

The feast was enormous. It started with servings of a thick chunky stew, similar to beef stew but with meat and vegetables that I didn't recognize. It was served with a glass of some sort of creamy yet sweet drink that cut through its heavy flavors surprisingly well, without detracting from them. After that several massive roasted chunks of meat were brought out on huge plates of cooked tubers and vegetables.

The staff sliced off cuts and brought them around to everyone, serving plenty with meat to spare. Alongside the meat, a light mead was served, one that tasted of honey and berries, though I had no idea which ones.

While the roast was being cut, Thor left the raised platform and started walking amongst his people, shaking hands and talking, a wide smile on his face.

"That is mostly new," Lady Sif admitted, watching her prince with a smile and getting a confused look from us Earthlings. "He never used to walk amongst everyone, shaking hands and learning about random people. Sure he would happily seek out friends and even make new ones but... Going to Midgard, and losing his powers, even for the short time that he did had an effect on him. A good one."

"Being powerless changes you," Peggy said, nodding in understanding. "Even if it's not from a loss of personal power."

I saw Steve wince, before schooling his features. Eventually, Thor finished his round and joined us, dropping into the seat that was saved for him.

"Friends! How are you enjoying the feast? I believe the chefs have outdone themselves once again, this boar smells wonderful!" He said loudly, grabbing a tankard and taking a sip.

"It tastes even better than it smells," Volstagg responded, before eating another large bite, Thor chuckling in response.

The conversation shifted slowly to small talk, mostly focused on retelling the battle with the Chitauri.

"I will be honest, it was not the most thrilling of battles," Thor admitted. "Which for the circumstances is a good thing. The Chitauri are a vicious, greedy, warmongering species who fight with no honor. Fighting them off so proficiently is something to be proud of, especially for a species as young as humanity."

"Part of it came down to luck," I responded with a shrug. "Had Loki's original plan been used the portal would have opened up above New York City..."

“That would have been a nightmare,” Steve added, shaking his head. “Their fliers would have given them a sizable advantage. Thanks to Maker we would have been able to get there pretty fast and hold them off, maybe, but the civilian casualties...”

“From what I understand, it was the choice to move the... Scepter... to someplace with fewer civilians was what led to such an advantageous outcome,” Thor pointed out, taking special care not to mention the Infinity Stone. “Truly that is not luck but strategy!”

We shared a laugh, continuing to talk about the battle. Eventually, the subject of the destroyer that had been destroyed by the Chitauri came up.

“How many were lost?” Sif asked solemnly.

“Forty-three,” Peggy answered. “It would have been many more if Maker’s robots hadn’t been simultaneously diving into the water to pull sailors out as the ship was sinking and healing the injured. They even rescued the bodies of those they were too late to save.”

The small group was quiet for a while, most of us solemnly remembering the explosion that destroyed the ship, while the others waited patiently.

“What was the name of the vessel?” Thor asked after a long pause, a serious tone in his voice.

“The USS Morita,” Bucky and Steve answered at the same time.

Thor slowly stood, holding his mug in his hand and slowly raising it up into the air. After a few moments, people began to notice, the entire hall slowly quieting until it was almost completely silent. Even the staff stopped moving, standing patiently.

“To the lost sailors of the USS Morita, and all that died in defense of Midgard! Soldiers that died defending their home from Chitauri!” Thor called. “May they feast in Valhalla, or whatever hall they so choose!”

A cheer raised through the massive room, mugs raised in support of humans they had never met. The cheer was loud, but it still somehow felt solemn, an acknowledgment of the loss with a celebration of doing one’s duty. Thor sat down after a moment, draining the last of his drink, his hand patting Steve’s shoulder.

It was a while before the conversation picked up again, but it did eventually, with topics changing to lighter things. The feast continued, with more courses coming out before finishing with an extravagant dessert spread, small treats like cookies, and pieces of candy. When we had all eaten and drunk our fill, and the hall’s population started to thin, Ema and I excused ourselves back to our rooms. Hogun agreed to escort us, leading us back to our rooms where I immediately headed to bed, feeling stuffed and satisfied beyond belief.

I was asleep in a moment, after asking Ema to remind me to get as many cookbooks as I could barter for.

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I woke up the next morning to Ema calling my name and putting a plate of food down on the table in the far corner of the room.

“Someone just dropped this off, apparently breakfast here is more of a small group thing,” Ema explained with a shrug. “You were invited to the training area whenever you feel like going, something about sparring or training? I talked to Peggy and her boys, they are already heading over now.”

“Thanks, Ema. Do you want to go?” I asked as I stretched, sitting down at the table with her. “I’m up for checking it out at least.”

“I would like to go, it could be fun testing ourselves against Asgardian strength.”

