

Mischief and Tasers

by
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Part One: every breath you take

Loki has been shadowing Erik Selvig for days when he notices Darcy. Seemingly extraneous and hardly worth his time, he finds something surprisingly intriguing about her - the way she forms her words, the mixture of fear and bravado in her threats, and the untapped potential of a woman undefined.

An idea strikes him about Darcy, which gives him thoughts of possible schemes. Darcy, so close to Erik and Jane, and Jane, so close to his brother Thor, and wishing for him beyond the stars. Erik has more authority, more clout with this Nick Fury, but perhaps it's Darcy that people will never suspect.

A smile tightens at his lips. He watches her beyond unsuspecting window panes and docile mirrors. He's the ghost she senses in her kitchen but tells herself she's crazy - no one else is here.

Darcy turns around, a hitch of fear caught in her throat. She sees nothing. Her shoulders relax, and Loki can almost touch them, drawing lines over the soft fragile flesh like a teasing lover.

Darcy spins around again. She's angry; Loki likes it. She resumes her task, cutting an apple, and he watches her hands tremble. The lights flicker, and he sighs on the shell of her ear.

She tenses, but her hands ignore her fear. "Ouch!" she cries; the knife grazes her finger. She sucks on the blood, and Loki can smell the sweet rust.

"I swear to you, ghost or god," she mumbles, "I'm not above tasing you, whoever you are." She releases the knife and eats her apple, glaring at the air before she departs.

Her reaction delights him, and Loki is smiling with anticipation - hope for Darcy's potential. He slips through the shadows again, following Darcy's trail.

Oh, yes, this Darcy was going to be fun.

Part Two: Specters and Dreams

The idea that six credits for Jane's internship may not be worth the trouble does not cross her mind anymore. She's too involved in this research now, and truthfully, Darcy is positive she'll never want to

get out. She's also sure that S.H.I.E.L.D probably wouldn't let her leave anyway, not without consequences.

As usual, Jane sends Darcy on boring errands, like exchanging data with S.H.I.E.L.D or going to the library to retrieve more books; which is where she is now, idly roaming the stacks, and peering through obscure books on Norse mythology.

Despite Thor's disappearance, the research fuels Jane to work harder, search farther, and ultimately discover that wormhole which led Thor and the warriors to Earth in the first place.

It was cool when the other Asgardian warriors showed up for Thor. Darcy recalls thinking, *Whoa, hanging out with Gods is pretty freaking awesome after all.*

Also, she shamefully admits that she wants to see that warrior again who looks like Robin Hood. While he was shielding her and keeping her safe, it may have been a passing thought that if she could at least get laid before she died from a big, scary indestructible robot, he would be her go-to-guy.

And dating a God? Well, Darcy could only dream of it, and Jane is super lucky.

Unexpectedly, Darcy is snapped from her thoughts, yelping as she dodges a falling book from the shelf, almost taking off her head. She sighs relieved, knowing the ginormous book would have seriously hurt her.

Looking down at the open book, she gasps as her eyes skim over the chapter's title: *Loki, God of Mischief*. And almost by instinct, Darcy immediately wants her taser. Crazy or not, it's too strange to be coincidental.

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When Loki enters Darcy's bedroom that night, he sees the large book of Norse Mythology on her nightstand, bookmarked twice, once in the beginning and the other in the section about him.

He smirks. "Good girl," he whispers, and Darcy shifts in her sleep, lying on her side. She murmurs something called "pop-tarts" and Loki creeps around her bed, first gazing upon her face before he reclines at her side, like a specter pressing a light indentation on her sheets. Darcy doesn't even notice his weight - not that she will. Though, if she wakes up now, she may have quite a fright, only noticing the outline of his shadow for a second before her night vision becomes clear.

Loki studies the peaceful expression on her face. He thinks how boring this could be, but it really isn't, not when his thoughts spiral before him, first starting with his brother, then Jane, and then with Darcy. He's visited Jane like this, but she isn't nearly as interesting. Loki doesn't have the natural contempt for Darcy as he does Jane.

Jane helped his brother when he should have been shamed. Jane *changed* his brother, from a spoiled brat to a man ready to die for innocent lives, to a god who instantly gains his father's favor back after his last mortal breath.

Loki's hand hovers over Darcy's head, and her brow furrows and she shifts uncomfortably in her sleep. He reaches inside and tries to see her dreams. How simple mortals minds are! This girl dreams of food, music and... He stops. Darcy cries out in pain when he reaches too far, seeing his own brother in her mind. Then...Fandral?

Amusing, he thinks, feeling the stretch of a smile. Learning more about this mortal would not be boring at all.

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Like most dreams, Darcy's starts out somewhere in the middle. She knows she's dreaming. Nothing in her life could ever be this awesome.

A local band is playing in the background. She knows this club like she knows her own room. It's a coffee house on the campus of her school, and she hasn't been back there since she started her internship with Jane Foster. She misses this place, the light sounds of a soothing male voice filtering through the lounge, the snobby conversation behind her about how Florence and the Machine sold out, and even better, the cold cheap beer in her hand.

Usually, she's the third wheel with a friend and her date, but tonight, she's on a date herself. She's aware of his presence on the other side of their table. He's telling her how beautiful she is, and once in awhile, he'll kiss her hand like a weirdo - like Thor. His hands are smaller, though, with long slender fingers. She likes them; they fit well within hers.

She doesn't see his face. It's very blurry, and the golden lamps in the lounge create a fuzzy halo around his head. Darcy knows whom she wants her date to be, but even if she tries to imagine him, the picture doesn't come out as clear.

Ah, the guy who looks like Robin Hood. Fandral is what Thor called him. Super cute mustache, and a great butt too.

Darcy squints, but a splitting headache overcomes her and she screams with pain. "Ow," she says, and her date squeezes her hand concerned.

Her eyes widen when she finally sees his face - or so she thinks. He's not who she's expecting at all. His hair is too dark, and his eyes are so green that they almost frighten her.

Part Three: Haunted

Watching Erik Selvig conduct experiments on the cube of unlimited power could get positively boring. Of course, the cube itself was fascinating, and Loki loved being in its presence, feeling the overwhelming energy of it tickle his senses, almost like it was sentient and calling out to him.

However, he couldn't just watch this mortal bumble around all day trying to figure it. Loki helped him at times, putting advanced suggestions in his head – subtle (and not too painful, for the man would only get a headache and then proceed to throw a shot of whiskey in his coffee to start back again) so that Erik's test readouts would be evenly paced.

Loki dared not make him out to be a genius after all, and even Loki didn't know about the entirety of the cube itself. The origin of it was what intrigued him the most.

Still, the reality was that Selvig was no closer to finding out the whole truth of the cube today as he was tomorrow or even the next day.

Loki hated to be bored, so he decided to split himself and share his attention between two doppelgangers: one that would shadow Erik Selvig, and the other that would shadow Nick Fury and would try to find out anything of interest he could use. Fury's main interest, other than the cube of course, was his brother, and Loki soured at the sheer hope and anticipation S.H.I.E.L.D had in Thor's return – it almost made him sick.

“Find out everything you can and report back to me,” he told his doppelgangers, and they nodded.

Turning around, Loki felt the invulnerable tether to his doppelgangers before he set out to visit Darcy Lewis once again.

At least with her, Loki knew he wouldn't be so bored.

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Darcy was beginning to think she was going crazy. Was she really being haunted by a ghost? Of course, the signs were all there. Her things were being moved around in her room, and she could feel a heavy presence lingering in her bedroom before she went to sleep.

It didn't help that when she took her glasses off, she could see monsters in those shadows, amorphous shapes that would move and if she squinted, warping into humanoid form and watching her in shroud, waiting for her to close her eyes so it could strike.

Yep, she was definitely going crazy. So crazy she slept with her taser now, and her arms would tremble as she held it like a teddy bear, her one true safety net. (She knew the downside of this was that she was clutching an active weapon, and she only hoped she didn't set the thing off and tase herself in her sleep. Darcy didn't want to even think about the karmic meaning in that.)

She couldn't go to the others about her fears. They'd just confirm her as a nutcase. Not something she

wanted on Foster's review of her internship.

Even worse, Darcy had a sneaking suspicion that she wasn't dealing with a regular Casper here. Maybe she had read too much Norse Mythology lately. Or maybe her book falling onto the Loki chapter at the library was just nothing to worry about too.

Maybe not.

Darcy couldn't just sit around and let this thing come and hurt her when she wasn't expecting it. She had to do something, anything to at least defend herself from this otherworldly attack.

And she would so do that, for she hoped the bastard would show himself soon, so she could tase the hell out of his stalker ass.

Darcy couldn't sit by silently about her ghost any longer, so she nonchalantly asked Jane about Thor. It started out as nothing more than girl talk, and Jane loved to talk about Thor. (And Darcy hoped that girl talk, in the most superficial sense, would not alert her mentor to any suspicion.)

“So, did he talk about, you know, his brother at all?” *You know, Jane, the guy that Thor said was trying to kill us before he flew off in a blaze of glory to go beat his villainous little ass,* Darcy thought, though she couldn't say it aloud without freaking Jane out too much. The poor woman already thought Darcy was weird.

Jane furrowed her brow. “Well, not really, but Thor really loves his brother. I at least got that from him,” she said with a far off look in her face. “From the way Thor sees Loki, it's hard to believe he attacked us. It's hard to imagine Loki without seeing him through Thor's eyes.”

“But he's a giant douche-bag that wanted to kill us,” Darcy deadpanned, swiping one of Jane's pop-tarts. Jane swatted her, and Darcy cried out *Ow*, exaggerating the abuse.

“Yes, but that's not how Thor sees his brother,” Jane said.

“Damn, sounds like family drama to me. I dated a guy once with bro issues,” Darcy said, finishing off her last bite. “Never date a twin, seriously, it gets weird.”

Jane idly stirred her lukewarm coffee. “Why the sudden interest in Thor's brother?”

Darcy shrugged immediately. “I've been reading some stuff...” Darcy cautiously met Jane's gaze.

“Maybe I'm not giving you enough work to do,” Jane teased. “You shouldn't have time for reading.”

Darcy laughed, relieved that Jane hadn't suspected a thing.

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Loki returned to Darcy's room with a few surprises. The book from the library was only dogeared in one spot now, and at her bedside, he found a group of other unrelated books littered about the floor.

He read their titles and scoffed at them, and when the scent of white sage hit his nose, Loki rolled his eyes.

Did this stupid girl really think he was a ghost? As if such human herbs and magics could even give him so much as a scratch, let alone cause him pain.

He supposed he'd give her half-credit for trying, but he would soon let her know he was much more than a simple spirit.

Though, he found it intriguing she was taking a little initiative. At least she wasn't a total simpleton.

He picked up the library book and looked to the page where she had marked, and he laughed that it was still in the same section about him. It was like Darcy didn't dare move beyond this spot.

Reaching inside his long black coat, Loki pulled out a fresh copy of the same library book. He opened the front cover, remembering he had already signed "for Darcy" on the first page. He turned to her incense bowl, and on top of the remains of the white sage, he scribbled out another note for her just for good measure.

"If you think this will get rid of me, you're mistaken," it read, and he already anticipated the sort of fright it would give her.

After this, Loki had no doubt Darcy would know it was him; however, perhaps it was too soon for him to meet her in person just yet.

Until then, he'd just have a bit of fun before she was ready for her true purpose.

Part Four: Puppeteer

Darcy never expected her ghost to respond to her. Maybe it was silly for her to use the white sage, but she'd like to think of it as a warning for her stalker to leave her the hell alone.

Now, upon finding the personalized book and the note in her incense bowl, she was no doubt shocked and worried, and the reality of it distracted her during work, and she anxiously wondered if this menace was truly going to leave her alone.

If Thor's brother Loki was really messing with her as she assumed, well, not only was she scared, but also she was shamefully curious on what he wanted from *her*. She was just some grad student who followed around Thor's love interest like a clueless puppy; she was obviously nobody important for a god to even notice.

Seriously, wouldn't he be more interested in Jane?

And if Loki could be here, could that mean Thor could come here as well? Jane would be ecstatic if she knew, but that did raise the question; if Thor were capable of coming back, wouldn't he be here already?

Darcy felt a chill descend over her spine. She wanted to tell Jane about Loki immediately, not so much to get her hopes up, but to *warn* her. Darcy couldn't even imagine the repercussions of running to her employer screaming that the crazy god who tried to annihilate their town with a huge otherworldly robot was *here*, stalking them around the shadows.

Would Loki even *let* her inform the others?

Darcy stared wide-eyed at the note he left her. She didn't think he'd let her get away with anything. Suddenly, she felt very much trapped in her own skin.

As if her situation couldn't get worse, the words on the note began to disappear before her eyes. She blinked, and sure enough they were gone as though they never existed. Frantically, she spun around and snatched up her own personal copy of the mythology book he left her, and his dedication was gone as well.

So there went her proof. If she went blabbing about Loki's possible stalking now, she'd definitely be written off as crazy. Crumpling up the piece of paper, Darcy pouted. She couldn't do anything about it now, and she had no idea on what plan B was to deal with this supposed Loki problem of hers. Until then, she grabbed her taser and set off to the kitchen where Jane was waiting for her. Today they'd go back to the usual surveying site and collect more data.

Darcy wondered if she'd really be able to work today, especially with all her anxious thoughts about her stalker. She wondered if he would follow her to the site, and she cursed that he was powerful enough so they couldn't see him. But more importantly, it really sucked that he wasn't solid as Thor had been so Darcy could tase him.

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Work that day had been more productive than expected. Thanks to S.H.I.E.L.D, Jane was given more equipment to study her wormhole, as well as try to see if they could open it up again. More scientists from S.H.I.E.L.D were coming over to help her, and while Jane engaged in science mumbo jumbo with them, Darcy faded to the background and was left to her thoughts. Once in a while, Jane had her gopher some coffee or tools, but other than that, Darcy was nothing more than furniture that day.

Which made it worse on her anxiety, and she became increasingly paranoid and wondered if she was even going to get any sleep tonight. Jane would need her more tomorrow when the S.H.I.E.L.D agents left, allowing Jane to get more comfortable using to the new equipment from Stark industries on her own. Darcy was a bit deflated when they were told Tony Stark may even stop by, but he had to cancel at the last minute.

"We'll meet him eventually. He's very interested in Thor," Jane said with a grin. "And my wormhole."

Darcy arched an eyebrow. “Who isn’t?”

Jane beamed and went back to her work on the laptop. Darcy made a couple of extra pop-tarts for her and brewed a fresh pot of coffee at the physics lab. While she bobbed around in the kitchen, Darcy kept looking over her shoulder, wondering if she was being watched. Her gaze swept the room, looking for anything out of place, but nothing was missing. Even the scant pictures on the white-washed walls appeared perfectly level.

She tried to tell herself to calm down, but Darcy couldn’t. Even when nothing was happening and her stalker hadn’t tugged at her senses, she knew that he was in the shadows anyway, plotting and watching them. What he wanted, she didn’t know, and Darcy was willing to write it off with a shrug and a blasé attitude that she was only here for her college credits.

Only she wasn’t. She was curious and intrigued by these Norse gods and their motivations more than ever. She would diligently support Jane find Thor again, not just as her grad student gopher but as Jane’s only female friend. Likewise, Darcy was dying to know what the hell Loki even wanted with her. What did he really hope to gain from her? Would he try to hurt Jane? If the stories about the god of mischief were true, Darcy could only fear the worst.

Though, the stories don’t always portray Loki as completely bad, not all of them, and Darcy found that intriguing despite their first encounter with him, at least indirectly, which was almost fatal if not for Thor. She’d keep that in mind of course, but she wouldn’t admit that she was afraid of him.

If she could take Thor down with her taser, perhaps she could take down Loki as well.

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Loki returned that night to Darcy’s room that night after he had finished converging with his doppelgangers. All of them had retrieved them more information on Nick Fury, the cube of power that S.H.I.E.L.D was dubbing the Cosmic Cube. Erik Selvig was progressing on studying the cube, thanks to Loki’s subliminal intervention, and Nick Fury was meeting more with Tony Stark, mostly as his consultant for many different projects.

Coming back to Darcy was almost relaxing for him, subduing his frenetic thoughts about S.H.I.E.L.D and Jane Foster’s wormhole as well as his brother’s much anticipated return. (If Loki had anything to do with it, his brother would never return, but he felt as though he did want to see Thor again, but not until he knew more about this Cosmic Cube, if not acquire more power to go up against him and the Mighty **Mjolnir** once again.)

Truthfully, amidst all these schemes, visiting Darcy and playing with her fears was a bit of amusement for him – a hobby, he supposed, until she would be of significant use to him.

He supposed the spells of his messages had worn off by now, and she had enough time to see them before they disappeared. It delighted him to see her fright, and in a way, he did, as a shadow doppelganger he kept around just to observe her reactions and see what she planned to do.

He didn’t like that she was already exercising thought about telling Jane, or even Erik, when he

returned, but Loki supposed it was only a natural reaction for her, and he knew, in due time, she would tell the others about him, but it wouldn't be now.

Loki looked down at Darcy, sleeping as she cocooned herself in a wool blanket. He reached out a hand and lightly twirled a tendril of her hair around his finger.

“Oh, Darcy Lewis, the plans I have for you,” he said with a grin. When she didn't even flinch, he noticed she was almost dead to the world in her sleep. Loki glanced to her nightstand and saw the bottle of sleeping pills. He smirked a little, leaning over to whisper in her ear.

“You don't have to make this so easy for me, girl,” he said, and he brought his hand above her head as he thought the spell. Darcy, still obviously asleep, was betrayed by her body as Loki made her rise. She stood up, wobbled lightly on her feet, and Loki fell in step behind her as he continued to direct her body like a marionette.

He motioned for her to step through the hallway toward the center of the room and past the kitchen, where Jane Foster had her desk and laptop set up. Settling Darcy's body down in the desk chair, he had her log into Jane's computer, searching through her files for anything Loki might need. Though, he could very well do all of this himself, and much faster too, he enjoyed using Darcy for it, with her finger prints on Jane's computer if a question of suspicion ever arose.

He also enjoyed the fact that soon Darcy would know what she had done, and she would feel alienated and guilty for betraying her friends. It seemed fitting that Jane Foster's most trusted friend would betray her. Loki enjoyed the drama it would cause, pulling Darcy and Jane apart, destroying their precious human trust.

And Darcy, poor Darcy – she would be so alone. Maybe he'd even be doing the girl a favor. She didn't need to be a part of this. She shouldn't be here when Thor returned and joined the humans against the shadow of evil that would soon be upon this world. Darcy was too expendable, and death was far too unkind a reward for the girl who amused him and was helping him behind the scenes.

“That's interesting,” Loki said, noticing a new file on Jane's computer. Inside the folder were schematics, almost perfect at constructing a man-made wormhole that would connect with **Bifröst**. Of course, there were flaws, and it was far from finished, but it was too close at being complete for Loki's liking.

Loki waved his hands, and his Darcy puppet began to type. “It's time to do the job you were perfect for, Darcy.” He smiled wickedly and added, “Sabotage.”

Quickly, Darcy's hands charged like meticulous lightning across the keyboard. On the screen, she altered calculations and changed numbers, ultimately setting back Jane Foster's work at least two months. When she was done, she had left Jane's desk perfectly untouched as if she'd never been here.

When Loki moved Darcy across the room, he thought it'd be fun if he didn't return her back to her bed, so he left her on a stool to continue her drug-addled sleep against the kitchen counter.

He almost couldn't wait to see how she'd react when she woke up.

Part Five: Victims and Cowards

Darcy did not expect to feel the sun warming her face, waking her at in the early hours of a weekend morning. She shifted, and when her eyes opened, fully alerting her to her environment, she jumped out of her chair and almost fell on her butt. She looked around, knowing full well she would never fall asleep in the kitchen, especially when she kept her room quite dark and cursed any sunlight that dared to peek through the blinds.

“What the...?” Was she sleep-walking now? It definitely wasn't like her, even if she had taken some sleeping pills last night. She'd taken them before; they were just over the counter ones, nothing to worry about when it came to side effects or weird sleeping disorders.

So how in the hell did she end up here?

She heard Jane's trailer door creaking open outside. Darcy panicked, not wanting her mentor to find her sleeping in the kitchen, so she put her thoughts behind her and dashed back to her room. She heard Jane pattering around inside, knowing her routine as she started the coffee pot and waited for the S.H.I.E.L.D agents to show up.

Darcy sighed a breath of relief, and she looked around her room to see if anything was out of the ordinary. Nothing appeared strange, but she couldn't shake the feeling that something really bad was going on here. She had a sneaking suspicion that Loki wasn't done with her, and that he was still skulking around the physics building – messing with her, no doubt.

Darcy darted into the shower, letting the water run hot before she climbed inside. No doubt Jane would hear the water and know that she was up and ready for work after she cleaned up. Hopefully, Darcy would put her strange moment of sleep-walking out of her mind and concentrate on work. She still had unfinished credit riding on this internship, even though it was almost done. Jane had asked her if she wanted to work with her after school was over, and of course, S.H.I.E.L.D agents had been standing behind her when she did, leering at her and intimidating her into an affirmative answer.

Not that she'd let them influence her anyway, despite knowing so much about this research. She wanted to help Jane, and well, whatever Jane was working on was going to be a lot more interesting than becoming a politician. Darcy was already working on a book, a biography of sorts on Jane, and Jane Foster was a work in progress. Thankfully, Jane gave her permission, albeit after a slight blush.

Darcy closed her eyes and tried not to think about the menacing presence that seemed to follow her around these days. Working with Jane, shadowing her when she made her discoveries and tried to fix the damaged wormhole with S.H.I.E.L.D was something positive in Darcy's life. Of course, there was still this problem of being single, even around enough hot S.H.I.E.L.D agents to never show her any interest. Bastards. They were probably married to their work (or gay) anyway.

Of course, having an Asgardian God as a stalker probably didn't help her love life either. She didn't want to think there would be a connection – it was silly, right? But she really didn't know what Loki was up to anyway, and if he was the reason she was out of bed and drooling on the kitchen counter this morning, well, then he was a coward and a major tool for messing with her like this.

“Humph,” Darcy said aloud as she came out of the shower and wrapped a towel around her. She dried her hair, did her make-up, and checked Facebook for the day. Her Thor picture was still getting comments, and it made her sort of sad in a way. She popped over to Jane's page, and just as before, Jane's profile picture still was the one Darcy took with her one breakfast morning with Thor. He was wearing an apron, holding a spatula with dangling egg pieces, and he wrapped his big muscular arm possessively around Jane's waist as she smiled shyly in front of him.

Darcy sighed. They looked so happy. Maybe Thor and Jane were her reasons for staying on and seeing Jane's research go through. It was happier times, and Darcy would love if they could return to them. She made a silent promise to help Jane get Thor back, and she dressed, donning her knit cap before she met Jane in the kitchen. Pop-tarts and coffee flavored with Hazelnut were waiting for her as Jane's eyes were glued to the screen.

“Morning, Darcy,” Jane called to her, waving a hand before she went back to typing. She looked extremely engaged in her research. Her brow furrowed, and Darcy saw her whispering to herself.

“That's not right,” she said, louder than a whisper. Darcy bit into her pop-tart but started gravitating over to Jane's computer. Jane was sighing with exasperation, and the more she looked through her work, the angrier she was getting. It was almost incredulous anger, as if she didn't know about anything she was reading.

“This is all wrong! What happened?”

“Did you get a virus?” Darcy asked. “Maybe S.H.I.E.L.D can help with that.”

Jane didn't turn to her and kept banging on the keys. “It's not a virus of any sort, and I haven't needed S.H.I.E.L.D's help with protecting my work before. Nobody else knows the kind of work I'm doing,” she said, glancing over her shoulder to Darcy. “It's not like you, I, or Erik tell anyone anyway.” She peered at Darcy suspiciously. “Unless you let it slip on Facebook.”

Darcy tilted her head and frowned. “Seriously? I would never tell my Facebook friends that, cuz you know, S.H.I.E.L.D would probably assassinate me in my sleep. Besides, half my friends wouldn't even know what the hell I'm talking about anyway. They're all communication and art majors.”

Jane sighed. “Yeah, I know. It's just...all of these readings are wrong, like bad physics and math equations totally changed around,” she said. “It's like someone broke into my computer and just changed everything to random numbers and theories.”

Darcy wrinkled her nose. “I am the only one here last night, and I was out like a light. I had to take sleeping pills I was so wired.”

“Sleeping pills?” Jane cocked her head, looking worried. “Are you okay?”

Darcy waved her head. “It's nothing. I've been having some nightmares...you know, since...”

Jane looked away awkwardly and licked her lips. “Since the attack.”

“Yeah. It was kind of out of this world so...I don't think my brain has fully accepted it yet,” Darcy said.

“I'm sorry,” Jane said genuinely.

“I should be the one that's sorry,” Darcy said. “Your stuff was messed with last night, and I wasn't alert enough to realize it.”

“I'll have to call S.H.I.E.L.D, see if they can help me with some security,” Jane said, and she turned around and her gaze swept the room of the building. “I wonder who could have gotten in here. Do we have a window that wasn't locked?”

Darcy looked around, and when she saw a tilted picture on the wall, her blood froze. Yesterday, that picture had been straight – perfect, and as it drooped to its left, it seemed to be mocking her. Only one person could have done that where she would notice.

Loki.

And suddenly, she was very angry – so angry she may have to keep her taser around with her at all times.

“Well, I guess I have to go through everything and start revising all these wrong figures,” Jane said with a sigh, staring mournfully at her screen. She looked at Darcy desperately. “I guess this means your internship with me is going to be a little bit longer.”

“How long will it take you to fix it?”

“Two months – one month maybe if S.H.I.E.L.D can spare Erik, but the way he's been lately, so secretive, I don't think they can.”

“If there's anything I can do to help... I mean, you know, stay up late or do more errands than usual,” Darcy said, already feeling like this was her fault. Maybe now was the time to tell Jane that she suspected Loki, but before the words could come out of her mouth, she couldn't do it. It's like the motivation or idea stalled her and then wound her up tightly like a tourniquet. In seconds, the thought was out of her mind as if she'd never conceived it.

“You do enough already, Darcy, but if there is something I need, well, you're the one I trust most,” Jane said, and she patted Darcy's arm before going back to her work. Darcy stared at her, feeling a crumbling ache in her stomach as if she didn't deserve Jane's trust.

She mumbled “sorry” but she didn't know if Jane heard her. Finally, Darcy went back to the kitchen, made a fresh pot of coffee, and headed back to her room to grab her iPod. While she was there, she closed the door and released a deep sigh. She gritted her teeth and glared at the air.

“You like leaving notes, you little asshole? So here's a note for you,” Darcy said, and she rushed to her drawer, pulled out a note tablet and wrote in huge, red capital letters 'COWARD' and then deposited it in her incense bowl.

If that didn't get the message across, she didn't know what would. Darcy only hoped that Loki wouldn't kill her over it.

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Darcy and Jane were already back to the desert site with the S.H.I.E.L.D agents when Loki returned to the physics building to see how his plan had gone.

Jane had taken her laptop with her, and a quick visit to the site showed Loki that she had already realized her work had been tampered with, and she was slowly making her way back through the necessary corrections.

Darcy looked out of sorts, and Loki caught her looking sadly at her mentor often, doing her usual errands and trying to stay out of the way of the bustling S.H.I.E.L.D agents. He had sensed some definitive guilt from Darcy, but he did not know if she suspected that she was the one who tampered with Jane's work or if she was oblivious to his involvement. His suspicions were realized, however, once he returned back to Darcy's room and found her quaint little note.

It certainly angered him. He took the note, crumbled it in his fist, and turned it to dust. He didn't like when the warriors or even Lady Sif called him a coward. He didn't like when Thor once called him that as well. (It stung worse with Thor.)

But Loki found it entirely reprehensible when a mortal dared call him that. One word, so simple yet so biting. He hated that she affected him like that. Oh, the things he could do to her to make her remember her place; however, it would do no good, and the girl already suspected him. Despite the binding spell he put on her voice to stop her from blabbing to Jane Foster, he suspected Darcy was clever enough to find some way to alert S.H.I.E.L.D and Jane Foster of his presence.

Perhaps she had a small point. It was getting boring lurking in the shadows like a common boogie monster just to spy on her. Playing tricks on her were getting old, and he had admitted, for a time it was amusing, but now, with Darcy's charge toward him, his games had lost their glamor.

She knew he was lurking around, and that wouldn't do anymore. No, he had to get to Darcy some other way. She could still be so useful. Even after what Loki had her do, Jane Foster still didn't suspect her little helper as being the saboteur. The trust between the two women was strong, and Loki supposed it would be delightful to see it torn apart. He grinned, and he slipped out of Darcy's room – a plan for the next stage already simmering on his mind.

No more tricks, no more lurking in shadows. Tomorrow he would meet Darcy in person, and in her loneliness, she would reach out to him, regard him – and he would ultimately steal her away from Jane Foster.

Easily.

Part 6: Strategy and Preparations

When Darcy found Jane that night, as usual she was glued to her computer screen fixing the tampered calculations on her research from yesterday. From what Jane told her at lunch, she was making significant progress; the revisions were just taking a long time because the data entry was often tedious, and Jane had to be very meticulous at what information to actually fix.

