjust, but Loki didn't need it and immediately started to move under him, urgent.

There was no way to keep holding back. Tony pounded into Loki, as hard as he could, and Loki just arched his back and made pornographic sounds that drove Tony even crazier.

After pounding Loki into submission for a while, Tony eased off a little - a *little* - to experiment instead with angles. For science. He tried the sort of undulating thrust he'd perfected when he was twenty and determined that Asgardians, or frost giants, or possibly both, had prostates in exactly the same place as humans. And that they made strangled cries and begged for more if you hit the spot just right. Rotating your hips got pretty good results too.

Such good results, in fact, that Tony lost all ability to tease, or gather scientific data, or do anything but fuck Loki really, really hard.

"Ow," Tony said an indeterminate period of time later.

"Does that mean you aren't going to do that to me again?" Loki sounded sincerely disappointed, which gave Tony's ego a boost it hadn't, to be honest, really needed.

"Not for at least another five minutes." Tony opened his eyes and saw Loki looking at him sort of reproachfully. And he didn't need another five minutes. Or five seconds.

"Don't tell me. Asgardians don't have a refractory period."

"What is a refractory period?"

"That is so unfair," Tony grumbled, letting his eyes fall shut again. "Listen, gorgeous, I will happily fuck you into the mattress again, but I need to rest for a few minutes first. It's a limitation peculiar to us pathetic mortals."

“Oh.”

Tony snorted a laugh at how disappointed Loki sounded. “Patience, oh divine one.”

With incentive like a preternaturally hot demigod stretched out beside him, it wasn't long before Tony was ready to make good on his promise. Nowadays the most Tony could usually manage was three times in one night, which was more than respectable at his age, but with the inspiration of Loki he managed four, and then sucked him off twice. “Are you always like this?” he asked while Loki was catching his breath after the second blow job.

Loki buried his face in the pillow, embarrassed. “I'm sorry. I'm just very tired.”

Tony was still processing that when Loki couldn't hold back his snickers anymore. Tony grabbed a pillow and hit him with it.

“To answer your question seriously, I do not usually demand quite so much of my lovers. You have, ah, risen to the occasion admirably. But it has been a very long time.”

“Oh yeah? How long?”

Loki actually had to think about that. “Five years. I was busy.”

“I bet.” Tony leaned over and gave him a nice long kiss. Loki seemed to like tasting himself on Tony's tongue.

When the kiss was over, Loki just curled up against him like a cat and fell asleep almost at once. Tony, worn out, didn't take much longer.

He had a lot to think about. But it could all wait. At least until tomorrow.

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

“Harpooning” was a pretty good word for it, actually.

The following day went fairly smoothly. Tony and Loki slept late, ate a huge breakfast of non-breakfast foods on the flight to Arizona, and then both buried themselves in their work. Tony assumed that his fellow Avengers had figured out what was up with both of them oversleeping in Tony’s room, but to his relief none of them took him aside for an intervention.

If they’d had any idea what he was actually thinking - and not the lust part of that, either - they wouldn’t be so sanguine.

They both had a lot to process, and the unanticipated way they had *connected* in the sack wasn’t the only thing. Tony had learned a lot about Asgard and about Loki. Everything he thought he’d known about them both required revision.

That evening, he invited Loki to have dinner with him in his bedroom. He’d had Jarvis order all the properly romantic things: fine wine, fancy cheeses, oysters (hey, people who bang pagan gods need all the help they can get). And, of course, an assortment of chocolates.

Once they had settled down on the low sofas in his room, Loki accepted the wine Tony poured for him and they drank and nibbled together in silence for a few minutes. Tony watched Loki with newly proprietary feelings. Loki’s long fingers putting things in his mouth was a seriously distracting sight and should probably have a warning label.

Loki had been quiet all day too, clearly preoccupied with his own thoughts just as Tony was. He still seemed to be brooding, not paying much attention to Tony. Well, Tony would fix that soon enough.

“Perhaps...” Loki began at last. His tone made Tony quickly alert.

“I disagree.”

Tony enjoyed the quick flash of unwilling smile that inspired. Loki went on, insistent. “It might be wisest if we did not continue with this. The... the things that have happened to me in the last few years... they make this bad timing.”

“‘Bad timing’ is a synonym for ‘life’.” When Loki only quirked a corner of his mouth in reply, Tony went on, “Why?”

Loki looked at the dregs of his wine as if the words he needed might be under them. “Due to my recent troubles,” a phrase which Tony thought ranked up there with “the late unpleasantness” for wars, “finally having sex for the first time in five years had... an excessive emotional impact. We should stop before undue attachment is formed.”

“Use enough big words and maybe it won’t hurt,” Tony said, picking up the bottle and topping them both off. Loki looked annoyed, which was to be expected when his coping mechanisms were called out. Tony continued before Loki could snap a retort. “Just so you know, the excessive impact and attachment is not one-sided. And maybe I’m conceited but I don’t think it’s just because the last few years sucked for you.” He set the bottle back down and popped a slice of cheese in his mouth. “Also, I think trying to stop would just cause trouble.”

“How so?”

“It’s already too late. 24 hours ago I didn’t know what we were getting ourselves into either, but we’ve already done it and there’s no going back now.” There. That acknowledged what neither of them was ready to put into words, without saying it too plainly. “I think you know that.”

Loki basically hid in his wineglass for a minute or two after that, which Tony thought was a perfectly valid life choice. Meanwhile Tony swallowed a few oysters. It was only considerate not to disappoint his lover. Even if said lover didn’t have a history of anger management issues to rival Bruce’s.

“So you’re suggesting that we simply throw caution to the wind,” Loki said after a while.

“I’m suggesting that we not waste time pretending that we can just stop this.” Tony steeled himself, trying not to let it show that he was doing so. “Because I, at least, can’t.”

Loki gave him a searching look, one that made Tony feel naked. Not that physical nudity had ever much bothered him, but he felt like Loki was reading his thoughts. He didn’t think Loki could do that, but eventually Loki seemed to be satisfied by whatever he had seen in Tony’s face.

“So, what was all that about Muspelheim?”

Loki quickly gulped down more wine, and Tony refilled his glass again. “I knew that the Muspels had been chafing against Odin’s rule. I thought they would keep Asgard occupied for a while. It seems they were less formidable than I thought. Or perhaps Thor got lucky.” He gave an elegant shrug. “It just means we have a bit less time to prepare Midgard.”

“Hm.” Tony helped himself to a couple of the little smoked salmon sandwiches. “And repairing the damage from the Dark Elf War?”

Loki put an olive in his mouth and licked the juice from his fingertips absently. Tony didn’t think the effect the sight had on him was due to the oysters. “Again, I counted on it to keep Asgard busy for a time. Apparently Odin has decided to cement his hold over the realms

before repairing the harm to Asgard.” Loki frowned, his tone one of detached criticism. “He should know better. He taught me and Thor better. The people will be discontented.”

“Should we be worried?”

Loki’s expression was not encouraging, but he only said, “No more than you were before.” He picked up an oyster and regarded it dubiously.

“Don’t chew it, just swallow it. The taste isn’t the point.” Tony demonstrated.

Loki followed suit and made a face, reaching for the wine. “Then what is the point?”

“One, the sensation of it going down your throat. Two, it’s an aphrodisiac.”

Loki quirked an eyebrow at him and swallowed another.

“So, Sigyn seems to think that you’re the cat’s pyjamas.” Tony cracked up. “You should see your face now.”

“Do I even want to know what that means?”

“That she has a high opinion of you. More outdated slang. I’ve been boning up to tease Cap. Anyway, I thought Asgard didn’t think that highly of you.”

“The warrior nobility does not and never has. My presence among them was only tolerated because they believed me to be the son of Odin. The rest of Asgard has always been kinder to me.” He sighed. “It matters little, however. The warrior class holds all of the power in Asgard.”

“What about sorcerers? Don’t they have any clout?”

“Very little. Odin has always favored warriors above all, and not only is he a powerful sorcerer, he also, as king, controls the Asgard Force. No Asgardian can successfully oppose him.”

Tony brooded over that a bit. All that he could see before him was an assortment of risks. He hadn’t bargained for anything about this situation, and the only way out was through.

The only question was which risk he would take.

“Here.” Loki shoved the plate of chocolates towards him, remembering that Tony didn’t like being handed things. “I saved the dark bittersweet ones for you.”

Tony took one. “Tell me about the rest of your family.”

“The rest?” Loki was putting away milk chocolate at an awe-inspiring rate.

“The royal family of Asgard, I mean. Don’t you have cousins or anything?”

“Odin had two brothers. They both died without issue.” Loki frowned suddenly. His wineglass hovered forgotten in his hand.

“What?”

“He told us stories of how they died valiantly in battle by his side. Now I have to wonder.”

“You think he might have....”

“I have no idea. And no way to find out; the only witnesses are long dead.” Loki put down his wineglass with an air of finality. “You were very accommodating to me last night. I believe it is your turn. What would you like from me tonight?”

Tony swallowed. Loki was standing up now, moving towards him in leisurely fashion. “I want more of your incredibly talented mouth, for one thing. And then, I wouldn’t mind finding out how it feels to be harpooned by a super-deluxe-sized dick - if you can keep in mind that I, not being an Asgardian, *am* breakable.”

“I won’t hurt you, Tony.” Loki said the words quietly, seriously. Tony swallowed.

Holding Tony’s gaze, Loki slowly let his jacket slip from his shoulders. Tony’s eyes widened as he realized that he was getting the striptease he’d asked for.

There were no gyrations, no lewd teasing. Loki just took each article of clothing off slowly, graceful as always, never looking away from Tony’s face. Tony watched those miles of creamy skin being revealed with one sinuous movement after another, transfixed.

Despite his grace and his beautifully sculpted features, Loki was decidedly masculine. Not in the ridiculously overstated way of Thor, which was probably the Asgardian ideal. But his shoulders were broad and his body leanly muscled, and he moved with a confidence that all the warriors of Asgard had not been able to thrash out of him.

Loki let one navy blue garment after another fall to the floor. Then he moved closer and knelt in front of Tony, moving his hands slowly up Tony’s thighs.

“You said this was what you wanted.” His voice was soft and his eyes very green.

Tony’s mouth was dry. “Yes,” he managed to rasp, and didn’t move while Loki unzipped him.

“Oysters,” Loki teased as he freed Tony from his clothes.

“I’m pretty sure this is entirely down to you. The oysters are just so that at two a.m. you won’t resort to pounding on Cap’s door out of disappointment.”

Loki snickered at that. “I don’t care for overmuscled men.”

Oh, right. Or blonds, Tony would bet, but he kept that thought to himself.

“And you had no trouble last night.”

“Yeah, well, I had divine inspiration.”

Loki gave him a smug little smile before bending his head. Tony just let his head fall back and gave himself up to the experience.

It wasn't long before Loki had driven Tony completely out of his mind and his bones melted, leaving him unable to do anything but sprawl on the couch while Loki sucked him. And licked him. And hummed around him, sending vibrations all through him. Loki made it last, until Tony had forgotten everything except that mouth on him. And then Loki let him come.

When Tony was able to manage coherent thought again, he found that Loki had carried him to the bed and stripped him while he was recovering. “Hey. That was sneaky.”

“The god of mischief, sneaky. Who would have thought.” Loki was stretched out beside him, propped on an elbow, looking down at him. Idly he traced the edge of the arc reactor with his fingertips. When Tony tensed, Loki lifted his hand away at once. “Does that hurt?”

“No. I just don't usually let people touch it.”

“Ah.” Loki placed his cool hand on Tony's abdomen.

“You can. It's okay. I'm just not used to it.”

Loki gave him another searching look.

“Loki, I'm a selfish bastard who has no inhibitions about making his wishes known. I don't mind if you touch my arc reactor.”

That got a smile like the moon emerging from behind a cloud, and Loki cautiously ran his fingers over the reactor. “I can feel the magic in it,” he murmured.

“Can you?”

“Oh, yes.”

“What does that feel like?”

Those green eyes darted at his face, speculative. Then Loki took Tony's hand in his. “Can you feel this?”

A sort of pins-and-needles sensation pervaded Tony's hand. Not unpleasant. Loki's hand was glowing faintly. “Wow. Yes.” Loki let the glow fade and released Tony's hand. “You know, I can think of applications for that.”

For a second Loki looked incredulous, and Tony worried that this was some kind of Asgardian cultural insult. Like, maybe magic wasn't supposed to be besmirched for such purposes. But then mischief glinted in those green eyes and Loki's hand started to glow again, and he placed his glowing hand on Tony's breastbone. “Like this?”

“...Oh.”

Loki moved his hand to each of Tony's nipples in turn. Tony would have thought his refractory period (that proof of human frailty) would last longer, but, well. No. And when Loki's glowing hand got to his dick, he arched off the bed and finally had to grab Loki's wrist and pull it away. Which Loki let him do, grinning.

"Oh, man." Tony tried to breathe. He was *aching* now. "Loki, please - I can't wait, please--"

At once, Loki said his lubricating spell again, then rose to straddle Tony's hips. "The night is young, Stark. There is still time for me to harpoon you after if you still wish it."

"Oh, I definitely wish it." Tony put his hands on Loki's narrow hips and guided him as Loki impaled himself on Tony. Loki's eyes fluttered closed as his pelvis rested against Tony's, and when Tony wrapped both hands around Loki's excessive dick, Loki groaned and started moving.

For as long as he could, Tony kept jerking Loki off while Loki rode him. After a couple of minutes, though, Tony couldn't help it; he grabbed Loki's hips and thrust up into him, *hard*, and Loki's inner muscles clenched around him, and Tony could hear himself gasping out Loki's name as the convulsions shook him. And Loki cried out too, and Tony flushed all over with triumph at the sound.

More rest. At least Loki didn't seem to mind having to wait on Tony's human limitations. He refilled their wineglasses, moving around the room unself-conscious about his nakedness, giving Tony a wicked little smile as he came back to the bed.

Tony pushed himself to a sitting position, had a sip of wine, and didn't bother even trying not to look at Loki's endowment. "So, uh. Is this Asgardian standard issue?"

Loki smirked as he leaned against the headboard. "No." After a second he added, "I had to beat my big brother at *something*."

Tony couldn't help it; he cracked up. "I bet that really pissed him off."

"As a matter of fact, it did."

"You beat him at a lot of things, you know."

Loki only glanced at him. Tony didn't need him to explain. Except for this one accident of genetics, Loki had never beaten Thor at anything Thor cared about.

"Tomorrow's Saturday. We won't be expected at the workshop on Sunday."

"Yes?"

"If you want, tomorrow when we knock off for the day we could go to my house in Malibu instead of coming back here. Stay there until Monday morning. Just the two of us." At Loki's inquiring look, he added, "It's right on the beach, you'll like it."

"You do not fear being alone with me, far from the protection of your shield-brothers?"

“Should I?”

Bruce had asked him the same thing that afternoon when Tony had taken him aside to tell him his plans. “*Tony, are you sure about being all alone with Loki?*”

“*I think that getting him away from anyone who might mention that this Sunday is Father’s Day is a good idea,*” Tony had answered, and Bruce couldn’t argue with that. The only thing worse than Mother’s Day in Avengers Tower was Father’s Day in Avengers Tower. But Tony had another reason to want some privacy with Loki. And it had nothing to do with sex.

Loki took both their wineglasses and put them on the nightstand. Then he looked seriously into Tony’s eyes.

“No.” Loki’s voice was quietly emphatic. “You shouldn’t.”

Then Loki kissed him.

“Do you still want me to ‘harpoon’ you, Tony?”

“Oh hell yes.”

Tony didn’t often think about the first time he’d been penetrated. Now he wished that first partner had been a tenth as considerate as Loki. Maybe it was just that Loki was concerned about hurting him (something that hadn’t worried Tony’s first all those years ago, but then, that guy had been of very average endowment).

Whatever the reason, Tony felt, embarrassing as the comparison was, like a cherished bride. Loki spent a long time fanning his desire, until Tony was half out of his mind with pleasure. Only then did Loki begin preparing him, with magically conjured lube, artful caresses, and a lot of patient, careful stretching.

“Loki? C’mon, I’m ready.”

“Are you?” Loki’s warm breath fanned over Tony’s dick, frustrating him even more.

“Yes, dammit. Please?”

“From ‘dammit’ to ‘please’ in less than two seconds. Perhaps you are ready.” Loki curled his fingers inside Tony and Tony whimpered. “Hm, I think perhaps you are.”

Loki didn’t make Tony argue any further. He positioned himself and started to press in.

“Hngh,” Tony said, and wrapped his arms around Loki. Loki stilled for a second, then continued.

“Don’t stop,” Tony said a minute later. Loki had frozen, and there were still several inches to go.

“I’m hurting you.” Loki looked genuinely worried. Maybe he’d taken that human breakability thing a little *too* seriously.

“It’s all right!” Loki looked unconvinced. “Loki, it’s going to hurt *some*. You’re huge. It’s all right, I want this.” When Loki still did not move, Tony said, “If it hurts too much, I promise I’ll tell you. Now give it to me!”

Loki still did not look entirely convinced, but he continued, carefully, slowly. Tony closed his eyes and tried not to wince. It did hurt, but in a good way. He wound the fingers of one hand in Loki’s hair, keeping the other around Loki’s back, and breathed slowly and deeply. “Good. Slowly, like that. Don’t stop.”

When he felt Loki’s skin against his, Tony’s muscles finally relaxed. He couldn’t help groaning, and when Loki tensed in alarm, he clamped his arms and legs around Loki. “If you stop now I’ll kill you,” he growled.

Loki laughed softly and reached to brush a few sweaty strands of hair off Tony’s forehead. The unthinking tenderness in the gesture revealed more than Loki likely realized. Tony filed that away as he carefully shifted under Loki, feeling Loki tremble at the movement, and waited for his body to adjust.

It was an intense feeling, being this filled. Tony felt as if his entire body had been pierced. He licked his lips and, his hands on Loki’s hips to hold him steady, made a small experimental thrust against him.

“Ohh.” He closed his eyes.

“Tony-“

“Hush.” Tony took a couple more deep breaths and tried again. It seemed his body was ready now. He started moving against Loki, and when Loki gasped, nodded encouragement at him.

Loki started to move.

Damn.

Loki was still being cautious, with slow, shallow thrusts. It was still a powerful sensation, having this big a dick in you.

“Harpooning” was a pretty good word for it, actually.

As Tony moved gradually faster, Loki followed suit, letting Tony set the pace of their movements. It didn’t hurt if they were in synch, and Loki made sure they were. They moved together in the most amazing way. Tony’s prostate was being pressed constantly because *everything* below his waist was being pressed constantly, and the pressure sent waves of pleasure all the way through him.

Tony couldn’t even make a sound when he came. He just closed his eyes and kind of slumped while everything in him detonated. Loki fucked him through his orgasm and came so quickly afterwards that he must have been holding himself back deliberately.

They must have fallen asleep after that, because the next thing Tony knew sunlight was streaming in the wall-length windows and Jarvis was asking if they intended to get up at their

normal time this morning. Loki's face was nestled in Tony's neck, at least until Jarvis mentioned that breakfast was ready; that made him sit up fast.

Tony got up carefully, a little sore from the previous night's activities, and walked stiffly to the shower. After working all day to make anti-Asgardian weapons, he was whisking his lover away to Malibu. And while they were there....

Well. It was going to be a big weekend, that was all.

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Tony and Loki go to Malibu together. And then decide to take another trip.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Loki spent Saturday doing repetitive work on the weapons that required little thought so that his mind could work. Not that it had taken him long to form his plan; it was what his brain did, more or less automatically. Even when he had been in prison and caring little whether he lived or died, his brain had of its own accord mapped out the possibilities of his eventual release - he had known that sooner or later the stolen relic would be taken out of its vault, sooner or later they would have use of him - and formed a dozen plans for how to turn each scenario to his own advantage, and how to escape if necessary.

Of course, none of his speculations had included Thor losing all feeling for him so completely. Loki had been a fool, thinking that at least some affection would have remained. Learning that he was wrong had shattered his will to apply his plans.

Thor had never loved Loki, only the role Loki had played in his life. Perhaps, had Loki been able to resume that role, some semblance of affection would have been his reward. Even at the time, Loki had known that he should be forcing himself to play it. Annoying little brother, irritating Thor to make him forget the graver troubles between them. Mischievous trickster, making Thor laugh despite himself. Loyal dotting younger brother, risking his own neck to save Thor and his friends without expecting so much as a kind word in return. And when the occasion arose, the martyred hero, wiping out his own "sins" by nobly sacrificing himself to save his big brother. If Thor had thought Loki safely dead, he would have loved him again. If Loki had managed to barely survive his own martyrdom, he could perhaps have manipulated Thor into interceding with his father. He could have gotten *something* out of it.

But he could not. Loki had spent two years coming to terms with losing his father, or rather, any hope of winning his father's love. Learning that his brother's had also been a sham hard on the heels of losing his mother had destroyed Loki's will to strive too utterly. In the end, all he had cared enough to do was escape rather than be put back in that cell. Had his escape failed, he would have made Thor kill him rather than imprison him again.

Sigyn had reminded Loki that he did have things to live for. Just not the things he would most have wanted.

And now there was also Tony. Brilliant, handsome, willful, cocky, passionate. No one could constrain him. He defied the most powerful people of Midgard when they dared to oppose

him. He was unafraid to fight against the might of Asgard. When Loki had been only an evil invader to Midgard, Tony had flown *to* him, not away, removed his armor, and walked towards him unarmed, defenseless - as defenseless as a man like Tony Stark ever could be. Reckless. Arrogant.

Dangerous.

And that weak, helpless, lone mortal had *threatened* him. Flirted with him, made jokes at his expense. Offered him hospitality, of all things. Loki had to come within a few feet of him with a menacing glare and a magic spear to make Stark look at all afraid. And when the fear had at last been visible, Loki had only been the more impressed. Stark wasn't one of those people who simply didn't feel fear when he should. Not like Thor. He *was* afraid, and had walked right into the lion's den anyway.

Whatever else happened, Loki was not going to let Asgard defeat Tony Stark. That meant preserving Tony's realm. And so that, Loki would do.

