

Thor led me to a seemingly random room, startling a Shield agent, who quickly grabbed their things and rushed out, sending wide eyed looks at the three of us before closing the door behind them. When we were finally alone Thor leaned back on a counter, crossing his arms as he examined me.

“You were the topic of many a discussion in the halls of Asgard, Maker,” Thor explained. “Father even informed Heimdall to pay particular attention to your activities. The scholars scoured the records for any magic, force or being capable of what you do with ease.”

“I...I’m not sure how to respond to that.” I admitted, my nervousness only increasing. I could feel Ema’s tension rising as well.

“My father was concerned that you may be some sort of higher being, masquerading as human for their own amusement,” Thor explained, his arms still crossed. “He would not admit it, but he feared that you would prove dangerous and he would be forced to intervene. He almost did, when you began replicating the Destroyer armor. The only reason he did not was because of your healthy respect for the Odin Force.”

“Yeah, I’m not messing with his Juju,” I assured him. “Not interested in stepping into that world of trouble.”

“And yet you had no issues using my own essence in your own creations.” He pointed out, raising an eyebrow.

“Woah, hey, that’s not how the Deck works,” I assured him, raising my hands up. “The golden concept I got from your sparks was not directly attached to you. I would have been able to tell.”

“What do you mean?”

“I assume you know the basics of how my power works?” I asked, getting a nod in return. “Well I get a breakdown of the concepts in each card, I can feel them when I focus on them. I’ll admit sometimes things can sneak through for more complicated cards, but the lightning I got from you wasn’t very complicated. It had magic, electricity and lighting, which were all sort of connected, but the glowing concept, what I assume you interpreted as me using your essence? That wasn’t connected to you. I wasn’t stealing or using your essence, or divinity or whatever, but essence in general. Here, let me show you.”

I pushed out my cabinet of tricks, digging through it for a moment before pulling out a maxed out healing amulet, a copy of my own version. I passed the Norse god the amulet, which he studied silently for a moment.

“Hiemdall was watching when you made this,” He said, running his fingers over the golden accents of the amulet. “You are correct that I feel no connection to this. I do not understand how that could be possible given the source of the essence you used.”

“A singular person's identity is a complicated thing,” I explained. “If I had to hazard a guess, I could have locked them together if I had access to more samples, something like blood or a shard of Mjolnir. It also might have emerged if I had stacked all of the cards into one, something I specifically avoided to make sure I didn't mess with you.”

Thor was silent, studying me in a way that I honestly hadn't expected from him. Eventually he nodded, his arms uncrossing to support himself against the counter.

“Father said as much, that I would have been able to tell immediately if you were toying with my actual essence,” Thor admitted with a shrug. “But he was curious if you understood your precautions were sound or if you had only been blessed by luck. I am happy to hear that you were being careful for my sake.”

“Yeah, I wouldn't have used it if it was tied to you.”

“Good, because if you had Odin would have smote you without warning,” Thor explained. “He may be sworn not to engage with Midgard's affairs, but there is room for discussion when it involves Asgardians.”

“Right... okay. And what about...”

“Your use of the Destroyer armor?” Thor finished, while I nodded in confirmation. “It falls into the same category as you using the Bifrost energy. We left it here, lost track of our own weapon and we can hardly blame you for your own resourcefulness. However, my father would take it as a personal favor if you kept a firm grip on both of them. He built the Destroyer with his own two hands, and while disconnecting it from the Odin Force has diminished it, your craftsmanship has created a truly powerful weapon. It is not a trinket to be passed out.”

“Yeah, I don't have any plans to spread it around,” I assured him. “Not to mention you can't really study anything I make with the deck. It's all kind of nonsense that just works.”

“Father would like me to bring a few samples of your creations home, so they could be studied,” Thor asked. “He is interested in learning just where your powers come from, and how they work.”

“I... could definitely agree to that, if we could set up some kind of trade,” I offered, holding up my hands when he raised his eyebrows. “Nothing major, I'm just always on the lookout for exotic things.”

"We shall see," He responded, pushing off of the counter he was leaning on. "With the Tesseract gone I will have to wait for my father to recuperate from sending me here in the first place. It may be several weeks before I am able to return."