Darcy still felt horrible about it. It was partially her fault, anyway, whether it was because she was too dead tired to realize there had been an intruder, or because she knew it had to be Loki and she still hadn't been able to tell her mentor about his presence.

Darcy frowned, watching Jane from the kitchen. Yeah...why was that?

Staring in a daze at Jane, a sudden idea struck her. Darcy bounded to the computer and grabbed Jane's arm. Jane started, looking bewildered and annoyed by the interruption.

"Come on, break time," Darcy said to her sweetly, pulling her lightly and grinning at her, trying to ease Jane's mood.

"Darcy, I can't," Jane said, practically panicking at the mere thought of leaving her work.

"Seriously, I'm going to teach you to have some fun. It'll relax you and then you'll be fresh for work again," Darcy pleaded, giving Jane the puppy face. "Give me two hours."

"Two hours?" Jane huffed.

"Delivery pizza and two episodes of Enterprise," Darcy cooed at her. Jane couldn't refuse Star Trek; it was her kryptonite. Darcy caught a thin smile crack onto Jane's face.

"Well, okay... but the pizza has to be..."

"Hawaiian, I know." Darcy snorted. "There's something really wrong with tropical fruit on pizza," she muttered, and Jane rose from her chair and playfully jabbed Darcy on the arm.

"Well, let the lesson in fun begin!"

.xxxxx.

Darcy yawned, and she shifted slightly on the couch, realizing she was missing Jane's warmth next to her. Apparently the both of them had dozed through the second episode of Enterprise, but Jane had woken up some time ago and was back at her laptop.

Knowing better than to bother her, Darcy left Jane alone, and she turned to the TV, still on the SyFy channel even though Enterprise was over. Darcy squinted at the show on now, which seemed to be a Ghost Hunters episode. She'd seen this show before, found it pretty dull normally, but lately it seemed

to be appropriate.

But Loki's not a ghost, she thought. That was well confirmed in the beginning. However, he was a “presence”, unwanted even, and maybe there was something science could do about detecting him (and kicking him square in the balls for his trouble, Darcy thought).

Darcy watched the ghost hunter on the TV show talk about equipment, and her interest piqued when they started talking about a device that helped find indications of the paranormal. It was called a KII EMF Reader, and as the hunter explained, it was sensitive at picking up erratic and unexplained electromagnetic fields within an area, and a high spike in an often low-level man-made electromagnetic field might be indication that something *else* was there.

Consequently, she was sure that in all the equipment Jane kept in the storage cabinets there had to be one of these KII EMF readers. Tomorrow she would definitely go looking for one, and then experiment with it around the physics building.

Grinning, Darcy almost jumped out of her seat with glee. If not for this discovery and small tutorial, she may have missed the chance to really do something about her Loki problem. Now, she had hope.

.xxxxx.

His doppelgangers were regularly reporting back to him on Erik's progress in studying the Cosmic Cube, so Loki found the perfect chance to finally infiltrate S.H.I.E.L.D and pose as one of their agents. He'd done it before, but nothing more than a shadow to blend in while his brother was being held captive not so long ago. He rather liked that look, with the long black jacket and green striped scarf; however, this time would be different. He had to be careful - with the perfect disguise, a flawless background and an identity that wouldn't raise suspicion.

He realized that fooling Darcy wasn't going to be easy either. Even though she didn't know what he looked like, he still didn't want to spook her.

Of course, showing up out of nowhere just when she'd become aware of him may be pushing things. He'd have to handpick some S.H.I.E.L.D agent and assume his identity - casting a spell that made those who ever knew this person remember him with Loki's face instead.

He had to pick the right person who could easily get close to Darcy, away from Jane's notice.

Loki had observed the agents' behavior at the site before, and most of them ignored Darcy. A few would gaze at her, turn away disinterested, and then go on with their work.

“But I won't,” he said, as he stood in front of a S.H.I.E.L.D computer and started needling through their files, and searching for agents assigned to Jane Foster. Most of them were scientists, and a couple of others were technicians who instructed Jane and her assistant on how to use Stark equipment.

Loki finally stopped the screen, settling on one agent whose identity he would take.

“Agent Tom Hill,” he said grinning. “It’s time you took a little vacation.”

.xxxxx.

Before Jane had left her trailer, Darcy tiptoed around the physics building toward the storage lockers in the back room.

Remembering what the KII device looked like on the TV show, Darcy easily found a pile of them in the first shelf of the far end cabinet. She picked one up, prayed that it worked (and that it was easy to use), and headed back to her bedroom before Jane suspected she was even back there.

While Darcy was testing it out in her room, she heard Jane starting coffee in the kitchen. Frowning, Darcy didn’t see anything out of the ordinary on the KII’s readings, so she switched it off and moved ahead to meet Jane.

“Big day today,” Jane said, handing Darcy the Happy Bunny coffee mug. Her favorite, which said: “I know how you feel. I just don’t care.” Darcy seemed to think it fit her sometimes.

“Hrmm?”

“S.H.I.E.L.D is sending some new agents out to the site today. They’re giving us new equipment,” Jane said, and she looked almost giddy.

“Think we’ll have a Tony Stark sighting?” Darcy asked, smirking.

“Is it Tony Stark or Iron Man you want to see?” Jane asked, arching an eyebrow.

“Either or is fine,” Darcy said with a light shrug, and she grunted after a sip of coffee. “Hey, does that mean the S.H.I.E.L.D agents will actually talk to me?” she asked sardonically. Jane pursed her lips and shook her head.

“They’re going to have to,” Jane answered, and she poured herself another cup. She smiled brightly. Wow, Darcy thought. She *was* giddy. “Darcy, you’re going to get your own special trainer on the equipment today.”

Darcy rolled her eyes. “Oh, joy,” she drawled. “I hope it’s a he.” Jane looked exasperated as Darcy added, “And I hope he’s cute.”

Part Seven: Substitute Teacher

Darcy *hated* the S.H.I.E.L.D agent who was training her. He was a loud-mouth, self-important ass, and he was just the kind of person she readily avoided throughout high school and college.

Only she couldn't avoid him this time, not with Jane counting on her to use this equipment.

Why did she have me as her backup in case she got sick or something? Darcy asked herself. She knew Jane trusted her, but she didn't know if she really deserved it, not with Loki still lurking around them in the shadows. Darcy appreciated it though, and she knew once she graduated college she didn't even need to look for a job. She had one with Jane immediately, and S.H.I.E.L.D had seen to that right away.

I guess it pays to know a lot of government secrets, Darcy said, snorting as she remembered how her friends on Facebook begged her to tell her the projects that were keeping her away from the usual parties at college. If only they knew... The downside was she was drifting away from her friends significantly. It was very lonely, even if she did get a great friend out of Jane Foster.

Agent Hallas was teaching her something again on the new Stark equipment, and Darcy tried to pay attention, but he just had one of those voices that made your ears bleed where she couldn't quite concentrate on her tasks.

It didn't help that the jerk already assumed she was an idiot and felt the need to tell her three times how to use something, or even input something, like she was in grade school or something. Really?

So Darcy listened. She thanked him a couple of times in a mocking, sweet voice that seemed to unnerve him more (but was kind of hilarious), and when she understood the task, and Hallas felt he needed to repeat it, she imagined his head being hit by a bolt of lightning. Then Thor would come down from the heavens and sweep her off her feet, let her squeeze his muscles and fix her breakfast in bed. Ah, it was a nice dream. (She dared never to tell Jane, of course.)

“Are you even listening?” Hallas snapped at her, and Darcy nodded her head vigorously but flipped him off under the table.

“Agent Hallas, I am sorry to interrupt, but there seems to have been a mix-up,” a smooth voice behind them rang out. Hallas turned around annoyed and looked up into the face of possibly the hottest guy out of the whole lot of the S.H.I.E.L.D agents. Darcy tried not to gape.

“Sorry, Agent...Hill was it? What sort of mix-up is that?” Hallas furrowed his brow.

Darcy froze. Agent Hill was staring right at her when he answered his fellow agent. If he wasn't so gorgeous (with dark hair and large green eyes, and the long black coat helped too) it could have been creepy. Darcy prayed she didn't drool.

"It seems I was assigned to train Ms. Lewis instead. You're supposed to shadow Agent Lynn as a back-up, in case Jane Foster needs your expertise on the security defaults," Agent Hill said. Immediately, Agent Hallas stood up and banged his hand on the table with a sigh.

"Thank God," he said relieved. He didn't even look at Darcy as he mocked her once more. "It's like teaching a kindergarten class over here. Excuse me, Agent Hill."

Darcy stood up too to go after Agent Hallas, and she wished Jane would have let her bring her taser with her. Well, she wasn't allowed to have any weapons on the site with S.H.I.E.L.D agents around. Stupid Agent Coulson. What did he know anyway? Still, Darcy could probably beat the crap out of Hallas just the same. Before she could march toward him, Agent Hill put up his hand. Darcy looked up and met his smile. He was patient and gracious, but Darcy could see a storm in his eyes.

"He's a cad, but not worth damaging your knuckles over, Ms. Lewis," Agent Hill said.

Darcy bit her lip, nodding when she couldn't argue with him. He was right. She really didn't want to bust a nail over an asshole like Hallas. It made sense why they never acknowledged her, if most of the S.H.I.E.L.D agents saw her as Hallas did. So what was Hill's story then?

"Thanks, I think," she said, not knowing if she thanked him for stopping her or for getting rid of Hallas.

"No need to thank me. I'm just following orders," he said, still smiling at her. *Wow, he really has a nice smile.* And nice eyes, and for a small guy, Darcy could guess he had a healthy frame underneath that suit. (And she couldn't help it; Darcy desperately wanted to see under that suit.)

"Now, shall we get started? As they say, the student is only as good as his teacher." His smile was contagious, and Darcy felt a little flutter in her stomach as Agent Hill looked at her. She plopped down in the seat next to him, and as they turned to the computer screen, she accidentally brushed against his knee.

For Darcy, that still wasn't close enough to him.

.xxxxx.

"I think you've quite got the hang of this, Ms. Lewis. It is evident that Agent Hallas is an incompetent tool and did not really see your potential," Agent Hill said to her with a side glance. Darcy beamed at him.

"Piece of cake, Agent Hill," she said, grinning at him and leaning closer. "Hey, what's that accent of yours? Are you from London?"

He smiled. "Something like that, but more north."

Darcy sighed. *Damn, that accent is fine, and he's so charming*, she thought. "Could you...say 'He's an incompetent tool' again? I like the way your accent makes it...I don't know... seem more awesome," she asked teasingly.

Agent Hill looked around, making sure his comrades weren't listening and he leaned close, so close that Darcy felt a hitch in her throat. *Breathe*, she told herself smartly. "Agent Hallas is an incompetent tool...and..." Darcy heard his smooth tone drop lower. "Meet me for coffee, tonight."

"Coffee?" Darcy breathed out. "Uh..."

"If you think that's too forward..." He backed away, and Darcy grabbed his arm, quickly releasing it when he seemed startled.

"Um, no, I want to! Definitely. I'm just shocked that anyone from S.H.I.E.L.D would...ask," she stammered.

"Well, I'm asking," he said smoothly. Darcy was pretty sure her heart stopped for a whole four seconds. "Now let's go," he said, looking around the camp as everyone was leaving, packing up trucks and

moving around sensitive equipment. “We’re done for the day, and I really need some coffee...” He stood up and Darcy realized she’d never get tired of his smile. “And company. Do you know how boring some of these S.H.I.E.L.D agents are?”

Darcy licked her lips and smirked. She tossed her hair flirtatiously. “I can only imagine.” And she took his hand when he offered it to her. They began walking toward Agent Hill’s car when Darcy heard Jane’s voice.

“Darcy?”

She turned around. “Oh! Jane, this is Agent Tom Hill.

”

“Oh yeah, I met you,” she said, furrowing her brow and meeting his eyes. Agent Hill shook her hand immediately. “Nice to meet you. Stealing my assistant?”

“Only for coffee,” he answered, but Darcy could see in his eyes that he was open for more. And hot damn, so was she.

Jane waved her hand and giggled. “Oh, please, don’t worry! You have fun. I have to do those revisions to my work anyway.” Jane looked at Darcy and her brow rose slightly with implication. “You deserve some time off, right Darcy?”

Darcy could kiss Jane, but she grinned like a loon instead, mouthed a ‘thank you’, and then scuttled off on Agent Hill’s arm. He even opened the passenger door for her. (*Okay, marry me now?* She thought.) And he sped them off toward the center of town.

As he drove, Darcy tried not to stare at him. He made small talk with her; though, he kind of drove like a maniac but seemed to do it just as smoothly as the way he talked.

Am I dreaming? She thought, wondering what the hell this man was on to be looking at *her*, of all people. Wow, he must really be lonely.

Darcy braved a glance toward him, and almost serendipitously, their eyes met instantly. She smiled

meekly at him, and he looked away with another mysterious smirk.

There was something about him, like she'd seen him before. Maybe in her dreams? It was possible, she surmised. If that was the case, maybe meeting him was somewhat meant to be, like she had been waiting for him for far too long.

Part Eight: Coffee and Ice Cream

Darcy had to admit she was nervous. She had always adopted a down-to-earth attitude about almost everything, even Gods falling from the sky into the desert – or other Gods attacking their small little New Mexico town with giant otherworldly robots. This time, a date with an actual good-looking guy who was moderately interested in her was more trying than any other life and death situation she'd ever faced.

Anxiously, she wiped her sweaty palms on her legs, smiling briefly as Agent Hill caught her stare and smiled back. She felt her heart skip a beat after that, and she felt like a total virgin moron for acting like this. Well, one part of that wasn't exactly true – Darcy didn't think of herself as a moron. Still, this was how she felt, like she was reliving high school all over again and she was making out with a boy for a first time.

Not that she'd complain if it came down to that.

“We've arrived,” Agent Hill said, bringing Darcy out of her thoughts. She blinked and looked ahead, seeing the familiar sign of the diner in the center of town. She'd eaten here so many times, and she'd seen S.H.I.E.L.D agents hanging around here as well. She knew the waitress, Shelly (with her wild black hair and a mole on her lip) by first name, and Shelly knew her too – always gossiping with her, telling her that Darcy needed to find a “fella” and how she missed that large hunky man Thor that came in a couple of times.

Well, once Shelly saw Darcy with Tom Hill, she supposed the story spoke for itself. Shelly might never let her hear the end of it.

Darcy silently followed a step behind Tom, and he opened the door inside for her, and Darcy had to swoon again at his chivalry. Where did he learn such etiquette and manners? Ah, right, he was from England, or so she guessed. He never really said one way or another.

Coming inside, Darcy paused as Agent Hill picked a booth, and Darcy couldn't help recognize this as the same booth that she and Jane had always gravitated to whenever they came here, like it was their booth for being VIP customers. Darcy found the coincidence interesting.

Now this booth would give her an entirely different memory, and she hoped it stayed good.

Settling in the seat, a night-shift waitress handed them menus, and Darcy peered around the diner, barely littered with quiet customers that seemed more like extras in a movie than anything else. Shelly

wasn't there, and Darcy pouted a little, wanting the woman to see that she was capable of snagging a date - even though she had bemoaned many times how the S.H.I.E.L.D agents obviously took no interest in her.

"Right then, what's good?" Tom asked, and Darcy looked up, still enjoying the sound of his voice whenever he spoke. He smiled at her. "I'm afraid I've never been here."

"Um... well, the breakfast is really good - the omelets and crepes," she said, trying not to stammer. She stared at her menu.

"I'll get what you're getting," Agent Hill said, immediately putting down the menu. Darcy watched as he propped an elbow on the table, rested his chin on his palm and then stared at her. She'd had experience with reading body language before in a class. At first, it was kind of a boring class, just an elective she could take for her major, but she always found the lectures interesting when the professor talked about the body languages of women and men on dates.

And right now, according to her "knowledge" on body language, Agent Hill's attention was totally hers. He was hanging on her every word, treating her like she special and the only important person in the whole room. Either he was just really good at manipulating his own body language to charm her, or he really was interested in her, Darcy didn't really know.

She grinned at him, throwing him a coy look. "I'm really not hungry; just coffee is fine." *Smart girl. You don't want to get caught eating something that makes you look like a pig, or something that you could potentially spill all over you.*

Darcy glanced at a folded advertisement to her left. And Ice cream. Ice cream was always good food for a date, and the imagery of eating it could do wonders. Knowing he was watching, Darcy made a "hrmmm" sound, and she grabbed the ice cream ad and could barely contain her grin. "Oh, and this apple turnover ice cream. It's irresistible," she said, meeting his engaging eyes. "You should try it."

"I'm sure it is," he intoned, still smiling at her. Darcy felt a tingle pulse through her body. *Agent Hill has to stop being so hot, she thought, before my insides explode.*

The waitress came and went, and Agent Hill was very interested in learning about Darcy's past, why she became Jane's intern, about her true field of study, and about her family. Darcy didn't mind opening up; though, she did notice that Agent Hill was hardly in the mood to open up about himself. He was mysterious, and Darcy knew right away that was a red flag, but for some reason, she didn't care. She liked this moment between them - feeling relieved to finally click with someone after being alone for so long.

It was almost too good to be true.

He watched her intently eating the ice cream, and sure, she was putting on a bit of a show, but he didn't call her on it, and he didn't stop her. Once in a while, they shared each other's bites, and Darcy elicited such girlish laughs she didn't know she had such silliness within her.

God, please don't let this be love, don't let it, Darcy told her. She didn't want to get her hopes up. She didn't want to be disappointed, and worst of all, she didn't want to be betrayed.

Inevitably, it turned late, and they were one of two left in the diner. The wait staff glared at them as they began to clean up for closing, and Tom and Darcy got the hint, and made their way slowly outside, talking and laughing - mostly joking about the S.H.I.E.L.D agents, and Darcy tensed as he shut the car door on his side, smoothed down his black coat, and made his way to the driver's seat. He glanced at her, and Darcy smiled silently, wishing the night would never end. She felt a ball of anxiety in her chest, knowing once he took her back to the physics lab, she had to decide whether or not he'd let her kiss him.

For a first date, she knew better to invite him inside. *Oh, but I so want to, but he's a gentleman and I, well, I don't want to be the American hussy,* she thought.

But hell yeah I'm going to kiss him, she promised herself as he drove off. But she only would unless he asked her for a second date. She wondered if she should really wait for that at all, and just seize the day and kiss him anyway.

He walked next to her side, and he let her take his arm as he walked her up to the front door. Jane was inside, and Darcy could see the glow of her computer across the room through the glass.

"Um...thanks for coffee," Darcy said with an anxious smile. She averted her eyes, but she would not loosen her arm from his. Finally, he broke away, caressing the curve of her arm before pulling his hand away.

"We shall have to have coffee tomorrow night," Tom said. "After the training of course," he said.

"Of course," Darcy said cheekily with a giggle.

"Good night, Darcy," he said smoothly, squeezing her hand. She looked into his eyes. *Breathe, Darcy, Breathe.* She couldn't say anything. All the formalities, the niceties, were caught her throat.

Impulsively, she whispered "screw it" and lunged after him, pulling his face down to hers in a desperate kiss. She felt his tall, lean body tense against her touch, mostly from shock, but soon he melted into her, kissing her back archly while she tasted every gorgeous bit of those smirking lips.

Damn, she just didn't want to pull away. Not now, not ever. His tongue broke through her lips, tasting

her, playing with her, and delving deep inside. Darcy wondered if she could have a heart attack from something like this, and if it were possible, knowing her luck it'd probably happen to her.

Shifting on her weakened balance, Darcy finally fell away, giggling slightly against his face. He straightened, and she caught his stare again, beaming with a sort of strange triumph.

“Um...I was going to say sorry, but...looks like I don't need to,” she drawled, licking her lips. She turned on her heel, winking at him and walking a little smugly through the front door. She rested a hand on the frame and threw him a look over her shoulder. “Good night,” she purred slightly, and she sauntered happily inside after Agent Hill gave her a slight nod, and walked back to his car grinning himself.

When Darcy was inside, her thoughts were so consuming that she almost didn't see Jane jump up from her office chair, looking haggard and kind of scary, and peering at Darcy with anticipation.

“Well?”

“Agent Tom Hill seems to like coffee and ice cream,” Darcy said, stalling as Jane seemed to bounce like a puppy in her spot. Darcy grinned with naughtiness. “And... he's a damn fine kisser.”

Part Nine: A Handy Accessory

Was she really paying attention that much while Agent Hill taught her about the rest of the Stark equipment that day? Maybe, though, probably not as much as she should have. Darcy admitted she was swooning over Agent Hill, and he made it very hard for her to concentrate.

He was flirting with her all day, and well, she didn't deny his advances. She was totally the instigator too. And his brand of flirting was – *smooth*, and not quite as obvious as other men that Darcy's observed. He seemed to do it without seeming unprofessional too. None of the other S.H.I.E.L.D agents seem to notice or hear their giddy little conversations at all.

It was like they were isolated in their own world.

Leaning close, touching knee against knee, or the lingering side glances: they were the kinds of things that warmed her memories of the day and locked them in a standstill. Yet, in the back of her mind she still felt uneasy, like things were too good to be true.

Darcy hated that she had doubts, and her fascination with him seemed to overshadow her uneasiness for the most part; especially, when she was with him. Then, she could think or feel nothing else.

He was still a mystery. Agent Hill still offered her very little about himself or his history in general. Darcy could tell he was a private person, and that she often caught him in deep thought, as if his mind was working on overdrive.

When they packed up for the day, Agent Hill offered her a ride back to the physics building, only with the promise that two hours later they'd meet again for a real date, one where she could dress up and have dinner with him somewhere other than a diner. Even though this town didn't have a lot of great places for dates, she knew of a bar and grill close by that had decent food and ambiance, and when Darcy suggested that, Tom was more than willing to comply.

With a satisfied smile, he kissed her before she exited the car, and Darcy could feel him watching her bounce all the way back into the building.

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A real date. Had she had much of those anymore? Not really, and not with someone as delicious as her gorgeous S.H.I.E.L.D agent.

Yet, Darcy couldn't shake the nagging feeling there was something she didn't know about him. Sure, S.H.I.E.L.D officers were secretive. They were trained that way, among other things, and it was only natural that he'd be a bit more confidential about his personal life.

But that wasn't the problem at all. No, Darcy felt like there was something about Agent Hill that she wasn't sure about.

Still, she wouldn't worry about it now, and she did have a backup plan. Ever since her date with that creeper from the Internet, the one that seemed perfectly normal and hot who ended being a psycho, she carried her taser everywhere. Agent Tom Hill could be a saint for all she knew, but she wasn't betting on it. Plus, the taser was like an extension of herself. She felt almost incomplete without it. (Damn, S.H.I.E.L.D, for not letting her take it to the work site.) And... it fit nicely within her Guess handbag, perfect for occasions like these.

When she stuffed it in her bag, Darcy glanced at the KII meter. She wondered...There would be no need for this tonight, right? And as she stared at it, she felt cold from the possibility of some unseen force freaking her out and then ruining her date. She bit her lip, shaking her head. She'd kill that Loki bastard if he tried anything, so she vigorously snatched up the meter and stuffed it in her bag as well.

For the rest of her date, she broke out the black mini skirt. It was 2 for 3 in the man-snagging department, with some experience for a "come in for coffee" notoriety as well. Was it slutty to jump in bed with someone on the second date? Darcy wondered. Nah, not really, right?

Standing in front of the mirror in her cramped bedroom, Darcy smoothed her royal blue low-cut shirt (*my girls are going to prove their use tonight*, she mused) and her eyes swept down her legs over her shiny black shoes, inspecting them for any imperfections. Her make-up would have to suffice, and she didn't think she looked too skanky, which was good.

"Whatever, I'm hot," she told herself, and she laughed a little as Jane called her from downstairs. Poor Jane. She was still fixing that tampered data.

"Darcy! You look amazing. Are you going dancing tonight?" Jane asked.

"If Tom buys me tequila than yeah, we'll call it dancing... for now," Darcy said with a smirk, and Jane laughed lightly. She eyed her happily and Darcy caught a flicker of regret on the woman's face. She almost knew what Jane was thinking; what she wouldn't give to have a happy date with Thor someday, whenever he returned.

"Have fun," she said, tucking her hair behind her ear. Darcy heard a honk outside, and she knew when she left that door, Jane would be back in front of her computer screen, fixing her research.

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When she slid in his car, Darcy felt his eyes on her, looking her over appreciatively. He told her she

looked beautiful, and Darcy instantly felt flushed and nervous. She shot him several sly glances, flirting with him the majority of the car ride over to the club. When they arrived, he did everything gentlemanly, like opening doors, and ordering her a drink, and pulling out her chair for her when they found a table.

Darcy looked around the club, filled with a haze of noise and moving bodies. They were merely background furniture, and as Tom returned to their table with their drinks, Darcy began to get a sense of déjà vu. She didn't take a sip of her drink yet, but she did stare at it for a few minutes before Tom asked her what was wrong, and he assured her he did nothing to her drink.

The coil of uncertainty in her stomach returned, and cautiously, she sipped the drink and smiled nervously at him. He took her hand, and she never realized this before, but his touch was so cold. Bad circulation? Maybe.

A song ended, and she noticed an unusual quiet in between tracks, only filled with the droning chatter of people. Then, she heard something else. There was a strange beep in her purse. Her phone? Her brow furrowed.

"Darcy, what's wrong?" he asked her, concerned.

"Um, I think my phone is beeping," she said frowning. "I hope Jane is okay."

She dug into her purse, only to find that her phone had no messages and was fully charged. So, the beeping didn't come from there. She could feel Agent Hill's eyes boring into her, and she hesitated to dig for whatever else was beeping.

She didn't need to; Darcy knew. She put her phone back, and stealthily she took a peek inside her bag. Her blood felt cold when she saw the spike in the KII meter beyond the normal levels that would appear from the club.

She snapped back to Tom, who was still holding her other hand. "Uh, not my phone," she said, smiling weakly. "Must be somebody else's."

Tom looked slightly reassured, but she met his deep green eyes, and she knew that he still suspected something was wrong. And was it her imagination or did his eyes seem darker? His smile and expression no longer seemed as kind. Suddenly, he looked very sinister to her, and Darcy couldn't figure out why.

But her KII meter was going off, and it kept beeping in her purse.

"Are you sure? It certainly sounds like it's coming from you," he asked, his tone almost wicked and

mocking. Darcy checked her phone again. Still nothing, but he didn't know that since she didn't take her phone out.

"Oh! Yep, it is mine," she lied with a huge smile. "I have a text from Jane." She looked at her phone, still keeping it concealed within her large handbag. "She's had a small accident at the physics building." Darcy put on her best frown. "She needs me. I really should go back," she said with a pout. "You know, this is all for my college credit."

"Of course," he said, rising from his seat. Instead of waiting for him to take her chair out for her, Darcy shot up and headed for the door. Swiftly, Agent Hill followed, and suddenly the KII meter fell silent in her purse. But what the...? Darcy thought. Agent Hill still hovered behind her, so did that mean Loki was somewhere in the club?

If that was the case, why did she get these creepy vibes from Agent Hill all of the sudden?

Was Loki influencing him?

He headed back to her place, and she fidgeted nervously during the ride. She stared at her purse, fearful the KII meter was going to go off again, and then he'd discover it, and she'd have to explain.

Thankfully, it didn't and when they arrived, Darcy turned to him and immediately apologized.

"I ruined our date," she said, and he shook his head.

"Make no apologies. I will see you tomorrow. Give Dr. Foster my best," he said, and Darcy felt wilted and cold inside, regretting how she behaved toward Agent Hill. If he was innocent and she was just paranoid, she knew that after that spectacle, she'd probably lose him.

So much for having a decent guy for once, she thought, as she slammed the door behind her. Jane had already gone back to her trailer, and she was nowhere in the physics building. Darcy wondered just how much work her mentor had finished without her.

Sighing heavily, Darcy headed up to her room. When she arrived at the door, her purse screamed at her side, making her jump. She pulled it out and looked at the meter's lights flashing with the accompanying sound. The door to her bedroom was ajar a crack, as if someone was already inside. Slowly, she opened the door as her other hand slid into her purse, finding her taser.

She froze, seeing someone's back toward her as he stood over her bed. He turned around, and all her fears and suspicions finally made sense. It was Agent Tom Hill, only, at the same time, it *wasn't*. He grinned at her. She didn't know how the hell he got in here, or why he was dressed like a World of Warcraft reject, but she wasn't stupid. He wasn't actually Tom Hill. He'd been wearing a mask as the

S.H.I.E.L.D agent the whole time.

No, she knew who he really was. There really was no one else that he could be. Loki.

“Hello, Darcy,” he said to her, and the door slammed behind her. Darcy jumped and instinct took over.

She blinked, and there was a snap followed by a loud buzz before whine of crackle. Lights flickered against the walls. He shook from the onslaught of electric volts, bewildered and aghast in front of her, the sleazy smile disappearing from his face before he tumbled to the floor.

For a long pause, Darcy stared at the unconscious figure, feeling the dread already sneaking into her bones. “Oh, shit...” she said, and when it dawned on her that she tasered *another* god, one potentially more dangerous and lethal than the last one, she felt almost faint.

But instead of falling over from shock, Darcy’s instinct kicked in again, and she could only dumbly listen to the self-preserving voice screaming inside her head.

Buck up, Darcy, she told herself sternly, and duck-tape the sneaky bastard to a chair.