Throughout the day as his hands infused the uru weapons with seiðr, anchored by the tektites embedded in the metal, Loki's mind was forming plans, weighing possibilities, planning for contingencies. By the end of the day, all he needed was to take the first step, and the entire Nine Realms would fall to his design.

He would not take that first step until he had spoken to Sigyn one more time. If she was wrong about what Asgard wanted, he would abandon the scheme entirely.

“You ready to go, babe? 36 hours of fun in the sun.”

Loki looked up, jarred from his thoughts, and saw that the others were wrapping up for the day. “Oh. Yes.”

Tony was right, Loki liked the Malibu house. Especially the ocean view. They spent some time idling on the narrow strip of beach, watching the waves. When the sun set, they went inside and Tony fucked him with the windows open so they could feel the breeze and hear the ocean. Tony was an excellent lover despite his limited experience, which was the inevitable result of his short mortal lifespan. He had tremendous natural talent and a dizzying amount of passion. Afterwards Tony put frozen pizzas into the oven. They lounged about the living room eating at a leisurely pace, putting off serious matters for as long as they could.

But eventually, Tony said, “Loki, I need to know the truth about something.”

“No conversation that starts that way ever leads to anything good. Well?”

Tony sighed, pushing his half-full tumbler of whiskey away. Loki noted the move with alarm. Tony Stark rejecting alcohol was a Tony Stark with weighty matters indeed on his mind.

He looked Loki in the eye. “Has any world ever managed to throw off Asgard?”

Loki answered quietly. “No.”

“Then why'd you lie to us? Did you think we'd feel better if we got to die like warriors?”

“I didn’t lie. Odin is old and weary, and he no longer has me or Mother to help him, only Thor. For the past several centuries, Asgard has become accustomed to depending upon Thor’s might and my strategy. It has given up one of those already. If,” Loki’s voice became flat, “it also lost Thor, Midgard could make itself too troublesome to oppress.”

“So we have to kill Thor.”

“Or at least render him harmless. Which I have no immediate way of doing.”

“Do you still love him?” Tony’s dark, expressive eyes were watching him carefully.

Loki sighed. “No. But there is lingering sentiment after a thousand years of brotherhood. I would rather he not die by my hand.”

“Can you live with it if... if we do it?”

Loki laced his fingers together. “When Thor took me out of prison, he told me my choices. If I cooperated with him, he would put me back in my cell. If I did not, he would kill me.”

Tony’s warm dark eyes widened, incredulous. “He was depending on your magic to *keep him alive* and that was the incentive he gave you? What the fuck made him think you wouldn’t just stick a knife in him the first chance you got?”

Loki shrugged. “He is Thor.”

Tony rubbed his forehead for a moment. “Christ. Okay. So the plan is, we use these weapons to neutralize Thor, and then Asgard leaves us alone?”

That did sound rather tenuous. “There are other factors. The other realms grew restless during the time that Asgard lacked a Bifrost. They will tax Asgard’s warriors so that they will have graver worries than Midgard. Of all the realms, Midgard is perhaps the least threat, and thus will be ignored if others challenge Asgard.”

“That’d be real convenient if Muspelheim hadn’t let us down.”

Loki tried to think of some words of encouragement. Midgard would be safe once Loki had enacted his own plan, but he could hardly tell Tony that.

“You know,” Tony was saying, “building weapons is just a stopgap solution. All Odin will have to do, long-lived as he is, is wait for a world war or something to weaken us to make his move and we’ll be colonized again.”

“So what do you suggest?”

“That Asgard should be ruled by someone with... a better attitude.”

Loki went very still. That, he had not expected.

They looked at each other for a long time. At length Loki asked quietly, “Tony, just what are you saying?”

“That I think that you should be king of Asgard.”

The words hung in the air for a long moment.

“I know it’s asking kind of a lot of you,” Tony said eventually. “You’re just recovering from being depressed, I’m asking you to fight against your own family even if they have disowned you, and being king sounds like a thankless job. But I don’t see any other way of protecting my world. I have to ask you to do this for us.”

Loki decided on the opposite coping strategy; he reached for the bottle and refilled his whiskey glass. “You know so little of me. How do you know I won’t claim Midgard just as Odin has?”

“If you can convince me that Sigyn isn’t the only Asgardian who trusts you, I’ll help you.”

Loki took that in for a minute. Tony’s willing help would make the plan easier at several points.

“When you left Sigyn and me alone,” Loki said slowly, “she asked me the same thing.”

“What did you tell her?”

“That I would consider it. That is, whether it was possible, not whether I wished to. She was right: if I can liberate Asgard from the House of Odin, it is my duty to do so.”

“Can you?”

Loki gave himself a long minute before replying. One last minute of freedom.

“Yes.”

And the shackles were now on him, as firmly as the quarter-ton of chains he had worn for his sentencing from the All-Father.

“If you took the throne of Asgard, would you be able to keep it?”

“Yes.” Only his folly in trying to win his false father’s affection had separated him from it before. How many people had suffered and died for Loki’s desperate attempt to prove himself a worthy son? He would atone to those who still lived. He would benefit Asgard, Jotunheim, Midgard. All the realms. Not with a mad self-deceiving scheme this time, but by simply doing his duty as a prince of Asgard.

Tony was studying him. In Tony’s face Loki could see: Tony had shouldered enough grim responsibilities in his life to understand what he was now undertaking.

“Sigyn asked me to return to Asgard to talk to more Aesir who want me to claim the throne.”

“Let me come with you.”

Loki smiled and stood up, extending a hand.

“Then wash yourself and don your armor, Anthony Stark, son of Howard, Man of Iron.”

Tony looked startled for a second, but at once he took Loki’s hand and stood. With his free hand he reached up and tugged Loki’s neck, so Loki bent down and kissed him. Hand in hand they went to the palatial bathroom (and Loki was in a position to deem that adjective suitable in this case). They washed up and dressed.

Watching Tony don his new “God-buster” armor, seeing Tony meet his eyes steadily before the faceplate descended, Loki remembered the day when Thor had nearly gotten his four dearest friends killed on Jotunheim. Still they had been loyal to him, and still they despised Loki who had saved their wretched lives. Still they had refused to listen when Loki pointed out what they all knew, that Thor was not ready to rule, and had committed treason against the man who had saved their lives for the sake of the very man who had imperiled them. The memory was bitter and Loki swallowed the bitterness as he always had.

Loki had watched the boundless and unreasoning affection they all felt for Thor, and of course he had envied it. But now in another realm, Loki had a prize of his own, and if he had to choose, Thor could have that unthinking devotion. There was something Loki would far rather have.

You may have our father, Thor, Loki thought. You may have the blind worship of Asgard’s warriors.

I have Tony Stark.

Tony stepped to Loki’s side. “Get in, loser. We’re going to Asgard!”

Loki smiled. Not bothering to ask what Tony was quoting, he lifted his hands and began to summon seiðr.

Chapter End Notes

I used to defend Thor’s intelligence until TDW, where among his brilliant decisions (his decision-making skills haven’t noticeably improved since his “We’re going to Jotunheim” days) was breaking his very dangerous brother out of jail and giving him no incentive whatsoever in Thor continuing to breathe, and considerable incentive to see Thor dead as soon as possible in simple self-defense. Thor and his idiot friends made sure that Loki’s life depended on all of them dying as soon as possible. Luckily for them, the “villain” is far more ethical than any of them are. Though really, given the circumstances, in this movie Loki’s honorable behavior wasn’t so much honorable as masochistic.

The part of this chapter where Loki is reflecting on how he ought to have manipulated Thor by playing his old little-brother role even after Thor had, to say the least, ceased to be brotherly, was inspired by [this brilliant post by small-potato-of-defiance](#) where she theorizes that Loki was doing just that to ensure his own survival while in the clutches

of his canonically homicidal foster brother. I agree, though I wish that the movie hadn't had Loki putting up a front when he had to be in the depths of despair; it sends the message that you can be that cruel to people and expect them to just shrug it off. Just as Loki's saving everyone's lives when they've made it clear that they are just eagerly awaiting an excuse to murder him sends the message that you can get what you want from people by denying them any love or affection and threatening them with the worst cruelty at your disposal.

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Tony meets the people of Asgard.

Chapter Notes

Since in the movies virtually all the Asgardians with lines are the warrior aristocracy, the Asgardian civilians in the next few chapters are either totally original or else based, often tenuously, on characters from Marvel comics and Norse mythology, though I have taken considerable liberties with their portrayal. This Amora is derived mostly from the animated movie *Thor: Tales of Asgard*, in which she was Loki's magic teacher and was attracted to him, not Thor.

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

Sigyn and Angrboða (who was also beautiful, by the way, and even taller than Sigyn and Loki) did not seem particularly thrilled to see Tony arrive with Loki. But the moment they looked Tony's way, narrow-eyed, Loki said promptly, "I trust him."

Not, *He can be trusted*. Not, *He's on our side*. But, *I trust him*. Tony warmed inside to the words.

Sigyn seemed to accept this. Enough to tease Loki. "You only say that because he's good-looking."

"Hey, do you know how much trouble this handsome face gets me out of?"

"Since you are a friend of Loki's, I would speculate a great deal."

Loki cast his glamour over himself and Tony and the four of them set out in an open golden carriage drawn by what appeared to be really large house cats. Tony managed not to gawk quite so much this time, but Asgard was still damn intimidating. The thought of trying to fight the people who had created all of this was just plain crazy.

Luckily, there was a spare prince hanging around unused, ripe for the suborning. Odin and Thor had handed the other Eight Realms their freedom on a platter.

To hear Thor talk, anyone would have thought all Asgardians were warriors. Tony had known that couldn't be true, of course, but now he saw a different side of the realm.

Their first stop was at what appeared to be a meeting hall. Loki explained swiftly that it was where the Thing met. All adult citizens had a voice in the Thing, but in practice its jurisdiction consisted of “whatever Odin didn’t care about”.

“It is not a meeting day,” Angrboða said with regret. “Then again, if it were your presence might have caused too much excitement. I do believe the speakers are meeting today.”

“Each township chooses two speakers who meet with each other and petition the royal family,” Loki explained.

When Loki stood before them and dropped his glamour, Tony felt grateful and proud at the way the speakers’ faces lit up. They all stood and bowed or curtsied in unison before crowding round to speak with Loki. None of them even gave Tony more than a glance. They probably figured Tony was Loki’s henchman. Tony imagined Pepper’s reaction if she could see Tony Fucking Stark playing second fiddle and decided to go with it just so he could watch her face when he told her about it.

Besides, he really needed to listen now. Not have people be impressed with him.

“Loki, will you return to us soon?”

“Do you need a place to hide? There is a place on my farm, not very grand, but comfortable enough.”

“The Western Quarter has still not been repaired! We came as a delegation to the palace and Odin would not even listen to our petition before he refused it!”

“There are scarcely enough healing stones.”

“Loki, I am no warrior, but my strong right arm is yours should you need it. And those of my sons and my brothers-in-law as well.” They called Loki by his first name without apparent embarrassment, but the way they said it it might as well have been a title. Asgardians seemed to say names in general with a sort of emphasis, as if names were meant to be honored just because they were names.

“This year’s crop is not faring as well as it should. This is Asgard, we have enough stores for years, but Odin refuses to regulate the weather or the seiðr, what will happen if he continues to neglect these matters?”

“My son Dagal has begun to grow a beard this year. He worships Hogun the Grim and wishes to be a warrior like him. I have no wish to see my son die on a distant realm, or return alive but with blood on his hands. Nor do I wish for half-Aesir grandchildren I shall never meet whose mothers will hate them for how they were begotten.”

Tony winced, remembering certain things Jane had implied about Thor. He had invited her more than once to live in the Tower if she wanted. She might have felt safer from Thor if she were surrounded by Avengers. Maybe she was equally afraid of Loki. Whatever, Tony would make the offer again on Monday.

“I too have a son-“

“As if I could forget your son, Gulbrandr. I hope you have ceased to wager with storm giants.”

“How many kinds of giants are there?” Tony blurted. And then all these tall beautiful people were looking at him.

“Forgive me for not introducing my ally sooner. I present to you Tony Stark, son of Howard, the Man of Iron, one of Midgard’s greatest sorcerers and warriors.”

Even for Tony Fucking Stark, it was a flattering description. Tony gave them his most crowd-pleasing grin, even though they looked more curious than impressed. Well, to them he must be like a chimp who knew sign language or something. A human who could do magic - kind of!

He would do something about Asgard’s ‘tude towards humans. But first things first. Loki was introducing the Aesir who stood before them. There was no way Tony was going to remember them all, but there was the blondest woman he had ever seen, named Solveig; Neffethesk, a healer; Thane, the chief speaker of the Thing; Thorgum the Tree Shaper, an arborist and the father of Hogun’s groupie; and Gulbrandr, the one who wagered with giants.

“To answer your question, Tony, there are frost, fire, rock and storm giants.”

Gulbrandr began to *sing* the story right on the spot. Tony was startled, but the others seemed to take it in stride, and joined in on the chorus. Apparently Gulbrandr lived in a remote area where giants and other outlanders occasionally made incursions, and a storm giant had beaten him at a game of some sort and demanded the man’s son as his winnings. Odin and another warrior had both warded the giant off for a time, but the giant was wary and stayed away until the warriors had left in boredom. Gulbrandr had appealed to Loki. Loki spent weeks at the man’s farm, patiently disguising himself and the boy with magic, until the giant deemed it safe to return for another attempt. Loki had thrown off his glamour at the last instant and slain him and the boy was safe.

“That song was never sung in the feast-hall of Valaskjálf,” Loki told Tony when the song was over.

“But often in the taverns and at the firesides of Asgard,” Gulbrandr retorted.

Loki smiled, gracious. Yeah, he was a prince, all right. “And how is Hrafn?”

“Just gave me my first grandson.”

Thane stepped forward. “Prince Loki, we must know: will you protect the realm from the folly of your father and brother?”

The room grew silent, and Loki looked around at them all. “Is this your wish? All of you?”

A chorus of soft “Aye’s” and nods answered.

“And do you believe that the rest of Asgard wishes it as well?”

“Only the warriors profit from Odin’s rule, or will profit from Thor’s.” Solveig spoke sadly. “Only they do not wish you to rule.”

“Can you fight your own kin?” Gulbrandr’s eyes showed sympathy. Probably imagining himself in Loki’s position.

Loki sighed. “You know I have no more kin. Odin and Thor have both disowned me.”

“That was what decided me to support you, should you ever escape and make your claim,” Thorgum announced. “I was unsure, until the news of Thor’s bargain with you during the Dark Elf War reached us.”

“What did you hear?” Tony asked. Thorgum looked at him, obviously still curious about this human in their midst.

“That the best reward Thor offered Loki for helping him preserve Asgard from Svartalfheim - for saving us all, because Thor could not have done it without Loki’s magic – was a lifetime in the dungeon.” Thorgum looked around at the others and spoke with rhetorical grandeur. “If Thor would do *that* to his own brother, what might he do to any of us who incurred his displeasure?”

All nodded somber agreement, and Tony thought, *You really screwed yourself, Point Break. And you’re getting what’s coming to you.*

“Honored speakers,” Loki was saying, “if I do as you ask, the burden upon all of you will be greater. I will not presume to try to do all myself as Odin has. When I am king I will have to delegate considerable functions to the Thing.”

Loki spoke as if he were saddling them all with an unpleasant duty, but all present stood up straighter. They scented more independence, more power of their own, and they wanted it. Tony hoped Loki was sincere. It was a deft move regardless.

Back in the carriage, Tony asked, “You’re going to make the Thing work harder?” He thought phrasing it that way was better, what with Sigyn and her girlfriend sitting right there.

Loki answered seriously. “Odin has become both cruel and complacent. It is the inevitable effect of having such unlimited power. I must cede some of it lest it do the same to me.” He held Tony’s gaze. “Do not imagine I do this from virtue. I have had a taste of madness. Being in its grip as Odin now is frightens me more than anything else. Even more than returning to the dungeon.”

Tony really couldn’t argue with that.

Their next destination was a temple. Tony wondered what gods were worshipped by gods - okay, he knew Asgardians were just powerful aliens, but still. From Loki’s explanation, it sounded like Asgardians were kind of like Buddhists or Jedi knights, in that they were more

about inner peace and using the Force than about some big guy in the sky - well, they *were* the big guys in the sky.

Loki introduced Tony in the same formal and ego-boosting way. Hey, even a prince couldn't be blamed for bragging that he'd hooked Tony Stark. Then Loki introduced to him the sorcerers of Asgard. Nearly all of them were women. It was a little weird. Even weirder was their habit of casting illusions to illustrate their words, or *Accio*'ing objects they wished to use instead of just picking them up with their hands. He'd gotten kind of used to Loki doing things like that, as much as one could, but now he was in a room full of people doing it.

The sorcerers were more sedate about it than the speakers of the Thing, but they too crowded around Loki, complained to him, and offered him help. He let them talk for a few minutes before raising his hands, and they all instantly fell silent.

Loki looked to one of them. "Kelda, you wish to see the caste of your betrothed removed from power in Asgard?"

The silence got heavier. Kelda only held his gaze, her eyes slightly shiny.

Loki lowered his head for a moment. "Forgive me, Kelda. I did not know."

"He was killed putting down the rebellion on Vanaheim." Kelda's voice was full of grief and bitterness.

"I am truly sorry, Kelda. I know how you loved him."

Kelda looked away. One of the others - Amora, Loki had introduced her as his own teacher - put a comforting arm around Kelda.

Loki let a moment pass before he spoke again. "I may require your aid in this, all of you. There is a working I must do, and it requires far more power than I can summon myself. I am hoping to find some other way to raise the seiðr. You know that if we did such a tremendous working here, it would be difficult to evade Odin's notice. But I may yet have to call upon you."

"We could perhaps all travel to another realm to do the working," suggested Igron, one of the few men present. "You could take us there, could you not, Skywalker? Vanaheim, perhaps? Or even Midgard, if you have allies there?"

"I could. If I must ask this of you, will you aid me?" All agreed. "And once I am secure on the throne your work will not be finished. Maintaining the balance of Asgard's seiðr is too great a task for one man. My foster father's mind has broken beneath the strain. When I wield the Asgard Force - the so-called Odinfors - I must ask you all to share that burden with me."

"You know that its nature is that most of it must be concentrated in one person."

"Yes, but those of you who are willing can take some of it from me. So that truly great workings will require a majority of us who share in it to agree."

Again, Loki was speaking in terms of asking them to do him the favor of please taking a little of this power away from him, it's just too much work for one undersized frost giant, when actually he was making sure they had plenty to gain from helping him with his coup. Tony thought both ways of looking at it might be accurate. With Loki, he didn't think there was ever only one answer.

Back in the carriage, Loki remarked with quiet amusement, "You are unaccustomed to not being the center of attention, are you not?"

"Ahh, it'll build character."

They stopped at a grand house - at least, Tony thought it was a house, not a public building of any kind. Gold, like practically everything else here, surrounded by acres of trees in glorious pale pink blossom.

Loki looked at their hostesses in surprise. "Here? Truly?"

"Would we have brought you here if we were not certain of them, Loki?" Angrboða threw him a withering glance as she alighted.

It was a home, a grand one, full of high ceilings and gold-plated everything. Loki informed Tony, as introductions were made, that Bragi, their host, was "one of the greatest poets Asgard has ever seen."

Grassroots politicians, sorcerers, and poets. Yeah, Loki definitely had the nerd vote.

But it was the lady of the house Loki focused on. "You too, my lady? I thought you didn't like me."

"I do not. You were a constant trial to me when you were young. But that is irrelevant. You are what Asgard now needs."

Loki seemed to weigh his words. "Then it falls to you to pay my price."

Her eyes flitted to Tony, then back to Loki. Loki said nothing.

"Your *price*? For our support in making you king?"

"Preserving Asgard is my duty. I think I am entitled to request something for myself."

She scrutinized Tony again. Tony made himself meet her eyes steadily. At last she shrugged. "Wait."

She left the room. Tony could hear a door opening, a snatch of birdsong. He wanted to ask what this "price" was, but knew that if Loki wasn't explaining, there had to be a reason. He could wait. Even though he was sure that the "price" had something to do with him.

The woman returned with a small covered basket, which she handed to Loki. Loki took it, then swirled his hands and made it disappear.

“You have a pocket dimension,” Tony stated.

“Yes.” Loki said it like he was saying that *of course* he had an Armani suit. What well-dressed man didn’t?

“You are showing me how that works.”

Loki gave him a flirty little smile, and Tony took a minute to congratulate himself on having hit the jackpot: a gorgeous wizard whose idea of seduction was offering him the secrets of how to use the Force. “Thank you, Iðunn.”

Chapter End Notes

In Norse mythology, Freya drove a cat-drawn chariot. No wonder Thor asked the pet shop clerk for a cat or dog large enough to ride.

I based Gulbrundr's story on a [real Norse myth](#).

Tomorrow: More Asgardian civilians!

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Tony and Loki continue their tour of Asgard.

Asgardians had a drink that was sort of an extraterrestrial cousin of coffee or hot chocolate. Rich and pleasantly bitter, and Tony could *feel* its effects instantly. It was like snorting Red Bull or something. Loki quietly recommended drinking only half his cup. Tony hated to admit it, but Loki was probably right; this was Asgardian strength, not meant for mere mortals.

“You have been sorely missed, Loki,” the tavernkeeper told him with patent sincerity. The man’s name was Jerrick, and Sigyn had presented him as yet another supporter of Loki. “Without you to herd Thor and his friends outside when they’ve had too much, we have to make repairs every week.”

Tony took another cautious sip of Asgardian Jolt. “You were the designated driver? I guess I shouldn’t be surprised.”

“I trust the palace is paying for the repairs?” Loki sounded as if he did not, in fact, trust that.

Jerrick just looked at him.

“Have you presented your claims to the treasurer?”

“Of course we have, your Highness, but you know you were the one who made sure we were heard and paid. You and the queen - I am so sorry about your mother, Loki.”

Loki looked away. “Thank you. As for this, well, I will make certain the treasurer settles up with you - when I am able.”