"What? Why?" I asked. "What about the Bifrost?"

"The Bifrost was destroyed in my battle with Loki several months ago," Thor explained. "He attempted to use it to destroy Jotunheim and I was forced to stop him."

"Holy hell... And you can't repair it?"

"We can, but we require the Tesseract to do so, as it was what originally empowered it," Thor explained. "Without it my father was forced to gather large amounts of dark energy to send me here. It strained him greatly, forcing him into an early Odinsleep."

"Damn... Well I'm pretty sure Loki is going to be coming back, probably sooner rather than later."

"What makes you say that?"

"Well for one, he obviously had a plan, and I'm willing to bet he's not the kind of person to just let a good plan go to waste?" I asked, Thor nodding in agreement. "He also left behind his scepter. I explained this to Fury already but... The blue gem that powers it is a big deal... Do you know what an Infinity Stone is?"

"I... Yes, the name sounds familiar," He said, frowning as he tried to remember. "There are a number of them, they are older than the universe, unimaginable power? They are myths, legends. None of them have ever been found."

"Well... I think the blue gem contains one, probably the Mind Stone considering what he was doing with it..." I said, trailing off before continuing. "And I think the Tesseract contains the other, the Space Stone."

"That... That is not good." Thor said simply, looking troubled. "If that is true then Loki will not rest before retrieving it. Assuming he knew what it was."

"These things don't just fall from the sky," I pointed out. "He would have had to have found it somewhere."

"Truly... we did not think Loki still lived." Thor admitted after a pause. "He... fell off the shattered end of the Bifrost, into the void. His return shocked us all."

"That sounds an awful lot like someone saved him," I suggested, Thor nodding in agreement. "Any ideas on who could do that?"

“No, at least none beyond simple guesses,” He admitted, looking very concerned. “In the end we must hope for the best but prepare for the worst. Come, the Director of Fury must be informed of this.”

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An hour later we were all in a much more secure looking briefing room, similar to the one where Fury had informed us about Loki’s arrival. Tony, Banner, Betty, Clint, Steve, Bucky, Peggy and Natasha were all with us, listening to our explanation of my theory, and what exactly it meant to have an Infinity Stone on earth. By the end of it Fury was holding his head in his hands and rubbing his face.

“What do you need to test this theory?” He asked when he finally recovered, now focused entirely on me.

“I need the Scepter, so I can pull the gem from it and scan it directly. I’m hoping that that will give me a straight answer rather than a broad outline I got from scanning it tangentially.”

“Done, the WSC is meeting in about thirty minutes to discuss what we should do with a mind control stick but I’m making a judgment call.”

The one-eyed spy made a quick call on his phone, ordering someone to bring up the scepter, which was a large process in and of itself since they were taking pains to keep anyone out of its area of effect. While we were waiting Tony leaned forward.

“So what are we doing about this impending return?” He asked, looking around at the table. “Lots of big names here but what’s the actual plan?”

“My teleport pads are the quickest way to respond to a threat. I can be anywhere on the planet in about twenty minutes, and most population centers in a quarter of that,” I explained. “The problem is we have no idea where Loki is going to come through, he could pop up literally anywhere.”

“The algorithm Banner and I came up with is running, but with no leads yet.” Tony responded, Bruce nodding across from him.

“That sounds like the Tesseract isn’t here any more.” Clint pointed out.

“Tony, if you whip something up...”

“You can do your bullshit, yeah I’ve already got a general plan,” He responded, already nodding. “I’m gonna have to tear up a spectrometer but it won’t take long.”

“Good, depending on how that works out, I can make that into something which would let us monitor the whole planet at once.”

As Tony and I talked I watched Clint, Bruce and better look slightly confused. I also noticed that Fury had leaned back in his chair and seemed content to let us spitball ideas, which I found odd considering his usual control freak nature. Ignoring it for now I focused on the three who seemed lost.

“My powers, they work by combining my cards together. Short answer is that I can blend things together and essentially craft things by anticipating what the blending will do. It functions on concepts, which I can sense when I hold one of my cards.”

I explained, summoning a random card from the Deck, making it disappear back into my cards with a flourish. I waved off their questions, shaking my head.