Part Ten: The Unwilling

First, there was darkness. He was floating in a void, disconnected from his body and feeling as weak as a mortal, if that was possible. Almost as weak as when he fell from the crumbling Rainbow Bridge and into the depths of space.

Thankfully, then, Loki knew a secret way to arrive at Midgard, and even though his powers were not what they were in Asgard (and splitting himself into duplicates drained him as well), they were still superior to humans, and soon, when he found out more about the Cosmic Cube through Erik Selvig, he will be more powerful than ever.

Until then, he waited out his time on earth – observing and plotting, and having a little fun here and there, mind you.

Then, he thought of Darcy Lewis, a foolish, intriguing little mortal whom no one suspected, helping him from the shadows through his spells when she did not know it herself. Still, he did not intend for her to be this clever, nor this soon.

He groaned awake, feeling constrained. Apparently, she bound him to a chair. Well, that wasn’t hospitable. He turned his head, meeting her eyes darkly. Truthfully, he was more annoyed than angry.

“You know these bindings cannot contain me,” he droned with irritation. He watched Darcy shudder, her grip on her weapon tight, the same one that no doubt injured him moments ago, and she stared at

him, speechless and wide-eyed.

“Well,” she said, her voice trembling. She cocked her head nervously. “It was worth a shot.”

As soon as the spell escaped his lips, Loki was free, dusting off the bindings and standing up regally to face her. He frowned, keeping himself calm as anger and chaos simmered beneath his skin. He really did feel slighted that she attacked him like that, even though he really couldn't blame her. He didn't expect her to figure him out so quickly, and well, it threw him off more than anything.

Still, it was rude, and he supposed the girl had to be punished.

As he crept toward her, Darcy froze, backing flush against the door of her room as much as she could. His eyes swept over her as she shivered, and he felt her fear. Perhaps she didn't believe she'd come out of this alive? She had good instincts, and though it was probably deserved, Loki still didn't want to kill her.

Tormenting her and making her believe that he *would* was definitely more fun.

He leaned over her, his face coming inches from hers. She looked away, and he pulled her chin back, gripping it hard in his gloved hand as he forced her eyes to meet his.

“You have been a very bad girl, Darcy. How dare you attack me, a God, with your puny human weapon,” he said, glaring at the offensive tool in her hand. He quickly grabbed it from her, overpowering her strength as he crushed it easily, and threw it behind him. Darcy whined as he destroyed her weapon, something that obviously meant a lot to her. “Now,” he said continuing, “What shall I do about your punishment?”

“Well, you could kill me. End this,” she said, almost jokingly. Is this mortal really a fool? Does she invite death?

“Do you wish it?” he asked her, his tone lowering as he loosened his grip on her chin and began stroking her skin teasingly. She looked at him annoyed, yet still frightened of what he had planned for her next.

“Well, no, I'd really like to live a lot longer, at least until I finish this internship,” she said, and she was still joking with him, not taking this seriously at all. Well, her fear was taking him seriously, and he supposed the snide remarks were just a part of who she was. He admired her for that at least.

“You could put up a fight,” he said, his tone lowering as he looked at her. She met his eyes, and he almost felt like she was searching for something, feeling him out despite her terror and resolve.

“Seriously, why would I amuse you any more than I already have?” she countered, and Loki laughed.

“Oh, how clever. If I killed you quickly, you'd take that satisfaction away from me wouldn't you?” Loki said, and he leaned down and whispered in her ear. “Now you're getting it, Darcy.”

“What do you want? Just tell me, okay? You've been messing with me for like two weeks now and it's

getting old,” Darcy said in weak exasperation.

“What do I want? You’ve already given me what I want. Now I’m just here to make sure my spell stays strong and you don’t tell your precious Jane Foster of my presence,” he said, and the color in Darcy’s face seemed to drain.

“What do you mean I already gave you what you wanted?” Her fear had returned, and Loki relished the thick suspense in the air.

“Darcy, you should never take drugs that make you completely pliable to mind control. Just a word of advice,” he said, and Darcy gasped. “Yes, and if you haven’t figured it out, I used you to tamper with Foster’s files on how to reconstruct the *Bifröst*, or as you know it, the wormhole.”

“You...you asshole!” she hollered at him, and he did not expect her to smack him against his cheek.

Loki snapped his head toward her, the grip on her chin becoming painful. She cried out as he twisted her jaw in his grasp. “You really are trying my patience with your behavior.”

“Oh yeah? Don’t you think you might deserve it?” Darcy seethed, glaring at him intensely. She seemed newly invigorated by his information that he used her. “I’m going to tell them. Somehow, I’ll tell them you’re here and what you made me do.”

Loki’s grin stretched. “I do not think so,” he said. “That’s why I’m here, Darcy. When S.H.I.E.L.D ultimately realizes it was you, they’ll imprison you, and when they ask you all sorts of questions, you won’t be able to say anything. You won’t even be able to utter my name; that’s what the spell is, and the closer I am to you, the stronger the spell is.”

“Ugh,” she said, and he began to lessen his grip on her. When she finally showed no sign of resisting him any further, Loki let his hand fall and watched her as she rubbed the wounded chin.

“Can I just say one thing? You really suck at stalking by the way. Also, thanks for seducing me. I can’t believe you did that! I wish I could have the whole week with you washed from my brain!” He watched as she crossed her arms and glared at him, throwing her head back as if she finally regained her confidence, acting as though she was equal to him. It grated on his nerves slightly, but Loki couldn’t help but admire the fire in her spirit. Perhaps this is another reason her chose her to be his unwilling aide. It was more fun for him to manipulate strong-willed people.

“I suspected you would discover me sooner or later,” he said. “It does not matter anymore. I only needed to delay my brother’s return, and I did.” He grinned at her. “I offer you my thanks in your help, Darcy.”

“Oh shut up,” Darcy said, and she turned away from him with a frown. “I can’t believe you made me betray Jane like that, and I can’t even tell her.” She began to pace to the right, and Loki followed her, leaning over her shoulder.

“It’s perfect, don’t you think. Best friends who unknowingly destroy each other? Besides, I’d had enough of that woman’s mooning over my brother. Destroying her research is less than what she

deserves,” he said, and Darcy turned to him, jabbing him in the chest with a finger.

“Don’t you touch her!” she said, and then, after pausing, she looked away as if she realized something. “Wait, Thor’s coming back?”

Loki’s smile disappeared at her elation. She grinned at him. “Well, that doesn’t matter then! Jane’s going to fix her research, and Thor will come back!” She met his eyes. “Who really cares if you’re here if Thor can come back?”

Loki was seething, and he moved forward, caging her against the door again. His tone dropped low, becoming sinister. “Yes, my brother will return, and you all can celebrate how your dear friend, *your hero*, has come back to you, but your celebration will not last long.” He watched in delight as Darcy’s happiness quickly waned.

“I will give him such a grandiose homecoming he will wish he never returned,” he said. “Until then, Jane’s research still remains unfinished, and who’s to say I won’t have you sabotage it again?”

He could feel Darcy tense as he caged her. She scowled at him, and he saw unshed tears in her eyes. “Don’t. Just...haven’t you done enough?”

He leaned close to her ear, and his lips were close, just like a light kiss. “No. It’s never enough, not for what my brother has done to me. What he has denied me. No, Darcy, it will never be enough.” He pulled away and sighed. “And I have to play the role which was given to me, the role that myths paint as my character.”

“The god that no one likes?” Darcy braved the retort, though it didn’t bother Loki much.

“Yes, I suppose that too,” he said, and he stepped forward and drew her face into his palms. “Fear not, Darcy. I won’t kill you. Perhaps I’ll even spare you in the end if you help me.”

Darcy’s jaw dropped, and he could sense both anger and shock rolling off her. She inhaled a shaky breath.

“Yeah, I’m going to have to say no to that,” she said, and he pulled away with an even smile.

“You’re not going to have a choice,” he said. “Well, now that you know I’m around...I must go. I have matters to attend, but I will return.” He brought a finger to his lips. “Shhh. Don’t tell anyone I was here,” he teased, which seemed only funny to him.

“No, you really *don’t* have to come back,” Darcy said condescendingly. “I promise I won’t miss you”

“Cheeky,” he said. “But unfortunately, you won’t be able to get rid of me.” He leaned close again and studied her bemused expression. “Like you, I’m *ecstatic* for my brother’s eventual return.”

He locked with her eyes as he tapped into his magic, ready for a jump back to his other doppelgangers with Erik Selvig and Nick Fury. Soon, as Darcy’s image faded from him, lost into the darkness, he snapped back into his duplicate bodies, and he tried to remember her expression, her face of varying

emotions from anger to shock.

Loki was almost relieved. It had become tiresome hiding in the shadows from her. He admitted it had been fun in the beginning, and even wearing the face of another seemed to have its use, but now... that farce was over. Darcy truly knew who he was and why here was there – well, as much as he allowed her to know.

More importantly, she knew that he wasn't leaving her any time soon, that he was a definite threat to Thor and even to his brother's friends. And the best part was? The poor mortal girl couldn't say or do anything about it.

It would just be their little secret.

Part Eleven: Foolish Games

For the time being, Loki put Darcy out of his mind. He really hadn't expected her to attack him like that so quickly, or for her weapon to even work on him.

I'm wearing my magic a bit thin on Midgard, he thought, still trying to get used to the differences between Asgard and Midgard. He was overconfident, though he still wouldn't admit to being foolish. He had some fun at Darcy's expense, and at least the charade of pretending to be someone else to win her was over.

He didn't need to *win* Darcy anymore. Loki was sure she knew her place, so he left her with confidence that his spell remained strong, and the girl wouldn't be able to tell anyone of his presence.

Loki returned to spying and manipulating Erik Selvig quickly. For a mortal, Loki found him rather impotent and cautious, and if it weren't for his influence, Erik might have never had the willingness to study the Cosmic Cube. Following him through S.H.I.E.L.D headquarters, Loki found himself in the middle of a conversation between Nick Fury and Selvig, and unlike others, this conversation was slightly more interesting.

"It's dangerous," said Erik Selvig. "I know that for a fact. Some of the physical makeup of the Cube is still a mystery to me, but from what I've seen, it's not of this world, and it's too risky in the wrong hands."

"We gathered that initially," Fury said, almost irritated by Selvig's lack of progress. "Just keep analyzing it, and we'll worry about keeping it out of the wrong hands."

Loki was intrigued, and he sent his curiosity through Selvig. "Oh?"

Fury stared at him with a steely smile. "Nothing to concern yourself over."

Erik seemed defeated on the matter, but Loki wouldn't give up just yet.

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Loki paced around Fury in the shadows where he couldn't see him. *Interesting*, he thought. Fury was by no means a transparent human. Fury had secrets, schemes, and machinations, and Loki admitted that he admired him for it.

Still, his cryptic attitude left much to be desired. Selvig went on his way, back to studying the Cube. For the day, Loki would follow Nick Fury. He'd followed him before, but not as much. Perhaps he underestimated Fury's role in all of this. Loki just thought he was another high ranking soldier, easily replaced by any other mortal soldier if he were to die.

Perhaps, it was foolish of him to think of Nick Fury as expendable. He certainly had the clearance and initiative to hold onto the Cosmic Cube, even if Erik was studying it.

As he tailed him, Fury's elusive secret was even more interesting when he came in contact with Agent Coulson. Loki knew of this man well. He had imprisoned his brother for going after the hammer, and well, taking out a number of his men. He seemed to be Fury's right-hand man.

"Any news from New Mexico?" Fury asked him.

Coulson's lips pressed together tightly. "Dr. Foster is finally moving faster after we brought in the Stark equipment. Still no evidence on who tampered her research."

"We may not be able to wait for this Thor guy," Fury said, and Loki watched them as they sat opposite each other in a concealed S.H.I.E.L.D room.

"We're activating the Avengers Initiative early?" Coulson asked, but he seemed mildly surprised, but Loki was more than entranced.

"Not formally," Fury said, and Loki was still intrigued by this Avengers Initiative. He'd heard of it, but not in depth. Loki watched as Nick Fury smirked. "But we will start taking auditions."

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Clearly, S.H.I.E.L.D had counted on Thor to join their Avengers Initiative to protect this Cosmic Cube from all the evils of the universe who wanted to put their paws on it, namely evils like *him*. Loki was sure his brother would jump at the chance to prevent Loki from getting at the Cube, provided Thor could come back, and S.H.I.E.L.D, as well as Jane Foster, were betting everything they had that he would.

Loki was sure they'd find away. Heimdall was indeed powerful, and the humans were certainly resourceful. Loki wouldn't underestimate them, which was reason enough to crave their destruction along with his brother's.

He wondered though, if his brother would enjoy the idea of working with other Midgardians, powerful or not, in order to protect this Cube, to circumvent inevitable evil that had S.H.I.E.L.D on their toes since before Thor's arrival.

If they only knew true evil, Loki thought, and though he didn't consider himself as such, he would

definitely live up to his reputation in order to defeat his brother and his pathetic allies once in for all.

Then, Father, you will see you underestimated my worth, he silently promised. Yet, he didn't want to admit this was his fighting force. Really, should it matter what All Father thought of him now?

As foolish as this Avengers Initiative sounded, Loki did not overlook them. He would research the candidates for this team, for the allies that his brother would someday make and fight with to protect the Cube.

The Cube will be mine anyway, Loki thought. *I cannot have the hammer, so I will take something better. All in due time.*

Loki, of course, was already formulating a plan. Strangely enough that plan still included Darcy Lewis, so wasting no more time, he quickly returned to her.

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Since her last encounter with Loki, Darcy had become paranoid about everything. Jane, thankfully, didn't notice anything out of the ordinary, and if she did, Darcy would tell her she hadn't been sleeping well.

As Jane came closer to fixing her tampered research, Darcy was afraid that Loki would have her sabotage the work all over again. Sometimes this fear prevented her from sleeping. If she fell asleep, would Loki creep back and slip into her mind again? It was possible, and she had tried everything to give credence to his presence. Nothing worked: no notes with his name, no bookmarked texts of his legends, and outward screams of his name completely failed as well.

His spell definitely was powerful, and she felt foolish to believe otherwise.

As the KII meter became unsuccessful in tracking him, she utterly quit trying to tell Jane about Loki when all her methods would either fail or be totally erased from existence. Plus, she doubted if the KII meter would work on him again, now that he knew that it alerted his presence when he did a powerful spell.

Then, she started sleeping again. Darcy couldn't stop it if she tried. She'd lost so much sleep worrying about Loki that her body ached for it, and it'd been days since she'd seen any sign of him.

Of course, Darcy seemed to give in too soon. Just when her guard was down, Jane found her - sleepwalking in the physics building and making her way toward her laptop.

"Darcy!" When she came too, she tried so desperately to explain herself, and "Loki" was right on the tip of her tongue.

But she couldn't say it. She mumbled gibberish before falling into Jane's unsteady arms. In the darkness, Darcy swore she could hear his sinister laughter.

Part Twelve: Power Shift

Darcy swore up and down that she didn't tamper with Jane's evidence. It was true, to a point, but when she tried to tell Jane who the real culprit was, the words only appeared in her head, but they could not escape her lips.

It was like she suddenly forgot. She was left stuttering, muttering incoherently and on the verge of a panic attack. Her hands flew up to her head, clutching her hair as she crouched down in a ball, crying. Then, the piercing whine echoed within her head and tears leaked out her eyes with no sign of stopping. She felt Jane hold her, whispering her soothing words, but Darcy could not make them out. Until the thought was out of her head about Loki, she would suffer a headache under the horrible sound.

Gee, great spell, Loki. Thanks a lot, jerk-off, Darcy thought to herself, unhappy to have a lingering headache for the rest of the day. Jane ordered her to bed and assured her she could do her work without Darcy's help that day. After her nap, Darcy crept downstairs from her room and found that Agent Coulson was there, talking to Jane about Darcy. She frowned, listening in to make sure they didn't think she was untrustworthy.

"We found her fingerprints on your keyboard, but if you say she uses it for Facebook, we really can't prove she did the tampering," Coulson said.

"I know, and I trust Darcy completely, but she's been acting so strange lately. She's withdrawn and spaces out sometimes. I know she had something with one of your agents and it broke off suddenly, so I just figured she was sad from that," Jane spoke. Darcy felt a weighty pause where neither one of them said anything.

"One of my agents? That's odd. I gave them orders to not date civilians while they were out here. Do you know which one it was?"

Jane didn't answer right away. "You know...I don't remember his name. I'm sorry. I'm drawing a blank."

"Hrmm," Coulson said. "I'll question them. I don't suppose you could ask Darcy?"

"Darcy!" Jane yelled, and Darcy jumped at her voice and quickly sprinted down the stairs in attention to them both.

"Um, yeah...?" She looked nervously at Coulson as he studied her intently, probably trying to find anything strange in her behavior. Shoot, she thought. She was totally busted. They were going to stick her in a cell, or worse, waterboard her to get to the truth, and knowing Loki's spell, they would never get it, and she'd probably die or drown before that happened.

"Agent Coulson wants to know which one of the S.H.I.E.L.D agents you dated. He just needs to know because it isn't allowed, and it may give a clue on who tampered with my work," Jane said.

Darcy furrowed her brow, and Coulson continued. "My agents have strict orders, and there is one that went out of line, I'm guessing he wasn't one of my agents."

“An impostor?” Darcy asked. “Is that possible?”

“Not back at headquarters, but out here in the desert, well, security is more lax,” Coulson admitted. “I can’t keep track of all of Stark’s men either.”

“Well, um, I’m sorry but...” She turned desperately to Jane. “I can’t remember his name. I don’t know why, but when I think it’s on the tip of my tongue, it disappears.”

“Oh, really?” Coulson looked back and forth to Darcy and Jane. “This is disturbing. You both don’t remember him?”

“I wish I could, and I’m not lying,” Darcy clarified, but she was feeling another oncoming headache. “I think...I think his name was Tom, but I can’t remember more than that.”

“Well, that’s a start,” he said, his eyes lingering on Darcy for a moment. “Listen, we know how your finances are, Ms. Lewis, but from what I suspect is going on here...I think it would be best if we move you away from Dr. Foster’s sensitive equipment in this building. Now, Dr. Foster trusts you, but if outside forces are tampering with the material, or trying to, I think it would be in all our best interests to have nobody around this data. We’ll put up a stricter security perimeter with cameras and motion sensors. Now that you’re so close to fixing the wormhole to Thor’s world, I’d like to be a little more cautious.”

“Certainly,” Dr. Foster said. “What do we need to do, especially in the day time?”

“I’ll give you and only you the security clearance to enter the building. Ms. Lewis will have to accompany you. I’m sorry but I don’t want to give such a security level to a civilian.”

“No, it’s okay,” Darcy said agreeably. This was possibly the best method in warding off Loki. If S.H.I.E.L.D suspected any foul play, well, perhaps their high tech security could give him a bit more of a challenge, and the less Darcy was involved the better. Loki couldn’t use her anymore if she wasn’t here, and the notion gave her tremendous relief. “So where am I staying?”

Coulson answered, “There’s a hotel in the center of town. We’ll set you up there until Dr. Foster doesn’t need you anymore for her research.”

Jane looked at Darcy. “I wish I could come with you, kiddo, but it’s for the best. I’ll keep the camper out here next to the physics building, and you’ll just have to come to work on time in the morning so I can let you in the building.”

“Sounds good,” Darcy said, and she flashed Coulson a weak smile. “I’ll start packing.”

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Jane had taken a few hours off to help Darcy pack and load her things up on the truck to move downtown. Thankfully, most of Darcy’s possessions were still at her parents’ house, and the things she brought with her to her internship were only essentials: her clothes, her music, a few books and her

makeup and toiletries. The back of the truck hadn't even been filled up that much, and when they reached her new hotel room, Darcy was thrilled as S.H.I.E.L.D supplied her with her own computer (a used one that Tony Stark was going to donate that Coulson managed to snatch up) and they paid for cable and premium channels through the hotel TV. It was almost like a vacation.

"Looks like S.H.I.E.L.D really takes care of their own," Jane commented, putting down the last box as Darcy flipped on the TV. She channel surfed a little before she found the movie House Bunny, one of her personal favorites.

Darcy snorted. "Does S.H.I.E.L.D really consider me one of them?"

"Well, they do want to make sure we're happy so we can finish this research," Jane said, slumping on the bed next to her. Darcy turned to her.

"Hey, wanna grab some ice cream?" Darcy asked. "I need some carbs for when I start unpacking."

Jane frowned. "You go ahead. I'm going to go back to work." She sounded a little disappointed, but Darcy wondered if she could bring her a snack later. Jane might appreciate it, and it was the least Darcy could do after all this trouble she was causing.

"Jane, are you really that much closer to bringing Thor back?" Darcy asked, and Jane smiled, her eyes brightening with excitement.

"I really am, Darcy. Truthfully, the tampering didn't set me off that much. Thanks to the Stark equipment, Thor could be back here in a few months at the earliest." Jane paused. "But I am going to need your help."

Darcy smiled. "Of course, you know I got your back." Jane rose from Darcy's bed and headed for the door.

"I'll see you at work tomorrow 7 AM sharp," she said, and Darcy gave her a quick salute as Jane left with a grin.

Darcy was immediately immersed in loneliness after Jane left. House Bunny played in the background, and she groaned at the idea of going through her boxes again. She imagined she could leave most of her stuff packed. She pulled out her iPod and some books, and she hung her clothes up in the closet. She lined the bathroom with her soaps and make-up, and started inspecting the nooks and corners of her hotel room. Fresh towels stocked her pantry, and the room was big enough with its own small kitchen. She found dishware and pans, and she even found money on the counter, no doubt from S.H.I.E.L.D, for groceries.

"Just like a vacation," Darcy mused, and though she missed the physics building, she was relieved that she was no longer around as a potential danger to the research. She wondered if Coulson was finding any luck with the one name she managed to pluck out of her memory of Loki, even though it was a fake name.

Darcy ventured out after an hour of unpacking, and headed down to the small, family grocery store just

a few buildings down from the hotel. She picked up a variety of things, mostly junk food, and assured herself that pop-tarts and ice cream were totally justifiable things to buy with S.H.I.E.L.D.'s money.

She flipped on another movie while she nibbled on a cherry pop-tart, and she picked up a book, thankfully not Norse mythology but of sexy vampires, and she dressed down to her summer pajamas of shorts and a tank top, and began to get lost in another world.

Right when she got to the good part of the book, the sex part of course, Darcy heard a steady knocking at her door.

"I don't need housekeeping!" she yelled, knowing that no one else other than Jane would bother her at this time. She had a pretty good sense that Jane was still nose-deep in her work.

The knocking continued, which forced Darcy to leap from her bed and march to the door, angry at being disturbed. She was so cozy in her covers reading her smutty book, so who dared to disturb her? She didn't even care that she was barely dressed in only her thin pajamas. Her tank top hung low and disheveled, and she was sure whoever was on the other side of the door would not appreciate her revealing clothes, which would hopefully send them away.

She swung open the door, taser ready in her hands, and she glared up at the offending guest. Her anger disappeared and turned into awe when she saw who it was: Loki.

"You!" She yelled, and she hated that he was wearing the same clothes as the S.H.I.E.L.D agent he'd posed as, spurring happier false memories that she'd rather forget. "You know I should have known you'd come back." She lifted her chin as he stared at her.

"They relocated you," he said bluntly, looking inside her room.

She crossed her arms in front of her chest. "Because of you."

He arched an eyebrow. "Surely the spell didn't break. You couldn't have told them."

"No, I couldn't. I tried, but then I got a splitting headache. Thanks for that, by the way. No, S.H.I.E.L.D wanted both of us out of there. Jane's research is being protected by S.H.I.E.L.D's high tech security."

"I am sure their security isn't that impenetrable," Loki said with a wave of his hand.

"Yeah," she said with a heavy breath. "But at least you can't use me anymore."

"So you think," he said.

"What do you want, anyway? Haven't you done enough here? I would think you have bigger schemes to ...uh, well scheme," she said, narrowing her eyes at him.

"I wanted to make sure that things go according to plan, and that you don't spoil the fun by revealing my name," Loki said. "Apparently, the spell is wearing off." He stepped forward, and took her chin under his thumb. "You are a headstrong girl, fighting my spell like that. You managed to tell

S.H.I.E.L.D one of my names. I found out they were talking about this “Tom” character that you were dating, and that he clearly wasn’t one of them - considering the real Agent Tom Hill is missing and never set foot in New Mexico.”

“So that’s the name I forgot. Well, ha! Serves you right,” she said, pulling her chin from his thumb.

“You wanted to know why I was here. I’m here because of *you*, and well, I need to watch this area for awhile,” he said with a grin. “You didn’t tell me the big news. You are holding out on me, Darcy, aren’t you?”

“Huh?” she asked confused.

He stepped so close to her Darcy could feel his breath. He whispered, “Of my brother’s eventual return. You know; I heard you two talking, you and Dr. Foster,” Loki said, and Darcy’s mouth dropped. “There is word within S.H.I.E.L.D. They too are extremely optimistic for Thor’s return.”

“So?” Darcy said. “Why do you look so happy? I thought you didn’t want him to come.”

“On the contrary. I only wanted to delay him.” He smirked at her.

Darcy sighed. “Fine, whatever. So, you’re back and you’re stalking me again. I’m so thrilled,” Darcy said sarcastically, and she lifted her taser and jabbed it into his chest. “Just remember that my taser does affect you, and I will use it, as many times as I can.”

Loki looked down at the taser, unimpressed. “I thought I destroyed that.”

“Got a new one, stronger, and it’s imported from Europe,” she said with a cheeky grin. “Want to test it?”

Loki arched an eyebrow, leaning close to her ear. “Don’t you dare, mortal.”

Darcy shrugged, unfazed by his closeness. “Suit yourself.” She moved away from the door, leaving it opened as Loki hovered over the stoop. She settled back into her bed to continue reading her book, and when she sat down, she looked at him as his gaze swept in the contents of her new room. His eyes finally met her stare, and she threw him a placid expression.

“Well, are you coming inside or standing in the doorway for the rest of the night?” she asked.

“You...are inviting me inside?” There was laughter in his tone, and Darcy rolled her eyes.

“Well, it’s easier than knowing you’re just going to be stalking me from the shadows anyway. So I figured, hey, it’s better for both of us if you just came inside. If you are squatting here, I do expect some kind of rent money. For all this trouble, I really could use at least ten new music albums I’ve been meaning to download,” she droned, and Loki actually looked bemused by her words. “What do you say, Twilight? In or out?”

“But...I could still kill you, mortal, and you invite me into your home? I are you seriously stupid?” he

mocked her.

Darcy, unaffected, only sighed. “Look, you’re going to creep around me anyway, and well, I could use the company. Besides, watching a movie with another person is much more fun than by myself. There’s no one around to hear my witty commentary.”

Loki looked momentarily conflicted, as if he didn’t expect her to be so blasé about his presence. He stepped inside, and Darcy reclined on her bed, smirking at him. She patted the side next to her. “Go ahead, put your feet up. S.H.I.E.L.D.’s paying for the room anyway.”

Loki was too unsure to join her on the bed, but he settled in one of the chairs in the room and looked back from the screen to Darcy.

“Why the devil did you call me Twilight?” Loki asked her, and Darcy’s grin increased.

“Oh, it’s from this book about this lame emo vampire who stalks a human. It’s a great book. I suggest you read it,” she said sweetly.

Loki’s brow furrowed, unsure about her tone. Darcy could see the curiosity brimming in his eyes, and she couldn’t help but love the idea of Loki reading that book. If he was going to be around invading her life again, she might as well find her own way to get back at him for all the things he’d done.

Of course, she wasn’t a master manipulator like he was, and she certainly didn’t have his inventory of powers and spells, but she was still a human woman, stubborn and independent, and a model of her generation. She hardly thought Loki could handle her after awhile. If he were anything like the men she’d dated, he’d be gone in no time - unable to handle her like most of them.

You want to stalk me and make me betray my friends? Darcy thought, turning to Loki as the movie started, ironically the movie Twilight was on one of the premium channels.

Their eyes met, and he looked intrigued, yet uncomfortable. Darcy shifted in the bed, arching her back slightly and pushing out her chest. She grinned at him, wishing he could read her thoughts. *Bring it on, Loki. Just. Bring. It. On.*

Part Twelve (B): Sex is Not the Enemy

“What in Odin’s name is this?” Loki sneered as his face contorted with disgust at the TV.

“It’s True Blood, my favorite show,” Darcy said grinning. She chomped on some chips while watching it, and once in a while, Loki’s hand would sneak a chip for himself. Darcy supposed he ate them because he was bored, but honestly, who could resist Doritos? Not even Loki, the God of Mischief, she thought.

“It’s giving me a headache,” Loki said, and his nose wrinkled as the TV showed yet another sex scene. “Ugh, and it’s horribly gratuitous.”

“Hey, that’s the best part!” Darcy exclaimed; her eyes glued to the TV. For a moment she was

mesmerized. “Ah, I love Eric. Mmm, hot, Viking ass.”

“Ha! The Vikings!” Loki snorted.

“Well, they did worship you. You should feel somewhat revered, shouldn’t you?” Darcy asked.

“I’m not having this conversation with you while you watch...*that!*” Loki said, as a woman’s moans filtered throughout Darcy’s living room.

Darcy laughed. “If I would have known sex could defeat the almighty Loki, I would have put this on sooner, you know, when you were stalking and manipulating me,” Darcy teased him.