Ema and I ate our breakfast, which was fresh bread, with some sort of egg and smoked fish, similar to salmon. When we were finished I cleaned up quickly, taking advantage of one of my many invisible tattoos to clean my body instantly, leaving me smelling faintly like cinnamon and sandalwood, or at least that's what Ema claimed. I threw on one of the more casual outfits that the seamstress had left for me the previous day before stepping out into the hall. A guard was waiting for me.

“I am here to guide you to the battlegrounds, should you wish to join Thor and your friends.”

I nodded and followed behind the armored guard as he led us through the halls. We left the main palace and continued walking for several minutes before eventually stopping at an overlook. Below us was a large field, spread out over maybe two or three football fields of space. Dozens, if not hundreds of warriors were sparring, running through drills, and practicing with dummies. There was even an area where warriors practiced with bows, crossbows, and other ranged options.

“Thank you, I think we can handle it from here,” I said to the guard, who hesitated for a moment before nodding and walking away.

I gave one look to Ema, who immediately groaned and rolled her eyes. I smirked and stepped up onto the stone railing, leaping up into the air and flaring my wings open, the metallic feathers catching the wind, letting me lazily fly down. It took a single circle of the field before I

spotted Thor waving to me, the glint of his armor catching my attention. I swooped down and landed smoothly.

“Ah, Maker! Glad you decided you join us,” Thor said with a chuckle. “We were beginning to wonder if you would sleep through the day.”

“I live on a tidally locked moon, day and night get kinda lost on me sometimes,” I explained with a shrug. “So... what's going on?”

“Thor thought it might be fun to do some light sparring,” Sif explained as she stretched her arm above her head.

“What better way to get to know new friends?” He responded, smiling brightly.

I peeked over his shoulder at Bucky and Steve, who both looked intrigued and were already wearing their armor, while Peggy was further back, sitting on a bench. I waved, getting a smile, a nod, and a wave back.

“Sure, sounds like fun. Are we going all out? Using training swords? I'd rather not get struck by lightning.”

“That is... a fair point. I will restrain myself from using my lightning, and those of us who use blades can use dulled weapons instead,” Thor suggested, Lady Sif nodding in agreement.

“Great, Ema?”

“Sounds like fun.”

Sif started clearing people out, soldiers and warriors moving aside as they saw who was asking, and who they were asking for. Some of them packed up and left, but most simply moved to the side and waited, clearly interested in seeing the coming matches. Hogun, who was the only member of the Warriors three present, arrived with some blunted swords, attempting to hand one to Bucky and Steve, both of which shook their heads.

When the small ring was done, Sif immediately made her way to Ema.

“Emerald, shall we start off?” She asked. “I find myself wondering about the power of Maker's right-hand woman.”

Ema gave me a look, and I only shrugged.

She nodded and stepped onto the field, passing by the pile of blunted weapons. Instead, her right hand shifted into a sword, its edges dulled. It was vaguely triangular, with the spine of the blade a straight point from about four inches under where her hand would be, all the way up

to the tip. The blade itself was a diagonal line stopping about three inches from where her fist would be, and the final line connected to the starting point of the spine, though there was a lot of extra material there, probably to make a solid part for blunt impacts. Her left arm morphed into a heater shield, solidifying with the green and gold symbol of the Conceptual Deck.

Sif watched the forming of her sword and shield with a raised eyebrow but ultimately said nothing. She grabbed a blunted sword and readied her shield, walking a dozen or so feet away from Ema before taking a ready stance. The rest of us stood off to the side.

“Care to make any bets?” Thor quietly asked with a smile.

“What happened to a friendly spar?” I asked. “Besides, it’s not a fair comparison.”

“Well I know it’s a steep challenge, but Ema could still-”

“I meant for Lady Sif,” I said with a chuckle, Thor looking at me with doubt in his eyes. “The only chance Lady Sif has is if Ema decided to play fair or not. Even that would only make it take a bit longer.”

Before Thor could say anything in his friend’s defense, Sif charged in, swirling her sword to attack from the side, which Ema blocked with her own sword, countering it up and shoving her back with her own shield.

Soon they were in a blur of fighting. Sif’s strikes were perfect and confident, the result of hundreds, maybe thousands of years of practice. Each attack went exactly where she wanted, each strike was tuned to her movement. Ema on the other hand wasn’t nearly as refined, but she made up for it with her range, flexibility, and impossible reflexes. She was clearly restricting herself to “human” motion and possibility, but her lack of muscles and nerves meant that she didn’t just move, she flowed.

“That is impressive...” Fandral added, having finally shown up with Vallstag about three minutes into the spar. “I don’t know if anyone has held off Sif this long.”

“Not even Thor?”