“It's not that simple and we really don't have time for the details,” I said before turning to Steve. “What do you think?”

“I think there isn't much most of us can do but wait,” Steve answered, shaking his head with a deep frown. “Do we have any leads on what he was trying to do?”

“He was attempting to open a stabilized portal,” Peggy explained, an open folder in front of her. “According to what his victims have told us. To what, or for what purpose, we don't know.”

“There's only so much you could be doing with that,” Bucky pointed out, the military trained members of the group grimacing. “Either someone wants to come through, or someone wants to leave.”

“For now we should assume someone wants to come here,” Fury pointed out. “If someone wanted to leave... well I don't think it would go down quite like this.”

The group agreed with the director, who was about to continue when someone knocked on the door, which opened a moment later, revealing Coulson. He was pushing a cart of some sort with a beefy looking box on top.

“Maker, you're up.” Fury said, nodding to the box as Coulson finished pushing it into the room and along one of the walls.

I stood from my chair, making my way to the box, Coulson stepping back. I nodded to the suit wearing agent, who simply nodded in return. I put my hand on the large latches that held the box closed before looking around.

“Everyone has an Anti-cuff on, right?” I asked, getting various nods in return. “Alright, let's give this a shot.”

I pulled the scepter out of its containment and turned, placing it down on the table. I reached down into my belt and flicked out my enhanced knife, leaning down over the weapon. I carefully sliced the blue gem free, pulling it out with two fingers. Before I could even react I stumbled, barely managing to stay upright as everything flashed through my mind at once.

Images of me, of Clint's farm, of a cul de sac and a young blonde girl with a scraped knee. I could see Bruce, stepping in front of some sort of machine, horror running through me as the man I loved sacrificed himself. I could see a woman, dressed in some sort of red blue and gold uniform that I recognized immediately in the back of my brain as Captain Marvel. I could see a woman with long brown hair playing a cello, one of many people playing but all I could focus on. I could feel the self loathing as I realized what horrible things the weapons I had made were being used for and the despair as the destruction my body had caused when I lost my temper. I could feel my mind expanding, feel it-

A slicing pain was suddenly all I could feel as my mind stuttered, froze and refocused. I was once again standing in the Helicarrier meeting room. I idly realized that a significant number of the Avengers were standing around me, various looks of worry and horror on their faces. Natasha was standing beside me, and helped me sit down in a chair. It took me a moment longer to realize Ema was standing beside me as well, her arm in the form of a sharp blade. I looked down and realized she had cut off the two fingers I had been using to hold the blue gem.

“What the hell was that?” Fury asked, standing with one hand on his gun.

“I... I didn't think that through.” I admitted, taking a deep breath to steady myself. “It was starting to overwhelm me, the Mind Stone's energy.”

My fingers, which were already almost done re-growing, had been charred and fried to the bone, the energy of the Mind Stone burning through my tattoo improvements in seconds.

“How long was I...?”

“We were trying to get you to drop the stone for about thirty seconds,” Ema answered. “When your fingers started to char I went with plan B.”

“Thanks, I think you might have saved my life,” I said, shivering slightly. “That... that is power normal humans can't handle. If I wasn't enhanced as hell... that might have destroyed my mind. I had assumed the blue shell was some sort of protective barrier because the Mind Stone is supposed to be yellow but... It clearly isn't enough.”

I took another deep breath, examining my hand for a moment before I stood, deployed my cabinet of tricks and grabbed a universal scanner before closing the cabinet and carding it

again. I ran my scanner over the stone, managing to avoid scanning the charred remains of my fingers. As I sat back down I reached forward and carded my fingers, idly tearing the cards before finally examining the readings.

“It’s the Mind Stone,” I confirmed, ignoring Fury’s curse. “The blue shell around it is an ancient attempt to seal its signature away while still allowing you to draw its energy.”

“Well they did a great job.” Clint said sarcastically. “What the hell should we do with it?”

“Maker’s original idea of keeping it somewhere far away from population centers is a good start.” Natasha pointed out, now sitting beside me, Ema on my other side. “Beyond that... we do what we can to prepare and hope that it’s enough.”