“Don’t be absurd,” Loki said smoothly. He leaned near her, and Darcy suddenly wondered when he’d become so close to her on the couch. He’d been gripping the other arm of the sofa when the show started, and now he was barely a breath away from her. She tensed as one of his fingers twirled a tendril of her hair. “As if such a foolish thing could defeat me.”

Bravely, Darcy turned to him and grinned. “Care to test that theory?” Loki froze, and when he disappeared into thin air, she snickered.

“What a total virgin,” she mocked, only wishing Loki stayed around to hear her.

Part Thirteen: The Lodger

Darcy didn’t know what Loki wanted from her. Yet, here he was, mostly, eating her food, criticizing her TV choices, and sharing the space of her S.H.I.E.L.D-funded apartment. Sometimes Darcy didn’t know when Loki would pop up, and most of the time he was silent when he was there, even ignoring her to do his own things. She hated how she was actually getting used to his presence, feeling a sense of loneliness when he wasn’t there.

It was all very troubling. This was the same person who stalked her for several weeks and manipulated her into sabotaging Dr. Foster’s research. He even impersonated someone else to fool her into dating him, even though it seemed to be more of an amusing distraction on his part rather than an important factor in his *evil plans*, whatever they were.

Darcy was still confused on that part too; though, she assumed Loki liked it that way. He was an enigma, and whatever he had planned for Thor’s return could not be good, but for the life of her, Darcy couldn’t figure out his clear objective for using her and hanging around her apartment all the time. She also didn’t buy the obvious lies that he was interested on how she reacted around the others while being the only one who knew of him.

She was sure that was part of Loki’s true intentions, but Darcy hadn’t been born yesterday. And though she thought initially she could tangle with Loki and let him hang around her, it was becoming obvious that Loki just needed a place to hide and store his crap, probably until the day he decided to go to battle with Thor. It was definitely something she wanted no part of, and it unnerved her that Loki was ultimately playing her for the fool, and she’d be damned if he’d kept getting away with it too.

Marching into the living room late that evening, Darcy had found her unwanted roommate lounging on her couch with his feet up on her coffee table. Pieces of his Asgardian getup were strewn about her living room, which she did not appreciate, and he seemed preoccupied with a rather large book that was probably older than the planet itself.

In a bold move, she kicked his feet off her coffee table and dug her fists into her hips. “Okay, tell the truth, what the hell are you really doing here again? Besides messing up my apartment.”

Slowly, he looked down at his disrupted feet and then up to her angry expression. He appeared all too ruffled that she had disturbed him from his reading. Darcy, however, didn’t allow her fury to waver.

“You invited me in, Ms. Lewis,” Loki said bluntly, yet his royal manners seemed intact. It only fueled Darcy’s rage.

“Yeah, but you forgot the part where you can’t just stalk me for free. I’m still waiting to cash in those music downloads, and hey, you ate my new tub of ice cream again. Thanks a lot!”

“I like cold things,” Loki said simply.

“Yeah, I bet you do,” Darcy muttered. “Seriously, when are you going to pay me back for the things you take? Huh? If you’re going to squat here at least pay your fair share!”

“Will you leave me alone and allow me to stay without complaint, *if* I do these things?” Loki asked, still irritated that they were having this conversation.

“Just ...what?” she barked at him, and after she blinked he had disappeared from the room, teleporting to God-knows-where, and he was back in an instant, with a wad of cash (probably stolen) and three new tubs of ice cream (Ew, the totally wrong kinds of ice cream too: juicy orange, mint and vanilla bean).

“The mint is mine,” Loki said, and Darcy’s words were caught in her throat as he went back to his dusty old book, acting as though the conversation never happened.

“Wait...what?”

“Are you going to keep saying that or are you going to let me finish my reading? I paid for the things you demanded, so I live here per our arrangement, so now leave me,” he said coldly.

Darcy couldn’t believe it. He was ordering her around in her own apartment. Granted, S.H.I.E.L.D was still paying for it, but they were the ones that moved her out of the science building. They were inconveniencing *her*, and now Loki was too. She stood agape in front of him, and he continued to read, turning pages that grated on her ears, acting like she was invisible.

She’d had enough. Darcy was *pissed*. She let out a war cry of frustration, which Loki found distracting enough to look from his book, and he met her crazed expression with an arched eyebrow. Darcy could think of nothing but retaliating in the only way she knew how - in the most juvenile terms.

She picked up a large pillow he'd discarded on the floor and she launched it at him, hitting him square in the face. The pillow fell, and she saw his lip curl in annoyance, but he kept his eyes averted from her.

"Jerk!" she exclaimed, and she stormed out of the living room and back into her bedroom. Of course, she could have stayed there and finished the disagreement. She could have thrown Loki out, but she knew she wouldn't be able to, and even if she could, she knew he'd just stalk her like old times. He was keen on staying there, and nothing she did would convince him to go. He may even torture her; lock her in the apartment if it meant getting his way.

But why? Why was staying with her so important to him? It wasn't like he was there all the time. Frequently he popped in and out, and Darcy could only guess he was doing nefarious things. He'd come back with smirks on his face, and she could only guess he'd been prowling around S.H.I.E.L.D playing pranks on poor Coulson because the next day she'd see Coulson and he'd be in a sore mood - for him, and security would be stricter at the site.

If only she could tell them about Loki. She wondered if they had any idea of Thor's brother being here at all.

Darcy shook her head. She went into the bathroom, threw water on her face, and mulled over the idea of taking a good soak in the tub. It was a meager bath tub and it hurt her neck when she tried to relax in it, but she'd be away from Loki, and hopefully left alone with her thoughts.

Of course, it wouldn't be that easy. After she'd discarded her shirt and started the water, she felt his presence behind her.

"AHHH!" She reached for her taser but remembered she left it in the kitchen after her rant. In a last moment of defense, she tried to slug him, but Loki caught her fist.

"Hey, what are you doing in here? It's my private time!" she said, covering her chest with one arm the best she could. She felt her face go hot.

"Oh, stop it. It is nothing I haven't seen before," Loki said, chiding her modesty.

"Yeah, well, maybe it isn't about you," Darcy said vehemently, glaring at him as she remembered that once, when he was playing Agent Tom Hill, she would have loved to give him a show like this. It had even been part of a fantasy, now one that was obviously ruined because of Loki's deception.

Loki let go of her arm and she quickly reached for shirt, pulling it back over her head as he stayed silent behind her. She took her time, though nervously, hoping he'd get some kind of good show from it. Though, she wondered if Loki ever felt such things as desire, or even if he had any such inclinations toward her. He probably thought he was well above her to think such things. She huffed at the thought.

"Well, what do you want?" she snapped.

"I came in here hoping to punish you for that display out there, but then I realized that perhaps I have been too unkind to you, Darcy," Loki said, turning from her so she couldn't see his face.

Odd. It was like he didn't want her to see his emotions. Loki had feelings?

Of course he does, Darcy thought. He felt anger and hatred and vengeance. He loathed Jane and had gone into rants about her, whether or not Darcy wanted to hear him bash her friend. So perhaps he could feel the other emotions too? Was empathy too out of reach for Loki?

Darcy wondered if this was his way of apologizing. Realizing that, she sighed.

"Whatever. You just stress me out, okay?" she said, feeling her anger suddenly dissipate. He did at least replace the ice cream he used. "I don't even know why you're really here," she said in exasperation. "You come into my space and there's no reason for it. You've already used me for what you wanted to do."

"I've told you why," he said, coming closer to her. She crossed her arms and tried to read the complex expression on his face. Usually, this was impossible, but in his eyes, Darcy could see that Loki was disturbed about something. More than preoccupied, which was probably the reason for the stacks of old books next to the couch. No, there was something else going on with Loki and he was obviously fighting internally with himself because of it.

"Yeah, you did tell me, and I think you lied," Darcy said, tilting her head. "Mostly, anyway."

"Well, they say it's what I do best," Loki said, and Darcy might be mistaken, but he seemed kind of hurt by that.

"Look, I get that you don't want me to tell them about you, that you think your spell will wear off if you leave here, but what if I gave you my word I wouldn't tell them?" Darcy asked.

"I wouldn't believe you. You've been known to lie too, Darcy Lewis," Loki said, almost amused by her offer.

"And what would it matter? You said you actually want Thor to return, that you're waiting for him!" Darcy said. "What difference does it make if they know you're around?"

"All the difference, Darcy. I have big plans for my brother, and the element of surprise will be on my side," Loki confessed. "And well, I suppose it doesn't harm you by knowing this, but I have come across something fortuitous that will benefit me whether my brother returns or not. In fact, I look forward to facing him once again."

"I knew it. There *is* something bigger going on with you!" she accused him.

"That part should have been *obvious*," Loki said with a dark smirk, one that she'd hardly seen on his face before. "Are we done squabbling about this *rent* thing? I have business to attend to."

Darcy's brow knitted together. "Yeah..." Her voice trailed off as she got another idea. "Hey, Loki, when will you be done with your business?"

"My plans do not have a time restraint; why do you ask?" he said, eyeing her suspiciously.

Darcy grinned at him, and she sort of felt crazy for even having the suggestion. "Because I want you to watch a movie with me - the *perfect* movie for you, and this time you have to stay and watch it, not bitch about it five minutes in and then disappear," she said, pointing her finger at him. "You know, unlike the last time I asked you to watch a movie with me. You'd actually have to stay all the way through."

Loki looked at her cautiously, his grin already gone. He didn't know what to make of her, and Darcy could sense it. One moment she'd been screaming at him, and the next she'd been calm, inviting him to watch a movie with her. Perhaps she *was* crazy, and even Darcy admitted that she didn't really know what she was doing.

Loki was here to stay in her apartment, and whether she liked it or not, he wasn't going anywhere either. He was up to no good, probably planning a terrifying amount of mischief and destruction, and somehow Darcy was involuntarily getting roped into his schemes.

So, when life gives you lemons...make vodka lemonade... she thought, and she smiled ecstatically when Loki nodded and reluctantly agreed to her request. He didn't know what he was getting into while hanging around Darcy Lewis. She didn't really want him here, and she was scared for her friends while Loki obviously targeted them, but Darcy admitted she was intrigued by him. Maybe a part of her didn't entirely want him gone after all.

And maybe, while he was here anyway, Darcy would have just a bit of fun before he inevitably changed his mind about killing her.

Chapter Fourteen: Movie Night

Darcy shouldn't be this excited, but she was and she couldn't help but dance around her house, gathering things for their "movie night" while Loki went back to reading his book. Darcy caught a side glance or two from him as she pawed through her liquor bottles and began scooping up bags of chips so they could camp out in front of the TV. Finally, she rummaged out a few movies, popped the first one in and then unceremoniously fell into the seat on the couch next to him.

When the movie played, she felt his eyes on her again and she turned, grinning at him as she put the down remote and began pouring some spiced rum into two glasses with ice. "Cheers," she said, downing the first glass and looking at him again.

He arched an eyebrow. "Are you very much settled, Ms. Lewis?" Loki asked her, a bit perturbed. She cackled.

"You know, I'm surprised you're still going through with this. I mean, it's a wonder you're even sitting here and agreeing to the torture of spending time with me," she droned.

"I believe I can manage," he said, flashing her one of those smarmy smiles. "Additionally, you did promise that I could remain here and store my belongings. No one would suspect my presence here, and as long as you tell no one, then this will become the perfect hiding place."

"Huh, okay, whatever," she said, rolling her eyes. "Anyway, maybe you can learn something from this movie."

"What would that be?" Loki asked, glancing briefly at the glass of rum in front of him. Clearly, she

poured it for him, but he was still debating on whether or not he wanted to indulge her and drink it.

"Well, how to be a bad-ass villain," Darcy said. "I assume that's the route you're going for, and nobody does it better than Emperor Zod in Superman II, and maybe we can pop in Star Wars and you can learn something from Darth Vader."

"I think you forget something, little girl," Loki said, and he was done warring with himself and picked up the glass of rum. He took a delicate swig before turning toward her. "I know how these human movies go. The heroes always win."

Darcy grinned at him, grabbing the bottle on the table and refilling his glass.

"And *you* forget something, God of Mischief," she said, becoming pleased as he continued to drink. "Those are just movies, Loki. This is real life. You have more of a chance to win when someone isn't scripting everything."

Loki's brow rose and he rewarded her with an amused smile. "Interesting point of view. I suppose you may be onto something. My brother defeated me in Asgard, maybe it's my turn for victory."

Darcy shrugged lightly. "Maybe," she said in a sing-song voice. "I still think you can learn something from Zod." Her eyes went wide, and she reached over and grabbed Loki's arm with unexpected excitement. "Oh. My. God. You have to totally do that!"

"Have you had too much to drink already?" he asked her.

"No, no, I mean, when you make your enemies submit, you have to totally say: Kneel before Loki," Darcy said, snorting within her laugh. Perhaps the alcohol was getting to her, but she was admittedly having too much fun.

Loki sighed, unaffected by her enthusiasm. "That is ridiculous," he said, and he leaned close to Darcy, his voice just above a whisper. "Why would I use someone *else's* catchphrase when I've defeated them?" Darcy looked awed, and Loki took another sip of his drink as he appeared satisfied with himself. "By the way, this...liquor is atrocious. I will find us something more suitable."

Darcy gaped as Loki disappeared from her couch before her eyes. She pouted at his disappearance, finishing her drink mournfully as the movie droned on in the background. When he returned, he brought a cold chill with him, and she could see icicles crusting the ends of his hair. He handed her a bottle, which could have been frozen too if not for the alcoholic content.

"What the...? Is this magic liquor or something?" she asked astounded, and it excited her that he went to this trouble. "The label is in a foreign language. Is that Swedish?"

"Norwegian to be precise. I was always fond of their liquor," Loki said, returning to his seat and quickly taking the bottle from her hand. "I assume you wanted to make this a party?" Darcy nodded dumbly at him while he awaited her response. He poured the magic Norwegian liquid into their glasses. "Well, now, Darcy Lewis, this is a proper party."

.xxxxx.

Half of the bottle of Loki's Norwegian liquor was gone by the time Superman II ended, and Darcy popped in Despicable Me. Clearly, he was pacing himself for her benefit, and Darcy could barely take a sip until the burning in her ears stopped before taking another.

Plus, each sip made her drunker than five large glasses of Guinness, and she cursed the Asgardian God's ability to hold his liquor. However, she did have a strange curiosity on how potent Asgardian

liquor really was.

"Hey, hey, you know what?" she asked, and she was so far gone she could barely keep her eyes open. Sometime between the end of Superman II and the next movie, she'd been begun hanging all over her roommate, who seemed to take things in stride even when she'd put her head on his lap.

"No, I do not know *what*; please indulge me," he said, and while Loki seemed annoyed and impatient in the beginning, the liquor he brought seemed to move him into a copacetic lull.

"I was thinking if you gave me college credit, I would totally be one of your minions," Darcy said. "But only if I get to wear a jumpsuit. Green. You like green, don't you?"

"I do not think you would be a very good minion, Darcy," Loki told her, staring at her hands on his chest with a weird expression. Lightly, he pushed her away, but her palm still rested on his arm as she gaped at him. "I have a feeling you would defy me if I ended up insulting you or if you suddenly felt self-righteous about something."

Darcy furrowed her brow at him, but she could feel her eyes closing as the alcohol began really hitting her. She fought to stay awake, and she caught Loki's intrigued stare when she glanced over at the rest of her glass.

Loki picked up the bottle possessively, and Darcy was sure he was cutting her off for the night. She supposed she shouldn't drink anymore, especially on how touchy-feely she was getting with him. He seemed annoyed by it, even stand-offish, and though Darcy would be more embarrassed sober, she wasn't anywhere near caring about her behavior now.

She couldn't help it. She missed parties like this. She missed cute guys, bad liquor and skipping class the next day because she was too hung over.

Most of all, she missed sex. Of course, she couldn't say that to Loki. Did she even think of him that way? He was gorgeous, mysteriously seductive even, and sometimes it was hard for her to not get lost in his green eyes. But Darcy initially had a different perception of him, and she couldn't help mistaken him for the Agent Tom Hill she'd been falling for when he'd been tricking her. It'd been cruel of him, and she had yet to forgive him. It was even harder to forgive when the man she'd fantasized about was truly the man who'd been stalking her in the shadows, using her as a puppet to betray her friends. This was the man that had sent a robot from another planet to destroy them, and though he didn't really know her at the time, he still had tried to kill people, and she wondered if he may kill her yet if she crossed him in some way.

Her forlorn thoughts had started sobering her up, and Darcy pulled away from Loki and reclined back against the other side of the couch. She sighed languidly. "I liked you better as Tom Hill."

"I know; you tell me this quite frequently," Loki said with slight irritation.

"You could have just told me who you were. You didn't need to stalk me. You didn't need to make me sabotage Jane's work," she said, feeling tears ebbing in her eyes. "I could have..."

"Cease this yammering. This is what I planned, and there is no changing it now," Loki dismissed her, but Darcy still pouted.

"I could have liked you as who you are. You didn't need to pretend," she said adamantly, and she met Loki's eyes and saw a flicker of realization as he thought of something unsaid.

"Yes I did," he said. "You do not know me, Darcy. You do not know what I'm capable of," he chided her.

"I have a pretty good idea," she said stubbornly.

"I do not know what your obsession with Tom Hill was. Can't you just accept the fabrication and be done with it?" he sneered at her.

"No, I can't. I'm not..." She sighed, annoyed with herself, and with him for catching her in a vulnerable moment. Part of her didn't really care if she told him how she felt - technically it *had* been him, even if he was playing a role. That part of her, however, was soaked in alcohol and she had no inhibitions now. "It was just nice to not be lonely anymore," she said, rising from the arm and sitting up to face him. "It was good to be wanted again."

"It was all a lie," Loki said, stressing his point. He seemed quite intent on having her put Tom Hill completely out of her mind. She wondered if that truly bothered him because he felt guilty or that he simply didn't want to deal with her feelings any longer.

"Yeah, but it was a good lie," she said. "For a while anyway." She turned to the movie, grinning as she realized what scene they were on. "Oh! This is my favorite part. When he takes them to the fair. Aw, he won her the fluffy unicorn! Ha-ha," she said, and when she turned to an uncomfortable Loki, he did seem a little relieved she was moving on from the Tom Hill issue.

She leaned against him. "Besides, I'm sure you're not that much different than he was. I mean, maybe you charm all those Asgardian ladies with those green eyes and princely manners of yours."

"Yes, I am quite the ladies' man," he said sardonically. "Sif, especially. I cut off her golden hair, and then had to replace it to appease Thor. When I finally did, the enchanted hair I brought her turned black. But of course, Sif quite understood the joke and forgave me for it."

"She did?" Darcy asked intrigued.

"No," Loki said annoyed. "In fact, she despises me. Most of the ladies in court do."

"Wow, maybe they just don't appreciate your humor," Darcy said teasingly.

Loki arched an eyebrow at her. "Perhaps."

She punched him in the arm. "Oh, don't be a Grumpy Gus. Now, pour me another drink. I feel too sober; which means, I'm going back from zombie-drunk mode to slutty-drunk mode, and trust me, you don't want the last one."

Loki turned to her. "I don't?"

Darcy laughed with embarrassment. "Well, it *is* a party." He poured her a glass of that magic booze again, and Darcy slumped lightly against Loki's chest. "Trust me, drunk, slutty Darcy always ends up doing something stupid."

"I shudder to think it," he said wryly.

"Hey!" she said offended, and she settled down with an offensive pout. "It's not like I'm not already terrified of you. I don't want to do something crazy and then you'll get pissed and finally be rid of me." She closed her eyes and sighed heavily again. "It's not like you won't eventually kill me anyway."

A weighted pause wedged between them, and Darcy could feel Loki's eyes on her as she tried to focus on the movie. "You really believe I'll kill you." She couldn't tell if he sounded amused or incredulous. Maybe it was a little bit of both.

"Duh," Darcy said. "You've threatened me before, and you really don't have any use for me now. I still don't get why you're even hanging around me," Darcy said. "It makes no sense. I'm Darcy Lewis, the

intern. I'm expendable."

"You have nothing to fear from me, Darcy. I'm not going to waste my time killing one mortal, and especially not one as accommodating and hospitable as you," Loki assured her.

Darcy laughed lightly. "I'd bow and courtesy to you if I could still move my legs," she said lazily.

"I'm far too busy to concentrate on how one human affects me," Loki said, and Darcy felt his arm shift around her, holding her. It was unexpected, mostly since the whole night he reacted stiffly to her, sitting like a statue as she leaned against him.

Then, she felt his fingers in her hair and breath against her head. "Do not fear me and do not fear what I can do," he said, his voice low and husky - but oh, so dark. Darcy tensed to his touch and words, and she did not try to move to meet his eyes.

"Tell me, do humans really fear one powerful alien god?" Loki asked.

"Um...though I think you're plenty scary, if you go up against Thor again, it may not be as frightening...if I were, as you say, just one human," Darcy said. "I mean, yeah, you're both aliens and that's kind of frightening to the average person, but like Superman against Zod, it's somewhat of a fair fight."

"So what would tip it to my advantage? Thor may have help from his Warriors three and Lady Sif. Still not a fair fight from my end," Loki mused, and the more he talked, the more Darcy's blood ran cold from his intentions.

"You'd have to find more people. In fact, do you know what would really scare everyone on Earth?" she asked, and she found the energy from her spot and turned to him. She locked with his intrigued gaze, and she felt a strange ache in her chest when they came close enough to kiss. Loki, however, was more concerned by her response.

"Full scale alien invasion. That's what most humans are scared of. I mean, I've seen so many alien invasion movies that I don't care to admit it, but man, humans are scared of lots of aliens. Lots and lots of aliens, coming here and enslaving the whole planet," Darcy said, and her brow rose when she saw the calculating expression on his face. "Oh no, did I just help you out?"

Loki grinned, turning to the bottle on the table and emptying it in her glass. He handed it to her, and Darcy felt locked by his intense green eyes. "Have another drink, Darcy."

"Ugh," she said, taking the drink readily. "I'm such an idiot."

"On the contrary," Loki said, pulling her into his arms again. He sipped his own drink and seemed more content than he had all day. Darcy tensed momentarily as his hands weaved through her hair, and she felt betrayed by her own body as she started to crave his soothing touch. She heard him continue, "I'm officially promoting you from minion to General."

"Sweet, a raise," Darcy said, feeling the alcohol buzz over her brain again. "Still, it's a shame there's no college credit."

Darcy was surprised she was able to wake up the next day after sleeping like the dead from the night before. She supposed the liquor that Loki supplied certainly didn't help. At least she wasn't really dead, or had grown an extra head.

You never did know with weird alcohol, and with what Loki had brought, Darcy was surprised she was still in one piece.

Before she headed to work on the site with Jane, Darcy rushed out of the house, already running late, and she noticed that Loki was not there. It wasn't unusual; Loki had disappeared more as the days went by, and as Darcy rambled about the progress they were having at bringing Thor back, Loki seemed to say even less and was gone even longer periods of time. She wondered if it would be longer this time, especially since they had such a great time last night, and if there was one thing she knew about Loki, he didn't like to have fun with humans, rather he liked to have fun at their expense.

She was thankful that he had picked up his crap at least, and her living room was in more than pristine condition than she'd left it before. Not a bad roommate, she thought, and for some smug reason, Darcy liked to think of Loki doing menial labor such as chores, but she knew he totally did a Harry Potter on the place to make it clean.

When she had locked up the apartment, she started remembering the night before, sad that only bits and pieces were clear, and the rest of their time together were more like hazy memories. She finally realized when she'd woken up in her own bed that morning that Loki must have carried her from the couch to her room, and despite who he was, Darcy felt touched by that.

There's no way he's going soft on me, she mused, though having a more sympathetic Loki may be a good thing, given the plans of world domination he'd been steadily putting into motion lately. He'd been positively giddy about some of the secretive things he'd been planning - Darcy had seen it on his face, even though he thought himself too clever to reveal any of it to her.

Work droned on that day, and Darcy didn't know why she was anxious to get home; it wasn't as if Loki would definitely be waiting for her anyway, but she admitted to the desire in seeing the Trickster god.

Gees, what's wrong with me, she thought grimly. I must be stupid for getting my hopes up for him.

Sometimes Darcy had to remind herself that Loki had taken advantage of her, and he was the sole reason they were delayed in bringing back Thor; however, she couldn't help but regard Loki's slow progression in becoming more than just a stalker and unexpected roommate. After last night, was it possible for them to become friends?

"No way," Darcy said aloud while she was on her break, and her thoughts consumed her while

browsing her Facebook page, something she'd been showing little interest in lately while staying with Loki. It wasn't as if she could snap pictures of him and put them on Facebook. She supposed his magic would prevent such things.

Still, she could at least try.

"No way?" Jane came up behind her, and Darcy almost jumped. She put a hand to her chest.

"Jesus, don't sneak up on me like that," Darcy said.

"Are you ok?" Jane asked, her eyes filled with concern.

"Yeah, just...have a hang over," Darcy said, and Jane frowned at her. She looked over Darcy's shoulder and noticed her Facebook page open.

"You miss your school friends?" Jane asked.

"Yeah, I mean, sometimes I still drive out on the weekends to see them. But lately, I haven't because we've been so busy," Darcy said, and Jane nodded.

"You know, you're always welcome to come out with me and Erik to the bar." Jane cocked her head. "You haven't been coming out with us as much anymore. We thought you were dating someone instead."

Darcy furrowed her brow. Jane knew that she was dating, but somehow, in the recent time, the thought and knowledge had escaped her. It was funny how Loki's magic worked. She wondered if Coulsen had forgotten that it'd been one of his agents too, even though Loki was mad she let that slip and he had to cover his tracks.

"Uh, well, no, not recently. I mean, I had a friend come out for a visit this weekend," Darcy admitted, and she couldn't believe she was able to say it! She supposed it was vague enough, but if Jane was nosy enough, and Darcy knew she was, maybe she would ask more about him; even sneak by unannounced to find Loki there.

Darcy wished!

Jane smiled widely. "Oh really? A guy friend?" she asked teasingly.

"Yeah, but he's totally not into me," Darcy said sternly, and Jane noticed her tone. Her one eyebrow arched with amusement.

“Aw, what’s wrong with him? Is he handsome?” Jane asked, and Darcy was starting to feel a nervous ache in her stomach. Loki was more than handsome; he was gorgeous and Darcy hated to admit it when he’d been such a dick to her, but it was the truth. He wasn’t as ripped as Thor, but despite the black clothes he wore, Darcy could tell he was built well underneath them, and being a hot-blooded American girl, she’d wondered plenty of times what was under his clothes.

And well, he had been Agent Hill at one time, and with the way Darcy felt about him physically, she couldn’t just erase those feelings away.

“Yeah, which is why it’s impossible,” Darcy said. She waved her hand. “Let’s move on, okay? It’s really a complex situation. And if you really must know, he can kind of be a jerk to people, and it’s really hard to like him despite his looks.”

Jane nodded and frowned slightly. “I know how that goes.”

Darcy shook her head. “Well, soon you’ll have Thor back and everything will be great. You two can horizontal tango and make up for lost time.”

Jane tore away from her gaze and looked almost sad. “Yeah, let’s hope you’re right because some days I’m not so sure it’ll be okay, or if he’ll even still want me.”

Darcy watched her, and Jane smiled lightly before she set off back to her work. Darcy felt bad for Jane. She had no idea the woman was having doubts. Darcy thought if she had someone like Thor to wait for, she wouldn’t have any doubts at all.

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After a long day at work on the site, Darcy sighed with exhaustion and dropped her things on her kitchen table when she got home. As expected, Loki was not around when she arrived, and though she probably would have enjoyed seeing him lounging on her couch reading old books, after her conversation with Jane, Darcy wondered if it was a good thing Loki wasn’t around.

She wouldn’t be able to stand herself she started getting attached to Loki and pined for him like the way Jane pined for Thor. At least Jane and Thor had a chance. Loki was certainly not dependable and his loyalty was questionable. He was the loner type too, and Darcy didn’t even want to think about how he regarded women.

The silence became eerie in her apartment, and Darcy quickly gathered up some snacks and parked in front of the TV, immediately turning it to Mob Wives.

“Yes,” she cheered lightly, but despite the distraction of the TV, there was still something strange about the way her apartment felt. It couldn’t be because Loki wasn’t there? No - Darcy knew it was something else.

Creepy! she thought, and her gaze stopped at the small closet door just before the front stoop in her living room. Usually, she didn’t even use that closet, maybe for some shoes and her winter coat, but it had never felt this weird before.

Had Loki put something sinister in there? Maybe something that would destroy the world and that was why it was giving off bad vibes?

“There better not be a ray-gun in there,” Darcy grumbled, and she jumped from the couch and headed over the closet. Her hand hesitantly reached out for the doorknob. The dark feeling putting her nerves on edge became worse.

“I wouldn’t go in there if I were you,” a voice said, startling her. Immediately, she took a swing at the voice, but Loki elegantly dodged the trajectory of her fist.

“JEES, you scared the crap out of me!” she yelled at him. “Don’t do that!”

“I was merely warning you for your own safety,” he said annoyed.

“What the hell did you put in my closet?” she asked, and inevitably, the Trickster smirked at her.

“Shit, this is bad, isn’t it?” she asked, ignoring his warning and opening the door out of curiosity.

