



xxiii. We Have A Hulk

Auralie and Tony landed on Stark Tower's landing platform. Auralie dropped down from her position holding onto Tony and sidestepped him so he could have his armor removed. Loki had been waiting for them, and he smirked as they walked towards the inside of the building. He went inside as well, and Auralie frowned, wondering what his next game would be. She briefly noted Dr. Selvik and the Tesseract, but that was a problem to deal with in a bit.

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"Sir, the mark 7 is not ready for deployment," Jarvis, Tony's AI assistant, said.

"Then skip the spinning rims, we're on the clock," Tony responded.

The two heroes went inside and stood behind Tony's drinks bar. Loki had come in and was waiting for them, almost assured of his victory, and so overconfident.

"I hope you two are here to appeal to my sense of humanity," Loki said tauntingly.

Auralie rolled her eyes, "not even close."

"We're here to threaten you," Tony replied pleasantly.

"You should have left your armor on for that," Loki scowled.

Tony just smirked, because he knew it would annoy the other man. He got out a glass and began pouring himself some scotch, asking Loki, "you want a drink?"

Loki laughed, "stalling won't change anything."

"Threatening," Tony corrected, "no drink? I'm having one. Beacon, you can't have this yet, can you?"

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"Nope," Auralie replied, "but if you have coffee, that would be amazing."

"Sure thing kid, whatever you want." Tony smiled, draining his glass and going over to the coffee machine. Loki seemed confused by their antics but did not find them to be a threat. Exactly the reaction they had been hoping for.

"What in the nine realms are you trying to accomplish?" Loki asked, directing his question at the teenage girl, having decided that Stark was too bothersome to talk to.

"Showing you that you've overplayed your hand," Auralie replied, not really putting much thought into her answer, just going on instinct and bluster as she breathed in the aroma of brewing coffee.

"My army is coming," Loki said, "your heroes are scattered, what have I to fear?"

"The Avengers," Tony said, reaching for a mug to put Auralie's coffee in, "we're kind of like a team. Earth's mightiest heroes, that sort of thing."

"Yes, I've met them," Loki laughed.

Tony smirked, "yeah, it takes us a while to get any traction, but let's do a headcount here; your brother, the demigod....." Loki winced in annoyance at the mention of Thor and Tony slid the mug of coffee over to Auralie, who drank it gratefully.

"A super soldier, a living legend, who kind of lives up to the legend," Tony continued, discreetly sliding high tech metal bracelets on his arms. Auralie hid her smile and set her coffee cup down, knowing the tables were turning.

Tony went on, "a guy with breathtaking anger management issues, a couple master assassins, and a whip-smart teenager also known as the Eclipse. And you, big fellow, managed to piss every-one of them off."

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"That was the plan," Loki smirked triumphantly.

Tony fired back, "not a great plan. When they come, and they will come, they'll come for you." Tony had come around the bar now and was facing off against Loki. Auralie came up behind her genius friend, ready to help if it came to a physical smackdown, but doubtful it would. Loki liked to talk, that much she could tell.

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Loki laughed bitterly, "I have an army."

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"We have a Hulk," Tony said. Auralie smiled at both the true statement and show of solidarity between the team that had assembled to protect the world.

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Loki snorted, "I thought the beast had wandered off?"

"No, you're missing the point," Tony's vocal volume had increased, "there's no throne. No version of this where you come out on top. Now maybe your army comes, and maybe they're too much for us to handle, but that's all on you. Because if we can't protect the earth you can be damn well sure we'll avenge it."

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"Well said Tony," Auralie murmured, showing her loyalty to the billionaire, and encouraging him to go on because he had friends to watch his back.

Loki seemed at loss for words for a second, but then regained his normal confidence and arrogant nature, stepping closer to Tony, lifting up his scepter, and pointing it at Tony's heart. The Asgardian said, "how can your friends have time for me if they're too busy fighting you?"

He placed the tip against Tony's heart and Auralie gasped, about to charge at Loki and try to stop him. But then she heard the clang of the scepter against the arc reactor and breathed a sigh of relief. Tony's little circle of light protected his heart in more ways than one, and Auralie was glad. Losing Tony to Loki's influence could have ruined everything.

"This usually works," Loki assured them, trying again.

"Ah well, performance issues," Tony said, "not uncommon. One out of five....."

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Loki had run out of patience. He grabbed Tony by the throat and tossed him across the room. Auralie gasped and turned invisible, running at the god of mischief and kicking him in the ribs. He staggered back, and she ran to Tony's side. She helped him to his feet, but Loki advanced upon them again. He shoved her aside, and she went flying into the bar, groaning in pain and trying to get up and help Tony, who Loki had in another choke hold.

Tony gasped for air yelling, "deploy." Loki then threw the billionaire out the window, and he plummeted towards the streets of NYC. Loki turned back to the teenager, who had gotten to her feet but was still out of breath. She had screamed Tony's name as the god threw him, but other than that did not seem remarkably concerned for her friend.

The reason, of course, being that Tony was going to be fine. Jarvis had deployed the Mark 7 armor, which flew past Loki, knocking the god aside, and catching Tony in mid-air. Tony flew back up to the tower, repulsor rays pointed at Loki.

"And there's one other person you pissed off," Tony said, "his name was Phil."

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A/N: I am on a roll with these chapters.

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