“Thank you, but do not think that is not the only reason we want you back here. The whole realm is suffering with the queen in Valhalla, the king’s wits wandering, and the elder prince more spoiled than ever. Though I will rejoice when you return. I will be able to bring my daughter back from my sister’s farm.”

Loki stiffened. “Ingeborg? Has she been harmed?”

“No.” Jerrick spoke shortly. “I sent her away before it came to that.”

Tony’s gut twisted. He didn’t think it was the drink. Now that he looked around, everyone working here was either a man or a woman old enough not to be of much interest to boisterous drunks. “I take it she’s pretty.”

“Exceptionally so. You were wise to remove her, Jerrick,” Loki said.

To get all of their minds off the ugly implications of this conversation, Tony asked about the not-coffee. Jerrick was happy to talk about what was evidently one of his favorite subjects. The drink was brewed from some kind of roasted beans, so Tony was right, it was a sort of extraterrestrial relative of coffee and chocolate. They got into geeking out over the different ways of brewing and serving it, and from there to the manufacture of Asgardian hooch. Tony had experimented with home brewing a long time ago - when he was too young to buy the stuff legally, not that that had ever been a huge impediment for him - so they talked shop about it while Loki listened indulgently.

“Okay, that’s it,” Tony said after a while, “I have got to try that. I think I’ve got enough of this Norse Red Bull in me to stay vertical. Gimme a glass of the good stuff.”

Jerrick hesitated, looking to Loki, who snorted, amused.

“My friend does not need *my* permission to drink.”

“I did not mean - I thought you might know better if humans ought to drink mead brewed for Asgardians.”

“In the case of this particular human, I wouldn’t worry.” Loki gave Tony a sly look.

Even so, Tony was pretty sure Jerrick watered down the mead he gave Tony. And it was still about like 200 proof. Five years ago Tony would’ve just chugged it down anyway, just to see what would happen. If he weren’t tending to such important business, he might have done that anyway. Instead he took a few slow sips, letting the liquid trickle slowly down his throat.

Maturity was such a downer.

“That is definitely the good stuff. But I think I’d better stop,” he said regretfully.

Loki took Tony’s cup, drained it in one long swallow (show-off), and rose. “I thank you for your hospitality, Jerrick.”

Jerrick refused to allow Sigyn to pay for what they’d consumed, and they proceeded to another grand house. When the carriage stopped, Loki did not move. “You had better be certain, Sigyn.”

“You know how highly Ularic has always thought of you, Loki. I sent him a message; Torger should be here as well.”

“And who are Ularic and Torger?” Tony asked as Loki set his jaw and stepped out of the carriage.

“Counselors to the king.”

Oh.

They were both old men, and the relief in their eyes when Loki dropped his glamour was painful to see. Ularic began by apologizing. “When Thor took you back from Midgard, we advised the king to make use of you again. I contended that his deception about your birth would only look worse if he condemned you. If he demonstrated that you were of value to the realm, his taking you from Jotunheim would look like a wise and farsighted move.”

“Did you know what I was?” Loki asked bluntly.

“No. We never had any idea that you were adopted, let alone that you were born of another realm.” Ularic was emphatic.

“And it does not trouble you now? The prospect of a *frost giant* on the throne of Asgard?”

“But you are not a frost giant any longer,” Torger said, sounding a little puzzled. “Oh, all the realms now know that you were born one, but Odin transformed you. You are Asgardian now. You have been since you were a baby.”

Loki closed his eyes for a moment. Tony would have liked to hold him, but didn't think he'd appreciate it in front of his future viziers.

“Loki,” Ularic said, somber, “we failed to persuade him to be lenient then, but we had not forgotten you. We were waiting for his wrath to cool. Then we would have asked again.”

“Or for some dangerous mission to arise which required a sorcerer's abilities, so that we could suggest that you be assigned it. If it were dangerous enough, the king might have considered it suitable atonement, and we would have contrived to get you what help we could.” Torger's wrinkled mouth twisted. “We had hoped that we could rely on your brother to protect you. I never thought to say this, but little as we thought of Thor, it seems we thought too highly of him.”

Ularic went on, “You may ask anyone at court, we spoke for you as much as we dared—”

“Ularic.” Loki's voice was gentle. “My foster father has lost his reason. It is no shame to be afraid of him. *I* am afraid of him. Even his son is afraid of him. I am grateful to anyone who spoke for me at all. You may have saved my life.”

“Your *mother* saved your life. She pleaded on her knees until Odin relented out of sheer vexation.”

Loki looked like he'd been turned to stone. Abruptly he rose and went to the window, staring into the courtyard as if it were full of corpses.

The rest of them were silent for a time, waiting for Loki to master himself. He was still glaring at nothing, clenching his fists, when Torger lost patience and went to him.

“Enough of that, young man.” Loki's glower did not deter Torger. Nor did the fact that he was likely speaking to his future king. “I have known you since you were a clever child eavesdropping on the grownup talk in the palace. You have always met your obligations. All that you may do for your mother now is justify her faith in you.”

Loki closed his eyes again. When he opened them, his expression was cool, collected. “And what will you expect of me, when I have unseated my foster father?”

“That you not endanger Asgard, as he did in his mad plan for revenge against the Dark Elves. That you not neglect the realm for the sake of further conquests. That you produce and train an heir whose rule will not be a disaster.”

Oh, hell. Tony hadn't even thought of that. He was going to have to share Loki with some princess now. Well, they would deal. Tony could see there was no way around it.

Maybe Loki wouldn't get himself a queen until after Tony was dead. To Loki, thirty or forty years wasn't that long.

“I will do all of these things, and more. I will make many reforms once I am king, and I will need your counsel for every step. I will not make the same error I did before, planning on my own without testing my stratagems against other minds.” He smiled, sour. “I expect you could have told me that my scheme with Jotunheim would not have won me the king's favor.”

“But it did end the war Thor started.” Sigyn and Angrboða nodded at Torger's words.

Loki put a hand to his forehead. “I hope you will not recommend solving problems by killing entire realms, Torger. That is a gambit I will not repeat.”

“What reforms do you speak of?”

“I will not relinquish the right to personally sentence those who oppose me in claiming the throne. But once I have, I will yield that royal prerogative. All accused of crimes in Asgard shall be tried by a jury, not only those whose fate does not interest the king. No one, citizen of Asgard or not, shall be sentenced without a trial.”

The women smiled their approval. The old men looked at each other. “We must discuss this further, Loki. There may be instances-“

“And in those instances, we shall seek another solution. The king of Asgard can find other recourses than locking people away and hiding the deed from the realm.” Loki waved a weary hand when they seemed about to argue. “We shall discuss it further once I am king. That is what I shall need from you. I will make many reforms, but always I shall confer with you and my other advisors about how best to make them. Speaking of the others, tell me: when you were advising Odin to spare my life and make use of me, who among the advisors spoke against me?”

They hesitated. Loki made an impatient gesture.

“I am not going to kill them, I am going to dismiss them. I believe I have enough deaths on my soul. Their names.”

Torger listed them. Loki nodded in resignation as he listened, only stopping the other man once. “Njörðr spoke against me?” He looked surprised.

“He always used to respect your wisdom, your Highness. I believe he thought your reason permanently shattered by your ordeals.”

“And what did he want Odin to do with me?”

Neither old man answered.

“I wonder,” Loki mused, “if experiencing mercy will teach him to value it.”

“Some will interpret your mercy as weakness, Loki.”

Loki sighed. “I know. And I know that I shall be forced within the first year or so of my reign to demonstrate that it is not. Do you still want me on the throne of Asgard?”

“Yes.” They said it almost in unison, and there was no doubt in their voices. Then Torger asked, “What must we do?”

“You must tell me what is going on in the palace. And tell me if anything else occurs.”

“How may we get messages to you?”

Loki went to the desk and took several sheets of... “Is that *parchment*?” Tony asked, too incredulous to continue watching in silence like Natasha would.

“More like papyrus,” Loki said absently, lining the sheets up together.

“Is there a reason a high-tech realm like this doesn’t have iPhones?”

“Papyrus is more aesthetically pleasing.”

Tony looked around the high-ceilinged room. There were only a few pieces of furniture, everything was gold-plated, and the room was illuminated with *torches*, even though Tony had seen Asgard’s magic lightbulbs.

“Got it.” So they were fixated on stuff being pretty. It made Tony’s love of technology itch, but he supposed it was a valid life choice. Though why didn’t they just make Art Deco-looking iPhones?

A glow came from Loki’s hands and then permeated the papyrus. He murmured strange words Tony didn’t understand. When the glow dispersed, Loki handed one sheet to each of the Asgardians present, tucking the last into his own pocket. “Write on these sheets and I will be able to read it at once. Whatever you write will fade after a few moments, leaving the space blank for more.”

Damn. Maybe iPhones weren’t quite so nifty after all.

Loki listened to the old men talk for over an hour. Mostly they were confirming the complaints others had made, but there was also a great deal of minutiae about the palace; small changes in guard rotations, parts of the palace closed off until Odin felt like repairing the Dark Elf damage, and the most recent shiftings of alliances in the court. Asgard had long

been accustomed to the dominance of the warrior aristocracy, but was at last growing weary of it.

When they took their leave, it was dark and even Loki was looking weary. “Only one more house,” Sigyn assured him. “That of your aunt.”

“I thought you didn’t have any more family,” Tony said.

“Not of Odin’s blood, and I think that is what you meant, is it not? Potential contenders for the throne? Sigyn refers to my mother’s sister Freya.”

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Tony meets Loki's Aunt Freya.

Chapter Notes

I wasn't going to make Freya and Freyr very important in this fic, but Iron_Dragon_Maiden left a comment with her headcanons about them. They dovetailed with my headcanon about this fictional universe so perfectly that I had to use them. Thank you!

Tony was lucky he was an insomniac. Otherwise he'd probably be falling asleep in his chair right now, even though it was an Asgardian chair - Asgardians didn't seem to believe in comfortable furniture. If he could open a La-Z-Boy outlet here he'd have another billion.

However, he *was* an insomniac, and this was a normal (sleepless) night for him, so he was able to stay alert for the explanation of Vanaheim (Vanish?) history Sigyn and Angrboða were giving him.

As soon as they'd gotten into Freya's house and Loki had dropped the illusions, his aunt had folded him in her arms. Then she had stepped back and demanded, "What are you going to do about that man?"

Loki had given her a bleak look. "First, Aunt, you must tell me: how did my mother die?"

Freya had been completely horrified that no one had told him. There had been a fuss of fresh embraces, exclamations of outrage at how the House of Odin had treated Frigga's favorite child, and finally she had bundled Loki off into another room so they could talk alone. Tony was left with the Viking Lesbians and a pot of Asgardian Red Bull.

"I take it Aunt Freya wasn't too keen on Odin?" Tony asked once they were all seated. They looked at him like he was insane.

"Freya is from *Vanaheim*," Angrboða said, as if that explained everything.

"What's the deal with Vanaheim?" Tony asked, and when they looked at him with fresh amazement, reminded them, "I'm from that backwater Earth realm. All I know about Vanaheim is the name."

“Then you do not know that Vanaheim was one of Odin’s earliest conquests?”

“No. So then why would a woman from Vanaheim marry him?” As soon as the question was out of Tony’s mouth he saw the answer for himself.

Oh, *hell*. No wonder this family was fucked up. No wonder Loki, also a war prize, was Frigga’s favorite child.

Seeing the disgusted comprehension on Tony’s face, Angrboða said, “It isn’t quite so bad as you seem to be thinking. She was not forced to marry him. But she and her elder brother and sister were both brought to Asgard’s court as hostages against their father’s good behavior.”

“And their father was the king of Vanaheim?”

Sigyn nodded. “I believe Frigga thought that she might be able to influence Odin if she married him. And I think she has, in a small measure.”

Tony spent some time just taking that in. Everything else he knew about Loki’s mother was coming together now. It was a classic Stockholm thing; she knew what influence she had was tenuous, and telling herself that she had *chosen* to marry the one-eyed bastard probably kept her sane, so of course she had supported his conquests. Of course she had lied to herself about what kind of man she was married to. In the circumstances, it was to her credit that she had been able to remain loyal to Loki at all, instead of throwing him under the bus like Thor had.

“Please tell me the rest of Asgard isn’t this messed up.” Tony stopped himself just in time from using stronger language. He wasn’t sure how Asgardian ladies would take it.

Angrboða clarified that matter by saying, “Only Odin All-Father could bugger up anything this badly.”

“By the way, son of Howard,” Sigyn said. Tony looked at her, a little thrown by the unfamiliar title. She continued, very sweetly. “If you break Loki’s heart, I will strangle you with your own intestines.”

Tony wondered if this was hyperbole, but decided not to ask. “I’ll bear that in mind.”

They eventually fell into desultory conversation about the giant kittycats who drew the carriage, until Loki emerged with his aunt, his eyes red and his face pale, but peaceful and resolute.

“It seems I have an ally I did not hope for,” Loki announced to them all.

“Did you really think that Frigga’s brother would not support her favorite son?” Freya admonished, coming to stand beside him.

“I did not expect *anyone*’s affection to survive the revelation of my true parentage, or the wrath of Odin. Nor did I suspect that Freyr... well, I should have.”

“He could not have spoken freely to you before,” Freya said.

“Of course not. I was a loyal Odinson, and Freyr Odin’s vassal.”

“My brother will help you. When you appeared on Midgard after we thought you dead, he thought the Norns might have given us the instrument of our vengeance.”

Loki turned away quickly. *Dammit, Auntie*, Tony thought, *why’d you have to put it that way?*

“And no doubt he saw an opportunity to rid himself of the All-Father’s yoke.” Loki sounded disinterested, as if he were remarking on the habits of extinct animals.

“You have reason enough to want vengeance on your own account,” Freya said fiercely. “But what of what he did to my sister? Your mother, who loved you as if you had grown in her own belly? He allowed her to die. He broke her heart.”

“*Aunt.*” Loki’s voice was sharp. “I will unseat the All-Father, but not out of revenge. I will do it out of duty to Asgard. And to all the Nine Realms.”

Freya did not look impressed. “So long as you *do* it.”

“Guys, catch me up here,” Tony interrupted before Freya could rub Loki the wrong way too hard. “What can your uncle do for you?”

“Well,” Loki answered, “he’s king of Alfheim.”

“Oh. That might come in handy.”

“He is Odin’s puppet king, as I was to be for Jotunheim.”

“Go to see him,” Freya urged. “When you escaped, he hoped you would come to him for sanctuary.”

Loki’s mouth twisted. “How generous of him.”

It was late and all of them were tired. Freya offered them rooms for the night. He took formal leave of Sigyn and Angrboða, thanking them in courtly fashion and kissing their hands. Once they were gone, Freya tried to put them in different rooms, but Loki was adamant about not being separated from Tony.

Asgardian bedrooms were pretty much like everything else: golden, streamlined, barren. The bed was more comfortable than most Asgardian furniture, if you could get over the fact that the comforter was *fur*.

“Can we talk here?” Tony asked once they were alone. “Are we private?”

Loki did his magic hand gesture. “We are now. What is it?”

Tony had his suit fold itself up, then sat down on the edge of the bed, giving Loki’s hand a tug. “C’mere, I’m getting a sore neck from talking to Asgardians all day.”

With an indulgent air, Loki sat beside him. Tony kept his own expression serious.

“Listen... I asked you to do this because I don't know how else to defend my world. But I hope you know that you aren't just an *instrument* to me. If you told me right now that you couldn't do it, I'd still feel the same about you.”

Of course, he hadn't actually *said* how he felt about Loki, not even in his own mind, but judging from Loki's expression, it was still what Loki had needed to hear.

Soon Loki would be the most powerful man in the known universe, and when you scratched him you still found a heartbroken little boy. Feeling protective (of the powerful sorcerer with superstrength and a realm full of people who wanted him to be king), Tony reached up and brushed Loki's long silky hair back from his face.

“So look, today we've been all over Asgard, having people tell you they want you on the throne. What if somebody blabs?”

“It will make no difference. I do not need their support to claim the throne, only to keep it. Nor do I rely upon them to hide me.” He frowned slightly, putting a hand on Tony's knee. “Though it was possibly a mistake for me to allow you to accompany me. If someone talks, Thor will know to find me through you. I did not wish to risk you.”

“I wouldn't-“

“I know that. But Tony, above all else, you *must* keep yourself alive. Should I fail, your world will need you.”

“Finally, someone whose opinion of me is almost as high as mine.”

Loki cupped Tony's jaw in his free hand. “Do you realize that the only safety for me is seizing the throne? If I am not king, there is nowhere in the Nine Realms I might hide. No barren moon,” he murmured to himself.

Tony put his hand over Loki's and squeezed it reassuringly. “So now that we've confirmed that the non-jock constituency wants you on the throne, how are you going to do this? You going to sic these peasants and craftsmen on the army? Have them fighting Thor's hammer with their pitchforks and-“

“No. That would never work.”

The penny dropped. “Wait. Oh. You've had *us* making anti-Asgardian weapons. Did you-“ He stopped.

Loki let his hand drop, looking away with a loud exhalation. “Plan this from the start? Is that what you think?”

Tony considered for a moment before shaking his head. “No. You weren't planning your next meal when we first found you.”

“Nor did it occur to me that any part of Asgard would still want me. Even aside from my crimes and failures, I am a *frost giant*. And not the son of Odin.”

“I’m glad for you, seriously. So how are you going to take the throne from Odin? Are you going to use the weapons we’ve been making?”

“If I must. Will you help me to take them, if I need to?”

“Yes. I said I’d help you if you convinced me that Sigyn wasn’t the only Asgardian who trusted you. Well, I’m hella convinced. The weapons we’ve been working on are at your disposal - and if SHIELD tries to stop you from taking them, between you and me, they can’t. What else do you need?”

Loki smiled slightly. “How about those old Stark missiles you still have secretly stockpiled?”

“How did you know?”

For a second Tony kicked himself, expecting Loki to say, *You just told me*. But what Loki said was, “It’s what I would do.”

“Hm. Suddenly I remember why I like being underestimated. But yes, if you need them, they’re yours.”

“I may not have to call on any of these weapons. There is another possibility. One Freyr may be able to help me with.” Loki’s shoulders slumped abruptly. “But it might not work.”

Tony slipped an arm around him. Loki didn’t just look tired, he looked *sad*. In a different way from how he had during the months he’d been living in the Tower and slowly emerging from his depression.

“Loki? Are you going to be okay?”

To Tony’s surprise, Loki pulled him close and just held on to him, with a long, slow exhale. “Thank you, Tony.”

Tony really wanted to ask Loki about his Plan A, but decided to be a good boyfriend instead. “C’mon, let’s go to sleep. We can talk more in the morning.”

Loki fell asleep almost immediately. Like most people, he looked younger when he was asleep. More innocent.

Tony chuckled about that before going to sleep himself.

Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Loki and Tony have an audience with the king of Alfheim.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tony woke to find Loki still cuddled up to him, lightly stroking his back and shoulders. Loki looked way too good for someone who'd just woken up. Must be another Norse god power: looking good before breakfast. Tony stretched, ran his fingers through his hair, and put a hand on Loki's hip. "Do we have to get up right away?"

Loki smiled. "Not at all."

"Good. Mile high club members, eat your hearts out."

"What?"

"You're a member if you've had sex on an airplane," Tony explained, pulling off his shirt and reaching for Loki's. They'd slept in their clothes, only removing their shoes.

Loki rolled his eyes briefly before magicking the rest of their clothes off. Tony pressed against him, savoring the feel of that smooth skin against his own, and kissed him. Loki's mouth followed his obediently, opening willingly when Tony touched his tongue to Loki's lips.

Tony enjoyed that for a while, doing as he liked while Loki just laid back and let him. All those people who had bowed to Loki the day before, the way they had fussed over him, and here he was just waiting for whatever Tony wanted to do with him.

When Loki was king, when people were kneeling to him out of fealty instead of terror, Tony was going to enjoy the fuck out of bending him over afterwards. Just the thought made the blood rush to his cock, and Loki felt it and smirked, pressing against him.

Tony reached to pin Loki's wrist to the mattress. They both knew Loki could throw him off with ease, but he cooperated with a little smile, waiting.

"Do you know what I want from you now?" Tony murmured against Loki's lovely pale-skinned throat.

"I can probably make a fairly good guess." Loki's attempt at arch detachment didn't quite come off; he was too breathless, too eager.

“I want you to get me all good and slick and loosened up,” Tony said. Loki tensed a little. Tony hid his amusement; it seemed there was a down side to being hung like a bull. “And then I want you to lie on your back and let me impale myself on you.”

Loki was still for a second. “Oh,” he said. “That - that sounds like a good idea.”

Tony kissed him again, then just laid back and waited. Loki looked at him for a moment before moving close and beginning, and his expression made Tony’s throat tighten. He would never have expected this kind of feeling could develop between them, and so swiftly, but now it seemed inevitable. Like it had just been waiting to happen.

He closed his eyes and let Loki pleasure him, that talented mouth and those equally skillful hands all over him, meticulous and unhurried. Loki was so fucking good at this.

After toying with the rest of Tony for a while, Loki put his mouth on Tony’s prick and his fingers in Tony’s ass and just threw himself into it like he’d be willing to keep doing that for hours. It felt so good that it took all of Tony’s willpower to say, “Stop,” when he was on the verge of coming. Loki stopped at once, and Tony sat up. “Lie down,” he ordered, and Loki did so, a slight smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. Maybe he was amused at the soon-to-be King of Everything taking orders from a commoner too. And maybe he liked the idea, if his state of readiness was any indication.

Tony positioned himself and slowly began to lower himself onto Loki, willing his inner muscles to relax. He still felt as if his entire body was being filled, but now he could control the pace of penetration completely. Loki lay very still, his hands lightly on Tony’s hips, biting his lower lip and trembling a little every time Tony moved.