“It’s not so much as ‘what’ as...” Loki began. Darcy opened the door and looked ahead, stunned.

“Oh my God! There’s a whole different world in here,” she exclaimed, looking at the vast garnet-colored darkness that rolled out before them. Darcy spotted a black stone walkway that led to circular room set off by some dull golden lights. Inside the lights was an ancient looking desk covered in books, candles, and various other items that Darcy couldn’t even begin to describe. Within the darkness that spanned around them, Darcy couldn’t see anything, and she shuddered wondering if the blackness would consume her, or if it hid monsters inside.

“I told you not to go in there,” Loki said in exasperation.

“What is this? Another dimension?” Darcy asked, and then it dawned on her. “Hey... you turned my

closet into another dimension!”

“Technically, I connected your closet to another dimension, a place that will contain my things. Now you do not have to worry about me filling your apartment with my armor and devices,” Loki said, walking inside. Darcy hesitated as he strode ahead. He turned back to her, and she still didn’t know how she felt about this, or if she even wanted to come inside.

“Wow, that’s ...kind of cool, actually,” Darcy said, still impressed. She crossed her arms and peered at him. “Let me guess, you’re gathering stuff that’s too big to hide into my apartment.”

Loki did not nod, but he smiled at her. “You continue to be smarter than I’ve accredited you, Darcy.”

“It’s because you really don’t know me,” Darcy said with a snort. “Or you just don’t want to,” she said, and before he could respond, her attention turned to her left. “Hey, is that what I think it is?” She squinted in the darkness. “It is!”

“What are you seeing? You’re not supposed to see anything in this darkness,” Loki said with a frown.

“Well, I see it, and you have a motorcycle in your inter-dimensional closet, a very pimped-out sweet looking motorcycle at that,” Darcy said with a mischievous grin. “And that means one thing...”

“And what would that be?” Loki asked her.

“Now that I’ve seen your motorcycle, you must take me for a ride on it! After all, you’re using MY closet to store it - basically for free.” She grinned at him. “So what do you say? Gonna show me how fast this thing can go?”

Loki turned toward her, walking slowly before coming within inches of her face. Smugly, he looked down at her, meeting her challenge. In a low voice he replied, “As you wish, mortal, but I am warning you. I will take you on this ride, but you may not survive it.”

Part Sixteen: Take a Free Ride

At first, she had no hesitation. Darcy would have ridden on Loki’s bad-ass motorcycle even if it killed her. And well, according to Loki on the speeds that it could go, she possibly *could* die from it - if he didn’t drive carefully.

Her real hesitation didn’t come from the possibility of her death, but rather from the closeness she had to be to Loki, clinging onto him as he zipped down the deserted New Mexico highways. From the first time he revved up the bike, Darcy latched onto him with a hardened grip, making the Trickster god tense up as she pressed herself against him and squeezed her arms around his chest. When he slowed

down a bit (and for him it wasn't really slowing down), she loosened herself around him - at least to let him breathe (if he really needed that), and he seemed less rigid from there, proceeding to get lost in the drive himself.

Darcy felt sort of embarrassed for touching him this much, but then as they drove on, she let herself enjoy the surroundings, and she felt freer than ever before as the rest of the world zipped by her in a sandy yellow and blue mesh of hues.

(Though, she had to admit her face was starting to feel numb from the force of the wind against her helmet, but she was having such a good time she hardly cared. She just hoped she didn't get a wicked face burn or something a day later.)

The speed of Loki's bike was unreal - as if they were spanning different dimensions themselves, and she supposed he used magic to improve upon its general speed and design, which impressed her even more than his reluctance to take her for a ride.

That really didn't take much convincing at all, and it was clear after awhile, he was more than happy to show off his toys to her.

When she realized that most of the evening was gone, he slowed the bike to a manageable pace as they headed back toward town. Darcy didn't know how long they'd been riding, and she wasn't clear on where he'd taken her since he'd zipped around highways so fast and zoomed off trail into the rocky desert with smooth ease. When she'd glanced at her surroundings, they had cruised into nightfall, and he was veering toward the center of town toward their humble little apartment.

When it was safe, Darcy removed her helmet and whipped back her hair. She released one hand from him and whooped with delighted laughter. "Oh my God, that was amazing!" Immediately, she noticed his sexy smirk as he eased into a slower pace. She felt excitement pool in her belly as their eyes met, and she caught herself before she got lost in the depth of his green eyes once again. She frowned, not liking the direction of her thoughts as she still kept one arm wrapped around his abdomen - his *very taut and fit* abdomen.

Yikes, what's wrong with me? She thought, *I will not like Loki like that. I will not!*

Sensing her immediate shift in emotions, Loki stopped the bike in front of the town's famous welcome sign. He turned toward her, his lips pressed as he stared at her with suspicion and curiosity.

"What is the matter?" he asked, and there was a small flicker of displeasure in his voice. Or was it simple intrigue? Darcy froze. He couldn't possibly sense the feelings she was starting to have for him, could he? She hoped not. Darcy couldn't quite explain them herself, let alone be able to explain them to *him*.

She met his eyes and smiled awkwardly. "No, nothing, everything is great! I think...I'm just really tired... and hungry." She giggled nervously and licked her lips. "I hope to God that isn't a bug in my teeth."

Darcy hoped he bought her deflection, and after peering at her for a second to gauge her mood, he gave

up and resumed driving them bike back home.

When he stored the bike back in his bizarre dimensional closet, Darcy stretched her arms and let out a loud, uncouth yawn. Already heading to her bedroom, she turned away from him, hoping she could hide in her covers before the tension between them became any worse.

“I’m off to bed. I have a big day tomorrow! We’re giving the wormhole program a test run,” she said, and she caught him staring at her.

Bravely, she inquired about his strange look. “What? Do I have something on my face?” she asked, but she was fearful of his next words by the darkness in his eyes.

“Back there, you lied to me, Darcy Lewis,” he said accusingly, and she backed against the door. He slid forward, already crowding her and looking down at her face. She frowned at him. “Well? Explain yourself.” Why did his voice sound so acidic every time he was mad? It was frightening, yes, but it was also annoying, as if he distrusted everything anyone said. And Darcy hated that no matter what she did, Loki could never be fooled.

“I did not!” Darcy said defensively. “Okay, not really. Look, I’m a woman, all right? You can’t know everything on our minds! I was just thinking...about girl stuff, so just drop it.”

“Provided that is true, I see it as a weak argument, Darcy. What are you really hiding from me? Is it something about my brother? Did that annoying Jane Foster finally realize my presence and they’re forcing you to give me up?” he sneered with accusation, and Darcy was almost relieved he thought her behavior was about Thor. However, the truth of her growing affection for him was much more worse than the potential battle between he and his brother - well, at least Darcy thought it was worse.

One thing was for certain; Darcy felt like she was definitely losing her mind.

“No! It’s not that. It’s just...I had a great time today,” she said, her voice trailing off as she averted her eyes and managed to escape his invasion into her personal space. “I had a great time with *you*, and that *sucks*, on so many levels,” she emphasized forlornly. Darcy let out a huge sigh and she found the courage to meet his eyes. She was shocked to see him taken aback.

Loki - the God of Mischief - was at a loss for words? How was that possible? And why did he look like he was almost hurt?

“Am I that horrible to you?” Loki asked, his tone coming out softer than ever before. “Or do you still worry that I’ll kill you?”

“No! It’s not that, and it’s not what you think,” she said resolutely. “I worry about something way worse.” *I worry about falling in love with you, you stupid asshole*, she thought to herself, and she hoped to the Gods that Loki didn’t have telepathic powers.

“Just forget about it. Thanks for the ride,” she said, managing a small smile. “I gotta go to sleep.”

She could feel him watching her as she left, and she felt a chill go up her spine. Luckily, he didn’t hold

her back, demanding more explanation. Instead, she retreated to her bedroom, alone with her thoughts - which didn't help either since she couldn't stop thinking of him - *of them*, and tossed and turned without any sleep for the rest of the night.

Things were definitely changing between them, and Darcy knew that the tension would only get worse, especially since he lived with her and was showing no signs of leaving any time soon. At least, she didn't think he was leaving, not until he succeeded in his grandiose plans - and even then, Darcy wasn't clear if he still intended in using her for anything else, or if he really just planned on dropping her and going about things on his own.

The only thing she could do was try to drive him out of her apartment and out of her life *now*, while she still had some sanity left. She couldn't bear it if she had feelings for him and his identity was revealed, that Jane and S.H.I.E.L.D would finally know the truth, and that Darcy would feel she had no other choice but to choose Loki's side over theirs, and she knew she *would* - ultimately doing anything he asked of her and taking advantage of her, just like he had in the beginning.

As if it wasn't embarrassing enough that she started to have feelings for her own stalker, they obviously weren't going away any time soon.

Just what the hell was she going to do?

Chapter Seventeen: Reverse Psychology

What the devil is she thinking? he thought to himself, frowning. He wasn't a fool, and he knew that Darcy didn't think he was either.

So what was she doing? He'd noticed the change instantly, especially after the strange conversation they had last night after their motorcycle ride. He thought he'd finally gained her trust, and he had to admit, he was very fond of the girl, even if she'd been a pawn in his game against S.H.I.E.L.D and Jane Foster.

It was more than that now, but Loki wasn't sure to make of her most recent behavior. How did a dull, dowdy mortal girl suddenly transform into dressing like a barely-dressed harlot? Of course, she was still Darcy Lewis underneath the make-up and form fitting clothes, and he could tell she was uncomfortable - *determined*, yes, but mostly wide-eyed as if she couldn't figure out why she was behaving such a way herself.

He noticed her flimsy attire at breakfast. Darcy was always adamant he stayed out of her private space when she was in her bedroom, mostly for undressing, putting on what meager makeup she owned, and using her bathroom. Of course, he allowed her the privacy, but he couldn't help being suspicious that she was hiding something from him, or sitting in her room devising plans on how to circumvent his spell and reveal his presence.

And when she would stay in there and not appear for hours (and not be sleeping) - well, it made him *curious*. Of course, he'd had enough uncomfortable encounters with her taser to avoid a situation like that again. Though, he was getting more powerful lately, sometimes Darcy still knew right where to jolt

him - and a burst of electric bolts like that, in that close of proximity of sensitive parts, would catch anyone off guard, whether god or mortal. At least for gods, he was still uncomfortable for a minute or too, and it was annoying to say the least.

This time, before breakfast, she didn't seem to care that she pranced around the kitchen, making pancakes in nothing but her heart-printed underwear and loose-fitting half t-shirt. He wondered why she hadn't worn such attire before. It was a crime to hide such an endowed figure; even he could appreciate that.

What he did not appreciate was the obvious flirting, or that she was trying very hard to make him uncomfortable.

Was this her way of trying to push him away? Like something such as this would scare *him - Loki* - away! He almost found it a little insulting, and he wanted to play along with her and scare her, especially give her exactly what she deserved.

Except, it wasn't real. It was a game, and Loki knew all about games.

"Pancakes?" she eyed him through her glasses and waved the spatula in her hand. She beamed at him. "I can add chocolate chips."

"What are you doing, Darcy?"

Darcy turned away with a nervous giggle. He watched as she dumped the chips in the pancake batter and stirred maddeningly.

"Pancakes, dummy, that's what I'm doing," she said, and though she insulted him, her tone came out much like a kitten's purr. She grinned at him, and Loki felt so incensed by her obvious seduction that he forgot his plan to meet her challenge and get her back. Instead, he declined breakfast and retreated to his study within the other dimension of her closet. He caught Darcy's obvious pout in the corner of his eye when he rushed away.

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First it was pancakes, and when food didn't win him, Darcy tried to entrap him with her general closeness. While Loki was never bothered by her invasion of his personal space before (especially when she was drunk and trying to snuggle with him on the sofa - which he didn't mind, for some reason) and he couldn't deny that it felt nice being touched by another person - not one who felt they had to abide him because he was royalty or because they wanted something. Darcy was... different in that vain. She almost acted like she *wanted* to touch him of her own accord - out of friendship, out of spontaneous joy - but never out of fear or forced respect, and after all he'd done to her, Loki couldn't believe she'd get near him at all.

But as he said, things were different and changing between them.

Darcy wasn't acting like herself. He could still sense her anxiety, but she came to him like she was playing a role, rubbing herself against him within even more thinly-made attire, wearing thicker

make-up and calling him by odious endearments.

She wasn't even being cute; she was being annoying, and she was acting like the kind of woman he despised, and that he was sure, Darcy despised as well.

Instantly, she trapped him. He had braved reading a book on the sofa, and though he was mostly curious on how she would engage him next, he did not expect her sliding next to him in the couch and not even turning on the TV.

She was staring at him, and he could sense it; though, he dared not look up from his book.

Perhaps he should humor her, take her challenge, but when he felt her head rest against his shoulder, he tensed, almost regretting that this wasn't sincere. What had he done to her to make her behave this way?

When she put her hand on his thigh, he snatched it a tight grasp and pushed her against the other arm of the couch. He hovered over her, pushing his knee between her legs. He looked down at her with fury rolling off his face. He grabbed up both wrists and pulled them over her head.

"Stop," he snarled, and she looked at him, wide-eyed with her voice caught in her throat. He could feel her trembling under him. She licked her lips and began closing her eyes after a sigh.

He blinked at her, her body looking pliant and ready for him. Tentatively she opened her legs for him and all that existed between them were his clothes and the thin heat of her panties. He felt her leg curve around his and he stiffened again.

Then, he saw her for how she truly felt. Her face was flushed, and though her body was reacting naturally to his touch, he read the truth on her conflicted expression. She really didn't want this. Not now, not in the state of mind she was in.

He pulled away from her, and she opened her eyes, realizing that he was standing at her side, staring down at her with contempt. She opened her mouth to speak, but Loki feared the incessant nonsense that would pass through her lips.

Plus, he didn't want to deal with the tension between them any more that day

So he left, and he thought of better ways to approach her.

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Darcy woke up with a start in the middle of the night when she realized that her lamp was on and

someone was sitting on her bed. It was Loki, of course, and she shuddered lightly and wondered if he was still angry with her on what happened between them earlier.

Instead, he seemed calm, and his dark inflections wrapped around her ears like velvet. "I couldn't figure out why there was such an extreme change in you today. It was puzzling, and the more I observed you, the more your motives became clear." He paused, but she sensed his amusement. "You wanted to drive me away. Clever girl, but that won't work on me," Loki said, his hand finding her hair as he weaved his fingers through the curls. Darcy felt slightly lulled by his touch, and with the instant affection he showed her, she almost felt ashamed for what she did today.

Still, she didn't feel *that* ashamed. For all he'd done to her, he deserved far worse than her little experiment in flirting - an experiment that had epically failed.

At least Darcy was clear on how the Trickster god really felt about her, despite whatever feelings she had of her own.

Lightly, she pulled away from his touch, rolled over and propped herself up on her elbow. "Are you sure that's what I was doing?" she challenged him. Why stop now? She was already caught, and she was curious enough to see his reaction.

"No mortal would be stupid enough to seduce me," Loki said. "I believed you were not a stupid mortal, Darcy Lewis."

"Is it so bad to be seduced? I mean...look at you," she said, arching an eyebrow.

"You were not seducing me with honest intentions. I can tell the difference," Loki said, and Darcy frowned.

"If I seduced you honestly, I'm sure you would kill me or..."

"Or what?" he asked.

"Mock me, berate me, and tell me how stupid I am and how I'm totally unworthy and out of your league. Don't you think I've had enough of that from regular guys?" Darcy harrumphed.

"This is what you think? I don't believe it. I believe that you were playing games with me to leave you alone, while you, Jane Foster and S.H.I.E.L.D brought back my brother without my knowledge. You wish to spare me that satisfaction of preparing for his return - and preparing to fight him," Loki said.

"You really think my mind is that complex?" Darcy asked with a snort. "Wow. You really *don't* know me, do you? That wasn't my plan at all."

"Then what was it?" Loki asked, sounding annoyed as his theory was proven wrong.

"I...I don't want to get close to you, so I wanted to scare you away, alright?" Darcy confessed, and she couldn't believe she was doing this, but the words were coming out and she couldn't stop. (And if he killed her for her next words, well, then she'd haunt him for sure. Forever.) "Do you know how hard it

is to be friends with someone who's evil and wants to take over the world?"

A heavy silence fell between them and Darcy could feel the hair on the back of her neck stand on end as seconds rolled by in Loki's silence.

Then, he laughed, louder and less sinister than she'd ever heard before. His laughter was genuine amusement, unexpected and without darkness. Darcy thought it was a beautiful sound, which made it even harder for her to put aside her growing feelings for him.

"This is why you wished to drive me away? You mortals have the strangest ways!" Loki said with incredulous laughter in his voice, and he cupped his hand against her cheek. His amused voice suddenly dropped to a teasing tone. "If that is how you drive a man away, dear girl, you make want to stay even longer."

"You don't need to stay. Really," Darcy squawked, feeling her face flushing warmly. "I know how busy you are...in your secret lair, making all your evil plans, putting laser beams on sharks, that kind of stuff..."

Loki chuckled again. "Do not worry; my plans are very close to being complete."

"And Thor is very close to returning," Darcy mumbled with worry.

"Precisely."

Darcy groaned, throwing the pillow over her face. She could feel Loki's smugness next to her. She didn't want Thor to come back to Loki and all his evilness. She liked them both, and worse, she liked Loki *more* despite the fact that Thor was sweet, totally cut, and well *great*. He was a good guy, and Loki didn't want to be. She liked Loki - possibly more than *like*, and she was loyal to Jane and Thor. So she was decidedly screwed. "Why does this have to be so hard!"

When Loki chuckled again, she peeked out from under her pillow and pouted at him. "Any chance I can save you from the Dark side and turn you into a good guy?"

Instantly, she saw Loki smirk at her like a naughty cat. "But Darcy, whatever do you mean? *I* believe I'm a *good* guy."

Part Eighteen: When in Rome

Darcy stared forlornly at her coffee cup as she tried to stay awake. She had tossed and turned so badly the night before after her talk with Loki that she could barely get out of bed this morning and answer Jane's request to get an early breakfast at the diner before work.

She also felt sad when she knew she should be happier. This was supposed to be the last week of her internship with Jane Foster, but she just knew that S.H.I.E.L.D wouldn't let her leave that easily. She shuddered at the thought at what Agents Fury and Coulson had planned for her now that she was much more than an intern, but rather an intern that knew too many delicate government secrets.

"I suppose you already know why I asked you here," Jane said, and Darcy noticed that Jane's mood was off as well, for she was way more nervous than usual. Jane pursed her lips. "Your internship."

Darcy nodded. "So...I get that it's not ending any time soon?"

Jane averted her eyes for a moment and took a sip of her coffee. Was it really that hard for her to spit it out?

"S.H.I.E.L.D has put a hold on your student status at the university. They want you to stay on our project until completion and Thor's return. Then, Coulson said that they will review your security level in the government and when you can return to school," Jane said, and Darcy rolled her eyes.

"And he couldn't tell me this himself?" Darcy asked, and she saw Jane smile slightly for a second.

"He's looking for Tony Stark...again. You wouldn't believe what he goes through with that man," Jane said.

Darcy snorted. "I hope Tony Stark gives him a mad hard time now."

Jane sighed and shook her head. "I'm sorry. I suspected the moment they got involved when Thor first arrived that something would happen to you like this. We know too much, and S.H.I.E.L.D has complete control over our lives now." She paused briefly and added. "But at least it's worth it. We're doing good things here."

"Yeah," Darcy said, with a light shrug. "But I can't say I'm surprised either."

"You're not mad? I mean, you can still contact your family as usual," Jane said. "It's like before, we can only share so much, but we can still see them and talk to them."

"Well, it's a good thing I'm not too close to my family," Darcy said. "God, this sucks!" she complained, and she saw Jane's frown. "Oh, no, I don't mean...with *you*. I mean...well, you know what I mean. I was this close to graduating with your credits. Damn it!"

"I know," Jane said. "I promise I'll make it up to you. Maybe I can convince Nick Fury to give you a job recommendation for your troubles."

Darcy laughed. “You better! And it better be good too; in fact, I suggest you tell him he has to give it in person. I have a feeling the eye-patch and intense look does wonders for the hiring process.”

The two women giggled, and Darcy became lost in her thoughts, musing on what it meant in staying longer than she planned. There still was no exact date when they’d be able to open the wormhole and bring Thor back, but they were making progress, and she knew it would happen soon.

Thor would come, and Loki would be waiting for him - implementing whatever nefarious things he planned on doing. Darcy shivered, instantly feeling conflicted.

“There’s your check, ladies,” said a sunny female voice, bringing Darcy out of her thoughts. It was the owner of the diner, Tammy, who had become fond of them since Jane and Darcy became regular customers. She was a large woman with overly-dyed red hair but a sweet smile underneath her caked make-up. Darcy realized she was looking at her particularly intensely. Her mega-watt smile grew and she fiddled nervously with her hands in front of her.

“Oh, Darcy, I meant to ask you. My son Heath is in town and well, he’s a good boy, single for awhile now, and I was wondering...”

“Are you trying to set me up on a date with your son?” Darcy asked with a laugh, and the tension in Tammy’s faced seemed to ease.

“Well, I suppose you could call it like that. He’s a good boy, handsome - of course I’m biased, but when it comes to girls...”

“Hey, it’s cool, Tammy. You give me free pie on Sundays and consider it a deal,” Darcy said, readily accepting the offer. Normally, she’d be hesitant, but things had been so strange with Loki lately she needed a distraction. Maybe a human boy without ulterior motives was a good - *safer* - thing for her.

“Oh, bless your heart, Darcy! I’ll tell my son to pick you up tomorrow night at seven if you’re not busy. He comes into town tonight,” Tammy said, and Darcy nodded.

“It should be okay once I’m off work,” Darcy said, “Unless the boss-lady here needs me for anything *important*.” Darcy shot Jane a pointed look. She hoped the woman felt guilty enough for getting her into this S.H.I.E.L.D mess and would give her a break.

Jane grinned widely, nodding her head. “Go for it. I’m all for you going out and having some fun.” Jane punched her arm. “You’re too crabby lately anyway. It’ll be good for you, kiddo.”

“Sweet!” Darcy said, smiling sweetly. “Tammy, I do believe your son is going to be one lucky man tomorrow night.” The three women laughed, and Darcy suddenly felt more relaxed, especially since her first encounter with Loki, which drove her into unhealthy states of frustration and paranoia.

And a date with a so-called cute boy was definitely what Darcy needed. (Well, Darcy hoped he was cute anyway.)

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As Darcy was heading home from work that evening, she instantly remembered the date she had made with Tammy's son Heath and wondered what Loki would think about it.

"It's not like he sees me that way, so why should he care?" Darcy grumbled aloud, but she was nervous if that was really true, or if Loki might see her as some kind of human pet and try to prevent other people from associating with her. The thought made her shudder.

No. Loki isn't that possessive, is he? Darcy snorted. She didn't think it would even reach his radar, and maybe he would act like his usual, snobby self and not care about other mortals who didn't concern him - like this Heath person.

Or so she hoped anyway.

When she arrived home, she sighed with relief when there was no sign of him. Darcy was kind of grateful this was one of those long days where Loki was gone - off doing super-villain stuff that she could accept because well, she didn't know what he was really doing and ignorance was bliss, right?

It wasn't as if she could tell Jane or Erik, or even Coulsen for that matter, with Loki still tethered to her by his wondrous spell. Darcy sighed. She wondered if she'd ever be free of the God of Mischief in that sense

But did she really want to be free from him? Her feelings were still complicated, and she was having a harder time being calm and cool in his presence since she admitted to liking him.

Maybe I'll like this Heath guy more and problem solved, Darcy thought, but she bit her lip and instantly was consumed with doubts. *How could anyone, mortal or not, compete with Loki? Damn, maybe Heath doesn't even stand a chance,* she mused, and she quickly shook her head as she sifted through her closet. She hoped she could find something decent among her crappy, old clothes to wear for her date, and it wasn't like this desert town had a mall.

"I see you are thinking too hard again, mortal," said Loki behind her, causing Darcy to almost jump out of her skin.

"Holy crap, dude, we talked about this!" she said with a long exhale. She finally relaxed as he smirked at her. Okay, so apparently he wasn't going to listen to anything she'd ever said about his stalking and sneaking up on her. "Someone needs a stalking intervention, seriously."

"Once again you are quite a master at talking in riddles, or you mortals really do have an uncouth language," Loki said, still watching her as Darcy turned back to her closet, angrily pushing back hangers and making noises of disgust at every shirt she laid her eyes on.

"Whatever, dude, and Gods are masters of invading people's privacy," Darcy said, looking at her teal sweater without a grimace. *Okay, maybe that will do,* she thought, and it definitely allowed the girls to come out and play a little.

"You seem to be concerned with your appearance again," he said, and she watched as he placed a hand

on the teal shirt. She caught herself in a long minute as her eyes followed his long slender fingers sliding down the velor fabric. Dumbly, she looked up at his face, finding it very hard to concentrate on having a good time on her date tomorrow with him accosting her clothes. Damn him. He laughed lightly. "You're not trying to seduce me to get rid of me again, are you? I would think you learned."

"Nah," Darcy said with a wave of her hand. "Trust me, I'm not a dog. I learn my lesson once. Unlike some people. You know. About stalking." She grabbed the shirt from his grasp and turned to the mirror, draping the sweater in front and looking herself over.

Okay, so the teal shirt wins. She smirked and turned back to him. "I have a date tomorrow night! I just wanted to see if I had something in my closet that didn't make me look like a total loser, and I really didn't want to go to the only boutique in town that sells decent clothes." She wrinkled her nose. "It smells like cats in there. And pee. Well, mostly cat pee, and I'm quite sure the cats are possessed by demons because they follow you around and start yowling if you even think about ganking something."

"You're babbling again, which means you're happy," he said, and he cocked his head curiously. "A date?"

"Yes, that's what humans do in order to perhaps get some *sexy timez*. Ask Agent Hill about it," Darcy said, and she threw the sweater over the chair in the room and made a beeline back to the closet. She knew exactly what to wear with it too - her slutty black mini-skirt. It worked every time.

"So...you have nothing to worry about. Go do your *thang*, hunch over your super creepy Professor Snape desk, make a fist and laugh maniacally in the void as you await your brother's defeat," she said, and she saw Loki's brow rise, as he was slightly taken aback that she'd speak to him in such a way. She smirked widely. "I don't care. I'm going to get some...and it's been far too long."

Then, she walked out her bedroom and headed toward the kitchen. She felt she deserved a cookie after that conversation.

And Darcy knew she'd won when Loki didn't follow her.

Part Nineteen: The Dark Knight

Darcy didn't expect Heath to compare to anyone beyond Loki and Thor in the looks department, but when her date showed up, her defenses were down enough that her mouth gaped.

Thor had been ripped; Darcy still had dreams of him and she was certainly not ashamed of that. However, she knew Thor was always off-limits, especially when he and Jane liked each other so much. But Darcy wasn't dead, and she sure as hell ogled the God of Thunder when he was around.

Heath could have been Thor's little brother, and duh, she knew that Loki was but Loki looked nothing like Thor, and well, as he'd confided in her one time, he was adopted. It made sense (you know, his issues and all.)

Heath was All-American, blond hair and blue eyes and definitely spent a healthy amount of time in the gym, and he had a smile that Darcy was sure could kill her if she stared at it like idiots stared at the sun.

How did Tammy's son not have girls beating him off with a stick? That thought worried Darcy. People could definitely be charming on the outside, but she wondered how he'd be after two hours into their date.

So course she packed her trusty taser.

Heath chatted with her at the door, and Darcy fidgeted nervously in front of him, knowing that Loki was keeping out of sight that day, but it didn't mean he wasn't wicked enough to pop up and spoil everything.

When he didn't, Darcy invited Heath in for a moment before they set off to the steak house that Heath chose. Darcy didn't mind it; she'd never heard of the place anyway, and apparently it was in the next town over, which was about ten miles north.

"I always eat here when I'm coming back from work," he said with a mega-watt grin that matched his mother's, and Darcy knew where he'd gotten his smile. Of course, it looked better on Heath.

"That's cool. I'm all about the meat-eating and such," Darcy said, and she noticed immediately that Heath's gaze directed to her boobs when she talked. Okay, that was annoying, she thought, but it wasn't like she didn't instigate it with the outfit she wore. Though, if he acted more charming maybe she'd be more willing to jump him tonight.

So far, the more Heath talked about cattle, horses, the desert, his job as a cattle rancher, blah, blah, and still stared at her boobs as she talked, she found him less interesting by the minute. So what if he had a pretty face?

They talked about their interests, and he had barely zero interest in anything technological, which was like 90% of her interests. He didn't even have a Facebook page, and Darcy found that just plain weird.

The only music he liked was Country and Western. Seriously? How were they separate genres?

And when his food came, he had the worst table manners she'd ever seen, and Darcy had been exposed to frat boys. Drunk frat boys and even intergalactic gods that threw coffee on the floor and thought it was complimentary, and Heath was worse than any of them.

Darcy was starting to dislike Heath more and more. Even his laugh was getting annoying, and maybe she was being unfair, but she started to notice little things that would probably start to disgust her more if they continued dating. Like how he had the biggest forehead she'd ever seen, and there was this weird mole growth under his chin she suddenly couldn't stop looking at. How did she not notice these things in the beginning?

