

## Infixity War

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# Infixity War

by [TheMSKProject](#)

## Summary

The Final Chapter of the Marvel MSK.

Cate has the power of the eternal flame  
Sarah has power at Avengers Tower  
and Maddie is a high class sorcerer.

That's a far cry from the starting status of common Trespasser from Book one huh?

and now

BY THE POWER OF RETCON!

THANOS SHALL CONSUME PANT!

Enjoy a highrolling Action bopping between our three protagonists and tying all the loose ends from all the books prior in one big chaotic bow!! Now in Hi-Def 4K and Dolby Digital Surround Sound! Again, not really, it's a book... I just have dreams... \*Sad Summary Writer Noises\*

# We'll Figure it Out

## Chapter Summary

Directly after the events of [Ragnarok Chapter 12](#), Stephen Strange and his assistant are on track to majorly alter the timeline to keep Thanos at bay where he belongs. With the Asgardians safely evacuated to Norway, a few dominoes need stacking before they can continue. Namely, someone has to end up yeeted into Space for a Guardian pick-up.

A small ship sits in the shadow of a much larger vessel, the foreboding tone of the scene amplified as the larger ship charges an offensive attack beam and utterly destroys the smaller ship, killing everyone inside.

*So good thing no one was inside.*

“What?”

Ebony Maw looks down at the wreckage, ready with a speech to the many dead and dying Asgardians he was sure he hit. However his gaze is met with nothing of the sort, just metal and rubble floating in the expanse of space next to the shards of the recently destroyed Asgard.

“What’s going on down there Ebony?”

The thundering voice frightened him.

“Nothing my liege~!”

“You’re lying to me.”

“No actually sir... I’m not. There’s no one here.” Ebony’s voice trembles, praying he could live another day as he felt the wave of frustration from his purple leader.

Thanos’ gaze scans the wreckage thoroughly,

“How?” He growls.

“I d-don’t know your eminence~”

A roar has Ebony ducking as a random unneeded part of the ship is thrown in no direction in particular.

“Go to Earth and retrieve the 2 infinity stones there. I’ll collect the reality stone.”

“And the space stone sir?”

“We’ll Figure it out, just get moving with a team.”

“Of course!”

~\*~\*~\*~

Meanwhile on a cliff in Norway.

“Stephen! We need first aid over here!” I holler.

A familiar voice reaches me over the din of a hundred plus refugees.

“One moment Maddie!”

“Got it!!” I yell back. “He’ll be here in a minute. I’m not as good at mending magic, so I wouldn’t dare risk it, but I can keep your pain low until he gets here alright?”

The child nods at me and I mentally wince as I feel my magic return from Stephen’s hands. I can’t perfectly describe it, but keeping dimensional energy going through his fingers made him seem close, like there was always a part of me in a second place than my own body. When I retract it, not only do I feel regret, but I get the sensation of being disconnected from something, like I’m a balloon and someone just let go of the string. It was a terrifying feeling the first few times but now I am accustomed to it, no longer needing to impulsively be *right* next to him until the moment I return the magic. The other thing the magic does is give me a general sense of where Stephen is in relation to myself, meaning when I let the energy return, he can easily sneak up on me. Like right now.

“Alright I’m here.”

I jolt as his voice reaches me, not too far behind my form as I visibly jump. Strange is used to this, and merely taps my left shoulder to let me know where he’s going to be before striding to kneel at my left side. I almost feel like a horse in these moments, needing constant contact to know where he is and not get spooked by a sudden movement. It’s embarrassing, but also, I don’t mind too much as it means he has to be close.

“H-her arm.” I stammer, kicking myself.

Stephen pays no mind, just starting a spell and mending the gash with ease.

“Keep your pain spell going for another minute or so while the muscle heals.” He instructs.

I nod without hesitation.

“Of course.”

At that he taps my back before walking off to the next refugee. My gaze going to the ground as I smile. He was always so considerate of my shenanigans.

“You like him don’t you?”

The question caught me off guard, my head jerking upwards to the direction of the voice. The girl is smiling at me.

“I-”

My fingers mess with my hair as I feel the heat rise in my face, clearly becoming flustered by the thought.

“He likes you too.” She chirps, “He gave you the same look papa gives mom.”

My chest feels as though someone threw a box of pennies inside my rib cage. Each coin bouncing off my bones to make an echoing ripple across my body.