“She is the better fighter, without a single doubt. I simply power through her technique,” Thor admitted sheepishly. “She hates sparring with me.”

Eventually, there was a shift in their fight, as if at the same moment they both decided to stop holding back. Ema got faster, her movements even smoother as she stopped pretending she required muscles to move, though she still kept the range of motion the same. Sif became faster as well, but her strength seemed to almost triple. Ema was forced to dodge or angle her strikes away, as directly blocking her blows drove her back, her feet digging into the ground as

she slid. Considering the fact that Ema weighed multiple times more than a normal person, it was an impressive show of strength.

“Unbelievable...” Hogun said to himself.

“How is she keeping up with her?” Fandral asked.

“I did say it wasn't exactly a fair comparison.”

Eventually, Ema was forced to move in a way humans couldn't, bending her elbow backward and blocking a blow that she hadn't predicted in time to dodge. Her morphed weapon blocked the strike perfectly though, the blunted practice blade shattering from the force. Simultaneously they both jumped back, Sif breathing heavily.

“Are you injured?” Sif asked, referring to Ema's arm bending backward.

“No, but I believe this might be a good place to call a draw.” She suggested, Sif nodding in agreement.

“I believe you are correct. You are a mighty warrior Lady Emerald.” Sif responded, giving Ema a small bow

“You are as well Lady Sif. If I wasn't so... unique, you would have certainly won.”

“Are you saying that you were holding back? Even at the end?” Fandral asked, still in disbelief. “No offense Lady Emerald but I do not quite believe you.”

“Feel free to step up and test it,” I responded with a smirk, Ema rolling her eyes at my brag. “She could take on all three of you and come out on top.”

“... That sounds like a challenge,” Fandrall said. “Lady Sif may be the superior warrior but we are fierce in our own right, and I doubt she could handle all three of us.”

“Ema?” I asked, giving her a look. “You up for it?”

“If I must.” She responded with a put-upon sigh, before smirking. “It would be nice to cut loose. No offense Lady Sif.”

The warrior woman said nothing and simply watched with critical eyes. She seemed concerned that someone who had so handily held her off was bragging that she could go even further beyond what she had seen.

“I suppose it would be rude to complain, only to back out of the challenge when the lady accepts,” Fandral said with a cocky grin, looking back at his friends. “Shall we?”

Volstagg and Hogun shared a look before nodding in agreement. Hogun did not look particularly thrilled to be dragged into this, but he stepped onto the field anyways. Ema stepped back onto the space as well, this time positioning herself in the center. She was about to push out her swords when I spoke up.

“Ema, Full scary mode?” I suggested

“Are you sure?” She asked, looking at her opponents.

“Up to you.”

For a moment she considered before smiling, her partially formed weapons absorbing back into her hands. Her armor also faded, as did the fake coloring of her skin, leaving her the same dark burnished metal that she was in her default state. Her body slowly shifted to her mannequin, doll-like shape, all of her strong features fading save her bright emerald eyes.

All three warriors stopped and watched for a moment, their eyes going wide before getting ready. They shared barely noticeable looks, showing just how well they knew each other and that they could communicate so fluidly without a single word. Suddenly they charged, exploding into action. Hogun, who was directly behind Ema, swung his spikeless morning star, while Volstagg and Fandral attacked from the front, probably attempting to keep her focus on them.

Instead, Ema morphed, shifting her shape and spreading it around in a circle, blocking all three of their strikes with ease. Her general form was still visible in places as if she was freeze-framing her movement. She morphed again, slamming each of them with a heavy, enlarged fist, before her body regrouped into a single form, standing with her hands behind her back. The warriors three recovered and shared another long look before charging again. This time, instead of moving her main body stood still, arms and limbs pushing out of her body to block each attack, her eyes spinning around her head to watch all three of them at once.

Just as Sif had done, they suddenly stopped holding back, striking and moving faster, hitting harder, moving quicker. Still, Ema stood, this time not flinching to block every single blow, not wavering a single inch. This went on for a few minutes, the Warriors three trying several ways to distract, catch her off center, mislead, anything to try and land a hit, ultimately failing, though there were a few close calls.

Eventually, Ema decided enough was enough. Two thick strands of her exosuit grew out of the ground behind each of the warriors, rising into the air silently. At the same time, one of each reached out and snagged their target's weapon arm, while the other held a blunted chunk of metal against their throats.

After a few moments, Ema released the warriors and pulled her strands back, slowly morphing back to her armored and fully fleshed-out form.

Thor and Sif were speechless, while Steve and Bucky, who both had hints of what Ema was capable of from when we were fighting the Chitauri, were only mildly shocked.

“So... Who wants to fight Maker?” Ema said as she walked off the field, the warriors commiserating behind her.