Tony paused about halfway, breathing and trying to release the tension from his muscles. Loki’s long-fingered hands moved, one cupping his balls, the other gently squeezing Tony’s cock. Tony closed his eyes, concentrating on those sensations and finally continuing to impale himself. He was being stretched impossibly, and it burned, but it was good. He stilled with a couple of inches to go as his muscles spasmed in protest at the invasion. Loki looked up at him with worry, but that was another advantage to this arrangement: Loki couldn’t stop. Oh, it was a good thing that he was concerned about hurting Tony what with the log he hauled around between his legs, and it was sweet and all that, but he really needed to leave it to Tony to decree when it was time to pause.

Tony squeezed him with his inner muscles, just slightly, and grinned at Loki’s whimper. He lowered himself the rest of the way and paused, letting himself get used to being so full. Loki was actually *shaking* now with the effort of waiting for him.

Tony felt wicked.

He leaned forward a little, but promptly regretted it and straightened back up. Another unwilling little moan escaped Loki, and he released Tony to clutch the sheets beneath him. Always so careful not to hurt Tony with the Asgardian superstrength in the throes of passion. Tony smiled.

“Will you do something if I tell you to?”

Loki met his gaze with hazy green eyes. "If I can," he breathed.

Tony's smile widened. "Don't move until I tell you to."

Loki groaned. Tony laughed softly and started, very slowly, to move.

"Remember. Keep absolutely still, until I tell you otherwise."

Tony was half surprised that Loki did just that. He could feel the tremors in Loki's muscles under him as his body instinctively started to move with Tony's but then restrained himself, over and over again. Loki's pale face flushed and his arms went rigid at his sides.

Eventually Loki couldn't help himself. He bucked up into Tony, then immediately froze, biting his lip again and letting out a little whine of frustration.

Smiling, Tony rose up on his knees, so that only the tip of Loki's cock was still in him.

"*Tony*," Loki protested.

"Don't move," Tony reminded him. "Not until I tell you to."

"Please," Loki whispered. He said the word with no shame at all. And with a languishing hunger in his eyes.

Tony held out for several more seconds, just because. Then lowered himself again. "All right then. *Move*."

And Loki did, still trying to be careful with him, and Tony let him rock them both until Tony spilled over Loki's coaxing hand.

Tony groaned a little as Loki moved slightly against his sensitized flesh. He was still too dazed to protest when Loki grasped him by his hips and carefully lifted him up. Tony gasped at the sudden empty feeling. The next thing he knew he was on his hands and knees, Loki's huge dick moving between his thighs. It was kind of startling, after Loki had been so sweetly compliant before, but Tony figured he had earned it, so he clamped his thighs tightly around Loki until he finished. Until Loki was gasping and jerking over him, and then when he'd caught his breath there were long, hungry kisses.

They bathed together. Asgardian bathtubs were basically small swimming pools. Tony would have liked to linger, but they had an audience with a king ahead of them. And in roughly twelve hours they were due back on Earth. Tony planned to call in sick (everyone would doubtless conclude they were actually hung over from too much alcohol and sex) but they had to be there to call in or SHIELD would know something was up. So they washed each other swiftly and got dressed, and a flicker of Loki's magic made their clothes look neat and pressed.

Breakfast was brought and they ate quickly, in silence. Then Tony put his suit on and they emerged from the guest room.

Freya was waiting impatiently. “If you will help me to gather the seiðr to transport, we will reach Alfheim more swiftly, Aunt,” Loki said, imperturbable.

She moved to him and they both raised their hands together. Tony spoke up. “Just a sec. Before we go, is there anything I need to know about Alfheim? Like, if I eat or drink anything, will I wake up and find out it’s a hundred years in the future?”

An awkward silence fell and they both looked at Tony for a minute. Tony was starting to worry that he’d made the Asgardian equivalent of a racist slur when Loki said, “You need fear no such peril, Tony.”

The sorcerers mustered enough magic to transport, and soon Tony and Loki were in a lavish overdecorated room.

“Whoa.” Tony put out a hand to regain his balance. Loki swiftly reached for him.

“The atmosphere is somewhat different here. More oxygen, and gentler... air pressure, I think is your term. It should not harm you, but you will feel odd for a time.”

“Great.” Tony took some measured breaths. “Where are we?”

“My uncle’s sitting room. He should be with us momentarily.”

Sure enough, a minute later a tall chestnut-haired man in purple silk joined them. He fastened his eyes on Loki with greed.

Loki bowed - only his head, not from the waist. Freyr inclined his head slightly. Tony’s guess was that there were strict rules to this; bow your head ninety degrees if you were a prince and the other guy was a king, forty degrees if you were a vassal king and the other guy your liege lord’s son, and so on.

Head high again, Freyr appraised his nephew. “Loki Odinson - or should I say Laufeyson?”

“You should say *Friggasson*.”

Freyr smiled warmly, then looked to Tony. “And a mortal. Is Midgard now allied with you, son of Frigga?”

Tony answered. “No. Just me.” Tony had heard the spiel enough times now to rattle it off himself. “Tony Stark, son of Howard, Man of Iron, one of Midgard’s greatest warriors and sorcerers, genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist.”

Freyr looked a bit baffled at the recitation. Loki was genuinely amused. “My friend speaks the truth. I have won the greatest prize of Midgard.”

Freyr acknowledged this with a nod and focused on Loki again. “Why did you not come to me for asylum months ago?”

“I did not wish to endanger anyone. Nor did I hope anyone would have the courage to shelter me from Odin. I have spoken with Freya, Uncle. It seems we have common cause.”

Freyr gestured them to chairs. Well, more like one-person sofas. Where Asgard was all stark lines and simplicity, Alfheim was exuberantly ornate. The “chairs” were heavily cushioned, and covered with brightly covered silks and satins. Velvet wall hangings lined the room, all elaborately embroidered with beautiful people of both sexes and various mythological creatures. Which Tony had just realized might not be mythological after all, just not Midgardian. The low table between the chairs was carved within an inch of its life and held golden goblets and silver dishes full of fruit and pastries.

Loki waited for Freyr to pour himself wine from a flagon, then served himself. Tony followed suit - when in Rome - but waited for Loki to drink some before he did. It was sweet, too sweet. Tony puzzled briefly over whether this had been some kind of ritual before concluding that Freyr just didn't want servants around to listen to him plotting a palace coup.

“You say we have common cause.”

“Odin does not serve Asgard well. Thor will not. Both of them have disowned me and denied me any safety anywhere within the Nine Realms.”

“They are not only wicked, but foolish. They should know your cleverness better than anyone; do they imagine their might can easily overcome it? And do they think that Frigga had no allies, that they might cast out her son with impunity?”

“I was adopted. I suppose Thor thinks all my connections null and void now that he knows, and Odin All-Father imagines that having created them, he can just as easily erase them.”

“And now you know that the fate the All-Father meant for you is similar to that he has given me.”

Loki snorted. “It hardly compares. You are viceroy of Alfheim, a beautiful and civilized realm. I was to be viceroy of Jotunheim, a freezing and broken world.”

“What must you do to claim Asgard instead?”

“All that stands in my way is the magic of Odin and the warriors of Asgard.”

Freyr arched an eyebrow. “Oh, is that all.”

Loki set down his goblet and looked at his uncle seriously. “What will Freyr ask of King Loki?”

“Independence for Alfheim and Vanaheim.”

“On condition of military alliances against outside threats. Also, Alfheim must leave Midgard unmolested.”

“Your lover insists, I suppose.”

“The humans have had harassment enough from other realms in recent years. And they still tell stories of the pranks your people played upon them before Odin ordered all the realms to withdraw from Midgard.”

“Ehn, youth will be youth. It isn’t as if you didn’t have a bit of fun with the mortals when you were young.”

“Right before we came here, Tony asked me if eating or drinking anything here would result in his waking to discover that a century had passed.”

Freyr looked at Tony, startled. “They still remember that?”

Tony kept his face as stern as he could. “You bet we do, buddy.”

Loki covered his mouth with his hand for a moment. Freyr looked flustered. “Very well, we shall leave Midgard alone. Also, I wish for my sister to be released from the court of Asgard, to come and live with me.”

“When I am king Freya will be free to come and go as she likes.”

“The enchanted swords Odin stole from me and put into his vault.”

“You ask a great deal.”

“As do you.”

“Those swords are highly dangerous. Many of them can pierce the enchantments that grant so many races their invulnerability. Do you mean to set forth on conquests of your own, make Alfheim a second Asgard?”

“Those swords were our creation, and ours by right. When you claim the throne all the realms will test the new balance of power. We will need to defend ourselves.”

“I shall have the swords converted to shields. Then they shall be delivered to you.”

Freyr didn’t look satisfied with that, but he gave a grudging nod. “And what does Prince Loki ask of King Freyr? Warriors, I suppose?”

“Possibly, but there may be an alternative. If you will provide me with sorcerers to help me in a working, and if the working is successful.”

“What working?”

Loki explained. Tony and Freyr both stared at him for a long time.

At last Freyr spoke.

“Why were you not king centuries ago?”

“Because I loved Odin and I loved Thor.”

And that was all that had protected either of them from Loki, all these centuries. And they had thrown it away.

Freyr studied his nephew by adoption carefully. Then he rose.

“I will summon the most powerful of my court’s sorcerers. And place them at your disposal, son of Frigga.”

Chapter End Notes

Legend has it that the Fae had many enchanted swords that would do things like fight by themselves, never miss their mark, or pierce any protective enchantments.

Now that Loki's going to have them turned into shields, I guess Alfheim will have to see if they can get Steve Rogers to visit to show them how to use shields as offensive weapons.

Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Loki's plan is revealed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Helblindi Laufeyson, King of Jotunheim, was sitting on his throne, listening to his council as they wrestled with the eternal problem of how to feed their people, when the Asgardian materialized in front of them. Helblindi's long-lost brother. Loki of Asgard, more hated by Jotunheim than even Odin.

“Kill him.” A guard rushed to obey, but the Asgardian merely flickered. It was a projection. All the Jotnar present backed away from him.

“You are not welcome here, runt,” Helblindi snarled.

“My message will be.” The cursed spawn glanced around the court. His gaze remained on Menja and Oglandnir for several seconds. Perhaps because they were midgets too. But unlike him, they hadn't been turned into hairy warm pink things. The runt tore his attention away and back to Helblindi. “I have restored the Casket to you.”

Helblindi was on his feet at once. “You lie. The Casket was lost in the Void when the Odinson destroyed the Bifrost.”

“It was. It took the work of ten powerful sorcerers to retrieve it. We had to expend tremendous amounts of seiðr for the working, and there was no guarantee we would succeed. But retrieve it we did.”

The Jotnar present murmured, but fell silent when their king spoke.

“Then give it to us! It is Jotunheim's by right.”

“Go to the old temple. It is there awaiting you.”

Helblindi glared, suspicious. “Why would *you* do that? You who tried to destroy our already desolate realm?”

“*Because* I did that. I cannot undo my crime against you, but I can restore to you the means of healing your world.”

“And what will you demand in return, *Odinson?*” Helblindi spat the last word. Loki’s mouth tightened.

“I am not a son of Odin, and I am setting things right, not incurring a debt. The Casket should have been returned to you centuries ago.” Loki frowned, looking again at his fellow midgets. “I thought the Jotnar killed their runts in infancy.”

The Jotnar present all exchanged looks of disgust. “Is that what Asgardians do? Your people are savages.”

Loki stared at Helblindi for a moment before saying, “A warning. My fellow sorcerers and I have bound the Casket to Jotunheim. If you take it to another realm, hoping to make war, it will be powerless. Use it here to restore your world, but restrain your aspirations of conquest.”

Helblindi snarled. “We deserve revenge upon Asgard for all it has done to us.”

“You do indeed. But Midgard and the other realms should not suffer at your hands.” The projection of Loki smiled, the sharp smile he had worn when he had come to entice Laufey with his schemes. “As for Asgard, I suspect its warriors will be obliging enough to come here to be killed. Especially if you do not reveal the Casket’s new limitation.” The smile dropped from Loki’s lips and his expression became severe. “Kill any Asgardian warriors foolhardy enough to put their necks within your reach. My concern is for Asgard’s people. I have no wish to see our farmers and artisans, our women and children, paying the price for the bloodlust of our warriors.”

Helblindi took a menacing step closer to the projection. “I am going to the temple now. If your words are false, we will not cease until we have found you and torn you limb from limb.”

Loki laughed. “I fear you will have to join a very long line.”

Chapter End Notes

As you see, Loki's working was successful.

Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Loki gives Tony a gift.

Loki collapsed almost the minute they returned to Tony's Malibu house. Tony was surprised Loki actually managed to stagger to a couch first. A couple of the Elvish sorcerers had had to help him muster the juice to get the two of them back to Earth.

It was dawn of Monday morning. Tony instructed Jarvis to make lame excuses to SHIELD for them, found a blanket to drape over Loki's unconscious form, and stretched out on the other couch. It wasn't that comfortable, but he was afraid to be too far from Loki. Too much had happened this weekend and Tony was feeling paranoid. They should've gone back to the Tower instead, where at least they'd have the rest of the Avengers to protect them if anything happened.

With all that on his mind, Tony didn't sleep well. He kept waking up every time there was some tiny noise, like a couple of seagulls fighting outside or something. Loki slept like the dead.

It was night when Loki finally woke up. Tony crammed the oven with as many frozen pizzas as would fit, putting in fresh ones as soon as each was cooked, and Loki devoured them like there was no tomorrow.

"We still have to keep making weapons," Tony said when they had polished off all the pizzas and were digging into pints of ice cream. "We can't count on the frost giants to take care of all of it."

"True. But once Asgard notices that they have their Casket back, it will hasten to take it from them again, and the battle will cost Asgard many warriors."

"Asgard defeated them before."

"Odin was young then and at the height of his own power. Most of the war took place on Midgard, not on Jotunheim - now the Jotnar will be defending their home. And now they have been nursing their grudge for a thousand years."

"So you're sure the Jotuns can win."

"I have faced the Jotnar in battle." Loki's face was grave at the memory. "Thor slaughtered hundreds of them in less than an hour, but even so, we would all have been killed had Odin not snatched us away with the Bifrost. With their Casket restored to them, to ensure their victory there is only one thing I must do."

“Which is?”

“What I should have done centuries ago, but loved my brother too much to do. *Nothing.*”

Tony couldn't think of anything to say to that, so he just let it alone. After a few minutes, Loki spoke again.

“Asgard's warriors have grown dependent upon me. My strategy and magic. My *tricks.*” The last word was bitter. “Especially Thor and his warrior band. For centuries they have plunged into danger, knowing that I would save their necks when they couldn't be bothered not to stick them out. When Odin faced the Jotnar a thousand years ago, he was leading men who never had me to rely on.”

Loki pushed the now empty carton of Vanilla Swiss Almond away, weary.

“I could have been Odin's only heir hundreds of years ago, simply by just once staying home with my books when Thor dragged his friends off on some foolhardy quest. They hated having me along, no matter how many times I saved their lives. They tolerated me only because Thor insisted on taking me with them. I thought it meant he had some affection for me.”

“Loki...”

“Not that I ever contemplated actually *doing* that. It is only that my mind evaluates these things of its own accord. And I think it was a bit of a comfort to me, to know that I *could* take his place had I wanted to. I didn't know then that I was not Odin's son, that had Thor fallen Odin would have spawned another son of his own blood to place above me.”

Tony retrieved another pint of Häagen-Dazs and put it in front of Loki. Chocolate; for this, only the hard stuff would do. “Loki, they were idiots for not valuing you.”

Loki took a listless bite or two, staring into the ice cream as if the answers to everything were written upon it. “This isn't what I wanted,” he said eventually.

Tony was trying to think of something comforting to say, even if it was just the usual “There, there” platitudes, but Loki abruptly shook himself and stood up.

“Enough,” he said, even though he was the one who'd been carrying on. “You are right, we have a great deal to do. Or rather, you have. I have a gift for you - for all Midgard, but you are to be its custodian.”

Tony put the remaining ice cream into the freezer and turned to Loki. “Yes?”

Loki twirled his hands, and the basket he had received from the Lady Iðunn appeared between them.

“Iðunn believes this is only for you. But I know that you will not hoard it. You will share it with the world.”

“What is it?”

Loki lifted the basket's lid. Lying within were three apples. A peculiar shade of yellow.

Almost... *golden*.

Tony stared, then met Loki's eyes. "You're kidding." He had read about this, but had believed it a mere myth. And Loki's pronunciation of Iðunn's name had thrown him off the scent.

"It is these which have given the Aesir long life and invulnerability. Other realms have other sources of these things. It is past time that Midgard shared in such gifts."

Tony looked at the apples. He didn't dare to touch them.

"They do not lend themselves easily to sowing. I doubt Iðunn believes I can do it."

"But you can?"

"I can. But I will need fertile soil to do it in. And secrecy until the orchard has grown, lest one of your world's powers try to claim it for themselves alone. And in case by some unlikely chance my coup fails. You have the wealth and the cunning to protect the trees until they have borne fruit. Until there are too many to keep them hidden away."

What could a mortal say to a gift from the gods?

"You say you wish to wipe the red from your ledger," Loki said softly. "That you wish to atone to your world for the harm you unwittingly caused."

"I'd say this is my chance." Tony paused. "And yours."

"It is time Midgard took its place among the realms. Humans have shown themselves to be every bit as worthy as any other race."

Tony looked at his lover. At the man who had once unleashed an army of monsters onto Earth. Who had tried to destroy an entire world.

Who had just given the elixir of life to the former Merchant of Death.

"Thank you," he said quietly.

Loki took one of the apples out of the basket and held it out. "Eat one now. Midgard needs you. The other two you must conceal somewhere safe until it is time to plant."

Tony accepted the apple from Loki's hand. Holding Loki's gaze, he took a bite.

Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Asgard reminds Midgard of its hegemony.

Loki had never loved battle as other Asgardian warriors did. They had seen this as a defect in him, and he had believed them. He had done battle anyway time and again, to prove himself, to please his supposed father. To watch his brother's back, keep the once-beloved oaf alive.

Even that fateful day on Jotunheim, he had never been less eager for a battle than he was today.

But Thor had come with twenty warriors to smash up more of the humans' weapons, rob them of their means of self-defense in a hostile universe, and the Avengers had been summoned. Loki and Tony were the only ones who knew to be disappointed. They had not been able to help hoping that Asgard's warriors would not visit Earth again before walking into the trap that was Jotunheim.

Loki sent the arc reactor Tony had provided into his pocket dimension. The Avengers had been scattered when the summons had come. Loki, Tony and Banner had been in Arizona with Jane Foster, working on yet more weapons. The rest had been in New York. Asgard's attack was in Virginia. They could not possibly reach the battle site in time. But Tony had said, "Hey, would this help?" and shoved an arc reactor at him. Much larger than the one in Tony's chest. He had been making it, he explained, to power a helicarrier.

With the reactor's power, Loki had been able to transport the three of them to the Tower, and then all of the Avengers to the scene of battle.

Loki felt sick when his eyes fell on his foster brother. Beside him, all the other warriors with him - twenty in all, Sif and the Three included - faded into the background. Thor was always the center, wherever he went. His might, his power, his sheer confidence overwhelmed all.

Loki had once been one of the multitudes of moths drawn to that flame. Now, his foster brother seemed nothing but a fool, full of bluster and vanity. And that change in perception grieved Loki as much as anything else.

"If you leave now," the Captain's voice rang out to the astonished Asgardians, "no one has to get hurt."

Loki was relieved that someone else had issued the challenge.

"Yeah. Piss off back to Asgard," Tony said. "Or to Valhalla."

“Leave this place, son of Odin,” Loki said. “There is nothing for you here but defeat.”

Thor’s face on seeing him was utterly furious. He hefted his hammer and took a half-step in Loki’s direction, but the green berserker landed on Thor first, and the two of them set to grappling, Thor grinning fiercely as they fought.

Loki turned to his own chosen opponent. During the strategy sessions they had had, Loki had insisted on the right to fight one Asgardian in particular.

“Yeah, we know.” Fury had rolled his eyes. “You gotta do the Cain and Abel thing with your brother.”

Loki shook his head. He had *done* that already. When he had been trying to destroy Jotunheim, Loki had fought Thor out of a frenzied idea that if only he could best the mighty Thor in single combat, Odin would be pleased with him. Would be proud of him. Would see him as a worthy son. When Loki had been forced to invade Midgard and had dueled with Thor, he had been striking out at the brother he still could not help but love. Trying to punish him for a thousand years of petty slights, of dismissal. For every time Loki had saved Thor’s life with magic and been ridiculed for it.

For the one thing Thor had that Loki never, ever could: the warm red blood of Odin flowing through Thor’s veins.

None of that mattered now. Loki had no father to impress. Any grudges he still held for Thor’s careless bullying were faint echoes of themselves by now. And if any desire for revenge still lingered in his heart, he would shortly have it in greater measure than he could ever have wished. No, he felt no more need to fight Thor with his own hands.

“I have no brother,” he had told them. “And no. I have fought Thor. Let Banner have him; your berserker can challenge Thor enough that he will not be able to slaughter your soldiers by the hundreds, as he has on so many worlds. I claim the right to fight Volstagg.”

All had looked rather baffled, but had granted him his request.

Battling someone you knew so well was not difficult. Loki had plenty of attention to spare for the battle in general. Many times he flung a dagger or a blast of energy to stop an Asgardian warrior about to slay a human.

Whatever else he had done in the past, never before had he fought his fellow Asgardians.

It might have been amusing, had matters not been so grave, to see how astonished Loki’s former shield-brothers were to find his ingenuity used against them instead of in their defense. They had always underestimated its value. Now they were beginning to realize how wrong they had been.

Loki felt too weary of the entire matter to feel any satisfaction over this.

Loki toyed with Volstagg for a time before the fat old fool gave him an opening, and Loki neatly sliced off Volstagg’s right hand. Then left him roaring on the ground, shielded by one

of Loki's forcefields, as Loki sought other battles.

The Captain was battling Fandral quite ably. Loki had time to see Agent Barton loose an un-tipped arrow into Sif's throat. For an instant, centuries of habit had Loki raising his arms to defend her. Instead he watched her fall. She had nearly taken Barton's life. Had Loki not stolen the healing stones, Barton would almost certainly be dead now. It was Barton's right to avenge himself.