“R-really?” I ask, my voice sounding a bit more desperate than I intended.

The girl nods quickly, but her mother’s expression turns slightly scolding.

“Don’t meddle in people’s personal lives dear, it’s rude.”

I raise a hand.

“No-no! I-... I needed to hear that.~ So... Thank you.” I explain, face softening as the former embarrassment in my cheeks settles as a warmth across my chest.

The rest of the minute passes comfortably and I head over to the next refugee, visibly easing as my magic returns to Stephen. My gaze flicking straight to where he is before I tend to the person in front of me, a relieved sigh passing my lips as I only have to wrap this person with some gauze.

Within a few hours everyone is tended to. My feet instinctively heading towards Strange.

“That’s everyone.”

“Good, but we still have work to do. Ready to send them out?”

I don’t even have to ask who he’s addressing.

“Ready when you are.”

In order for the timeline to go as planned Thor *has* to be picked up by the guardians. So now it's time to make that happen. We step up to the Asgardians and Guest team.

“Hey Cate!”

I greet, going to hug her tightly, reciprocated gladly with a pat to my shoulder.

“Hey!” She returns the enthusiasm and then some when she speaks. “So uh, that light show back there was pretty *lit*”

She makes some awkward finger-guns as everyone but me facepalms.

Stephen is the first to cut the ‘holy crap that reference was terrible’ silence, his tone starting off incredibly strained before easing into his normal confident attitude.

“Indeed. Um.... We have a problem.” He starts. We exchange a look and he goes on.

“Maddie and I *majorly* altered the timeline. Everyone but Thor and Cate are supposed to be dead at this moment...”

Cate's eyes go wide.

“What!? Why?”

“Thanos.”

Thor's eyes widen in recognition.

“He's-?”

“He's got a gauntlet to control the infinity stones and he's on his way, in order to keep the timeline on a semi-stable path we need to eject you and Cate into space to get help.”

The blonde male's face skews, but Cate looks overjoyed.

“You said ejected into space right?! And I won't die I'll just be in space?!”

I giggle, knowing the source of her excitement.

“Yes, you'd just be in space, and no, no dying would occur.”

“We're in!”

The female smacks Thor's shoulder, clasping it in a friendly manner as her eyes sparkle with anticipation. Thor barely able to splutter a response to his own defense as Stephen takes the agreement and ejects them through a portal into a random quadrant of space *far away* from Thanos.

“You put the transmitter on her right?”

“I nodded didn't I? Gave 'er the ol' 'Hug and Tag'.”

I snap back, curving my brow coyly.

“Great.”

His smile is bright and I can't help a small melting sensation in my chest as my gaze is forced away from him compulsively. My lowered vision letting me watch his skillful hands activate the beacon I'd cleverly planted on Cate's back. It was a distress signal aimed at the Guardians of the Galaxy, identifying them as rich nobles in need of assistance after a ship failure. We know the scent of money will draw the help of the rag-tag bunch.

“Where to next Steph?”

“Time to get everyone in place.”

“Then let's get to it!”

We high five and walk forward, but Loki stops our dramatic exit.

“What about me?”

Oh yeah, my other plan. Time to get Loki some respect among his people.

“Well... With their home gone, these guys need a strong leader to guide them.” I reply, watching his face twist.

His eyes seem to ask if I'm serious, to which I nod and continue. “Show 'em how good of a leader you are, they need you now.”

With my motivating speech setting up a valiant tone to the scene again, Strange and I swish our respective cloaks and step through a gateway to New York.

Time for phase 2.

# Oh! Hey Squeaky!

## Chapter Summary

Through a gateway to New York, The Mystic Arts duo enlist a very well known engineer. Well that is until a very rude Fish faced Goon decides to interrupt.

“Tony!” I call, waving a hand, but not catching the billionaire’s notice. “Stephen, there.”

Tugging the sorcerer’s sleeve and pointing, I lead my partner in time-crime towards the playboy philanthropist.

“Tony!” I call again, finally getting his attention.

“Oh! Hey Squeaky!”

His face perks up and I get a friendly bro-hug as I approach. Stephen clears his throat before explaining the situation.

“We need your assistance. Well all the avengers really. -speaking of- Maddie can you get Bruce?”