After dinner, Darcy reluctantly agreed to go to a bar with Heath, a place he claimed had a dance floor and good music (probably country, ew, but whatever, she thought). Darcy only wanted to get a drink, and knowing how he handled dinner (she couldn't believe he made her pay Dutch) she probably would

have to pay for that Margarita herself.

Ugh. But damn, she really wanted a drink. Maybe the booze would make Heath magically transform into someone less annoying.

When Heath copped a feel of her ass as she was getting into his car, Darcy realized that not even booze would make this night better.

She suddenly wished Loki *had* interfered and stopped this date from the beginning.

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Heath danced like a cracked-out gorilla. Seriously, Darcy had to excuse herself to the bathroom several times, whether it was to laugh her ass off or hide from the embarrassment from being with such a total loser. Even girls on the dance floor looked at her with the worst pity ever.

And, Jesus, he was handsy. He'd pawed her boobs so much while dancing, she almost asked him if he'd found cancer yet.

Darcy thought of one way to save her from this situation. She had to find an excuse to leave. He didn't need to take her back. She just needed to *leave*, and the only idea she could formulate was she had to puke her guts out, in front of everybody, so that Heath was embarrassed enough to bail.

She only hoped that such a display would not make him think he'd get some tonight because that was SO not happening.

Darcy could think of the one, sure-fire thing that would make her puke. Hot sauce and vodka. She had some terrible trouble with such a combination (don't ask) in college that the mere thought of the two made her stomach lurch.

It was perfect then, and she asked for a Bloody Mary, heavy on the Tabasco. After two sips, that horrid red meat dinner was starting to come back. Heath looked concerned (for her sick boobs, probably) and came over to see if she was okay. Then, she timed it.

"I don't feel so good," she said, putting a hand against him to push him back. "Get back."

Then, Darcy hurled everywhere. Gasps of shock and disgust rang out through the club, and she was silently cheering for victory as Heath escorted her out. Also, she knew she had puke-breath, and no man in his right mind would try anything on her now.

Or so she thought.

The moment Heath got her alone by his car, Darcy could tell something was not right. He wasn't in a hurry to let her into his car, and he was directing her wobbly body toward him. He spun her around so quickly it made Darcy dizzy, and she felt herself backed up against his car.

Then, his sloppy lips were on hers, and she thought she was going to puke again. She was so disgusted

that she started to fight him. He was strong, too strong that she hated how she admired his muscles before.

“Mmmh!” she said, his lips still clamped on hers. She began scratching, but he wouldn’t relent. He just kept pushing until his hands were all over her like snakes, pulling at her clothes, squeezing her breasts, and dipping into her skirt. Darcy froze. Oh hell no, she was not getting raped, not now, and not by this idiot.

She discreetly reached a hand in her purse, hoping he wouldn’t notice, digging for her taser gun. When she grasped the hilt, she felt a wave of relief.

Only Heath’s hands had stopped pawing her. His lips weren’t as fiercely pushing at hers.

And it was cold. Really freaking cold like winters in Canada.

Uh oh, Darcy thought. She blinked, peering up in the frozen face of her horrible date. He still looked like he was engrossed in forcing himself on her, only stuck in amber like a bug. He wasn’t moving, and given how unnatural his state was, Darcy was damn sure that he could be dead.

Shit. Her date was dead, and there was only one person who she knew could do this.

“Loki?” she breathed, and she spun around to her left where he was standing, a dark expression overtaking his face. “What...what did you do?”

“Be a little more grateful, Ms. Lewis. I saved you from this Neanderthal,” Loki said, an air of smugness prevalent in his tone. His green eyes were full of fury, and he stared at the frozen boy with unyielding malice. Darcy shuddered as she stared at him, feeling the dark, bitter emotions rolling off him in waves.

“You didn’t have to freeze him!” Darcy said, freaking out. “I had it covered!” She pulled out her taser to show him.

He looked at her weapon but seemed unimpressed. “I was not confident you could take this brute by yourself. I’ve taken down trolls smaller than him, but you, Darcy, are merely mortal.”

“With a goddamned taser!” she squeaked, and quickly she smacked him in the shoulder. “You ass! Unfreeze him now!”

Loki cocked his head. “You wish to save this disgusting worm after what he did to you?”

“I don’t want to kill him! I just wanted to tase him,” Darcy said. “When you think about it, it’s a lot safer, and well, he has a chance to, you know, not be dead!”

“He does not deserve to live after the way he treated you,” Loki said coldly, and Darcy felt her own blood chill at the sound of his words.

“Yeah...maybe, but...it’s really messy and complicated when you kill someone on earth. Plus, his mother and Jane Foster both know I was with him tonight! If they are asked by the police about him,

they'll point to me, and since I sure as hell can't freeze a guy like this, then they'll come for you!" she said, smacking him again. He seemed unaffected by her shrill tone and swats, but he did at least consider her warning. "You really need to think about these things! You're the one who wants to hide in the shadows!"

"I did not care about the end result, only for your safety," he said, turning to her. Darcy backed up and felt him cage her against Heath's car. He still had a dark look on his face, and she swallowed uncomfortably when he did not avert his eyes from her.

"I appreciate it," she said, trying to keep her voice calm. "But I can take care of myself. Remember?" She began to plead. "Now please just unfreeze him and then we can go?"

"I still am not convinced this mortal deserves mercy. He tried to take your womanhood. Do you not feel violated from this? Wouldn't you much prefer your revenge?" Loki asked her. Darcy stilled as his hand reached out and took a stray curl of her hair in his fingers and then tucked it behind her ear. She leaned her cheek against his hand and sighed, closing her eyes and feeling the coldness of his palm.

Loki watched her, but he did not remove his hand from her touch.

"A taser is enough revenge for me, and believe me, Loki, my womanhood is long taken," she said, feeling her face go hot despite his cold hand.

"But he did not respect you," Loki said icily, and soon, out of anger he drew his hand away. "No, he will remain as he is."

"What? Seriously, you're crazy! He'll die!" Darcy said, and though she thought she was getting through to him, Loki was still clearly pissed.

"There is one thing you must understand, Darcy. He is not the first mortal who I have killed, and he will not be the last," he growled.

"What...clearly you have issues! So you still want to kill mortals? Is that your big plan? Come to our planet because you can't be on yours and then kill everyone?" she asked.

"No," Loki said, pushing her against the car again. He locked with her eyes in a frightening stare. "I only plan to rule your planet, Darcy." He hummed softly and touched her hair again, which did not endure her as before. Instead, she felt her body tense, fearful of his unpredictable nature as he treated her like a piece of property. Maybe Loki did consider her a pet, which Darcy felt was totally not cool – and not right.

"You were born to be ruled, love," he said. "All of you."

"Is this why you came to my rescue and killed him? You feel like you own me? Well, let's get something straight! You don't own me!" She was about to pull out her taser to prove a point, but he boxed her in again, grinning at her madly.

"You are mine, do you understand? I claimed you the moment I had you do my bidding, and you can

act tough, and you can trade barbs with me and feel satisfied when you think you win, but you are still a mortal, and I still let you live because you are *my* mortal, Darcy Lewis,” he whispered in a hiss to her, and he leaned closer toward her ear. “Mine,” he added, his tone was so low and ominous that it sounded like a spell.

Darcy felt stiff and boneless as he entrapped her, and she didn’t want to give in, not to him. She glared at him, but his presence had become so intimidating (and she really didn’t want to join Heath as an ice sculpture) so she bit her lip and said nothing in response.

When he pulled back, feeling like he made his point, she rolled her eyes and snorted. “Whatever, mortal or god, you men are all alike,” she said. “Just so you know, I was more scared of you than I was of him tonight. He was just an annoying dick that was easily taken care of, but you...You are an evil bastard.”

Loki laughed lightly with amusement. “I’m glad you feel that way. It’s the truth, and that’s how you should feel of me. That’s how I want your whole race to regard me.”

But it wasn’t how Darcy completely felt about him. He wasn’t *just* an evil bastard. Loki was more than that, and sometimes he would open up to her. In those times, she felt she was making progress. Hell no, she knew she couldn’t change him, but maybe, she could at least get him to respect her someday.

Because telling him not to kill people was like asking Jane to stop drinking coffee.

Darcy was still pissed, but she was tired, and she was starting to really doubt that she’d go back to a normal life if Loki felt like he owned her. She made a sour face and looked back at Heath. She furrowed her brow and turned to Loki.

“Can I borrow a favor?” she asked him, and she watched a single eyebrow arch in curiosity. “Unfreeze Heath and I’ll owe you. Anything. I’ll even stop calling you an evil bastard or try to get you on Intervention for Megalomaniacs.”

“I cannot believe you want to save this lowlife, but I will take your request,” he said, and Darcy hoped she was doing the right thing. If she knew anything about the lessons in fairy tales, it was never smart to make deals with Tricksters. (She only hoped that Loki didn’t want her first born. Yikes!)

“Trust me, you do not want the cops sniffing around here, or me for that matter, especially when I was the last person seen with him,” she said.

“I cannot agree that he will survive the thaw,” Loki said cryptically.

“Just do it, please,” Darcy said with a sigh, and she really was afraid Loki would end up killing him. She hoped not. She didn’t want to deal with S.H.I.E.L.D *and* the cops.

Soon, Darcy watched as Loki waved his hand and dispelled the ice. Slowly, Heath was coming to, and when he was free from the ice, he fell unconscious on his face in the dirt. Quickly, Darcy ran to his side and checked his pulse.

“Still alive,” she said, feeling a wave of relief.

“How miraculous,” Loki drawled sarcastically at her.

Scoffing, she turned to him and met his eyes. “I’m staying with him until the ambulance arrive.”

“Do as you wish,” Loki said, a little perturbed she wasn’t going with him.

“Listen,” Darcy said, and as Loki was about to leave, he stopped and turned back toward her. “I know what you tried to do, and if you would have done something normal like punched the guy out or came to my rescue some other - less fatal way - I would probably be throwing myself all over you.” Loki quirked his eyebrow again. “But you’re dangerous, Loki. Sweet - in this case, and in the most inappropriate way, but still - *too dangerous*.”

He smirked at her, and when he left, Darcy could hear sirens in the distance. She wondered if Loki was still waiting for her in the shadows somewhere unseen.

When the ambulance and cops arrived, Darcy told him a story that Heath was complaining of chest pains and just collapsed. There was nothing suspicious in that story, and the ice that he’d been covered in was long gone. The medics said his heart was irregular, and Darcy felt relieved that this incident could even look natural.

An officer gave her a ride to her apartment, and Darcy became lost in her thoughts on the way back. She stared out the window and thought of Loki and what he had said to her. He was planning on ruling their whole world, and she was still shacking up with him! Hell, she was still friends with him, and some days she had feelings for him that were so much more than friendly.

The human race was definitely doomed in that case, but Darcy had a feeling she was doomed the worst of them all.

Part Twenty: The Writing on the Wall

It was never supposed to happen, not like this. It was nonsensical, reckless, and most of all - well, it was beyond stupid.

Darcy knew that, but such feelings were hard to get rid of, and then she didn't know if she wanted to get rid of them at all. Being free from these feelings was ideal, but the more she thought about it and tried to make herself see reason, the emptier she felt - and the more she wanted to eat tons of chocolate and fade away into oblivion.

So none of that was an option. The only option was to admit defeat and start looking for a straitjacket on Ebay.

She couldn’t be more upset with herself either. How can anyone sane fall in love with their stalker? Of course, Darcy hadn’t been sure it was love in the beginning, and maybe she wasn’t so sure now, but it

was definitely loyalty and lust and probably all other dangerous emotions that no Trickster or self-proclaimed villain deserved. She'd be on his front lines too, a token that he could use against Jane, S.H.I.E.L.D, and Thor.

Darcy hated to admit this, but her feelings for Loki were strong. Forget feelings for Tom Hill; that craziness was long out of her head. There was only Loki, the Loki she really knew who watched bad movies with her, snarked and traded jabs with her, took her on motorcycle rides, and came to her rescue against rapists. And it sucked, and she wanted to punch herself in the head repeatedly for ever having such emotions.

But it was what it was, and the worst part was that the moment he found out about her feelings, she knew he couldn't return them. Oh no, not someone like him: a god, a controlling bastard, and someone who would just use her as a means to an end.

It was sad really, and the ice cream she had treated herself to couldn't make her feel better. Rocky Road had always made her feel better too.

She left the ice cream parlor a couple of blocks by her apartment and headed home. She hoped Loki wasn't there. She didn't want to see his face. Not at all. He had almost killed someone last night, and thankfully the next morning Jane had allowed her a day off from work after the trauma of Heath's accident. Ice cream called to her as she sat alone in her apartment, grateful Loki was out doing his nefarious business away from her once again.

He will come back, she thought, frowning further. She almost wanted to skip going home and see if she could convince Jane to let her sleep on top of the Physics building. Darcy knew that wasn't smart, and S.H.I.E.L.D wouldn't agree to it. It was just more reason for Loki to come back, mind-control her again and then have her sabotage all of Jane's work.

She couldn't risk it, so Darcy begrudgingly went home.

A wave of relief washed over her when Loki wasn't waiting for her on the couch, reading one of his dusty books. He could be in his inter-dimensional hideout for all she knew, but she wasn't going to brave looking for him. Instead, she slipped into her frog-printed pajamas, picked up her copy of *Breaking Dawn* and began re-reading it, hoping the book would depress her more than her own life.

Soon, her eyes felt heavy and she decided to go to bed, relieved that she was able to spend a whole day in semi-sanity without Loki around. Though, she hated that the majority of the day was spent moping and thinking about all her feelings toward him, which led to moments of introspective fantasy scenarios where Darcy would betray Jane and Thor.

This was bad, she thought, turning off the light on her nightstand and staring at the wall to her left. She knew she wasn't going to get any sleep tonight, and maybe that wasn't so bad. Darcy had a feeling her dreams would be worse than any fantasies she'd thought about that day.

In all her tumbled musings, Darcy came to one conclusion. She had to ask Loki to leave her alone. For good. She knew it wouldn't be easy, and he might just laugh in her face at her audacity. She couldn't demand it - no, not from someone like Loki. He had already made his ownership of her clear, and she

still owed him that elusive favor for saving that boy's life. (And she hoped to any god that listened that when he claimed his favor from her, he wouldn't make her betray Jane and Thor.)

She could only try to appeal to him, out of desperation, and though she hated the thought of begging Loki for anything, Darcy needed him out of her life. It was almost as if the fate of the world depended upon it.

So she had to ask him honestly. She knew that Loki appreciated honesty, so she had to be straight with him.

She felt a sinking feeling in her stomach at the thought of Loki agreeing and leaving once and for all. Damn it, she knew it was her heart reacting. It really would be lonely without Loki around. She'd gotten used to him, and oddly enough, he made Darcy feel wanted. Still, it was a fucked up relationship, and it was only going to get more dangerous if it ever progressed.

Darcy didn't want to give herself hope either. After grueling months about hearing Jane go on about Thor and the things she'd planned when he returned, Darcy couldn't help feel envy. Thor was not Loki, obviously, but what kind of devotion would an Asgardian give a woman?

She shook her head and buried her face into her pillow. No. She couldn't want Loki like that. He'd used her, manipulated her, and more importantly, he probably didn't give a shit about her emotionally. She was his pet and nothing more. Claiming ownership on a woman was a lot worse than honest devotion.

No. Loki had to go, and Darcy had to sever her feelings toward him. In any way she could.

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When she woke up the next morning, surprisingly enough, scrambled eggs with cheddar cheese were waiting for her in the kitchen. There was an aroma of bacon, coffee, and her eggs in the atmosphere, and her mouth watered at the sight of the eggs. On the other side of her kitchen counter, Loki sipped coffee from her Cheshire Cat mug.

It was adorable, which only made Darcy feel more conflicted.

"Well," he bristled. "You could look a little more excited. I was looking forward to your cheerful face. Instead, I get horror and dismay. You should have told me you didn't like eggs."

"Of course I like eggs," Darcy said shortly. "I...I just didn't expect this. Why are you being so nice?"

Loki arched an eyebrow, and Darcy walked past the coffee and food he made her. She pulled a banana from its bunch and began peeling it.

"You have made me breakfast so many times before, I was merely returning the favor. I do not like to be in debt to anyone," he said simply, and Darcy immediately shook her head.

"Dude, you are so not in debt to me, really," she said, walking past him and returning to her bedroom. "I have to get to work. I missed yesterday already."

When she slammed her door shut, she thought she was in the clear. With Loki, such things were not so simple. Her distress was as obvious as a tornado, and he was waiting for her within her bedroom.

“You’re troubled. Is this about that worthless mortal you made me spare?” Loki pried.

Darcy scoffed. “Among everything else,” she said with annoyance. She started pawing through her clothes, picking out the drabest thing she owned to wear. She didn’t want to attract any attention today, not like the S.H.I.E.L.D men paid attention to her anyway. Still, the clothes reflected her mood.

“Ah, I see. This is a moody mortal period then? I do have other engagements...places to be,” he said, but she could still feel him staring at her. Was he trying to get some sort of reaction out of her? What was his game? Darcy didn’t want to know, but she never expected her depression to unnerve him as it was now.

“Whatever, it’s not like I understand why you’re here anyway, so just let me get dressed,” she said, and while turning her back, she peeled away her pajamas in front of him and began undressing as if he wasn’t even there. She always hated that he intruded on her privacy, and he didn’t seem to react, even to being called a pervert, which she had done to him in the past. However, Darcy didn’t care anymore. He clearly had no manners in that area, and he was beyond learning them now. Did they keep all their doors open for people to peep in Asgard too?

Expecting him to say something else to annoy her, Darcy turned to him and met his eyes. His expression showed only extreme curiosity, studying every one of her facial expressions and movements. Darcy bit her lip, feeling that this was the best time for her to confront him about her problem.

“Do you want to know what’s wrong with me?” she asked, her tone sounding angrier than intended.

His curiosity didn’t waver. In fact, he almost sounded amused. “Please, enlighten me.”

Darcy’s voice was unexpectedly shaky, and she inhaled a deep breath before saying, “I want you to go.”

Silence felt so heavy between them Darcy expected cartoon anvils to fall from the sky on her head.

“I will go then. Out of your bedroom,” Loki said, preparing to leave, but she could tell in his eyes he knew that there was something.

“No, I mean, I want you out of my apartment. For good. I know it’s too much to ask, and you probably won’t do it anyway because you think you own me. And I owe you a favor already, I know, but I need this... more than anything. It’s scaring me that you’re here, and I want you to go,” Darcy said. “I won’t be able to say anything to Jane anyway, right? Because of the spell. Well, I won’t. They won’t even know you were here, and I won’t be the one to tell them either.” She paused, and she saw intense anger and surprise flicker across his face. He probably would have charged for her if it hadn’t been for the tears.

Damn, she felt weak. And like a dope. She wasn't supposed to cry.

"You fear for your life," he said, his tone as cold as ice. The air in her room suddenly felt chillier too. Was it him? Darcy shivered.

"Yes, and..." she stammered, her words breaking from her as he confidence waned in his intimidating presence.

"And?" he asked.

She mustered all her remaining strength and moved forward, looking up into his eyes. Darcy lifted a shaky arm, and the moment her hand touched his cool skin, she felt her heart go warm as the rest of her nerves screamed at the touch. Loki was stunned by her gesture, almost frozen in place as she reached up and pressed her lips against his.

"I fear for my sanity and my heart, okay? God, it sounds so corny," she said, drawing away and leaving Loki bewildered by her kiss. She regained her composure and met his gaze sternly. "Please go."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," Loki said.

"Omigawd, really? JUST FREAKING GO, ALRIGHT? I don't know what you really want from me, and you will never give me what I want from you, so just save us both the trouble of the world crumbling beneath our feet and GO," Darcy turned away from him, retreating to her bathroom. She half-expected him to grab her arm and hold her back, and she had a whole bag of insults and rantings she'd lay on him if he did, but when she felt no weight on her elbow, she slammed the bathroom door and curled down onto the floor. The tears fell profusely, but she tried to retain her dignity and held back the sobs.

She could feel his presence still in her bedroom, and she banged her head on the door once, calling herself all those names that she'd meant for Loki.

Stupid.

Idiot.

Love-sick moron.

Just die, already! The world would be better without you.

"I'm a fool," she whispered in a shaky breath. "Because I stupidly fell in love with you."

Darcy didn't know how good his hearing was and if he heard her behind that door, but after several minutes, she composed herself and wiped away remaining tears. Cautiously, she poked her head out of the bathroom door, scared that he was still there.

Empty relief befell her when it was clear that he was gone.

Part Twenty-One: Power Trip

Darcy blinked open her sore eyes at the sound of her famous “Run the World” ring-tone. She didn't know how long it had been since Loki had left her, but it suddenly dawned on her that Darcy still had work with Jane that day and she was definitely missing it.

Her eyes widened and she jumped up from her spot in the bathroom and rushed to her phone. She had just barely picked it up and answered it before it went to voice mail.

“Darcy, Darcy are you okay? You didn't oversleep, did you?” It was Jane's frantic voice.

Darcy responded with a raspy “No” and then sniffled. Jane was concerned immediately and asked what was wrong.

“Sorry, I'll be on my way to the site now. I had...a fight with my ...friend, but he's gone now.”

“What sort of fight? He didn't hurt you?” Jane inquired worriedly, and Darcy knew that if she asked, Jane would be at her side in a minute. Darcy inhaled a calm breath.

“No, it wasn't physical. It was just...forget about it. I'm sorry I'm late for work. I'll clean up and head out there,” Darcy said, wondering if Jane would even miss her.

“Actually, it's okay. Fury sent me home today, so you don't need to come in,” Jane said, and Darcy felt a tremendous relief lift from her. “Who would have thought, but Coulson located Stark, and he flew in today to upgrade the software. He's adding more firepower, basically, to boost the CPU usage to finally stabilize the artificial wormhole. He's also going over my calculations to see if he can add anything to speed the process along,” she explained, and Darcy answered several times with grunt of affirmation, still grateful that her internship with Jane may not be totally screwed just yet.

“So, we're not needed today at the site?” she confirmed, and Jane agreed.

“Yeah, so take it easy today. Eat some chocolate, and if you need some company and a new tub of chocolate ice cream, you know where to find me.”

“Thanks,” Darcy mumbled, and she sighed again. “To be totally honest, I may not be in the mood for ice cream. Vodka may be more my thing today. Too bad Erik is still in New York.”

“Right, but he's flying out tomorrow. Darcy,” Jane said, and Darcy could sense the elation in her voice. “We're almost there. We're this close to bringing Thor back.”

“How long?” she asked, feeling moved by Jane's excitement. Darcy still wondered, even now, what Thor would think to know about his brother on Earth sneaking around ahead of him.

“Soonest a week, and if we have any minor setbacks, as early as two,” Jane said.

“Awesome,” Darcy said. “I definitely want to be front and center when Thor returns.”

“You will, well, behind S.H.I.E.L.D, of course,” Jane said.

“And you,” Darcy teased. “Don't tell me you're not going to tackle some S.H.I.E.L.D agents and dive into the big guy.”

Jane laughed. “You know me well.” She paused and before she ended the call, Jane told her, “I'm glad you're alright. I mean, you sound alright, like your usual self. I'm glad your friend didn't hurt you too badly.”

“Yeah,” Darcy said, her voice dropping, but she was lying to herself. “Me too.”

When Jane ended the call, Darcy looked around the kitchen where she retrieved her phone and noticed the breakfast Loki had made her was still there – cold, of course, but still looking good despite that he'd made it hours ago.

Her stomach groaned at the sight of it, and she knew the banana she'd had wasn't enough. In the spirit of not wasting food, Darcy gathered the cold breakfast, put it all on a plate and nuked it in the microwave. She savored the bacon first, then the eggs, and when she cleaned the plate, she felt a little guilty for kicking Loki out like that.

Though she still knew in her heart she did the right thing.

There was no way someone like him could reciprocate the feelings of someone like her. It was reality, and throwing him out was cutting her losses early. Hell, it still hurt, and she already missed his smug, arrogant face, and she almost wished he had seen the smile on her face when she ate his meal anyway.

But if Thor was almost on his way, perhaps this was her one and only way of helping Loki get away, and maybe she was helping Thor too, in a way, by severing her ties with Loki.

Who am I kidding? She asked herself. She was only helping herself. She didn't want the heartbreak, and she certainly didn't want to choose between Thor and Loki. It was like choosing between Satan and the Devil, wasn't it?

Darcy shuddered at the comparison and warmed up the last cup of cold coffee in the microwave. She went back into her bedroom, put her pajamas back on and found a Harry Potter marathon on TV. She frowned at the TV, instantly reminded of Loki's powers and his spell on her. Too lazy to turn the channel and get invested in something else, Darcy continued watching until she fell asleep.

The next day, Darcy got another call from Jane that Tony Stark needed at least two more days to upgrade the S.H.I.E.L.D computers and comb through her research.

Darcy was annoyed, hoping work would help her get lost in menial tasks than get stuck in morose thoughts about Loki, and if Darcy could have handled her treatment of him somewhat differently.

Instead, she busied herself with cleaning her apartment, catching up with friends on Facebook, and

illegally downloading a bunch of new songs – sad songs that she immediately blasted on her computer as she tore through the house cleaning every dirty inch.

When the floors were clean enough to eat on, she jumped in for a quick shower and decided to give Jane a call and ask her out to the bar. It was five o'clock already and though she was proud of her clean house, Darcy was bored – especially without Loki around to mock and tease her.

Man, she hated missing him this much. She really did love him, didn't she? Yes, he filled a big hole in her life, and yes, she wanted to do dirty, unspeakable things to him.

But she couldn't.

Still annoyed and depressed, Darcy decided to wear the sluttiest dress she owned to the bar that night with Jane, and she didn't care if she hooked up with some brain-dead redneck in town, she wanted to hook up – *to forget*, and maybe to get some free drinks. Why should she have to spend her money and S.H.I.E.L.D.'s money in her misery? She was pretty, had big boobs, she should get something out of that equation, shouldn't she?

Within this string of thoughts and ego-boosts, Darcy had slipped into her black dress, put on her makeup, and was changing up purses before she headed out the door. She made it halfway through her living room before she stopped in her tracks and saw the uninvited guest.

She swallowed hard, sure her eyes would bug out of her head. “Loki?”

Normally, after kicking someone out only for them to return, Darcy would lay into them and kick them right the hell out again, giving them a few choice words on their way out.

But she couldn't do that now, not with the pained state he was in. Loki staggered, barely able to stand on his feet. He seemed to be radiating greenish-white power, and he was sweating a lot, with rivers of it dripping down his forehead and nose. He struggled to speak, and he put his hand up.

“Darcy,” he said, and though she knew he'd never come out and ask for her help, or anyone's for that matter, it was clear why he had returned. Darcy tried to rush toward him, but he shook his head and continued to ward her off with his hand. Darcy felt a strange invisible power hold her body back. She couldn't move her legs or arms, and she wondered if she could even move her muscles to speak.

Was this power his? It was extremely strong, and fear shuddered involuntarily through her body when she realized the scope of Loki's potential.

“I have come to claim that favor from you,” he said raggedly, his tone raw and coarse. She could hardly believe it was still his voice. He seemed so different, so rough and immense despite what she knew of him.

She quickly knew the favor he meant. He had spared that boy's life at her plea, and now he was reclaiming her end of the bargain. Bewildered yet entranced, she waited for his next words. She nodded once. If it meant helping him, she would do that anyway.

“You don't need to ask...I'll help you,” she said, and she saw him shake his head vehemently.

“You don't understand,” he said, and she gaped as she met his eyes, dilated and puffy. A sheen of sweat glistened in the artificial lighting in her room on the bags under his eyes. He staggered forward again, coming toward her. Darcy stood still, feeling the power that was holding her back waning.

“I need you to take some of this,” he said, his hand coming toward hers. “I took too much,” he explained.

“Too much what?” she asked dumbly.

Despite the pain he was obviously in, he managed to smirk mischievously. “You will see. Do not worry, my dear, it will not harm you as it has me. I will only give you the excess. You may feel a bit strange for a few days, but it would be better if you took it on than me. I may not...be able to control myself if I keep it all.”

“I still don't...” Darcy shook her head, and instinctively she began to step back as he came toward her, his eyes fixated darkly on hers, grinning like a cartoon villain as he came upon her. He overtook her, and she squealed when she felt a burning heat on her arm. She looked down, and he had grasped her so hard there was a mark. It wasn't a bruise; his hand was burning her arm! She turned back to him, aghast.

“What the hell are you doing?” she asked, but his eyes began to close after the connection, and soon, the burning subsided, and Darcy sprang forward, catching Loki as he fell unconscious against her.

“Holy crap!” she said instantly, and she pulled Loki's body against hers as she managed to heft him over to the couch.

“How did I...?” She couldn't believe it herself, but she carried Loki and all his heavy armor to the couch as if he weighed nothing at all. She positioned him on the couch to let him sleep, and she stood back and gazed down at him with wonder. She turned to her arm, and where there should be a burn mark was completely flawless. She gasped, and suddenly she had a weird idea.

Darcy ran to the bathroom, scared and excited at what Loki had done to her. What had he meant by excess? And what was that crazy connection they had before he'd toppled onto her?