The Asgardians grew alarmed when they realized that the human's weapons could actually harm them. Some of them began calling for retreat, but of course they wouldn't leave without Thor, and Thor was having too much fun. Volstagg was gravely wounded, Sif and three others dead, and Thor as always was oblivious, lost in the joy of battling the Hulk.

Thor did look surprised - almost comically so - when he summoned lightning and Tony's lightning rockets sucked it up before it could do any damage. Loki grinned even as he crossed blades with an Asgardian warrior named Hrothgar.

He was so proud of Tony.

Hogun and Fandral, not realizing that Volstagg was protected by Loki's magic, had made their way to his side to defend him. Both kept shouting to Thor that they must leave, but of course Thor paid them no mind.

The battle was over only when the berserker actually managed to knock Thor unconscious by slamming him against the concrete floor several times. Loki winced, remembering, but he had survived and so would Thor.

The other Asgardians froze, shocked, when they saw their prince fall. Loki raised his voice.

"Take your prince and your dead and go. And know that Midgard will not submit to Asgard meekly." He could not resist a little smirk. "Tell the son of Odin that the Earth is under my protection."

The Aesir looked daggers at Loki, but they were concerned for their prince if he was not for them. They gathered up him and the bodies of their dead and stood together, and the Bifrost opened and took them away.

Once they were gone, the humans began to cheer. They had been combating Asgard for over a year with apparent hopelessness. This was their first victory. Now they had hope that Midgard might be free. Of course they were jubilant.

Loki wanted only to find a quiet room and a large bottle of strong drink, but with the ease of long practice, he forced himself to smile and cheer with them, and then join in their celebration. They needed him in this as they needed him to make weapons. Their confidence would waver if he did not seem to share their triumph. It was his duty to pretend.

Loki fooled almost everyone. He was good at this game, had been playing it for centuries.

He was quite certain that Tony was not fooled at all.

Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Tony and Loki discuss their plans while Asgard battles Jotunheim.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Loki was awakened by the movement of his seiðr. He slipped out of Tony's bed, careful not to wake Tony, materialized his clothes back onto himself, and padded to his own room, where he took out the sheet of papyrus he had enchanted. There were words upon it.

“Jotunheim has somehow reacquired its Casket. Odin, Thor, and most of Asgard's warriors have just departed to take it from them again.”

Numbly, Loki rolled up the sheet and tucked it into his shirt pocket. Then he sat on the bed, his knees drawn up to his chest, and gazed out the window.

A day he had not remembered in centuries abruptly came into his mind. He and Thor had been young, scarcely into manhood. They had gone on a hunting trip and Thor had wanted to barge into an entire herd of griffins. Loki had pointed out the sheer foolhardiness of such an approach.

Thor had smiled at him, that radiant smile that melted nearly everyone. Even their father, sometimes. “Come on, brother, where is your sense of adventure?”

Loki had smiled back, affected by Thor's charm as he always was. “Standing right beside me, trying to get me killed.”

Thor had ruffled his hair and Loki had pretended to be more annoyed than he was as he smoothed it down. By the end of the day Thor had a griffin's head and claws for his trophy collection.

Loki crouched on the bed and did not move.

“Sir, I apologize for waking you, but I've intercepted an encrypted communication from within SHIELD.”

Tony sat up, rubbing his eyes. “Where's Loki?”

“In his own room, sir.”

“Let’s see this communication.” Jarvis projected it into the air. Tony squinted at it.

“Oh, hell. Is Loki awake?”

“Yes, sir. He asked me to make his excuses; he doesn’t feel he’ll be able to work today.”

“Ask him if I can come in.”

Permission relayed by Jarvis, Tony crossed through the common area - no one else was around this early - and went into Loki’s room.

Loki looked even paler than usual, and the look in his eyes reminded Tony of when they had first found him hiding out near the beach. Or of himself when he’d first gotten back from Afghanistan.

Immediately he went to sit beside Loki, putting his arms around him. “Babe?”

“The warriors of Asgard are in Jotunheim right now,” Loki said without inflection. “Fighting.”

Tony tightened his embrace a little. “Jarvis, would you please tell Bruce and SHIELD that Loki and I are too hung over to work today?”

“Of course, sir. Trying to maintain your reputation, I see.”

“If Fury complains, tell him the size of Loki’s dick. I’m sure he’ll understand.”

That got a tiny quirk of Loki’s mouth. Tony traced his jaw with a callused fingertip. “You gonna be okay?”

“I doubt it.”

“Do you want me to remind you of all the reasons you’re doing this?”

Loki shook his head once. “I’ve been doing that ever since I heard. Asgard’s warriors will never yield their power so long as most of them live. They will never stop endangering the realm, never stop terrorizing the others.” He blew out a long exhale. “It will be over soon.”

“Can you deal with some unpleasant Earthgard news?”

“I would welcome the diversion.”

“Loki, I’m sorry, I swear I didn’t know this, but if Earth fails to fight off Asgard....”

Loki gave the smile Tony didn’t like, that was just bleakly amused that people were just as awful as he’d always thought. “I am SHIELD’s contingency plan. They will tell Thor and Odin that it was all my fault and hand me over in hopes of mollifying them.”

“It isn’t just that. If it *does* work, when they’re sure they don’t need you to make any more weapons-”

“They will use the weapons I created on me.” Loki said the words with complete calm.

“How’d you guess? It’s what you would do?”

“It’s what I *would* have done, a few years ago. Not now.”

Tony shook his head, admiring despite the situation. “Has anyone *ever* put anything over on you?”

“Odin All-Father.”

Oh. Right.

“On behalf of Earth, I apologize.”

“There is no need. I’m going to win.”

Tony started stroking Loki’s hair in slow, rhythmic strokes. “Babe, even if they make their move in time, I won’t let them take you.”

Loki smiled at him, slightly amused but mostly grateful. “Thank you. They couldn’t, though. Those weapons are imbued with *my* magic.”

“And you put in a failsafe, didn’t you? So they couldn’t be used on you. Atta boy.” Tony kissed his temple. “Listen, babe, I’ve been planning on dealing with SHIELD for a while anyway. I was just putting it off because they were useful for dealing with alien invaders. I’ve got everything in place necessary to take them down. As soon as I know you’re secure on the throne of Asgard, I’ll put it into motion.”

“What did SHIELD do to arouse your enmity?” Loki appeared diverted from his own morbid thoughts for the moment. Tony decided to encourage that.

He told Loki everything he knew about SHIELD’s misdeeds: his own illegal house arrest by Fury and Coulson when his old arc reactor had been poisoning him, Fury’s request that Thor torture Loki, Coulson’s threat to have Thor tortured when he was in SHIELD custody during his banishment, threats of torture to others that had been carried out, SHIELD’s long-standing practice of flying into international waters to evade the law, the World Council’s attempt to nuke New York. “When I give the word, Jarvis will send the evidence to the media outlets and the appropriate law enforcement. Not all of it will stick legally, but once the world knows what they’ve been doing, they’re finished. Not everyone in SHIELD, just the bad eggs.”

The conversation jerked from one subject to another. Loki shared his plans for Asgard’s weapons vault. Some of the relics he would return to their rightful owners, on condition of military alliance with Asgard against outside threats. A few he would keep for when Thanos reached the Nine Realms. Some were so dangerous that he would have to ask Asgard’s sorcerers for help destroying them or changing them to something less destructive.

This led Tony to make a remark about most of Asgard’s sorcerers being women, unlike those of Alfheim. “Asgardians regard magic as women’s work,” Loki explained.

“What, real men solve problems by killing them?”

“Of course.”

“I suppose you got shit for that. For doing magic.”

“All my life.” He exhaled, loud and slow. “I made certain I could fight as well, but still.... I’ve often thought how much simpler my life would have been had I been a woman.”

“Because no one would have minded that you preferred magic to fighting?”

“Not only that. Once I learned what I was, and why Odin took me from Jotunheim, it occurred to me... had I been a girl, there would have been no need for the lie. I would have been reared as a Jotun princess, betrothed to Thor from birth. Not that marriage to Thor would have been much fun. He’d have philandered constantly.”

“You’d have made him fall madly in love with you. Twisted him around your little finger.”

“Perhaps so.”

Tony didn’t think this was a good train of thought for them, so he started talking about his own plans for Earth. Once they had the apples growing, they would need more space. He’d always hoped to see the day when humans would have colonies on Mars and the moon. Now, with a little technical help from Asgard, that could happen.

“You know I will render you whatever you need,” Loki told him with a fond smile. “Consider yourself Midgard’s ambassador to Asgard.”

“Me, an ambassador. That’s a laugh. I just hope we can get it going before we make too many of ourselves.”

“The apples reduce fertility. Except in Volstagg’s case.”

“He’s got kids?”

“Two or three dozen. I’ve lost track.”

“Wait, is that why you wanted to be the one to fight him? To keep him alive for his kids?”

“Making that many orphans at one blow would have been tantamount to raising an army against myself. The healers couldn’t make his hand grow back in time for him to be in fighting shape today. He won’t be going to Jotunheim without his sword hand.”

“Sentimental and practical all in one. That’s my Loki. So, speaking of kids. You told your advisors you would produce an heir, but once you said Odin didn’t marry you off because you might spawn blue babies.”

“With magic I can ensure that any child I sire is Asgardian in form.” He looked at Tony, nervous. “You know I will have to marry.”

“I know. I feel bad for the lady, though. I mean, since there won’t be any interest on your side.”

“That is why I shall ask Sigyn to be my queen.”

“Lavender marriage, huh? Good idea. But I thought you’d have to marry a princess from a different realm. Cement alliances and all that.”

“In my case, since I am a frost giant, I think it more important to strengthen my ties to Asgard. Sigyn will not need... anything I cannot provide, and is fit to share the duties of ruling.”

“Does she want kids?”

“I believe she does.”

“So, you two make some little princes, and-“

“Princess. My heir will be a daughter. I hope that a girl will be less prone to battle fever. And I shall have only one child.”

Tony thought that last wasn’t such a great idea for a king. “Loki, I could not be any more sure that even if you had a dozen kids, you will not make the same screw-ups that Odin did.”

“I suppose that is *one* mistake I can be certain of not making.”

Abruptly Loki dropped his head onto his knees. Tony hugged him harder.

“I am so afraid,” Loki confessed, his voice muffled.

“Of what?”

“So many people suffered for my errors, before.”

That was kind of a lot to reassure someone about. “You were a little bit crazy then. More than a little bit. You’d just found out you were the bogeyman. You’ve had a while to get used to being a bogeyman by now. And now Asgard knows what you are, and they don’t seem to care.”

Loki nodded a little, not raising his head. “They seem to think that Odin’s enchantment truly changed me to an Asgardian. They don’t understand how magic works, that the Jotun is still underneath this form.”

“I’d say they understand better than anyone.”

“The warriors see it as an explanation of what was always wrong with me.”

“Now there’s an opinion worthy of respect if I ever heard one.”

Loki managed another smothered laugh at that.

“Babe, not only did you have the worst trauma you could have just then, you were all alone. You couldn’t trust anyone to give you good advice or support your authority. Now you’ve got advisors, you’ve got the Thing and the sorceresses to help you do the work. You’ve got me.”

Loki leaned against him for a second. Tony kissed the top of his head.

“Loki, your mother made you king. I think she knew you pretty well and she thought you’d be good at it. It wasn’t her fault the chance came right after you found out your own big secret.”

Loki lifted his head at last, looking exhausted. “None of it was her fault. She supported her husband’s tyranny, but she was as trapped as anyone. She had little choice.”

“That’s true.” Tony hesitated. “And he’s a jerk, but... neither does Thor.” Tony hoped that might make Thor’s betrayal a tiny bit less painful.

“True. Which is why, if he survives today’s battle, I shall show him more mercy than he has shown me.”

As if at a signal only he could discern, Loki took his papyrus from his pocket and unrolled it. Tony looked, but he didn’t know how to read the runes, so he waited.

Loki drew a long breath.

“The battle is over. Jotunheim triumphed. Many Asgardians are dead.”

“What about...?”

“Thor lives.”

“So you’ll have a chance to show him that mercy you were talking about. What about Odin?”

“Odin also still lives.” Loki pulled Tony close and kissed him, desperately.

“Will you be able to take him down?”

“Oh, yes. It will be easier than I had thought.”

“I want to help you. Let me come.”

That got Tony another ferocious kiss. “No. In the unlikely event that Thor comes to Midgard before you hear from me, offer to trap me and turn me over to him. Anything to prevent him from causing more mischief before I can stop him.”

“Loki-“

“I must go. I will see you tonight.”

Loki pulled the arc reactor Tony had given him from his pocket dimension. Tony stood back. A moment later, Loki was gone.

Chapter End Notes

My headcanon about Frigga being basically a war prize, and about Freya and Freyr, was inspired by [this excellent comment from Iron_Dragon_Maiden](#). It worked so well with my own headcanon that I had to incorporate it.

I had a couple more nice dramatic fight scenes planned for this fic, but when I got to it, I realized that they didn't really make sense, unless numerous characters abruptly lost several IQ points. You guys would have been going, "Whee! This chapter was so much fun! ...But why didn't Loki just leave before that happened?" etc. If there's interest, I could post a couple of "cutting room floor" scenes after the fic is finished. With brief explanations of where they would have gone and why they weren't included in the final cut.

ETA: Interest has most definitely been expressed, so there will be "deleted scenes"!

Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Loki confronts Odin.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The Jotuns had taken Gungnir as a trophy and displayed it in their throne room (if an open-air sector of ice deserved so grand a title). Since it was night in Jotunheim, only a few guards were in the room. It was simple for a sorcerer of Loki's abilities to walk in invisibly and take it, leaving an illusory replacement behind. There were no magical safeguards; any magical knowledge Jotunheim had once had was long forgotten.

Away from them, Loki did not look at the spear he carried. He had not forgotten its weight in his hands or the hum of the magic it held. He tried not to think of the days when he had grown acquainted with those things. He concentrated instead on the words he must speak, slyly entwining his magic with Gungnir's. Should the Asgard Force go to Thor's control instead of his, the Nine Realms would be drenched in blood.

Loki tried to indulge in a fleeting fantasy of running away and leaving it all to someone else. It was no use; even his daydreams knew that he could not.

Next he sent his seiðr out until it found his foster father. It led him to a great cavern beneath the icy palace of Jotunheim's king. (His brother. Loki did not dwell on that thought. He had had enough of brothers.)

When Loki drew near, his stomach turned and the heart he had thought turned to stone shattered.

Odin was on his back, bound immobile with ill-smelling restraints which must have come from some huge animal. Hanging above him was an immense serpent, its mouth open to show glistening fangs.

Loki had ceased to love Odin. Ceased to feel any loyalty to him. But hearing Odin's screams, seeing Odin's eye blister under the steady drip of the serpent's poison, awakened old sentiment.

Letting Gungnir fall, Loki seized a large stone from the ground. With his seiðr he quickly fashioned it into a bowl. And held it above his foster father's face, catching the venom before it could reach Odin's eye.

"Hello, Father."

It took Odin a few seconds to realize that he had a respite. To remember the voice he heard.

“Loki?”

“Yes, Father.”

Odin’s arms pulled against the restraints (Loki tried not to speculate about exactly what they were). Loki could see that the man’s limbs were red and chafed from such straining, his tattered gold raiment stained with dried blood. Loki knew from experience that pain of this degree made summoning magic hard; it took concentration, will. It had always been frightening to see his father, usually so powerful, helpless in the Odinsleep. This was worse.

“The serpent I nursed in my bosom.” Given the circumstances, Loki thought these words especially unfair. “Have you come to mock me? Or to contribute to my torment?”

Once Loki had said much the same to Thor. He pushed that memory away. “No, Father.”

“Cease calling me that. The boy I knew is dead. What remains is a creature I do not recognize.”

There had been a time when those words had been the worst thing Loki could imagine. He would have rather spent a century in the grip of Thanos than hear them. Now he only gave a short bark of laughter. “Then perhaps you should look in the mirror, Father.” He looked at the ruin of the old man’s face. “And to think I expected you to ply me with false words of affection, hoping to win rescue.”

Even now, had Odin said such words, Loki was not at all certain he could resist them.

“Have you no shame?” Odin spat.

“Everything I did, I did for love of you. Right until the moment you called me Laufeyson.” Loki had to say these things. After so many centuries, he must at last be heard.

“You pursued only your own wickedness.”

“And you reject even the memory of my love.” Loki held the bowl in steady hands. “Shall I tell you what was the happiest moment of my life, Father?” Odin only glared, his bloody eye furious. “It was when I killed my real father. Can you recall the words I said? Mother claimed that you can hear and see what occurs around you during the Odinsleep.”

“I should have left you in that temple.”

“You should. My parents must have been grieved when they found I had been stolen. Did you truly believe they left their runts to die? In their most sacred place? Or was that another of your lies?”

“Your birthright was to die!”

Loki closed his eyes for a moment. “Come now, my words. They meant so much to me. I slew my real father, and I told him, ‘Your death came from the son of Odin.’ Can you

imagine the joy I felt at that moment?"

He *had* been joyful when he said that. For just one shining moment, he had believed that after centuries of useless struggle, at last he had done it. He had proven his love and his loyalty to Odin, had performed the sort of heroic exploit (*murder*) for which Thor was so revered.

"You wished only to seize the throne of Asgard," Odin sneered.

Even after everything that had transpired, Loki actually gaped in amazement at this. It was a long moment before he could speak.

"No, Father," he said. "Had I wished for that, I would have waited five more seconds before slaying Laufey."

Odin's eye widened. And even now, Loki could not help but wonder if he had finally reached the man.

"Laufey would have killed you for me. I would have been truly king, not regent. Asgard's magic would have been mine. When Thor returned, I could have taken Mjölfnir from him. I could have turned him to a mortal again, had I wished. He could not have thwarted my design. I would have slain Laufey and all Asgard would have hailed my noble deed. I would have been king of Asgard ever since, Mother would still be alive, Midgard would not have been invaded, I would not have been tortured by Thanos or imprisoned by you, all the horrors of the last few years would never have happened. But they did, and all because I was fool enough to think I could win your love."

"You are deranged."

"And yet, your son will not inherit your throne, Father. I will."

"Never!"

Loki let his mouth twist. "I have used up so much passion on you, Father. So much love and rage and hate. I feel so little now. But do you know what still makes me angry? What you have done to my brother. I believe he might have been a good man, if not for your influence. He managed to retain some goodness for centuries, until you were able to separate us. Or perhaps I deceive myself. Perhaps his affection for me was only because I served him so loyally. Perhaps he was always fated to become like you."

"You will betray your brother as you have betrayed the rest of us?"

"And suddenly I am claimed by the House of Odin again. No, Father. I will care for him well. I will show him far more mercy than you showed me. And I will show you more mercy as well."

By the time Odin had grasped his meaning, Loki had already set down the bowl. A drop of venom splashed into Odin's eye and he screamed for one last time.

"Goodbye, Father," Loki said softly, right before driving his dagger into Odin's heart.

The impact of the Asgard Force flowing into him, making Loki its new focus and master, toppled him to the ground. He crouched on his hands and knees on the ice, feeling the power burning through him. He felt an instant of fear, of panic. Of wishing someone would *save* him from it all.

And after an eternal moment his eyesight cleared and the power had settled in him, dormant, ready to be used when he reached for it.

This would be easier, when he had gathered the wisest of Asgard's sorcerers and shared this burden with them. Still he would be its chief locus, but they would help him to carry it, would shoulder some of the responsibility lest too much power make him mad as it had Odin.

Loki stood, the most powerful being in the Nine Realms. He held out his hand and Gungnir came to it. Already he could feel the difference in his connection with it. It was now a part of him.

With a simple flexing of will, not even a hand gesture, Loki set fire to Odin's remains. The snake, cheated of its prey, slithered away. Loki watched until only ash was left.

He had enjoyed patricide more the first time he had committed it.

Chapter End Notes

Odin called Loki "Laufeyson" when he sentenced him in the prelude comics, though not in the movie.

I've written numerous fics where Loki gets some revenge on Odin. This is the first time Loki's actually gotten to kill him.

Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

The king is dead. Long live the king.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Only a few guards occupied Asgard's throne room when Loki materialized there. All of them drew their swords, then stopped uncertain at the sight of the forsworn prince holding Gungnir. Wearing armor of black and gold and his familiar horned helm.

“Odin is dead,” Loki announced, pitching his voice to carry through the large room. “I am king.” He turned to Hlidskjalf with a slight flourish of his black cape. “Summon Thor, that he may dispute my claim should he wish to.”

With relief, one of the guards left to find Thor so that the princes of the realm could settle the matter between themselves.

Loki stopped at the foot of the dais and turned to face the entrance, waiting. He would not sit upon the throne until he had dealt with the only rival claim. The Asgard Force hummed within him, awaiting his will. It permeated the entire realm. He could do *anything*.

No wonder Odin had run mad, after centuries of this. Loki would summon Asgard's sorcerers to share the Asgard Force with him tomorrow. He would do it today if this day were not already full of the inescapable first steps: accepting oaths of fealty, dispensing largesse and amnesty, arranging a predictable celebration. And he had to *be* there for all of it, just so that everyone could see him sitting on the throne and holding Gungnir. As a child, he had been amazed the day he had worked out that a great deal of a king's job was simply sitting there not actually doing anything except being the king. Presence at certain moments was essential, even though the king did nothing but sit there and breathe.

He had always been so glad he had a brother more suited to such things than he. The only wound was the knowledge that Odin had seemed to consider him and then dismissed him out of hand.

“*Loki!*”

Thor stormed in already incandescent with rage. In the corridors behind him, others were gathering. Word of Loki's return had traveled fast.

Despite the tremendous power of the seiðr now at his command, Loki had to fight down instinctive panic at the sight of an angry Thor. But when Thor hefted Mjölfnir, Loki spoke in a

steady voice.

“Mjölfnir. Drop.”

Mjölfnir did.

Loki kept his own expression imperturbable as contrast to the shock on Thor’s face. Save for his carefully slow, even breathing, Loki did not move at all from his apparently serene stance at the foot of Hlidskjalf, one hand hanging at his side, the other loosely holding Gungnir.

He waited.

Thor wasted nearly a full minute straining to lift his hammer, snarling as it remained immovable. Loki let him try a few times before speaking again.

“Thor Odinson. You are unworthy of this realm, unworthy of your title. I take from you your power.”

Thor didn’t believe that he could do it. Not until his armor began to disintegrate and he felt his strength draining from him.

Loki’s hand tightened on Gungnir. It had hurt the last time he had seen that lost look on his not-brother’s face. It hurt this time. But he kept his face stony as he stripped the Asgard Force from Thor, leaving him weak and helpless as a mortal.

The guards in the throne room and the spectators crowded at the entrance all backed away, as though being depowered were contagious.

Thor was still staring in shock. Loki had to steel himself to pronounce the sentence he had planned. *It is only for a few weeks*, he reminded himself. *Give him a shock and then give him a chance*. Even so, the words he spoke made him sick. “Put Thor in the cell I once occupied. And since Thor was very emphatic that prisoners should not be indulged with such luxuries as beds and furniture, be sure to empty it of anything that is left in it.”

The guards hesitated only for one moment before two of them took Thor’s arms, nervous until the uselessness of his efforts to resist proved that he truly was bereft of his powers.

“I will have my revenge, Loki! You will rue this day!” Thor was yelling as he was dragged from the room. Meanwhile, everyone else was kneeling - to the man they knew could reduce them, too, to mortal weakness.

Loki wanted desperately to be alone for a few moments. He wanted to vomit. Just one more little luxury a king could not afford. He would not be truly cemented as king in everyone’s mind until they had seen him planted on the throne for a while.

And so Loki ascended the steps and then slowly, ceremoniously lowered himself onto the throne. It was cold and hard and very uncomfortable. Loki wondered if that was deliberately symbolic.

He drew a breath, and began issuing orders. His rule was to be proclaimed throughout the realm and a day of celebration held. All nobles and remaining aristocratic warriors were to report to pledge fealty to him immediately. The grandest of the palace's guest chambers were to be prepared for his occupancy. (Loki assumed his own old room had been gutted long since, and could not have borne entering it or those of the rest of his family.) All day spits were to turn and kegs of mead to be opened in every public square in the kingdom, and in the evening, a lavish feast would be held in the palace.

These were the things expected of a new king. Even a frost giant who had seized the throne by trickery and magic.

Before beginning to accept oaths, Loki gave a few more orders: all of the royal counselors were to meet with him tomorrow morning, and as many of Asgard's sorcerers as possible in the afternoon. The Thing would have to wait until the day after.

Loki's ability to create illusory doubles would have been useful now if those doubles were able to do more than stand about looking like him.

For now, he had to spend hours sitting up straight and looking composed while Asgard's surviving warrior nobles knelt before him and took their oaths. He directed each of them to gather on one side of the throne room and wait after having sworn. Most of the ones who remained were greybeards too old to have joined the battle on Jotunheim.

Then there was Volstagg.

The first time Volstagg had knelt to swear fealty to Loki - an oath which he broke before the sun had made a complete turn through the sky - he had scarcely been able to keep a straight face.

He looked more serious this time. Now Thor and Odin could not protect him and he had committed treason against the present king once already, and threatened his life when he was helpless.

"Your Majesty," Volstagg managed. There had been a time when Loki would have enjoyed the fear in the man's eyes.

Volstagg had been so much braver when Loki had been in chains.

"Former shield-brother."

Volstagg plucked up his courage - it wasn't so easy, now that he did not have the favor of the crown prince to back him up - and said, "You fought well, on Midgard." He nodded deprecatingly to his own missing hand.

"Ah, yes. The ability to maim and kill has always been the only thing which won your respect."

Volstagg darted a glance at Loki's face. Loki kept his expression cold and blank.

"Well. Ehm. You maimed me. Heh."

“And because I did, you did not accompany your witless friends to Jotunheim. And because of that Gunnhilde is not a widow and a few dozen children are not orphans.”

Volstagg’s eyes widened in comprehension.

“Go home, Volstagg. Play with your children, tend your farms, stuff your face. Beat your swords into ploughshares. Concern yourself no further with matters which are far above your head.”

Volstagg bowed his head. “Thank you, your-“

Loki cut him off. “Go.”

Volstagg went.

Fandral was next. Fandral had always been the least loathsome of Thor’s friends. He and Volstagg were the only ones left; Sif had fallen on Midgard, Hogun to some Jotun’s icy blade.

“Why should I believe you will keep your oath this time, Fandral?”

Fandral hesitated. “I serve *Asgard*, Loki. My king,” he added after a second.

Good answer. “Asgard’s attack on Jotunheim has cost it most of its warriors. New ones will have to be trained. Peasants, mostly, accustomed to wielding pitchforks instead of swords. The handful of warriors remaining will be needed to train them.”

Fandral could see already that the prestige of his caste and his trade were plummeting. How could it be otherwise, with an *ergi* who did magic on the throne? Nonetheless, he answered, “I am ready to do my duty.”

“Of course you are.” Fandral would be vexed when he realized how little war Asgard was going to wage in the future. Loki waved him to stand with his fellows. Fandral stayed where he was.

“If I may, your Majesty.” Fandral swallowed visibly. “Might you consider softening your brother’s sentence if-“

“I have no brother. The mighty Thor himself has said so.” Loki raised his voice just enough to make his point: Thor was not to be referred to as his brother. He looked down at Fandral, who was looking more apprehensive now, and contemplated asking him if he had asked Odin to have mercy upon Loki. But instead he leaned forward and lowered his voice. “A friendly word of advice. Give my anger time to cool before asking me to set it aside.”

Fandral bowed his head. “Your Majesty.”

“Join your shield-brothers.”

Loki gave a short speech to the noble warriors about their new duties training up a new army, and dropped a few hints that they would not be allowed the kind of license they had enjoyed under Odin. Later he would make that clear at greater length, but now he had other matters to

attend to. With that he dismissed them all and began to receive others. Beginning with the royal counselors, Ularic and Torger first. After they had sworn, he recited the list of those who had spoken against him.

They all knelt, trembling. Imprisoning one's own brother certainly made an impression. If they knew Loki's eventual plans for Thor, their trepidation would evaporate instantly. Which was why he hadn't revealed them.

Loki let them all wait and sweat for a long minute before saying, "Midgardians have a custom I have found most intriguing. It is called 'mercy'."

A few furtive glances at him were stolen.

"That you spoke against me to my predecessor shows that you lack the wisdom to discern who shall be the victor in a conflict. Therefore you will be of no use to me. You are all relieved of your duties. You are barred from sitting on juries or being speakers of the Thing. Go home and tend your own gardens."

"Your Majesty," Torger warned as the dismissed advisors bowed their heads before rising to their feet, "you may regret some of this mercy you are dispensing."

"No," said Loki, making certain his voice carried to the entire room. "I *may* regret what some people do in the future. I will likely regret what I must then do to stop them. But never will I regret having shown them mercy."

Next came the vows of the lesser nobility - no longer lesser, now that Asgard's warrior aristocracy had been decimated. More confident of their loyalty, he did not require each to swear alone. Following them were Asgard's sorcerers, who also were permitted to swear as a group rather than individually.

Now Loki was receiving the oaths of those who wanted him on this throne, those who he was here to serve. The way they looked at him, with relief and affection, reminded him of why he had put himself in this arduous position. He found that he was silently vowing to himself to serve them well, to protect and provide for them always. All the things his not-father had talked about, when he and Thor were children, but apparently forgotten centuries ago.

Loki made a few more announcements before ending the audience. Honors for those who had helped him - Sigyn, Angrboða, Iðunn, Bragi, Ularic, Torger, Freya, a few others. Rebuilding the areas damaged by the Dark Elves was to begin at once. There was a general amnesty for lesser crimes. After this day, the king would no longer pronounce sentence on any criminals himself, but leave all of the accused to juries selected by lot from the Thing, as was done for any offenders in whose fate the king took no interest. In a few days' time Loki and his advisors would commence a review of every prisoner in Asgard's dungeon. Those deemed no longer a danger to the realm would be pardoned. And any couple in Asgard who married in the next year would receive a bag of gold.

Having done what was expected of a new king, Loki left the throne room for his new chambers. Already they had draped it with curtains and hangings of green. They could not know he had discarded the color. Wearily, Loki realized that he might have to keep the color

after all. For a thousand years, Asgard had been taught that it was the badge of their younger prince. He was the only one who knew its significance.

After dismissing the servants, Loki materialized more casual (by Asgardian royal standards) clothes onto himself and opened a portal - with the Asgard Force at his disposal he no longer even required the arc reactor Tony had given him - and stepped into Stark Tower's common room. It was early morning and the Avengers were having breakfast. Tony was not present. They all glanced at him without much interest.

"Morning. Where've you been?" the captain asked.

"Claiming the throne of Asgard. Jarvis, is Tony asleep?"

"No, sir, he is in his workshop. He instructed me to notify him the moment you returned."

"You're kidding?" Barton and the other humans were staring at him.

"No. Odin is dead. Thor is in prison. I am king."

Tony appeared in the doorway, smudged with oil, wearing a sleeveless white T-shirt and faded jeans, grinning. "Congratulations, babe."

Loki smiled at the sight of the man and went to kiss him, even if the other mortals were watching.

Agent Romanoff had stood up, abandoning her breakfast. "Tony, did you know about this? And you didn't notify SHIELD?"

Loki looked to her. "Ah, yes. Pardon me, I have been making proclamations for the last several hours, I had forgotten this one had yet to be made. Jarvis, would you be so good as to record this?" He materialized an illusion of grander clothes and armor onto himself, in black instead of green and minus the helmet (he had the impression humans found it alarming), and Tony stepped away from him to let him perform.

Loki could not suppress the smile that all had come to see as his "god of mischief" smile. He had to resort to casting an illusion of a serious expression onto himself before he could begin to speak.

"Greetings, Midgard. I am Loki Friggasson, King of Asgard."

He gave that a few seconds to sink in before stating that Asgard's uninvited meddling in human affairs would now end, and expressing hope for a freely entered alliance between the realms. He ended with a promise of technological exchange.

"Jarvis, send that to... well, everybody," Tony ordered, before stepping close to Loki again and putting his arms around him. "Did they give you much trouble?"

"Only Thor. Once I took care of him, no one else cared to challenge me."

“You say Thor’s in prison.” The soldier’s youthful face was wary. “How long are you planning to keep him there?”

Loki smiled sadly at the lad. “Do you fear I have become the thing I fled? He will stay there for one month. After that... to begin with, I will be making Asgard’s dungeons far less horrific. But I think a better place might be found for my foster brother.” Before they could ask more questions, he continued, “My coronation is to be celebrated with a great feast. I invite you all to attend and represent Midgard.”

“Uh, thank you. When?”

“How long will it take you to dress?”

It was agreed that in one hour the Avengers would assemble atop their Tower and the Bifrost would take them to Asgard. “Call Dr. Foster and ask her to attend as well,” Loki said. “If she agrees, I can transport her from wherever she is now. I would like for her to see another side of Asgard.”

“Should we wear our uniforms?” Romanoff asked.

“In the past I would have said yes. But Asgard is no longer a warrior realm. The formal attire of Midgard will be more suitable.”

“See, aren’t you glad I bought you guys tuxes?” Tony grinned up at his lover. “They all insisted they’d never wear them, but I knew superheroes get invited to state occasions.” His dark expressive eyes moved over Loki’s face, as usual taking in everything Loki hid from the world at large. “C’mon, lemme steal you for a minute before you go back.”

“Sir,” Jarvis said as the two of them went into Tony’s room, “Commander Fury is on the line. He wishes to know what kind of sick joke you are playing at.”

“Tell him my boyfriend’s the king of everything and he’ll just have to deal.” Tony reached up and tugged Loki’s head down. Loki sank into the kiss with relief.

“You okay, hon?” Tony asked when the kiss was over. Loki closed his eyes and rested his head on Tony’s shoulder.

He was just so relieved that it was *over*.

After a moment Loki made himself straighten and wipe a smudge of grease from Tony’s forehead. “And how go your plans for your own realm?”

“I’ve bought a few different pieces of land that are perfect for growing apples - I’m just hoping these work something like Earth apples. Bruce is already analyzing DNA from the ones you gave me. So, we’re on it. As for that other... Jarvis? It’s time to take care of SHIELD.”

“I have begun, sir.”

Tony and Loki looked at each other. “It’s okay, babe,” Tony said after a moment. “We’ll look after everybody.”

Loki kissed him again.

Then Tony pushed him away with reluctance. “You’d better go so I can shower. I don’t want to embarrass you in front of the other demigods.”

“I could not be more proud of you, Tony.”

Tony looked at him, serious. “Me too, Loki. Me too.”

Chapter End Notes

When I wrote the first chapter of this story, the movie wasn't out yet so I didn't know that Fandral did not join his comrades in threatening Loki. Now I do know. Since he was less of a jerk than the rest, I let him live.

Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

The Avengers visit Asgard to celebrate the reign of the new king.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

As Tony understood it, Asgardians held feasts to commemorate holidays, marriages, divorces, births, deaths, coming of age, days that ended in y and the beginning of a new minute. So of course the kitchens were firing up the ovens the second Loki's taut narrow buttocks touched the big gold chair.

Tony got the distinct impression that Loki did not feel like feasting. He was smiling graciously at everyone, laughing at their jokes and all, but Tony had been sharing a roof with the guy for months, and this was not a happy day for Loki. He might have gotten over the idea that his father had hung the moon (a more understandable delusion in his case than most), but a thousand years of love didn't just go away.

But apparently feasting when you didn't want to feast was a kingly duty, so Loki presided while everyone stuffed themselves far into the night. The Aesir were curious about the Avengers and Jane, which meant the humans had no trouble finding people to talk to after Loki announced them - all in terms almost as flattering as the ones he'd lavished on Tony.

"These mortals had the courage to grant me shelter when I was hiding from Odin's wrath," Loki declared grandly. Tony hadn't thought of it as a brave thing to do, more like desperate, but to the Aesir, who had feared Odin's wrath for as long as they could remember, that must be the element uppermost in their minds. "Let us show them the greatest of hospitality in return. All of these mortals have seen Asgard at war. They have battled Thor himself and lived to speak of it. Let us show them Asgard at peace, in friendship."

Tony still thought the Aesir regarded them as chimps who knew sign language, but it was a start. Loki introduced Jane and Bruce to some sorcerers. Jane and Bruce had learned enough magical terminology from Loki that they were able to start talking science and sorcery without too much trouble with the jargon. Bruce in a tux looked like a little boy whose mother had just scrubbed him and forced him into his Sunday suit; it was really cute. Jane wore an Asgardian dress they had given her on her last visit - Tony assumed it had been made especially for her, as the shortest Asgardian he had seen was at least ten inches taller than her - and it made her look like a princess from a storybook. She cleaned up nice. Given her usual jeans-and-sweatshirt style, it might have been the only garment she had suitable to the occasion.

The Avengers all wore tuxes, including Natasha. Tony tried not to stare at her; gorgeous women in tuxes had always been one of his favorite things.

Note to self: get Loki into a tux sometime.

Natasha was working the room, of course she was. By dawn she would know everything there was to know about Asgard. The Asgardians were curious about her, too; “shield-maidens” were not unknown to them, but still rare enough to be a novelty. Clint and Steve kind of stuck together as various Asgardians approached and talked to them. The women of Asgard seemed especially intrigued. Tony could hardly wait to tease Cap about it. Steve always refused to answer any questions about his sexual experience, or lack thereof, but if he wanted to get rid of his presumed innocence, he would have opportunities aplenty tonight.

Loki had Tony sitting on his right and Sigyn and her girlfriend on his left. This meant that Tony and Angrboða got to witness Loki’s rather businesslike proposal, which Sigyn accepted in equally businesslike fashion. They agreed to wait a few weeks before announcing their betrothal. Asgard had enough to talk about for a while. Tony found himself hoping she would change Loki’s mind about the “only one child” idea. He thought having a whole litter of kids to dote on might do Loki a world of good.

Tony and Loki didn’t really have a chance to talk. People kept coming up to talk to Loki, to flatter him and ask him for favors. Most of the favors he said would have to await consultation with his advisors. A few times he had requests of his own, uses for the abilities or resources of those now currying his favor. Now and then Loki would hold up his hands and the music and conversation would stop and he would make some announcement, and then the partying would continue.

Like when Freya approached the table. When Loki caught sight of her he stood and raised his hands, and spoke into the silence which fell.

“My dear aunt. Your brother, King Freyr of Alfheim, asked my permission for you to live with him in Alfheim.”

She inhaled sharply. “So you are sending me there?”

“I am not *sending* you anywhere, Aunt. You are free to go to Alfheim if you wish. Or to Vanaheim, or anyplace else that pleases you. Or you may stay here if you wish. You are no longer hostage against Vanaheim’s obedience.”

That got an approving murmur throughout the feasting hall.

Freya raised her voice over the murmurs. “And will you liberate Vanaheim, as your mother would have wanted you to?”

“If the Vanir will negotiate a military alliance with Asgard, yes. Asgard will no longer oppress the other realms. Their destiny is their own to chart. No longer will we sacrifice our sons and our resources to maintain power over faraway worlds. We seek allies now, not vassals.”

Freya smiled and curtsied as she thanked him, and Loki gestured to a place at his table and sat back down. Tony thought Freya might be a little peeved that Loki hadn't made Tony or Sigyn move so that she could sit beside him, but she accepted her seat nicely enough.

As she sat down and accepted a goblet of wine, Loki spoke to Tony in a low tone. "I have not yet told them about Thanos. When I do, hopefully they will understand why alliances are of such importance now."

"You really think he's coming?"

"I know he is. But it may be a while. We may hope so. At least now I will be able to prepare the Nine Realms to combat him."

"Hey, I hate to complicate things, but is Alfheim going to want Freyr to keep being their king when he was Odin's viceroy?"

"Freyr has ruled Alfheim well and is beloved of its people." Loki put down his goblet and recited:

Freyr is best
of all the exalted gods
in the Aesir's courts:
no maid he makes to weep,
no wife of man,
and from bonds looses all.

Loki's eye fell on the servant who was bringing more mead, a dumpy guy with frizzy hair who looked downright terrified of him. Tony thought he saw Loki's shoulders rise and fall in a very small sigh before Loki gave that impish grin of his and held up his hand, the fingers taut.

The servant gulped. After a second half a dozen brightly colored butterflies flew out of the cup the man was carrying. The servant gaped at them, then looked back to his new king.

Loki was smiling at the man gently, a smile intended to reassure. "That was just a bit of fun. Right, my friend?"

The servant looked like he didn't know whether to be less afraid or not, but he nodded, set the bottle and fresh goblets on the table, and scuttled away.

For a second Loki's mask slipped and Tony could see the melancholy underneath. A lot of people would say that a man who'd just become the most powerful being in the Nine Realms had nothing to be melancholy about.

Those people had never had many responsibilities. Or they had, but hadn't cared. Lucky bastards.

"Babe, look around," he said softly. "They love you."

Loki gave a grim little chuckle. “They do now. Odin’s folly has increased greatly in recent years and from me they hope for respite. But in a few months’ time, it will be clear that I cannot give everyone in Asgard every single thing they want, and their affection will diminish considerably.” Abruptly he laughed. “Listen to me. If my mother were here, she would give me a good shake.”

“Want me to do it for her? Or is only royalty allowed to shake the king?”

Loki shot him a flirtatious glance.

Much later, Loki swept his gaze around the feasting hall and bent his head towards Tony. “We have reached the point in the evening when people are more occupied with drinking and courting than with currying favor. I believe I may now make my escape.”

“Courting” seemed to be Shakespeare for “making out”, and Loki was certainly right about that. All around the room people were showing increasing signs of inebriation and many were getting a start on the night’s more private celebrations.

Loki tendered gracious farewells to Sigyn, Angrboða, and Freya before leading Tony out of the room. They were only stopped by people who wanted something from their king four times before they got to the door.

More high ceilings and gold walls and torches positioned in little niches everywhere. All the corridors looked the same to Tony, but Loki navigated them without hesitation. “I do not wish to be disturbed,” he told the guards at his door. Even so, once inside he spent a few minutes casting spells to alert them to any possible threats before letting Tony start to undress him.

“Sit down,” Tony ordered, and Loki sat on the edge of the bed obligingly. Tony kissed him a few times before getting down on his knees. “Hope you aren’t too bored with people kneeling to you,” he said before starting, getting a tiny smirk from Loki.

When he was sure he had Loki half out of his mind, Tony paused long enough to ask, “You think we could get away with doing this with you on the throne sometime?”

“Tony!” Loki sounded equally horrified and thrilled by the idea. Tony grinned at him before resuming. And made a bet with himself that he’d talk Loki into it within the year.

Later, when he had Loki bonelessly relaxed on the bed, feeling contented and cared for - when he had the most powerful man in the known universe pliant and softly sighing under him - Tony propped himself on one elbow and brushed the tousled hair back from his wizard-king’s beautiful face.

“So much has been going on since we got together,” Tony said softly, “that I kind of didn’t get a chance to tell you that I love you.”

Those green eyes got all wide and misty, and then Loki pulled him down and kissed him, slow and soft. “I love you, Tony,” he whispered.

Tony made love to him one more time before letting him go to sleep. He wanted Loki too pleasantly tired to have any bad dreams on this night.

Chapter End Notes

The verse Loki recites about Freyr is from the [Lokasenna](#). Ironically, it's spoken by Tyr to Loki, defending Freyr from nasty things Loki just said about him.

In case anyone hasn't seen it, the servant mentioned is the one from [this deleted scene from the first movie](#).

Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

The fate of Thor.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Not quite a month had passed when Loki could endure imprisoning Thor no longer. He had his foster brother brought before him. Even with the Asgard Force at his command, the idea of going down into those dungeons terrified him.

Tony had seemed surprised that most royal audiences did not, in fact, take place in the throne room. He had apparently believed that kings spent all day, every day sitting on thrones. (He also had some indecent ideas about what might be done on a throne. Not that the thought wasn't tantalizing, but *really*.)