Darcy looked herself over in the mirror, and weirdly enough, she turned her attention to the gross blemish she had furiously covered with make-up not twenty minutes ago. It was completely gone.

“Freaky!” she exclaimed, and she dropped her gaze down to the make-up tools on her bathroom counter and picked up a small pair of scissors. She bit her lip and had a wild, probably stupid theory. Quickly, she pricked her thumb with the point of the scissors and watch the blood bubble on the tip, and then suddenly...it had dried up and the prick was gone – instantly healed.

“Holy crap, what did he do to me!” She paced around the bathroom a bit, trying to hold herself together.

Did Loki just give me superpowers? Darcy asked herself, and though that would be really cool, she was sure when it came to Loki, things always came with ... side effects.

“Shit,” she said, and she ran back to him, but he was still asleep in his own sweat-drenched clothes. First, she shook him. “What the hell did you do to me? Wake up, you stupid ass!” She shook him a few more times and slapped his face, but Loki was out cold. She considered bringing her taser, but felt it'd be counterproductive in the long run.

“Argh!” she said, and when it was obvious healing had been the only side effect from her freaky connection to Loki, she took a deep breath and prayed that it was the only thing that was going to happen to her.

She hoped that he was right and she could handle it, but that didn't mean when he woke up she'd lay into him on what he'd done to her.

Staring down at him, Darcy chewed a finger before she decided to help him out of his sweaty clothes and alleviate some of the stress they were causing him. Once his armor was off and he wore nothing but black pants and a black long-sleeve shirt, his breathing seemed steadier and he was starting to cool off. She put a hand to his forehead, which felt cool, like she remembered his skin feeling the last time she'd touched his face.

She swallowed hard when she remembered that last time, and how she had forced a kiss upon him before she threw him out.

The whole incident seemed moot at this point. Loki had come back, and she wondered if he had no one else to turn to in this world. He was doing everything alone, that was obvious enough. So, when he was injured from doing whatever he'd done to himself, he'd come back to *her*, Darcy Lewis, and she couldn't help the amount of pride that she felt from realizing that.

Shifting his body on the couch, Darcy sat against the arm and laid him over her lap. She ran her fingers through his damp black hair, studying his sleeping face. He looked so vulnerable to her right now, and she felt even more privileged in being entrusted with such a sight. She caressed a finger down his jawline and sighed.

He was beautiful – even more beautiful when he was sleeping.

Damn it, she thought. Now things were even worse.

It was an understatement when Darcy felt a pinch lurch in her belly, and a layer of sweat had formed on her own forehead. Her mouth went dry, and suddenly she heard a piercing sound overtake her brain. She clutched her hands over her ears to drown out the loud sound, and she screamed.

Feeling movement in her lap, Loki's eyes sprang open from the commotion. Darcy howled in agony as the loud piercing sound caved around her. She couldn't stop.

She felt something warm and wet fall down her lips from her nose, and she wondered if she was crying. But it was blood – *her blood*, and it had dripped onto Loki's face.

He jumped from her lap and clutched her in his arms protectively as the piercing screech faded, and Darcy's screams turned into sobs.

Loki rocked her gently against him as she fell into a gray haze. Her vision blurred, and she felt a warm cloth sop up the blood from her nose. She turned to him, unable to see him clearly as her surroundings began to plunge into muzziness.

Before she fell into his lap from exhaustion, she whined softly to him, "What did you do to me?"

Part Twenty-Two: The Missing Link

It was becoming a dangerous habit, but Darcy woke up in another daze. This time it hadn't been from booze or crying, but she knew that it was worse. She remembered bleeding and the piercing sound that wouldn't escape her head before blacking out on the couch.

She also remembered Loki holding her soothingly before she passed out.

However, he *had* been the cause of her pain, and Darcy couldn't help but be miffed by that. She thought about yelling at him, but she was no longer in any pain after she woke, and she almost felt better than she had in a long time. The stress from her neck and shoulders seemed to be gone, and any past signs of blood or migraines were basically non-existent. She actually felt peppy for once too, without the aid of caffeine.

She looked around her surroundings, noticing that he had carried her to her bed once again. Jumping energetically out of her bed, Darcy sprinted toward the living room, not expecting Loki to still be there but hoping that he was.

When she saw him lying on her couch, Darcy was relieved, but the unhealthy pallor of his skin as he slept instantly worried her. She approached him, putting her hand on his cool forehead and realizing he was in a deep sleep, and his body was humming with some kind of power that felt like a strange pressure all around her.

So this is what he had given her? Some kind of power? He said he had taken too much, so where on earth did he get such power?

Darcy's brain buzzed with millions of questions, but she had a sneaking suspicion such power didn't come from her planet, and she supposed he'd been sneaking around other dimensions again, doing God only knew what.

Frowning and moving toward the kitchen to brew some coffee, she jumped in alarm when her phone's ring-tone cut through her contemplative silence. Picking it up, Jane was on the other end asking her how she was feeling.

"Alright. I feel...great, actually. Is it okay to come into work today?" Darcy asked, unsure if she wanted to leave Loki like he was, but enjoying the idea of getting away from his craziness for a bit. Plus, she

was curious to see the progress Tony Stark was making with their equipment.

“Yeah, Tony Stark is still there, so looks like you’ll finally get to meet him,” Jane said, referring to that one point when Darcy wanted to meet Tony Stark, joking that it’d be wonderful to snag a millionaire like him some day.

Darcy had hardly been serious at the time. Okay, maybe she had been *a little*.

It didn’t matter now, not really, but Darcy really was curious to see how his input would change the progress of their project. Having Tony Stark involved only indicated to Darcy that S.H.I.E.L.D was getting impatient at bringing Thor back. There must be a desperate situation afoot, and thinking of Loki’s state in her apartment last night, Darcy feared the possible connection.

“Okay, I’ll get ready in twenty. You picking me up?” Darcy asked.

“Yeah, I’m ready to go. Don’t bother making coffee. I have an extra cup for you. Just get dressed and bring something to eat,” Jane said. “Be ready in fifteen and not twenty.”

“You got it, boss.” Darcy saluted, but she knew Jane couldn’t see it. “I knew I stocked up on protein bars for a reason.”

Jane ended their conversation with another passive-aggressive order, and Darcy jumped into her bedroom to hunt for some clothes. She only wished she had time for a shower, but she was presuming Tony Stark would barely even notice her, as well as anyone else.

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Darcy reluctantly left a sleeping Loki on her couch and instantly worried about him on their way to the site. Jane was quiet and more anxious than usual, and Darcy wondered just how hard Jane had taken it these past few days after S.H.I.E.L.D had kicked her off the research site. She also could tell by the white-knuckle grip on the steering wheel and the short answers about Tony Stark that Jane didn’t like the playboy genius touching her stuff, despite having no say in the matter at him being there.

Sipping the fine Starbucks coffee Jane had brought her, Darcy woofed down the protein bar as they finally parked Jane’s van and headed toward the center of the site.

Darcy stood awed as she laid eyes on it, noticing it was much more beefed up with expensive machinery than before. Not only that, Tony Stark was parading around giving orders in his Iron Man suit with his helmet open.

Darcy couldn’t help it; she was speechless and having a hard time moving beyond her spot.

“Come on, fan-girl,” Jane said, pulling at her elbow and dragging her along the site. Jane chuckled at her. “You might want to wipe that drool off your lips too.”

“Shut up,” Darcy said, and Jane’s laughter only increased. Jane and Darcy both smiled as Erik Selvig

approached them with an eager expression.

“Good, we have lots to do today,” he said, and Jane moved forward expectantly.

“Erik, does Mr. Stark think we can bring Thor back today?” she asked.

“We’re almost there Jane,” Erik said, patting her arm. “He says there’s one missing link in your equations, one he can’t figure out himself, but once we solve that, maybe we can get this man-made wormhole to work. Now, the question is, is it going to work on Thor’s end?”

Jane nodded, and Erik directed her to Tony Stark so that both brilliant minds could solve the problems. Darcy fell behind, staring anxiously at all the hustle and bustle around her. She saw Coulson approach her and give her some meager duties moving equipment and making sure adapters were plugged in correctly. When she was done running around with equipment and water and coffee for the S.H.I.E.L.D agents, Coulson put her on a boring data entry task that a monkey could do.

She supposed that was how S.H.I.E.L.D and Tony Stark saw her, a simple monkey.

Darcy sighed with boredom, already finishing her data entry duties but acting like she was still working so she wouldn’t get stuck with a new more boring task. She stared as Tony Stark buzzed around as Iron Man, and she watched in wonder as they started to power up the machines for the wormhole. Mostly the machine just bustled around a bunch of wind and sand, and Darcy stalked unnoticed to a large screen computer where Tony had landed to observe over Jane’s shoulder.

Jane was entering equations as Coulson barked orders, and Darcy became mesmerized by the man-made tornado that was spiraling with measured control into the sky, sort of like when Thor had fallen to earth, only pushing upward instead of down.

Darcy was struck by it, staring into the wind tunnel and feeling herself fall into a daydream. She could see inside this tornado. She could feel its turbulent energy, winding and pulsating in chaos, but not burgeoning as expected. It was reaching upward for something, but something was missing, and the whirlwind could go into space but could not reach its end.

She didn’t know what is is, but as she thought further, she could feel a white beacon of light in between the top of their whirlwind and a shimmering rainbow bridge. Above the beacon, Darcy could see in her mind’s eye a damaged bridge and an ornate gate just hovering on the edge, healing itself at a slow pace. At the gate, Darcy could see a large, god-like man of armor looking at her. She almost escaped this dream out of fear as he recognized her. He nodded at her with bright eyes, and then she saw him stab a large sword into a portal of light. The light sunburst toward her, reaching just barely toward Jane’s whirlwind.

Darcy suddenly felt the intense desire to link them both; Jane’s whirlwind and the white light of the portal trickled toward each other like white veins in the starry sky. With a mental push, Darcy felt them fuse together. Her body felt overwhelmed with otherworldly warmth. The universe seemed to sigh in relief around her, and when she blinked open her eyes and came out of her thoughts, everyone was looking at her strangely.

“Darcy! You...you were glowing!” Jane exclaimed.

“What?” she said. It was impossible. She couldn’t be glowing. “No way! Protein bars don’t make you glow,” she said nervously, hoping the reason they were all ogling her didn’t have anything to do with Loki’s magic, but Darcy knew she couldn’t be so lucky.

“You were definitely glowing, just for a second,” Jane said. Coulson, Fury and Stark were looking at her with curiosity too.

“No way,” she said, shaking her head. Coulson started toward her, and Tony Stark looked at her like he wanted to experiment on her. Darcy backed away.

“Ms. Lewis, you were glowing with an unexplained white light right now,” Coulson said. “I think you have been exposed to some kind of unknown phenomena. We should give you a full check up,” he said, and Darcy still backed away as S.H.I.E.L.D agents surrounded her.

Oh, shit. If they analyze her, they’ll find out about Loki. She didn’t want to tell them about him, and despite the spell he had placed on her, now she was sure she never would tell. Yes, she felt conflicted about helping a known antagonist of S.H.I.E.L.D, but this was *Loki*; she’d come to care for him so much that she’d never betray him now.

And now S.H.I.E.L.D would find out everything.

“Hold on, Phil,” said Tony Stark. “I think we may be onto something with the intern.” He turned to everyone with a wide grin. “She fixed it! I don’t what she did, but she stabilized the wormhole!”

“What?” Jane said. “Darcy didn’t do anything! She just...glowed with light.”

“Light that shot out from her head and into the whirlwind. Not natural or scientific, I know, but if this girl is under some kind of spell...or if she has some kind of powers, whatever they are, she fixed the problem with wormhole,” Tony Stark said.

“That means Thor can come back now,” Jane said. She turned to Darcy with a grin. “You did it, Darcy!”

“What did I do?” Darcy asked.

“Take the girl,” Coulson said. “I’m sorry, Ms. Lewis, but we have to contain you.”

“I don’t think so,” said a voice behind her. Everyone snapped their attention toward the voice, but only Darcy recognized it. She felt a jolt of fear ripple throughout her body. Loki was here! She feared that Jane and the others were now in danger.

She turned around and Loki was in his full battle regalia, which didn’t bode for the others if he decided to fight. Tony Stark had already put down his Iron Man mask and was ready to blast off toward him. Loki, however, did not seem fazed by him at all. He only glared at everyone and then focused on her.

“The girl is coming with me,” he said with an air of command.

“And just who are you?” Coulson asked, just as unfazed as Loki. He was curious, but the man was never startled or emotional about anything. He was just about business. He seemed amused by the visitor, almost happy for a change of excitement.

“You will find out soon enough, but the girl is mine,” he said, and before the S.H.I.E.L.D agents could contain Darcy, she watched Loki fade in and out of reality. She gasped when she felt an arm grasp around her torso before she was snapped like a rubber band through her surroundings. She closed her eyes, and she could feel Loki’s body flush against hers as he clutched her tight. She was so scared she could barely remember to breathe, and when the pressure around them ceased, Darcy opened her eyes and found themselves back in her apartment.

Only something was different.

Loki had expanded the dimensional closet around her whole apartment, fading it out of her reality into somewhere else. Darcy looked around. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, and everything in her apartment was in its place. Yet, she knew that things were different. There was a dark haze all around them, and her eyes began playing tricks on her as things warped in and out of reality.

She spun around as Loki released her and met his eyes. “What the heck have you done? Are you crazy?”

“You’re welcome, Ms. Lewis, for rescuing you from the S.H.I.E.L.D agents who wanted to dissect you,” he droned wryly. He moved away to inspect her. “I trust the side effects are beginning to show themselves? I’m just glad you’re no longer bleeding.”

“You! You did this to me! What did you do? I remember...hearing a terrible sound, and then...my head. You burned me, but then I was healed!” she babbled crazily at him. “You doped me up with some kind of alien power, didn’t you! Holy crap I’m a freak now!”

“Please, calm down. You are fine,” Loki said, annoyed by her manic behavior. “Yes, I did give you an excess of my power. I had taken too much, and I knew you could handle it despite the side effects. You humans are terribly resilient, so you should be proud of your species that you didn’t die.”

“Your...magic? So, that was all you?” Darcy narrowed her eyes at him and put her fists on her hips. “Hey, but there’s more to it that you’re not telling me. You got extra power somewhere. I heard you say it.”

“Yes...but you don’t need to know anything more than that,” he said stiffly, and Darcy darted toward him and stabbed a finger into his chest. He seemed uncomfortable by her rough touch, which only meant that his magic was still infused within her.

“Don’t give me that! You gave me this power, and it freaked you out enough that you took me away from Iron Man and S.H.I.E.L.D, which means you really have to tell me what’s going on now because despite your spell on me not to tell, you just outed yourself in front them,” Darcy said, still stabbing her finger into his chest. Finally, he stopped her finger, grasping it tightly until she backed down. He

looked down at her with a frown.

“Very well. It was an experiment. I acquired a power source from an ally and attempted to absorb its power. It was working very well after I studied the artifact and knew more about it. I thought I had taken the proper precautions, but the power was more than I anticipated,” he said, letting go of her and stepping back. Darcy continued to stare at him bewildered. “I had to give you the excess. Though I did not know it would cause a hemorrhage in your brain. I am sorry for that, but it seemed like a good time to call in your debt, and as I suspected, my magic more than healed your hemorrhage anyway. Your skin seems to be healthier as well, so really you have nothing to complain about.”

“Well, I suppose,” she said with a grunt, and she crossed her arms, still feeling used. “Still, you have a shitty way of bringing that on me. You could have warned me.”

“I was unable to,” Loki said, his tone prickly. “You had banished me from your place, and I was injured from the magic.”

Darcy hated how he made her feel guilty. She was going to explain to him about kicking him out, but she thought it best to wait. She still didn’t know if he had heard her confess her love to him on the bathroom floor. Darcy shuddered and turned away from his eyes.

“So that was your magic I used to stabilize the wormhole today?” she asked quietly, and she walked hesitantly to her couch, which still seemed weird and hazy to her in this other dimension. She was too tired to care if there were any side effects from touching things in this dimension. She let out a sigh when her bottom sank softly into the couch. Loki joined her shortly, turning toward her. He seemed amused by her question.

“Ah, yes, Jane Foster’s wormhole. It seems as though I inadvertently helped her repair the *Bifröst* bridge through you,” he said.

Darcy arched an eyebrow suspiciously. “You’re way to happy to admit such a mistake.”

Loki chuckled. “I do not see it as a mistake. I welcome the happy accident. I am more than ready to meet my brother on his triumphant arrival.”

“And S.H.I.E.L.D and Iron Man?” Darcy prodded.

“Pathetic mortals of no consequence,” he said snottily.

“What about me? Why did you rescue me if you don’t care if they know you’re around or that I have your magic?” she asked, and she had a glimmer of hope inside her that Loki actually came back for her because he cared.

“Well, I do not want them to get their hands on you if you are still infused with my magic. In fact, I am not sure I will be able to let you go back to them at all. I’m guessing part of my magic within you will have some permanence,” he answered, and Darcy felt her blood go cold.

“What...” she asked softly. “You mean, I’m your prisoner now? Hell no!” She turned to him, throwing

her fist up ready to deck him. Effortlessly, he caught her fist, and she had almost forgot about his exponential surge of power. He glared at her, and she winced as he tightened his grip around her knuckles, quickly causing bruises.

“You know,” Darcy said, still wincing. “You really know how to charm a girl.”

“And that, Ms. Lewis, is why I have come back,” he said, and she felt his grip lessen, as he reached out his other hand to her cheek, caressing it softly. “I’m curious. You have confessed your feelings to me, and then you have kicked out of your dwelling.” Darcy froze, feeling busted as it was finally clear that Loki heard her. He drew her toward him, and she watched him as he continued weaving his fingers through her hair. “I do confess to feel some attachment to you as well, but I am not sure what it is. I have felt this way for some time, but I cannot identify it, and I am fearful it is the human sickness that affected my brother toward Jane Foster. Still, I was willing to experiment anyway, though with caution.”

“You can experiment all you want, I know that you can’t understand it,” she breathed, trying to compose herself as he pawed her yet insulted her. She felt her heart sink as she knew where this was going: Rejection-ville. She had feared it all along. “You can’t understand the love Thor felt for Jane. It’s how he could defeat your monster that one time. It’s how he got his powers back.”

“Don’t you think I know?” he replied icily, but he did not get angry. He did not harm her as he had minutes ago. He seemed entranced by her, and Darcy could only imagine the strange Loki-type thoughts in his head. They must be terrifying.

“So, Thor found human love but you can’t,” she turned to him, looking deeply into his green eyes. “Only world domination seems to get you off.”

He smirked at her. “Oh, what little you know of me, Darcy, my dear.”

“Oh yeah?” she challenged him, which only seemed to amuse him despite the dark look on his face. His magic pressured around her, and she knew he was still enjoying his boost from yesterday. Whatever magic she had absorbed from him would have been useless in her defense, but she didn’t feel some sort of confidence from it. “I don’t know anything about you, other than that you want to do bad things to people on my planet. How can anyone like that love someone like me? It’s okay, you can call me an idiot. I tell myself that everyday I see you.”

She locked with his eyes coldly, and surprisingly, she found a softness in that curiosity.

“One thing I will teach you about me, Darcy Lewis,” Loki said, and he was pushing her back against the couch. He hovered over her and she stiffened, feeling hazed as if he was putting her under another spell. “On Asgard, I was second to my brother. Second to everything. His friends were only my friends because of him. Women were only mine because he discarded them first. Now, is that someone who learns about love? I will not learn something just because my brother did it first.”

“But your curious, right? Otherwise you wouldn’t have kept me around,” Darcy said in a shaky voice. She swallowed as his hands rested on her shoulders, framing her neck. His power blanketed her, and she didn’t know whether to feel aroused or scared for her life.

His pause gave her some kind of hope. Maybe he wouldn't harm her, and perhaps he had some small amount of redemption within him.

Maybe he too loved her enough to see if something was there.

Loki's eyes roamed over her, and Darcy braved a hand and traced it lovingly down his face. He didn't flinch from her touch, only stared at her wondrously. She said, "I'm not asking for it in return. I get that's probably not possible..."

"Darcy..." he said, but she cut him off, unwilling to give up the chance to say her piece.

"I promise, I won't betray you," she whispered, and she saw the surprise in his eyes as she said those words.

His hands framed her face and she felt his forehead against her skin. "You say these words but...I have heard them before, and I have squandered the power of such a promise."

Her head was still caught in a haze from his magic, and Darcy didn't even realize her lips were on his cheek, trailing light kisses down to his chin. He sighed raggedly against her, and weirdly, for a moment they connected emotionally, and she could feel the war that was going on in his thoughts.

Suddenly, Darcy felt Loki's mouth bruising against hers in a desperate kiss. He sighed warmly against her mouth as he broke away, and she could feel his eyelashes brush against her skin.

"I told you that I do not understand your affections for me, and this is true," he said in a heated pause. His body was already moving against hers. "It is also true that I do not understand my *own* affections for you, and mark my words, girl, the presence of you better not ruin my greatest plan."

Darcy's hand snaked around him as he took her, his hands pulling at her clothes and his armor disappearing with a mere whispered incantation.

Soon, neither Loki or Darcy could fight the pressure between them. All they could do was simply succumb.

Part Twenty-three: A Darker Side of Paradise

With his mouth was on her ear, she could hear his heavy breathing against the shell. He whispered, "Let's try an experiment, shall we? Let us find out how much I really do feel for you, mortal." She shuddered at his words, and he knew that at this point, she'd let him do anything to her, and she would do anything that he asked. "Now, Darcy Lewis, college intern, remember to take notes."

His hands were on her bare skin. Darcy felt lulled in a daze, having no idea how she came to her naked state or even from the couch of the strange reality to what was presumably his bed. It was his magic, of course. A snap of his feelings and their clothes were gone, sucked away into this strange universe he'd created around them.

Bodies rubbed against each other, and she could no longer remember her will or logic. She succumbed to her heart, her lust, and she was falling completely into Loki's arms. Finally, he had admitted something for her, and though it wasn't all out words of love, it was *something*, Darcy thought; something only someone like Loki could express. That, and he was just as confused as she was.

Strange how they'd come to this. At first she had only been his instrument, his pawn in an intricate, unseen plot against Jane Foster and ultimately, his brother.

Yet Thor was still coming back. The Bifrost had been repaired by Loki's unintended assistance, and now he had taken Darcy to his bed.

His mouth bruised against hers, searching out tongue and heat, delighting in the soft, wanting sounds she made against his lips. She couldn't concentrate on him, not while his hands explored her, tracing every curve and angle of her skin. His long fingers found her breasts, resting more there than anywhere else, squeezing and massaging the shape of them, pebbling her nipples before he took them into his mouth. She leaned her head back, moaning as the sensations pulsed through her. His knee opened up her legs, sliding against the nexus of heat.

Damn, she thought, and then his mouth was nowhere when she felt hands everywhere, and then he'd discovered her - his silver tongue against the heat of her clit. She jerked in surprise, and he chuckled, easing his mouth against her as he lapped her up.

"God," she panted, and his light cackle vibrated against her skin as he delighted in her reaction. He continued, taking so much that it felt like he'd been down there for weeks. How long had he been down there? It wasn't enough. He could stay as long as he liked - take as much as he wanted.

His tongue flicked her nub and she squealed, her legs shuddering, the pulse of fulfillment reverberating in her core.

She sighed, and Loki stretched like a snake over her body and found her mouth again until she was tasting herself, sharing in his conquest. Darcy felt something long and hard against her; she'd seen it, been too embarrassed to stare at it, but he was already directing it between her, rubbing teasingly as her body ached for it.

"Darcy," he whispered, almost like hypnotic music. His breath warmed her chin.

"Mmm," she said, and feeling adventurous, she flipped them over, hovering over him as she grabbed his face in her palms. She devoured him a deep kiss before drawing him inside her. He made a surprised grunt in her mouth, and her hips had already found their rhythm. She rested her hands on his shoulders, bouncing on him as her breasts danced in his face. He leaned closer, snaking his arms around her waist and burying his face in her chest as she cried at every beat.

"Great All-Father, woman, you are insatiable," he said, licking and nibbling at her hardened nipples. "I do not know why I didn't ravish you before."

"Ravish away," Darcy said erratically, still keeping her rhythm as he pierced inside her. He moved his

hips with her pace, their breaths matching in a rising peak.

He made another noise against her breasts, and Darcy lurched forward, sinking down as her thighs turned boneless and her body burst with ecstasy. Loki still moved underneath her, and before she could come down, he flipped her onto her back and began steadily pushing and pulling inside her, grasping for his own end.

Darcy heard him almost growl when he came, filling her and scrapping his teeth on her shoulder when he broke. Composing himself, he turned her over on top of him on the bed, and met her eyes. Within his gaze, Darcy could still see darkness, but now there was something else - respite. She wondered how long had it been since Loki was allowed to be this content and peaceful.

It wasn't even ten minutes of rest before Loki was up again, his excitement rubbing against her sore thighs as he kissed light paths up her shoulder and onto her neck.

His hand cupped her breast and Darcy giggled.

"You're definitely not like other guys," Darcy said amused.

"You should already know that, girl, and I will apologize for it now," he answered.

"Apologize for what?" Darcy asked confused.

"For spoiling you for mortal males from this point on," he said, and as usual, his low, husky tones made Darcy shiver inside. He was already winding her up again.

"Damn, you should apologize," she said, turning into him and pulling him in for another deep kiss.

"I am polite after all," Loki said.

"Sometimes," she said, biting the bottom of his lip after a chuckle. Loki arched an eyebrow. "But it would be boring if you were polite all the time."

He stared at her intensely for a moment, so much that Darcy felt her whole body freeze. Suddenly, he pulled her into a tight embrace and kissed her again before flipping her onto her knees.

"What?" she said, but she cried when he pushed inside from behind - more deeply than before. He started moving, and Darcy felt her whole body tingle from his rough touch. Urgently he drove with harsh strokes, so much she already saw stars bursting before her eyes.

He pushed and pushed until she could feel the burning soreness between her tired thighs, but when he saw the tears, he pulled back, letting her rest as he drew her into an affectionate embrace.

Loki didn't apologize, and Darcy didn't want him to. It felt good in a weird way, she admitted to herself, and Darcy almost expected him to handle her like that.

And if he let her, she's like to handle him just as roughly herself.

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When she awoke, Darcy couldn't tell what time it was, but she felt an absence of heat around her. She didn't expect that, and momentarily she freaked that Loki had left her high and dry. Seeing him next to her sitting up in the bed, Darcy could hardly be relieved. She noticed the scowl on his face, and he was obviously warring with his thoughts again.

Did he regret what they did?

"Hey," she said softly, and she put a cautious hand on his bare chest. He made no motion to remove it, just met her eyes with a dark glare.

"Whoa, ice prince, what's with the dirty look? We just fucked like rabbits, remember?" Darcy said, pulling back as she gauged his reaction.

"I'm wondering if we should have at all," he said, his words cutting through her like a sword.

Why did she half expect him to react this way? Darcy pulled the covers over her chest and scooted away from him.

"Wow, still charming," she said sarcastically.

"You know I have to leave you, girl, don't you? I have to eventually leave you forever," Loki said, his voice becoming sharper. "You may never see me again. Could you cope with that? Or would you die inside every day I was gone?" He sat up in bed and leaned toward her. Darcy felt one of his long fingers curl into her hair. She watched him play with it and frowned.

"It's not the first time I've had a one night stand. I've been ditched before," she said coldly, lifting her chin. Despite everything, he must know she still loved him. Now he was just digging his heel right into her heart. Damn it. She kind of wanted to punch him, tase him, but what would be the point? He'd stop her anyway.

"You're an ass," she said simply. "I knew you would be."

"And yet, here we are," he said, unaffected by her words.

"Yep, still, good sex; kudos to us," she said, trying to be positive.

"Amazing how you can act so calmly after I am telling you that I'll leave you," Loki said, still playing with her hair entranced. She felt his hand move beyond her hair and pull back the covers that wrapped her breasts.

"And you won't miss me at all? Too busy with world domination and kicking Thor's butt, huh?" she said to him.

"Of course," he said.

“And here I’ll be, listening to Adele and eating fudge ice cream,” Darcy said with a languid sigh.

“Just like a sad, weepy mortal girl would,” Loki said, sliding his fingers over her now exposed breasts. Darcy tensed, and then relaxed into his cold palm.

“Yeah, and after awhile, I may eventually get over you,” she said, lifting up her arm to inspect the bruises on her pale skin. “And the bruises will heal.” She turned to Loki and met his intrigued eyes. He was suddenly closer to her in the bed than she remembered minutes ago. “Maybe someday I won’t even think about you.”

Loki slid an arm around her and brought her close. “But you will always miss me, in some way.”

“Sure, if that makes you feel better about yourself,” she quipped, leaning in and nibbling on his lip.

“Stupid girl,” Loki huffed at her, and he tensed when she put her hands on the hardness between his legs. He let out a ragged sigh when Darcy began to stroke him. “Look what you’ve done to me.”

Darcy laughed lightly against his cheek. “I should go,” she said. “You said you were leaving.” She started to release her grip on him, but he grabbed her wrist, and she was unable to move.

“You’re not going anywhere, not now, and perhaps, not ever.” His voice dipped into a whispered hiss, and Darcy was almost frightened by it. He liked to play the role of monster very well, and she’d be lying if she said she was getting used to it.

The worst thing was that it turned her on when he got like this, all emotional, bitchy and cruel. Something was wrong with her if this truly was what she liked about him, that bad side she couldn’t resist.

“Come here.” His voice was like the blackest silk against her ears. Darcy complied with a coy smile. Their eyes met, and Loki’s anger pulsed all over his expression. Perhaps he was angry with her.

But Darcy knew he was angrier with himself.

“I thought you didn’t want me anymore,” she said, testing him beyond what she should. He sneered at her before he kissed her roughly.

Pushing her down, he hovered over her. He was already sliding inside her, and she closed her eyes when she felt him come home.

“You know me better than anyone, Darcy, and you know that I sometimes lie,” he said.

He bucked his hips forward and Darcy cried. His hands gripped around her wrists and all she could feel was the cold heat of him burgeoning within her.

Loki wasn’t ever going to let her go. Darcy always knew that, and honestly, she didn’t mind. He would have her stay in his sick, twisted world forever, and she’d already made up her mind that there was no

denying him. This decision could be made against her will, but it never needed to come to that.

Loki had already claimed Darcy as his, and whether he liked it or not, Loki was hers.

Part Twenty-four: Gone

"Sometimes when you love something Darcy, you have to let it go."

She woke to the memory of her mother's words hovering in her brain. Darcy could hardly remember when her mother had told her that, but it must have been when her dog Skittles died of old age. She didn't now why the memory had surfaced now, but she guessed it had something to do with her empty bed and apartment with the God of Mischief nowhere in sight.

His strange dimensional space was also gone, and she was back in her lonely bedroom drowning in the weighted silence.

Just as he had promised to not let her go, ever, here he had left her in the end anyway.

"You must remember that Loki always lies." It sounded like a nursery rhyme stuck within her head, a lesson that all little girls and boys should learn.

Darcy frowned, rising from her toasty covers and sitting up in bed. She didn't really know what she had expected from Loki all these last nights. He was not some lover who would treat her with tenderness and adoring words, but rather he regarded her like an animal, as if he would eat her unless she bowed her head and knew her place.

He had proven that by the soreness that sang throughout every muscle of her body.

She definitely learned the lesson well. Her heart and body already ached for Loki's presence, but honestly she didn't feel surprised that he'd bailed on her.

"Ass," she spat at the air. The floor was cold on her bare feet, and she was thankful Loki had at least left her wrapped in her soft, cotton bath robe. It was green, and she remembered buying it a couple of weeks after he'd started living with her.

Now it just reminded her of his eyes.

Shaking the thoughts from her head, Darcy brewed some coffee when she caught sight of her phone blinking on the kitchen counter. She had 41 missed calls and just as many messages, no doubt from Jane and S.H.I.E.L.D.

Reluctantly, she listened to them all. Most of them were frantic pleadings from Jane to call her once she got the messages. The most interesting one, however, was the news that Thor was back, and instantly he'd been put on a mission to find her and his brother.

"Fat chance, Thor. Loki's gone," Darcy said, and she'd gone through three cups of coffee before she'd finally decided to call Jane.

"Yeah, it's me. No, he's gone," she told Jane, and immediately Coulson had picked up the phone.

"Stay there, Ms. Lewis. We'll send someone to pick you up. We have a lot to discuss," he ordered.

"Sure," Darcy said with a hint of sarcasm. "I'll be here."

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Coulson and S.H.I.E.L.D came to her apartment, and the whole grand entrance was a blur to her until Darcy saw Thor with Jane Foster hovering worriedly behind him. The moment Jane looked her over, the woman had pulled Darcy into her arms and began rocking her like a comforting mother.

"What did he do to you? You're covered in bruises!" Jane exclaimed, and Darcy's eyes went wide for a moment when she realized where those bruises came from. Her face immediately felt hot, and an awkward silence fell between them all.

"Jane, Agent Coulson, if you would please leave Ms. Darcy Lewis and me alone for a moment," said Thor in a quiet voice, and Darcy hugged herself, feeling even more uncomfortable under Thor's scrutinizing eyes.

He shot a stern look to Coulson, who had no intention of budging, but after a weird minute, the S.H.I.E.L.D agent sighed sharply and left Thor and Darcy alone in her apartment.

After a heavy pause, Darcy licked her lips and played with the sleeves of her baggy brown sweater, which covered most of her bruises but did not shield the marks on her neck. "So you probably know

what you're brother and I..."

Thor sucked in a heavy breath. "My brother has treated you unwell."

"He...really hasn't. I mean, in the beginning he used me, but I thought..." Darcy sighed, angry with herself. "I thought I was getting to him. I thought we were friends...maybe more." She looked into Thor's eyes. "I don't know why I'm telling you this. He was just... hard to resist. He was here, and I felt something for him. I feel totally stupid and embarrassed already for admitting that, so say what you're going to say. I already feel like a dope for even letting him stay at my place. Though it's not like he didn't cast a spell on me to not say anything to anyone about his presence, but then...I didn't really try that hard to fight it."

"My brother's magic is powerful. I am sure you could not fight much. Still, you will get no lecture from me. My brother, despite all that he has done, is still dear to me. I am glad there is someone else he is dear to as well," Thor said, but she could see there was more that Thor was trying to explain. "I did not even know he was alive. It seemed impossible he would survive that fall from the broken Bifröst."

"Ah, he told me about that. Something about other dimensions to Midgard that even you and Odin don't know about," Darcy said, and she smirked slightly at Thor. "For someone who was closely guarded on his nefarious plans, he did ramble a lot about things."

"So he has plans then," Thor said, almost like a growl.

"Yeah," Darcy said. "I am surprised that his spell is not working anymore on me."

"I have seen no trace of my brother. He is probably gone, retreating somewhere out of our reach," Thor said. "His magic has probably worn off or lost its strength."

"Yeah, well he can go around other dimensions here too," Darcy said, looking away from Thor's gaze. She was starting to feel uncomfortable the more she talked to Thor about Loki. She was conflicted, knowing it was right to help Thor but also feeling like she wanted to defend Loki.

Man, she had it bad for Loki. With him still plotting some bad things, she still wanted to help him in some way.

"Darcy Lewis, you are aware that S.H.I.E.L.D will make you tell them everything that you know about my brother. They will keep you locked up, just as they had done to me when I tried to take Mjölfnir."

"I know," she said, and she stepped toward Thor and put her hand on his arm. "But I don't know how much I can tell them, Thor. I feel strange about Loki. I don't want to betray him." She paused and Thor's eyes searched her face. "I love the stupid bastard."

"Aye," Thor said. "I know how you must feel." He took her small hand into his large grasp and pulled her along. "Now, let us go. I will try to help you as much as I can, Darcy Lewis."

"Thanks, Thor," she said, but Darcy still felt the unease in the pit of her stomach despite Thor's words. Though, she had to admit it was good seeing the big guy again.

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"Hey! What's a girl gotta do around here to get some pizza?" Darcy yelled. S.H.I.E.L.D had put her in this white, sound-proof room and left her there for odd hours at a time. She had a bottle of water, which she had emptied out of boredom, and she finally convinced Coulson to bring her iPod so she could listen to music and watch reruns of Hoarders.

She had always wondered if it was possible to listen to every song in her collection without skipping a track, and being in this horrible white room proved that she could.

Finally, the door slid open and Coulson walked in with a pizza box. The wave of cheese and sauce hit her nostrils and she held out her hands. "You are a godsend!"

Coulson held the pizza box just out of her grasp, taunting her as he had one more question to torture her with.

"I would really like to give you this pizza if you could tell us more about Loki," Coulson said.

"I told you, he has some sort of spell on me. Plus, he wasn't exactly chatty about his plans. I also told you about the power boost he got from god-knows where, and by that, giving me super human strength, which I still have by the way, so don't test me and give me that pizza," Darcy warned him.

Coulson looked at her with odd amusement in his eyes. He set the pizza down on the table, and Darcy darted for the first slice. She made moans of contentment as she scarfed down two of them in one gulp.

"Much better," she said. "Yum."

"Feeling more talkative now?" Coulson asked.

"Do you honestly think I'm keeping things from you to protect him?" Darcy said. "Trust me, I told you everything, and I didn't want to, and to be honest, I don't think it's going to help you."

Coulson just stared with his lips pursed. Darcy really hated when he did that.

"He made me sabotage Jane's research in my sleep. He stalked me to the point where I gave up trying to shoo him out of my bathroom, so I invited him to stay over. I did not invite him to turn my apartment into his dimensional secret base with high-powered motorcycles and dusty old black magic books. He wouldn't listen to me anyway; he kind of did his own thing," Darcy reiterated.

"Yet, you had a romantic relationship with this...person," Coulson said.

"Uh huh. I have a bad track record with men; what can I say? Plus, he could be really sweet at times. Just ask Thor," Darcy said. "Look, I really can't explain my actions there, okay? I don't need S.H.I.E.L.D to tell me I'm stupid. Loki is...probably really dangerous toward you guys, I'm not going to lie."

"We are well aware of Loki's capabilities," Coulson said.

Darcy snorted, finishing off her fourth piece of pizza. "Then you know him better than I do."

Coulson arched a single eyebrow. Darcy was sure he didn't believe her.

"Well, I think that's all for today," Coulson said. "If you can think of anything, Ms. Lewis, please, let us know."

"When can I get out of here?" she asked quickly.

Coulson shook his head. "I don't think you understand, Ms. Lewis. We're keeping you here hoping he'll come back for you, if he really cares about you at all."

Darcy immediately started laughing, but Coulson seemed unfazed by her audacity. "Are you crazy? He's not coming back for me! He still called me "stupid mortal" up until the last minute. He has more

important things to worry about than a little human like me."

"Are you sure, Ms. Lewis? He stayed around you for quite a long time. Although he may not have expressed it, Thor's brother may have had feelings for you too."

Yeah, but he's not going to come to me unless I'm in some kind of danger, like when Heath tried to rape me, Darcy thought, but she wasn't going to tell Coulson that. She sure as hell knew they'd stick her in a cage with the Hulk if it meant Loki would swoop in and save her life. No, she had told S.H.I.E.L.D everything, every detail of her life with Loki, but she would not tell them this.

It was the only thing she could do for Loki. She didn't want to outright help him, but she would at least keep him away from her and S.H.I.E.L.D.

She wasn't so sure he'd come for her anyway, but it made her feel better that she could do this one thing out of loyalty for Loki. She didn't even care if Coulson suspected her of doing it. Darcy still didn't agree with Loki's machinations, but she did feel some sense of loyalty toward him.

And this was her only way of not betraying him.

Darcy would stay in this white room for as long as S.H.I.E.L.D wanted to keep her just to prove her point.

.xxxxx.

Loki knew they had Darcy. He knew his brother had returned too, and he knew that Darcy was free to tell S.H.I.E.L.D everything she could about him.

Not that anything she could tell them could really hinder his plans.

He phased in and out of dimensional space to check on her. They weren't really hurting her, only confining her to get him to come for her.

But he wouldn't. He knew enough that she was fine, but now he had to leave her. Darcy was a dangerous weakness on his part, and S.H.I.E.L.D must know that now. So he would prove to them that she was nothing to him, a mere fancy and convenient pawn in his wider game.

When he didn't return to her and carried out his plans, they'd know she was really no use to him. Then, they'd let her go and Darcy would be free. She would go back to being a normal human who would fall in step under his inevitable rule.

And when he did come to rule this planet and all her people, when things were safe and comfortable for him, Loki would search her out and reward her.

When that time came, Darcy would sit by his side as intended. He'd have Earth. He'd have his brother kneeling before him, with an army ready to crush any foolish rebellion to dust.

Finally, Loki would have everything he deserved, and more.

Part Twenty-Five: It's Always Goodbye

Much later...

Eventually, S.H.I.E.L.D gave up confining Darcy in that white room and using her to get to Loki, and they released her - so to speak. Being under S.H.I.E.L.D surveillance drove her crazy for awhile, but ultimately Darcy became use to it. Admittedly it made her lonely, and it was irritating that Nick Fury had to first approve everyone who wanted to visit her.

Fortunately for him, not many people wanted to see her. Her parents, sure, they came around to her new flat in New York sometimes, but it wasn't enough. There was Jane and Thor, but since she saw them at S.H.I.E.L.D headquarters anyway, they didn't much need to visit her at home. Plus, the two of them were enamored with each other and making up for all that lost time they were apart.

Darcy supposed she should be grateful to Jane Foster. After she finally was able to obtain her full credits and finish her degree, Jane came to Darcy's rescue by giving her a job continuing as her assistant rather than being dumped in some high-security S.H.I.E.L.D relocation program with a new name and identity. She admitted working with the Avengers was a lot more appealing than that (even though she wasn't really allowed to talk to the Avengers much; helping Loki had denied her some common privileges.)

Still, she did cooperate with Nick Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D, and she did tell them everything she knew about Loki, and everything he had done. She'd even thrown in the affectionate stuff, which surprised Thor more than anyone. As expected, other S.H.I.E.L.D members didn't care she'd been intimate with one of their fiercest enemies, and she supposed they secretly wrote that off as her being naive and Loki using her.

No S.H.I.E.L.D agent or super hero could ever convince her that Loki only wanted to use her. Yes, in the beginning he *had* used her, but he'd been upfront about it. She could give him credit on that, but he

did come back to her. He formed a bond with her and whatever his reasons were, Darcy liked to think actions spoke louder than words.

Loki had cared for her. Maybe he still did.

She did wonder if she'd see him again. The more logical part of her brain surmised that she wouldn't, but then again, Darcy wasn't always logical when it came to men and matters of the heart. She still caught up on his news, trying to overhear or needle out any information on Loki as he took on the Avengers. She'd seen news footage, cringed at all the bad things he'd done, and when the camera would pan to the maddening fury in his eyes, she felt her heart drop, wondering if this was the same person who'd been with her all that time.

What had he done? What had he become? Then, she felt foolish. She knew all along this was the kind of person he was. She knew what he was capable of, and there was no denying his true nature. Not anymore, not when he'd given her up and went on to fulfill his original diabolical schemes.

He'd had help. He'd had armies and augmented power. He'd been sinister and cruel, lacking compassion and sympathy for humans that he crushed under his boots.

Loki was a fearsome enemy, and she began to see that his actions hurt Thor to the core just as much as it'd hurt her.

So she was surprised when she'd heard the latest news between the Avengers and Loki as they battled it out in the frenzied streets of New York City. The Avengers were gaining the upper hand, and Loki and his army were being pushed back - crushed even. Darcy glued herself to her TV as the CNN reporter got as close as she could to the mayhem and wreckage. They panned to Loki again, and she saw the madness on his face.

He was getting desperate.

And suddenly, the feed cut. The usual Emergency Broadcast System trill drowned in her ears, and Darcy knew this was S.H.I.E.L.D intervening. Something was happening in that battleground that they didn't want the public to see.

Darcy held her breath for a moment, releasing air slowly as the anxiety still coiled in her throat. She left the couch and headed toward her kitchen as the TV screen remained in a block of angry colors. The lights in her apartment flickered, and as she pulled out a coke from her fridge, everything went dark, and she heard a huge crash vibrate around her. She scrambled, leaving the coke behind as she searched for a flashlight.

She peeked out the window and saw a brownout in her neighborhood. She heard fearful and panicked

voices outside, car alarms screaming wildly, and she saw cops scrambling to follow looters that slithered out of the cracks in her neighborhood.

Then, she heard a groan close by. She froze, realizing another person was inside her place.

Darting the flashlight to the source, he squinted as the light met his eyes. “Loki,” she said in a scratchy breath. He held a hand up to cover his eyes, and she drew the flashlight away as she ran to him.

He snapped his fingers once, and candles lit weakly in her living room. A sweet rose scent percolated throughout, and Darcy was at his side as he struggled to breathe.

“You’re hurt!”

“It would seem they were beating me,” he said, taking her hand as she offered it. “Your assistance please.”

“Of course, it’s just...” She hesitated. “It’s been so long since I’ve seen you.”

“Dress the wound, mortal, and then we will *catch up*,” he said with some irritation. “My power is depleted. I need rest and recovery. I need...”

“Shh,” she said, lightly leading his head back onto a pillow. He let out a sigh of release as she began cleaning and patching up his wound. She stared at gaping hole in his side through his battle armor, singed with smoking gnarled flesh. The blood was masked in blackness, and she knew this was a distinctive wound. “Let me guess, Iron Man did this.”

“So it would seem,” he said coughing. “We don’t play well together.”

“Obviously,” she huffed. “You idiot, why’d you have to go up against the Avengers? I know you’re bad-ass and all, but they’re going to kill you.”

“I have an army,” he said automatically, like he told himself that like a mantra when things weren’t going his way.

“Right, and did you see that big green monster that the Avengers have?” Darcy scolded.

“Are you done admonishing me, mortal?” he sneered at her. He tried to rise but Darcy held him down. His eyes dropped to the black blood that painted over her green sweater and blue jeans, and he sighed, reluctantly letting her treat him.

“It’s just that I miss you. I haven’t seen you and S.H.I.E.L.D made me tell them everything after you

were gone and your spell was broken,” Darcy said.

“It does not matter. There is nothing you could have told them that would have ruined my plans,” Loki said bitterly.

“But...”

“Listen, girl, I admit that I have been distracted by the Avengers for some time, and I have meant to come back to you, but I couldn’t,” he said, and for a sincere apology, Darcy knew that was about all she was going to get from him. “But you see, I believe I may have made a mistake with you.”

“Don’t say that,” she shook her head. She wagged her finger at him. “Don’t you dare say that or I’ll tase you into a coma right now.”

He grabbed her waving hand and squeezed affectionately. “I had never meant to come this far,” he said, his voice trailing off. Darcy was surprised by the tenderness.

When the silence outside hit her, she tensed. “You can’t stay long.”

“What? I only just arrived, and you were the one who jumped to see me,” Loki said, coughing again. She saw that his wound was starting to heal as she gave him time to recuperate and rest.

“Yeah, and believe me if I had a choice, you’d stay and never go out there again, but the Avengers will realize you’re gone, and this is the first place they’ll look,” she said.

“Don’t be daft. My brother is thick-headed, but he will never suspect me coming somewhere so obvious,” Loki scoffed.

“And why not? What about the other Avengers? We haven’t seen each other in months, and I’m still being watched. Why wouldn’t they think you were here? Plus, that brownout and chaos outside is a nice distraction for a little bit, but it’ll be under control and those cops outside will call you in the moment they hear your voice on their bugs.”

“I have taken over the air waves in this area. Do not worry,” Loki said.

“Wow, you’re full of excuses,” Darcy said. “Look, just be careful.” She stared at him as he looked away. She watched the candlelight flicker over his face. She wished there was more light so she could see all of him. She wished she could hold him and never let go.

He still didn’t meet her gaze.

“Do you support me, Darcy Lewis?” he asked softly, still staring at a candle on her end table. “Do you want to see me succeed and rule your world?”

“I...” She paused, and he chuckled at her immediate reaction. Of course, she didn’t support his crazy, world domination cause. She may have joked about being his minion at one time, but she really didn’t want people to get hurt. It was impossible to make Loki into a good guy, and perhaps she would never want that, but she couldn’t support his ideals.

“I don’t want you to die,” she said, as a choked sob came through. She couldn’t fight the tears, and she couldn’t fight the longing. Loki stayed motionless on her couch, and Darcy lost her reserve, knowing that after he healed and left her place, it’d be the last time she’d see him. He was immortal, so maybe he couldn’t die, but she couldn’t keep telling herself that when he came to her like this, wounded and on the brink of defeat. She leaned forward, pulled his face toward hers and covered his mouth in a desperate kiss. He stiffened under her grasp but soon relaxed against the touch.

“I need to go,” he said rising from her embrace. Darcy stared at the wound, glad it was mostly healed and he could at least stand. She nodded, and before he disappeared into the darkness, she felt his hand caress delicately down her face before his touch melted away.

He was gone - again, and when Darcy’s lights flickered back on, the TV blared so loudly that she had to turn it off. Instead she turned on her iPod player, and Adele’s bold, heartfelt voice filled her room. Darcy fished out a small tub of ice cream from her freezer, scooped a sugary bite, and sniffled.

Silent tears ran down her cheeks and rather than wipe them away, she let them dry on her face. She wanted S.H.I.E.L.D to see them, to see that he’d come to her and affected her. It would show them what he meant to her, and what she meant to *him*. It would show them all that they were wrong.

Loki didn’t use her. Loki loved her, and he *could* love her, if he hadn’t loved absolute power first.

Part Twenty-six: Epilogue

The battle was over; at least, it was for now. Darcy hadn’t heard anything about Loki from S.H.I.E.L.D for awhile, but the moment they dropped their surveillance of her and told her they wouldn’t be needing her anymore, Darcy knew that something was up.

She didn’t know if Loki was alive or dead. S.H.I.E.L.D wouldn’t even release that information to the public through the news feeds, and they blacked out and confiscated any media on the subject before it could go viral. S.H.I.E.L.D definitely overextended their power on this, and all the public had to know was that the Avengers had saved the day, and they would continue doing so with similar threats.

And Loki was soon forgotten. Once in awhile a crazy story would pop up about him in the tin-hat conspiracy theory blogs, but Darcy knew that stuff was never true.

She still stayed on as Jane's assistant, but Jane was moved to a different facility away from S.H.I.E.L.D and Darcy soon followed her to Washington D.C. where they carried out research before they moved again. Darcy enjoyed being with Jane, and she enjoyed her job. She knew it was better than she could ever get with a political science degree, and after seeing how S.H.I.E.L.D abused their power in the government, Darcy didn't want to go anywhere near political office.

She was deluded to think she'd be totally free of S.H.I.E.L.D though. They put some poor sap on her detail, and she sort of felt sorry for the guy. It had to be a punishment to watch *Loki's girlfriend*, and she'd caught him enough times following her that he didn't hide it anymore. She waved to him sometimes, and she even thought about asking him over to dinner to fuck with him, but in the end, she decided against it. The poor sucker had it bad enough. She couldn't imagine the things he had to report about her. Her life was boring. All she did was watch Bravo and order too much take out. If the agent ever shot himself in the head from tedium of this job, she'd hardly be surprised.

As mundane as things were, she still held out hope for Loki's return. For awhile it was plausible, but as months rushed by, it seemed more and more impossible. Especially since nobody was allowed to tell her anything about him, not even Jane and Thor, and she knew they were holding back the real story.

She was starting to lose hope that she'd ever find out anything about the elusive Trickster god, until Thor finally showed up at her doorstep one Tuesday evening. He must have called off the poor S.H.I.E.L.D agent who was watching her, and he looked like an eyesore in his Asgardian regalia standing on the stoop of her apartment.

"Ah, I bring you good tidings, Darcy Lewis. May I enter?" he asked politely. Darcy held out her hand and let him inside. She ignored the nosy neighbors who'd poked their heads out to ogle at her visitor, and Darcy shut the door.

When he turned around to face her, Darcy leaped into his arms for a hug. "Thor! It's been forever. Jane doesn't stop talking about you."

"Aye. I apologize for avoiding you, but I have been busy with my comrades. I was also called back to Asgard recently."

"Yeah, Jane told me about that. We got drunk one night and gossiped about you. Fun times," Darcy said slyly, winking at him as his face turned slightly pink.

"Well, yes, I am aware of that as well," Thor said. "I have come to finally tell you about my brother. I was prevented from telling you the truth for some time because we were unsure about Loki's fate."

Darcy gaped at him, staring with anticipation. "He's alive," she said, releasing the words in a relieved breath.

“Aye, that he is, and as I know now, he is a Frost Giant that has gained much magic, so he is not easy to kill. Plus, the Avengers have agreed not to kill him as he turned against his allies and helped us.”

“Wait... he defected? Loki *helped* you?” Darcy almost couldn’t believe it.

“‘Tis true. My brother switched allegiances and helped us at the last second. Whatever his reasons were, he helped us, and we defeated the enemy. We saved the world,” Thor told her.

“So, this is what S.H.I.E.L.D has been hiding,” Darcy said, finally understanding the need for censorship and silence about Loki for so long. “They don’t want to admit that an enemy turned around and helped them. They don’t want to give him proper credit.”

“You must see their side. Loki brought this force to Earth. He did so much destruction,” Thor said.

Darcy laid a hand on Thor’s arm. “But he changed. He helped you!” She smiled with excitement and relief.

“Darcy, I believe Loki was losing, and his enemies had meant to betray and manipulate him,” Thor told her.

Darcy frowned. “So he realized this and decided to switch sides.” She met Thor’s clear blue eyes. “He realized he was better on the winning team.”

“S.H.I.E.L.D has not forgiven Loki’s sins entirely. He disappeared when the dust of battle settled and we were picking up bodies and tending the injured. I came to tell you the truth, but also let you know that my brother has disappeared. He may never come back.”

“Come on!” Darcy said with a laugh. “You really don’t believe that, do you?” Thor stared at her stonily. Darcy was sure he didn’t. He was just letting her know in case she had any false hope that Loki would return to her. She could see it all over his face.

“Please understand, Darcy Lewis, I am grateful for what you did for my brother. He was always loved, but did not know it. I suppose our love was never enough for him, not even mine. But take comfort, child, that you gave my brother something meaningful when all he intended was to use you. If he had many reasons for helping my comrades, I would like to think one of those reasons was you,” said Thor.

Darcy felt a lump form in her throat. She was speechless, and her emotions were starting to break. Had she really had a hand in changing Loki, even if it was only slightly? Had she really affected him that much?

“Thank you, Thor,” Darcy said finally, and she felt his large hand squeeze her shoulder. She pulled her brown sweater closed and hugged herself as a million thoughts swirled in her brain.

“I should leave you now to your thoughts. Fare thee well, Darcy Lewis,” he said, and he grinned at her. “I believe we will see each other again.”

Darcy nodded, and Thor let himself out as quietly as a cool breeze. Darcy closed her eyes, feeling lonely without his imposing presence. Then, she felt a strange yet familiar weight in her living room.

Turning around, she met his green eyes, and her heart raced in her chest, stopping only for a moment as he stepped toward her. He smirked at her, delighting in her stunned reaction as she held her hands up, trying to find the energy to embrace him.

He moved toward her, and she jumped from her spot into his arms. “Loki!”

“Stupid mortal,” he said affectionately, and she laughed against his chest, happy for even the rudest endearments from him.

“You came back,” she said, and she pulled away from his embrace to meet his eyes. “Wait, you’re a fugitive now, aren’t you? S.H.I.E.L.D, the Avengers...” He put a finger to her lips and ceased her talking.

“Am I not ever a fugitive? Really, girl, did you forget who I am?”

“No,” she said, and she tilted her head and leaned her cheek against his palm. She traced her gaze over him, soaking in his appearance, for it had been so long since she’d see him. He was dressed like Agent Tom Hill, probably as a joke to her, but probably convenient to him as he had no need for battle armor now. His shirt was a dark green under his smoky gray coat with his stark black pants, and she tugged on his hounds-tooth scarf and pulled it off his neck. As usual, he looked too suave and sophisticated against her sweater and jeans, but she didn’t care. He was here, and more importantly, he had come back to her.

He said very little as he brought her flush against him. She didn’t need words to celebrate his return. She needed only him, his body against hers, and his mischievous and silky words against her ear. She pulled at his clothes, finding his mouth as he took her quickly, ravishing her lips and skin. He was barely gentle, tugging off her sweater as his hands itched to hold her flesh.

“Darcy, love,” he whispered softly, and she was already driving him toward her bedroom. She squealed as he picked her up, carrying her to the bed.

“You know, this is so cliché, having sex after being apart for so long. I wonder if you really mean it or this is just a random booty call before you try to take over some other poor planet,” Darcy teased him. His lips stopped over her nipple, and she pouted as his pulled away to speak. His green eyes gazed at her mockingly.

“I can stop any time, girl,” he threatened her.

She glared at him, and pushed his head back down. “The hell you can!”

The rhythm never broke after that, and time hushed to a stillness, sucking them into their own world as they sank into one another, discovering what they’d missed and recovering what they’d lost.

He’d taken her, loved her, and bruised her so many times that night Darcy didn’t want to let him go

again. She wouldn't let him. She wouldn't give him up so easily as before.

He'd have to kill her first.

Feeling his arms around her, skin on skin, his tongue teasing her ear, her body shuddered, still aching from the lovemaking not moments ago. She could go again, if he wanted. When Loki touched her, her body turned to ancient fire.

"Will you stay with me now that I've returned?" he whispered to her, his soothing voice numbing her as it vibrated against her ear.

"Yes," she said simply. She could no longer imagine a life without Loki; didn't want to, and as evil as he was, she hoped to never find out. Silently, she promised her loyalty, and she was sure Loki knew it.

"Even if the world ends? Even if someday I bring its destruction?"

Darcy blew out a strained breath. "Yes, even then."

He pulled her against him, embracing her tightly. "Oh, my sweet, foolish mortal. Do you really know what you're getting yourself into by trusting me so blindly?"

She turned in his arms, and she watched as his eyes close as she kissed his forehead. "Of course," she said nonchalantly. She knew the gravity of everything, of him, but she didn't care.

She had her Loki back, and he wasn't going anywhere - not now at least, and having him in the present was all she could ask for. He was all that she needed.

With that moment in his arms, the world seemed to sigh into a calm, comfortable peace as Loki spared it his darkness. In the end, Darcy liked to believe that he'd given up everything just for her.

END