Loki considered meeting with his foster brother in his study, once Odin's, but in the end, the throne room seemed the properly dramatic setting for this meeting.

Flanked by the two guards who had brought him, Thor glared at him, fists clenched. Even knowing how safe he now was, Loki could not suppress a quick flash of fear. All of his life, he had known how dangerous Thor could be when angry. But Thor was also afraid.

Thor did not kneel. Loki did not instruct the guards to force him to. It was not necessary to make his point quite that blatantly.

“Are you going to execute me now?” Thor growled. “Eliminate the only rival for the throne you always wanted?”

Loki had promised himself that he would not become emotional during this conversation, but of course he could not help it. He leaned forward and let loose a torrent of impassioned words.

“If I had *wanted* the throne for myself, do you know what I would have done, when Father was about to make you king? Nothing! I would have let him crown you! You'd have bungled it. You'd have dragged Asgard into war within a week! You'd have neglected the realm for your battles! You would have made Asgard hate you! And who would Asgard have demanded rule the next time Odin had to Sleep? Who would Asgard have turned to when Odin eventually died and a new king was required? There is only one likely choice! I had no need to take the throne from you - if I had let you, you would have *given* it to me!”

The two stared at each other for a long moment. They had known each other since babyhood, but now Loki wondered if they had ever understood each other at all. He sat back on the throne, composing himself.

“When your father condemned me,” Loki said, “I was offered no chance at redeeming myself, no hope of any mercy, ever, no matter what I might do. You did the same. I will be kinder to you than either of you have been to me. I will offer you a choice.

“You claim to have become fond of humans. As it turns out, they have interesting ideas about how to run prisons.”

Thor jutted his chin. “You have learned new torments from other races?”

This dire expectation surprised Loki. “You *do* think me a monster.”

“You’ve always hated me. You envied me for being your superior. Now you have your chance for revenge.”

“That is not why I envied you. And the opposite of love is not hate. I loved you for most of our lives. I hated you for a few years, but never stopped loving you at the same time, both passions twining inside me and twisting my guts. Not until-“

He stopped. Thor was lashing out, as he always had when angry or frightened or hurt. Loki was not going to tell him where the vulnerable spot was.

My loyalty has always been yours for the asking, up until the moment you told me I was no longer your brother and that you would condemn me to that cell forever.

“I used to hate you,” he said instead. “I used to love you. Now I feel only sorrow.”

Thor’s eyes darted around the room, calculating escape routes and opponents. He knew it was hopeless and returned his glare to Loki.

“Humans - most of them, anyhow - have come to believe in kindness to the criminals they must imprison. Solitude of the sort you and your father damned me to leads to madness as well as despair.” Loki looked down at Thor from the most powerful throne in the Nine. “You will remain stripped of your Asgardian powers, all except for long life. I am not quite ruthless enough to kill my own foster brother. Not anymore. You are as much Odin’s victim as I am.”

“You are not fit to say my father’s name!”

Loki chuckled wearily. “Thor. I am king of Asgard. I do what I want.”

Thor looked around again, probably expecting Odin to come in hurling bolts of magic any second. A universe where Odin was not feared was not something Thor had ever imagined.

Loki continued. “All the Asgardians in the prison have been stripped of their powers - though not of their longevity - to stop them harming others. From this day forth, you will all be allowed to mingle with each other. You will eat with your fellows, play at games with them in a walled-in courtyard so you may all see the sky, labor beside them.”

“Labor?”

Loki snorted at the horror in Thor’s voice. “I am not sending servants down to clean the dungeons or cook your food. Prisoners will be compelled to do that work themselves. And there will be lessons for those who want them. The humans have assured me that many of those in prison wish to acquire wisdom.”

“Wisdom is a comfort for the weak and cowardly.”

It was bluster, but Loki retorted as expected. “How nice to see that you have changed so little. If I may give you some advice - All of our lives we believed my destiny was to be your advisor, did we not? - I suggest you not allow pride to prevent you from one day changing your mind on that score.”

“This is another of your tricks.”

“Not a trick. A choice. The other recourse is, I will do what the father you deem so wise and just did to you once. I will send you to Midgard, as a human. Unlike your father, I first asked Midgard if they were willing to receive you. If you wish it, you have been offered citizenship and employment in their armed forces. A life. But on Midgard, you will be subject to their laws, and I will not intervene when - or should I be hopeful and say if? - you get yourself into trouble.”

“You expect me, the son of Odin, to take orders from humans?”

“You think yourself above them?”

If Thor remembered having said those words to Loki, he gave no sign. He bowed his head for a long moment, in thought, not deference. Then lifted it. “Send me to Earth, then.”

“SHIELD is expecting you. The shield-maiden Maria Hill is their new commander.”

“What happened to Fury?”

“He abused his power in numerous ways and is finally being held to account for it.” Loki looked to the guards. “Escort Thor to the Bifrost.”

“Wait.” Loki could see the movement of Thor’s throat as he swallowed, braced himself. Thor hated having to ask his disowned foster brother for anything, but spoke anyway. “What about Mjölnir?”

Loki should not have been surprised. The hammer had been to Thor like a part of himself. Of course he wanted it back. He could not be allowed to have it; it was a dangerous toy. Without its tremendous power, Thor might have grown into a better man. Not foolishly believing himself invincible. Better able to sympathize with those less mighty than himself, which was to say, virtually everyone in the Nine Realms.

Loki paused only for a second before saying, “If you can lift it, you may take it.”

He rose, descended the steps, and led Thor to the weapons vault. Even now Loki felt a hint of sorrow at the confidence with which Thor strode beside him. Together they went to Mjölfnir's niche. Thor smiled at it like it was an old friend before reaching for it.

Once, Loki would have enjoyed this moment far more than was decent.

During Thor's banishment, Loki had watched Thor straining to lift the hammer and had relished the sight, relished seeing his mighty brother brought low for once. He had still loved Thor then, but in the anguish of his fresh knowledge about himself, the worst aspects of his own nature had emerged. All the petty grudges over a hundred thousand tiny slights had risen up and made him savor the sight of Thor unable to lift his precious hammer.

He did not enjoy it this time.

Odin had lied. The hammer's magic had never had anything to do with worth. Odin had spelled it that only he and Thor could lift it - and Thor only if he was in good standing with Odin. Loki had used to try so hard to lift it, had striven to be worthy, and never could.

They should have seen through the lie years ago. Why had the hammer not dropped the moment Thor decided to go to Jotunheim? Or when he began to slaughter every Jotun who had heard him called a "little princess"? Not to say centuries before that, on one of Asgard's many wars of conquest.

Thor strained and strained, but the hammer did not move. It was controlled by the Asgard Force - by Asgard's king. Loki could, with an act of will, have made it liftable to Thor. Or to anyone in the universe. But he stood and watched.

In Thor's face Loki could see that the hammer had taught him what no words of Loki's ever could. At last Thor's handsome leonine face showed doubt. And pain.

"Go to the Bifrost, Thor," Loki said gently. "You will be sent to Midgard to commence your new life with SHIELD." And then, because he knew Thor would never think of it unless someone prompted him, he said, "Perhaps there you may find worth again."

As Loki had hoped, the words seemed to revive something in Thor, and Thor squared his shoulders before turning to go. Loki stood still, listening to Thor's footsteps ascending the stairs, the guards falling into step beside him, the heavy door closing.

Alone, Loki reached for Mjölfnir, and lifted it. This was one of those moments he had dreamed of, before: the day when the hammer found him worthy. As with so much, what he had gained was not the things he had dreamed of, but the understanding that they were so much dross. His father's approval - given to those who were his useful puppets. His brother's affection - granted in return for subservience. The hammer's sanction - given by he who controlled Asgard's magic. The respect of Asgard's warriors - held by those who gave them battles to fight.

Unbidden, the daydreams with which Loki had soothed his own heartaches came back to him with force. All of his life, he had dreamed of the time when he would make his father value him; in his mind's eye he had seen the smiles and praise Odin lavished upon Thor turned

upon him for a change. Not exclusively, Loki would have been happy to share their father's love with his brother, but just now and then, to bask in that approval....

Looking at the torchlight reflected on Mjölfnir's runes, Loki clenched his teeth. When Thanos had occasionally given him enough respite to rest and think, and in the year he had languished in Asgard's dungeon, Loki had faced that his not-father would never give him what he craved. But he still had a little hope regarding his not-brother. He had dreamed of Thor's regard too, all those years: Thor thanking him instead of ridiculing him for saving their lives with magic, Thor listening to his counsel, Thor warming him with that radiant sunny smile.

Even in the midst of the Chitauri battle, still Thor had reached out to him. Loki had loved him so much for that. If only he could have told Thor the truth, told him why he was not free to take his offer... everything might have been different. But Odin had time aplenty to poison Thor's mind against him, and Thor was as helpless as anyone against Odin's authority and magic.

Loki had not gotten what he wanted. He had merely won.

Somberly Loki replaced Mjölfnir in its alcove. He did hope that with Odin gone for good, Thor would become the man he should have been. But never again would he be able to lift this hammer. Loki would not allow it.

Stop it, he ordered himself. He would not weep over hopeless dreams like a child. He would not indulge himself in these gloomy thoughts, not when he now had so much to do. He could still justify his mother's faith in him, even if she was no longer here to see it. He had an unmatched opportunity to wipe the red from his ledger. He had the love of Asgard's people. He had Tony Stark.

Forcing his mind to the day's tasks, Loki left the vault and headed for his study. It was where most of his real work was done. Tomorrow he would deliver an address to all the realms revealing the threat of Thanos to them. The Avengers had already recorded statements of their own knowledge which supported, if not proved, that Loki spoke the truth. There was no one else who could vouch for him. One way or another he would convince everyone. The Nine Realms would be ready.

He wondered what Thor would think when he learned the truth of why Loki had invaded Midgard. If Thor would regret having been so obdurate, when he knew.

Midgard had not been pleased to find their former foe as a king. Not that they could do anything about it. Many humans devoted hours of their short lives to denouncing him. Others wrote and spoke of the reforms he was enacting in terms even Loki considered excessively admiring. Ceasing Asgard's attacks on Earth had helped to mollify the humans, as had the beginnings of technological exchange. When Tony had the apples ready, Loki thought Midgard might warm up to him considerably more. Once again, Loki wondered if Thor would approve of the gift. And then dismissed the thought from his mind.

In any case, Midgard soon had other things to occupy its attention. Tony's evidence against SHIELD's clandestine activities had shocked the entire planet. Fury and numerous others

were in prison, many more simply dismissed. Half of the humans on the World Council had vanished without a trace, Tony thought to remote corners of Midgard where wealthy fugitives could hide. Others were awaiting trials, trials which Tony said would be highly public and very discomfiting. Agent Hill was the highest ranking officer in the organization who was not implicated in any of the scandals. She was on record as protesting SHIELD's unethical activities on several occasions. With her at the helm, even Tony, cynic though he was, thought it might become a force for good.

The other realms had been more pleased with Loki's accession to the throne. They had long wished to be free of Asgard's yoke. The treaties had yet to be finalized, but most realms considered military alliance a small price indeed to pay for their independence.

Many of the ambassadors sent by other realms were high-ranking ladies of marriageable age, who made a point of displaying their erudition and their magical talents, if any. (All the realms knew that feminine beauty would have little sway over Loki of Asgard.) Loki supposed he and Sigyn had better announce their betrothal soon.

Speaking of feminine beauty, a very pretty girl was waiting outside his study. She curtsied when he drew near.

"Ingeborg Jerriksdottir! I am glad to see you. Come in." She followed him into the study obediently and he took a packet from a shelf. "I have a gift for your father, from Tony Stark. Coffee beans; they are used to brew a stimulating beverage on Midgard. Tony insists that these are the highest quality that can be found in his realm. He intended it as a favor in return for the Asgardian drinks your father served him."

She smiled, only a little shy. She had served Loki and his companions many times, but being a king rather than a prince did make a difference. "Thank you, your Majesty. And please thank Tony Stark for us."

"So have you returned to the city from your aunt's farm?" She nodded and he went on, "I hope the tavern's clientele is better behaved now."

She dimpled. "It is much quieter these days, your Majesty."

He chuckled and was about to say more when one of his clerks stepped in and bowed. "Yes, Agmundr?"

"A delegation from the Thing is here to see your Majesty."

"Ah." Loki sat down in the ornately carved chair behind the equally ornate desk. "Show them in. Then accompany Jerriksdottir to the treasurer and tell him to pay for the damages Thor and his friends inflicted on her father's tavern, ever since the last time they were paid." Which was probably before Thor's attempted coronation, if Loki did not miss his guess.

He also was able to make an informed guess, based on centuries of experience, that Thor would be entirely indifferent to this matter.

Relief showed on the girl's face as she curtsied and left the room. Loki enjoyed being able to simply give this order, rather than try to wheedle the treasurer and the king into seeing the justice of it.

The speakers of the Thing filed in. Loki had met with such delegations many, many times in his life. Often the best he could do was promise to try to persuade the king to grant their requests. Now he *was* the king.

There was one disadvantage to this. Now he would sometimes have to refuse them, and the refusal would be his and his alone. That would not be pleasant after so many centuries of being their advocate.

But he had their trust. He could see it in their warm smiles as they bowed and curtsied. They knew that their new king would listen to them, would put their welfare above his own glory. They had *chosen* him; he had claimed the throne only at their bidding.

Loki inclined his head to them and gestured to them to begin their petition. And thus embarked upon the rest of his life.

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow: epilogue!

Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

Epilogue.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to Grey Bard for helping me get Steve's voice right!

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

Three years later.

Steve Rogers watched the Atlantic as it passed beneath Tony's private jet. Under his breath, trying not to wake Tony, Steve practiced his speech for the hundredth time.

“Now that the world has agreed that depriving the convicted of golden apples would be cruel and unusual punishment, those lawbreakers are going to be with us for a very long time. We need to change the way we deal with them. As idealistic as it sounds, we need to help them to reform instead of just....”

He frowned, unfolded the the paper on which his speech was written, and quickly crossed out the next few words, scribbling new ones above them.

“Still working on it?” The words were said around a yawn. Steve turned to see Tony stretching and trying to unrumple his hair.

“I want it to be right. It's important.”

Tony smiled lazily, accepting the cup of espresso one of the attendants brought him. “Yeah, but you know it doesn't really matter what words you use. What matters is that it's Captain America saying them.”

Steve shrugged, looking out the window again. Tony was right, which still bothered Steve, even after a few years of getting used to it. He was just an art student from Brooklyn, a soldier. There was no reason anyone should listen to his opinion on things like this, or any of the Avengers, really. But as the humans who knew Loki best, the Avengers had all been turned into *de facto* ambassadors for Earth, so now they were actually addressing the UN and

other government bodies. Since people were listening, Steve figured they had a responsibility to say things worth hearing.

They were flying to London for that very reason. The world was still marveling at the gift of Asgard's apples, which Tony had unveiled a year ago. The apples weren't just extending lifespans, they were changing the way people looked at everything. With so many years to live, improving the world seemed more important than ever - and more possible.

He and Tony would make their speeches, and then - Steve touched the Starkphone in his pocket. A certain number was programmed into it, but he had memorized it, just in case.

"Listen, Tony, I wasn't sure if I should tell Loki this, but Thor was on that mission Clint and I went on last week."

Tony looked up from his coffee. "Yeah? How is the big lug?"

"Big. Luggish." Steve shrugged. "He was one of twenty guys SHIELD sent with us. I didn't recognize him at first. He shaved and got a crew cut."

Tony smirked at that.

"Anyway, he seemed fine. Not that we talked or anything."

Tony nodded. "Yeah, don't bring it up to Loki. I've given him a couple of general reports Jarvis hacked from SHIELD's database - the first few months, Thor got written up all the time, then after a while he settled down - but he never asks. If Loki wants to know he can use the throne's Seeing Everything feature."

"That's real? I kind of figured it was another myth."

"What, like golden apples? And rainbow bridges? Yeah, it's real. He - don't tell anyone this, okay? He let me see it once."

"He let you sit on the throne?"

"Kind of. I was on his lap." Tony grinned as Steve looked away. It was a little embarrassing, the way people talked about these things these days. "But yeah, you just mentally tell it what you want to see and it'll show you. I could only take it for about a minute. It's not constructed for a human brain - for the meat we're made of, not our minds." Tony frowned a little, probably pondering how he could make one for himself, if Steve knew him at all. "I kind of freaked out for a couple minutes there. Scared Loki to death. That's why I only sat there once."

Steve asked another question before Tony could start making innuendos about what else he and Loki had gotten up to on that throne. He wasn't sure whether or not to believe Tony, but he didn't need to hear about it either way. "So how's fatherhood working out for him? You haven't told me about your last visit."

"Sorry, been working on my teleporter." Tony was going to duplicate with engineering everything Asgard had done with magic or die trying. "He's loving it. Sigyn and I finally

convinced him that he needed more than one kid. Well, I don't think it's really us who convinced him. I think he's having so much fun spoiling Váli that he wants more princesses to spoil."

"What, no princes?"

"Oh, right. He's standing firm on his daughters-only position. He hopes girls won't be as eager to go to other planets and kill things. Not that it's foolproof. Exhibit A: Sif. But we dudes are more prone to that particular defect."

The plane began its descent. Steve looked at his paper again, trying to memorize the newest wording, but gave up by the time they had landed. Tony was right: if Captain America and Iron Man said the criminal justice system needed reform, the world would believe that it needed reform. What kind of reforms would take more discussion and information than either of them could pack into one speech. Their job was just to get it started.

Tony seemed quietly smug about something as the plane came to a stop and the stairs were brought. It made Steve alert, just because quiet smugness from Tony, as opposed to loud smugness, usually meant he was more up to something than usual. Figured that of all the people in the Nine Realms, Tony was the one the god of mischief fell in love with.

Tony stepped back to let Steve disembark first. "Age before beauty, Cap."

Steve ignored this. The age jokes weren't going to stop until... well, until the world was full of young, healthy people who were over a hundred years old, come to think of it. He stepped out and let his gaze fall on the people waiting for them.

A couple of men in suits, dignitaries Steve had seen at these things before. Diplomatic attachés or something. And a woman, also in a crisply pressed suit, her auburn hair carefully curled and coiffed, her eyes wide and shining.

Steve found that he had stopped halfway down the stairs. His brain was telling him that no, it couldn't be, but he knew that it was.

"Peggy," he whispered a minute later, down on the ground, clutching both her hands. Seventy years in the ice and Norse gods and magic apples, and Peggy was here. Exactly the way he remembered her.

She blinked away tears, smiling up at him. "I told you not to be late."

"Does this mean I won't get that dance?"

Her eyes were just the way he remembered them, beautiful and steady and unafraid. "I'll think about it." She gave a little laugh, squeezing his hands. "All right, I've thought about it. You will."

Dimly Steve heard Tony saying, "I think our friends will be busy for a while. Show me where in this country I can get a drink."

Tony's voice sounded insufferably smug. Under the circumstances, Steve would excuse him.

Just this once.

Chapter End Notes

In the myths, Váli is Loki's son, not daughter, but Marvel's changed everything from the myths it wanted to, no reason I can't.

I planned a couple of highly dramatic scenes for this fic that turned out not to fit. I'll be posting them as "deleted scenes" in a few days, after I clean them up a bit. There's at least two.

I wrote this story to deal with how angry TDW made me. I really hate what it did to Asgard and most of the characters, particularly Thor. It would always have been hypocritical for an aggressive warrior realm like Asgard to condemn Loki's actions, except perhaps as acts of war unauthorized by the king. But Odin's excessively cruel sentence, for acts which he, Thor and Bor have canonically duplicated, made this moral double standard all too glaring.

They wanted TDW to be "dark and edgy". Their idea of how to do this was to take all the good guys in Asgard, who had seemed like mostly decent people with a couple of serious personality flaws that made them three-dimensional characters, and magnify their flaws to the Nth power, making them all complete and utter scumbags. Loki didn't get a chance to do anything bad even if he'd wanted to. The end result was that the sympathetic villain from the previous two movies seems like an incredibly sweet guy in comparison to these dark, edgy "heroes".

I didn't like this. Even though Loki was my favorite from the start, I didn't want to have to hate everybody else, but that's what TDW made me do.

I wrote this to purge that feeling. I hoped that channeling my anger into a fic would make it possible for me to get over it and love Thor again. Because I loved Thor so much. It hurt to have to hate him. It took us a while, but some of my tumblr friends who were similarly disturbed by the horrid behavior of the "good guys" in TDW did manage to come up with interpretations that don't condemn Thor so strongly, like [this one](#) and [this one](#).

I've gotten a lot of flames on tumblr and on a couple of my other fics for my reaction to TDW. So I was really apprehensive when I started posting this. But I have not gotten even ONE flame or negative comment on this story! And I greatly appreciate that.

And thank you all for the many flattering and insightful comments, and for staying with this story to the end! *blows kisses* I love you all!

Deleted Scene #1: The Day After Tony and Loki Get Together

Chapter Summary

This was going to be set the day after Tony and Loki's first time.

Chapter Notes

The point of this scene was to be our heroes kind of in shock at how emotionally affected they both were. Also, now Tony has seen Asgard, and its magic intimidated him. He's starting to figure out that Earth doesn't have much chance of fighting this realm off.

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

They both overslept. Jarvis fended off attempts to wake them, which they did on their own at noon. When they finally staggered out in search of food, Tony was glad of the reprieve.

“Jarvis, order us a bunch of cheeseburgers.”

“For breakfast, sir?”

“Look at the clock, Jarvis, it’s lunchtime. And I’m famished. Certain Norse gods who shall remain nameless wore me out.” He smiled at Loki, who had been watching Tony’s face carefully even as he mixed his vitamin drink. Loki smiled back, the tension in his shoulders relaxing fractionally.

“Dr. Banner and Dr. Foster are wondering if the two of you intend to join them in Arizona today.”

“After cheeseburgers. If that’s okay with you, O God Of Mind-Blowing Sex?”

Loki nodded, trying and failing to smother a smirk.

“Good.” Tony grabbed the nearest Starkpad - he kept them all over the Tower in case he got an idea and needed to get to work on it right away - and started typing. It wasn’t something he did much these days, too low-tech for him, but he needed to find out a few things without Loki hearing.

Jarvis, the team knows Loki and I were together last night, right?

They made that deduction, sir.

How much did they freak out?

They appeared resigned. Your reputation does precede you, sir.

Good. I was worried I was going to have to deal with an intervention. See, being renowned as an international playboy has its perks: nobody worries when you start banging supervillains.

That may be a mixed blessing, sir. The disapprobation of your comrades may have induced you to consider the wisdom of your new liaison more carefully.

Tony rubbed his eyes and stole a glance at his “new liaison”. Loki was following his vitamin drink with oversweetened coffee, a substance he’d taken to swiftly, while gazing out over the Manhattan skyline. He gazed out of windows a lot, Tony’d noticed. Couldn’t stand being cooped up without them.

Tony had been imprisoned. He understood. Way too well. But at least he hadn’t expected it to last for thousands of years.

Just what are you getting at, J?

During your activities last night, Mr. Stark, your facial and vocal cues revealed a degree of emotional attachment to Mr. Friggasson prematurely forming, which

Tony switched the Starkpad off. So much for distraction.

They decided to take the cheeseburgers to eat on the commute. This meant they didn’t have to talk much, and then they were in the lab, back at work on anti-Asgardian weapons. The only words they said had to do with the work.

Which was good, because Tony figured they both had a lot to process. Going back home had to have affected Loki, just like seeing the place and finding out another side to the wayward prince of Asgard had affected Tony.

And the sex had affected both of them. More than he would have expected.

“I need to work some stuff out on my computer,” Tony said eventually. Loki and Jane just nodded, intent on their work; Bruce was on the other side of the room, working on something else.

Tony chose a spot where the assorted equipment and materials gave him a modicum of privacy and went to work with his Starkpad. Usually he liked to speak out loud to Jarvis and

have the visuals floating in the air around him, but he didn't want anyone guessing at his current thoughts by looking at them, so he was stuck with the tiny little screen.

No discussion of emotional attachment just now, J, he typed. We need to update our assessment of the Asgardian threat. Just between us.

Whatever you say, sir.

I've heard that before. You sure we've got everything SHIELD knows about Asgard?

Positive, sir.

Okay then. Tony plugged in everything he could about what he had seen in Asgard last night: the floating buildings, the force fields used as birdcages, the war with Muspelheim that had apparently been won more swiftly than Loki had expected.

Tony really didn't like what this was adding up to.

On the up side, it was starting to look like Earth's unlikely ally was more trustworthy than they'd thought. Tony mulled that over for a while, staring at the screen without seeing it.

He wanted to believe that Loki could be trusted, actually had a conscience despite the things he'd done. It would justify Tony supporting the whole Trickster Initiative, and the way he'd been pressuring all the others to treat Loki with basic kindness. Not to mention for sleeping with him. But that was the problem: he wanted it too much. He couldn't trust his own judgment.

It would be nice if he could get someone else's opinion, but Pepper and Rhodey would be too worried about him, and too exasperated with him for thinking with his dick when the fate of the planet was at stake, to be any more objective than he was. And the other Avengers all put too much weight on the Chitauri thing. They'd been there, they'd watched the Chitauri tear up New York and kill thousands, they'd put their own lives on the line combating it. They weren't wrong, just... Loki had a thousand years of history before that.

Tony called up the files Jarvis had hacked from SHIELD about Asgardian history. Everything they had learned from Jane, Loki, and Thor himself, plus what Norse myths could be verified historically.

The picture it painted wasn't a pretty one.

When they returned to the Tower that night, Tony decided against facing whatever weird looks his fellow Avengers directed his way. "Know what?" he said to Loki while they were still on the balcony. "It's an Earth custom to buy someone dinner before you sleep with them. It's a little late, but let's go out somewhere. Put on a suit."

Loki looked as if he were putting a lot of effort into keeping his expression grave. "Does that mean I also am obliged to buy dinner for you?"

"I would've thought an Asgardian would kill it with his bare hands."

“Well, yes, that is our custom. If you like-“

“I was joking and I hope you are too, but you’re probably not. Never mind, just get dressed. Jarvis, grab us a reservation. Someplace fancy, I have a hot date to impress.”

Loki rolled his eyes but did not argue further. The Avengers who happened to be around gave them jaundiced looks when they emerged from their respective rooms all dolled up, but didn’t bug them.

If they had any idea what he was actually thinking - and not the lust part of that, either - they wouldn’t be so sanguine.

“Loki, you’d better magic yourself if you don’t want to cause a riot,” Bruce said mildly.

“I hadn’t forgotten,” Loki said, and as he spoke his coloring changed; his hair was now auburn and his skin much rosier. The suit was navy blue and the combination overall worked. Tony approved.

Chapter End Notes

I stopped here because I realized the story was dragging, and if I'd put in their dinner date it would have dragged even more. I don't think it's a bad scene, it could just be done better. Which I hope I achieved, where I put Tony's thoughts on his new attachment and on Asgard in much tighter terms.

Note: there'll be three deleted scenes in all. The other two are action scenes.

Deleted Scene #2: SHIELD turns on Loki

Chapter Summary

After Asgard's last attack (in Chapter 26), SHIELD decides it doesn't need Loki anymore.

Chapter Notes

This was going to go after Chapter 26. I changed tense to point up that this is from a different character's POV, Coulson's.

Coulson is a great character, but we seem to forget that he's got red in his ledger too. In *Thor*, when SHIELD arrested Thor while he was mortal, Coulson threatened him with torture. In *Iron Man 2*, he was party to the illegal house arrest of Tony Stark.

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

Coulson and Fury don't tell Maria Hill about their plans. She's a good agent but has always had too many scruples for this job. Only Fury, Coulson and the Council know about it.

They realize how right they were to keep it secret when they see how stoked the agents are over Earth's first victory against Asgard. Loki milked it for all it was worth during the impromptu party afterwards, glad-handing all over the place, soaking up everyone's misguided gratitude. Every agent there was willing to let bygones be bygones over the Chitauri. Which was why none of the agents who had ever personally combatted Thor were in on today's operation.

It might have been better to have kept Loki's presence on Earth secret from Asgard. Let the Aesir wonder how humans had created magically enhanced uru weapons. But SHIELD's contingency plan relied on Asgard knowing where its prodigal son was.

On the day chosen - two days after their victory over Thor - Dr. Banner is asked to stay in New York to consult on another attempt at reverse engineering the supersoldier serum. That very hope had been the inspiration of his own gamma ray research which had caused his condition, and he never ceased to hope it might also yield a cure for him, so he stays.

Fury, Coulson, and eight carefully chosen men fly to Arizona once they know Loki and Tony Stark are there and working. Coulson hopes they won't have to harm Dr. Foster. But getting her *and* Banner out of the way would have been suspicious.

The eight of them enter the laboratory, covering every exit, ready with the very anti-Asgardian guns Loki made for them. The scientists and the sorcerer look up from their work and see them. Only the sorcerer does not look surprised.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” As usual, being angry makes Jane forget that she is one tiny woman facing numerous heavily armed men. Coulson has always liked that fiery spirit of hers. Even if it was inconvenient.

Loki smiles, playing the urbane villain. “What did you expect, Dr. Foster? Did Thor never tell you that when he was in SHIELD custody when he was mortal, the Son of Coul threatened him with torture?”

Foster looks at Coulson, outraged as if it were the world’s first lie. “What?!”

Coulson has years of training and experience in how to find a target’s vulnerable spots, mental and physical. In this case, none of that is necessary. Loki’s wounds are known to all the Nine Realms.

“I wouldn’t worry too much on Thor’s account, Dr. Foster,” Coulson says coolly. “He wasn’t much perturbed when Director Fury asked him to torture his own little brother.”

The jibe hits home: Loki visibly flinches. No matter what he pretends, the psycho’s still sentimental. No matter how many things he and his foster brother did to each other, he still hopes that affection remained between them.

Stark doesn’t take it well. Of course he doesn’t. “Since when do we do that kind of thing? I knew SHIELD was dirty, but this is something else.”

“In case you don’t recall, he was invading our planet,” Fury reminds him.

“That kind of tactic doesn’t *work!*” Foster’s still outraged. And wrong. She knows everything about astrophysics and nothing about people. Nothing about the ugly reality of how people work.

“It worked on him once before,” Fury says. “Stark, you’ve seen the footage of him when he first got here. It was obvious on sight that he’d been tortured. He had the tremors, the sweats, the panicked expression. If he’ll break under torture once, he’ll do it again.”

Stark closes his eyes for a second. He’s had a taste of torture, and unfortunately for him, has developed empathy. A terrible liability, that. “You knew this all along? And you didn’t mention this to us?”

“What difference would it have made?” Fury demands.

“All the difference in the world.” Stark lifts his chin. You can tell he spent his childhood reading Captain America comics.

So had Coulson. But Coulson had grown up.

Loki’s soft laughter breaks the grandeur of Stark’s moment.

Stark whirls to him. “*What?*”

“You! This confirms everything I have ever heard of humans. You would side with *me* against your own world?”

Stark tries to think. “You’re our ally,” he says, testing. Foster’s gaze flits between the two of them.

“Just what do you imagine you are to me, Stark?” Loki smirks, his eyes missing nothing of the pain on Stark’s face. “What did you expect? That I would whisk you off to Asgard? Take you on a tour of Alfheim and the other realms? That I, a prince of two realms, would parade a *human* before my fellow sorcerers and my kinsmen as my lover?” The monster laughs at Stark’s wounded expression. This is what someone like him lives for. “Did you think I would tell you my secrets? Share my plans with you?”

The hurt is visible in Stark’s eyes. He’s starting to realize the mistake he’s made. “So what *was* I to you, then?”

“An instrument. A useful means to an end. And your usefulness is over, Stark. But by all means, stand here and stop a few of those bullets for me.”

Stark slowly steps away from Loki. Steps outside the ring of SHIELD agents surrounding Loki, Foster following him. Stands there looking at Loki reproachfully, as if he’s surprised that *Loki* betrayed him.

“Fire at will,” Fury says.

They do.

Loki doesn’t even bother to raise a forcefield. The bullets just lose velocity a couple of feet from him, in a way Coulson is pretty sure defies the laws of physics. And then the bullets fall to the ground, like they’d just been dropped, not fired.

The only sound is Loki’s soft laughter. Coulson and Fury exchange looks as they start to realize they have made a very large mistake.

“You humans still insist upon playing with forces far beyond your understanding. You played with the Tesseract until I used it to invade your world. Now you ask me to make magical weapons for you and imagine I would not ensure my own safety from them?” He reaches out and one of the bullets levitates into his hand. “As if I would give anyone weapons they might use against *me*.”

“Stark, did you know about this?” Fury growls.

“I had no idea,” Stark says. He sounds like he means it. He sounds horrified. Probably it’s just dawning on him that even by his standards, this was an ill-advised affair.

Maybe this will finally teach Stark to be careful where he puts his dick.

Loki smirks at Stark. “If it’s any consolation, Stark, you’re a good lover - for a human.”

He does something with his hands, and the arc reactor Stark was making for the new helicarrier appears. The tricky bastard kept it. The humans all back away swiftly as he activates it, and a moment and a flash of light later he's gone.

"Secure the building!" Fury orders, and the agents rush to do so.

Stark's staring at the spot where Loki was like he's just had his guts torn out.

"Stark. Can you find him again? Like you did before with the aquatic nano thing?"

Stark comes back to himself. "Yeah. If he's on Earth, then yeah." He goes to one of his computers in a daze and orders, "Jarvis? You heard the man. One aquatic nano thing coming up."

Jarvis's voice replies, "Already begun, sir. You are aware the search may take several hours."

"I know." He looks at Coulson and Fury with an expression similar to the one he had when he got back from Afghanistan. Coulson wants to swat the man upside the head; it's just a breakup from a tryst that had been going on for a couple of weeks. "I'm going home. Dr. Foster, if you'd care to accompany me, you're quite welcome."

She hesitates only for a moment. "Sure. I don't think I'm going to get any more work done today."

When they're out of the room, Coulson turns to Fury. "Sir? Did we have a Plan B?"

Fury glares at the spot where Loki disappeared. "That *was* our Plan B." He turns on his heel and Coulson follows him out of the building. "If Stark finds him, don't make a move, just monitor him. Make sure he feels safe."

"Until when?"

"If we can't fight off Asgard, telling Big Brother where Loki is will be Plan C."

Chapter End Notes

Since in this chapter I emphasized Coulson's moral greyness, I tried to come up with a bit of an explanation as to why a Captain America fanboy could be party to things like torture and kidnapping. I decided that he thinks that these are the harsh necessities of defending the peace - kind of like what Odin seems to think. If I had kept this chapter in, in the Epilogue I would have mentioned that Steve visits Coulson in prison often, hoping to encourage him to face that he's done wrong and adopt a better moral code. And I figured that Coulson would, in fact, do so in time, because he doesn't seem to be a bad guy, but someone who believes he has to do bad things in a good cause.

Notice the things Loki says to Tony here: “What did you expect? That I would whisk you off to Asgard? Take you on a tour of Alfheim and the other realms? That I, a prince of two realms, would parade a human before my fellow sorcerers and my kinsmen as my lover? Did you think I would tell you my secrets? Share my plans with you?” The spectators think this is Loki rejecting Tony. However, at this point, Loki has in fact done all of these things. A minute later Loki tells Tony that he was his "instrument", just a few days after Tony told Loki that Loki was not an "instrument" to him. Tony understands that Loki is telling him to pretend to turn on him too, for Tony's own protection. He also gets the implication that Loki can handle the situation. Loki wants Tony out of the line of fire.

I really wanted to keep this scene, but I couldn't make it make sense. SHIELD has to know that Loki's still useful to them at this point, and that pissing him off is risky if they fail to take him down. Also, there wasn't any good reason for Loki to still be hanging around on Earth, now that things are happening on Asgard and Jotunheim. If I were writing a screenplay for an adventure movie, I'd have kept it in and sacrificed a little bit of sense-making, as the writers of Loki's movies frequently do. For a written work with a highly intelligent readership - the comments I've gotten on this fic are incredibly perceptive - that's not good enough.

There'll be one more deleted scene, but it's only half written; I'll have to finish writing it for it to make any sense.

Deleted Scene #3: Thor takes Loki back to Asgard

Chapter Summary

This would have taken place right before Loki went to Jotunheim to deal with Odin.

Chapter Notes

This was going to occur after the battle on Jotunheim. Thor would figure out that Loki was responsible for the Jotnar getting their Casket back, and the most recent attack on Midgard showed Thor that Loki is on Earth. Tony warns Loki, and Loki instructs him to pretend to hand Loki over.

There's a few continuity details in this chapter I hadn't worked out yet, but since I didn't use it I never had to.

I wanted to keep this scene in. Thor really doesn't have enough screen time in this fic. But not only did TDW turn Thor into a villain, it turned him into a boring, two-dimensional villain. All he does is kill or assault people. He's just not interesting enough to write about anymore.

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

Loki was lounging on his bed reading when Tony burst into the room without knocking. "Loki! Thank God. Babe, we've got to get out of here." Loki only looked at him, not moving. "Loki... Thor's here. He smashed up SHIELD headquarters, demanding that they hand you over. They're going to do it. I'm sorry."

Loki still did not move. "Did Thor say what he intends to do with me?"

"He was vowing to put you back in that cell," Tony answered reluctantly.

Loki nodded and finally stood up. But instead of moving to leave, he started unbuttoning his shirt. "Take off your clothes," he said. "We don't have much time."

"What?" Tony said.

When they were done, Loki let himself drift off to sleep, confident that Tony would take care of things. Sure enough, Loki was awakened by a familiar, very strong hand yanking him out of the bed.

“Thor!” Loki blinked at his foster brother’s enraged face. He didn’t even have to fake being frightened.

Thor snarled at him. “Dress.”

Holding Thor’s gaze, Loki conjured clothing onto himself.

“What are you going to do with me?” Loki forced himself to ask.

“What I promised. Put you back in your cell. Mother wouldn’t want me to give you the fate you deserve.” Thor dragged him out of the bed. Tony was standing by the door, looking sick. He’d had a few drinks, Loki could tell even without getting close enough to smell the whiskey on him.

Loki let his eyes widen. “Tony? You - you said-“

Thor sneered. “Said what? That he *loved* you? Mortals are fickle by nature.”

Hm. Perhaps Thor’s feelings for the mortal Jane had been more serious than Loki had known. Or perhaps Thor was merely angry at a rare rejection.

Thor was clamping shackles onto Loki’s wrists, the ones Loki had worn for his sentencing. If he tried to do any magic, blades would emerge and slice off his hands.

“Mother would be *so* proud of you now.” Loki put as much malice as he could into his tone. As expected, the reply was Thor’s fist connecting with his jaw. Not a very hard punch, as Thor’s blows went.

“Hey, that’s enough!” Tony sounded completely appalled, even after everything he had seen Thor do. “He’s already in chains, you don’t have to-“

Thor released Loki and summoned Mjölfnir, advancing on Tony. Who of course didn’t have the sense to run, or grovel. Dammit. Loki should have realized Tony wouldn’t have the stomach for this moment.

He could think of only one way to distract Thor from attacking Tony. Loki lunged past Thor, a useless attempt to reach the door. It worked: Thor forgot about Tony in favor of seizing Loki by the shoulder, slamming him against the nearest wall, and planting his fist in Loki’s stomach, twice.

Loki stayed leaned over for as long as he was allowed, gasping for breath and hoping Tony wouldn’t interfere again. He should have warned Tony that Thor would do this. It wasn’t as if Loki wasn’t used to it.

Tony still looked sick when Thor hauled Loki upright and marched him out to the balcony. Loki stumbled keeping up. He got a glimpse of Tony’s stricken face before the Bifrost took them away.

Then they were in the Observatory, guards waiting to accompany them. Loki would have preferred to be stoic, but his game required that he make hopeless appeals.

“Thor, I can still be of use to you.” Thor ignored him, gripping Loki by his hair and striding along, forcing Loki to walk with his spine twisted. Twenty guards (Loki felt flattered by their number) fell into step around them. “Keep me shackled! Keep me on the leash your father had made for me! Just do not put me back in that cell! I’m no use to you there.”

Thor set his mouth in a grim line. Loki kept up with his desperate bargaining as they reached the palace and he was dragged through its corridors. “Thor, please, at least let me have a window. Put me in the tower instead of the dungeon. Let me see the sky! You can’t know what it’s like, underground, never seeing it. Please!”

Thor did not answer as he dragged Loki down the stairs. Loki had only gone down them once, and up them once, but they were all too familiar anyway.

They stopped in front of Loki’s old cell. The broken fragments of the furniture Frigga had smuggled to him still littered the floor. Grim-faced, Thor shoved him inside.

“Thor, we were brothers for a thousand years. You loved me once. Have *some* mercy!”

“I have. You live.” Thor activated the force field that would keep him in.

“Brother, please.”

Thor looked at him. “Do you recall the last time you said those words to me?”

Of course, Thor could not at this moment recall the hundreds of times that Loki had saved Thor’s life or swallowed Thor’s insults. All he recalled was when after a thousand years of loyalty, Loki had at last been driven to turn against him.

Loki went very still. “Yes.” He said it quietly. “That time, the trick was that you should not have had mercy upon me, and you did. This time, the trick is that you *should*. And I suppose you won’t.”

Thor snorted, turned on his heel, and stalked down the corridor.

Even after everything that had passed between them, the sight of Thor turning his back twisted inside Loki.

“*Thor!*” Loki shouted after him. When there was no reaction, he screamed. “*BROTHER!*”

Thor did not turn around. He climbed the stairs and was out of sight.

Loki sank to the familiar floor. There was no reason not to spend the next half hour having a good cry.

Then he made himself rest. He would need his strength for what came next.

When he judged enough time had passed, Loki stood up and said a word. The shackles opened and fell. Odin always had underestimated him. A moment of concentration dissipated the force field.

“You could’ve escaped any time?” Tony had asked earlier that day, incredulous.

“Yes.”

“Then why the hell didn’t you?”

“I needed time to heal. To rest. And then... once out of my cell, where would I go? Even if I escaped the palace, there was nowhere in the Nine Realms where Asgard would not pursue me.”

He had not added that he had been waiting to see if Odin would relent. If Thor would visit him, or pass a message to him through their mother.

Chapter End Notes

After this, Loki would have waited until night, when Thor would be asleep or drunk and thus definitely not on Hlidskjalf watching things, and escaped from his cell. It really bothers me that in the movie, Loki wasn’t able to escape on his own. It seems to me to really diminish him. So with this chapter I was going to establish that he could have gotten out of his cell anytime; the problem was what to do once he was out of it, with Heimdall alive and Odin on Hlidskjalf, and Thor probably on hand to hammer him. With two of those out of the equation, he would leave his cell and then go to Jotunheim to deal with Odin there.

I thought of this scene early in the planning. I thought perhaps that Loki might need to let Thor arrest him in order to get back to Asgard. By the time I got to this stage of the story, Loki had other ways, and again, there was no reason for him to still be hanging around Earth.

When I wrote the first few chapters of this fic, the movie wasn’t out and I didn’t know about the scene where the brothers are arguing and Thor physically assaults Loki while Loki is manacled. And Loki doesn’t look a bit surprised, and remarks that their mother wouldn’t be shocked, so evidently this kind of thing happened a lot. Apparently they were afraid they hadn’t made it absolutely clear that Thor is a bullying jerk. Thor then backs off, saying, “Mother wouldn’t want us to fight.” Yes, because when you attack someone who’s tied up and unable to hit back, that’s called “fighting”. It reminded me of the scene in the movie *Sleeping With the Enemy* where the abusive husband beats up his wife, and then in the next scene tells her, “I’m sorry we quarreled.”

Our hero, guys.

Anyway, I would have included that incident in the second chapter if I’d known about it then, but I didn’t, so I put it in here.

This is the last deleted scene. Thanks, guys!

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