“Only if you open the gateway.”

Stephen sighs at my response, but quickly complies, inwardly relieved he wouldn’t feel the disconnect. Within a minute I was walking Dr. Banner back through the portal.

“Bruce!” Tony trotted up to his pal, embracing his fellow scientist warmly, arms dropping back to his sides as he steps back and gives Stephen a questioning look. “So what’s going on?”

“Thanos has returned. And now he has something capable of wielding *all* the infinity stones.”

Tony’s face drops, eyes going dark as he’s bombarded with images he’d rather not remember.

“Hey~”

I pat my friend’s back, a motherly softness behind my actions as I get a grim, appreciative smile in return. A calculated tone cutting through our small exchange.

“We need you all to assist in defending the infinity stones on Earth. The mind stone is our main concern, as the time stone is with me.”

Tony seems to take the topic as a distraction.



“Well, I have no clue where Vision is.”

“Know anyone who does?”

“Not anyone I’m on *good* terms with.”

“Are you and Steve fighting again?” I interject, getting a regretful nod.

Stephen just seems irritated as he lets out a sharp sigh.

“Well figure out how to find him. We don’t have much time. As it is, Thanos’ minions are probably en route to our position.”

Almost like it was waiting for Strange’s verbal cue, a dark shadow overtakes the city of New York. Two figures dropping down from the ship. Ebony Maw and Cull Obsidian.

Maw begins spouting off monologue as I set my weight, bending my knees.

“Maddie, take your magic back.”

Stephen’s hissed whisper sends my gaze towards him, my face set as I shake my head.

“You need your power to fight.” He asserts, almost sounding desperate.

It’s then I remember he’d looked through many timelines before I convinced him to try and break the loop by going back to rescue the Asgardians. It’s a brick to my ribcage. He must’ve seen me die...

*How many times did I watch him die in the timelines I didn’t get to see?*

My expression skews, but I refuse to pull my magic from him.

“Stephen!” Focusing on my Vambrace Kyre, I’m ready to shift as he turns towards me.  
“Catch.”

I jump and take the form of a battleaxe, feeling myself caught in his hands clumsily.

“Maddie!” His yell is exasperated, but he can’t take the subject any further as I send out a pulse to warn him of a strike from Ebony Maw, apparently done with his speech.

Metal striking metal becomes a familiar sensation as Stephen blocks blow after blow, our connection from my magic allowing me to warn him with ease. A flash of movement makes me alert.

*"STEPHEN BEHIND YOU, SWING AROUND YOUR LEFT!"*

He moves to my warning without hesitation, and I feel my blade break a glass dagger Maw was hoping to get past my detection.

Tony is struggling to stop Cull alongside Banner, who was currently still Bruce rather than Hulk. My focus is broken by my recognition of the carnage our battle was causing the city, many buildings already damaged, and the Street is littered with broken glass from crashed vehicles.

My attention shifting for that one moment is one of my biggest regrets. Stephen sent flying as Cloak flares to slow him down, a red flash setting me on my feet to stand guard. My gaze goes over my shoulder and I wince apologetically, jolted out of it as Balthazar jerks my body to the right, glass barely grazing the fluttering bronze lining.

“Maddie take your magic!”

I shake my head again, raising my arm as Kyre blocks Maw’s blade. My teeth bared and arm beginning to tremble as he continues to attempt breaking my guard, just as my strength fails Maw is knocked to the side by a flash of orange. Stephen now in his place.

“For the last time, let the spell go!”

“I told you I won’t!” I howl, holding up my arm once more to block another attack from Maw as Stephen shares the block with his magic whip, staring blue daggers at me.

“This is *not* the time to be stubborn.” He growls.

“This is *not* the time to be arguing with me.” I retort before we both jolt.

Maw had gone to strike under both our blocks while we were distracted, only to be deflected by a blast of arc energy,

“Focus!” Tony yells from his suit, only getting a huff from Strange. A huff cut short as I barrel my partner to the ground.

A large block of rubble is hurled over where he once stood, the rough edge catching my shoulder and sending me tumbling over the asphalt as my head smacks against a broken car door, the world spinning to black.

“Maddie!”

Strange scrambles to his feet and Maw snatches his distraction, having him on the ropes with an ambush of shards.

Iron man is knocked out of the air by Cull as the henchman hurled another chunk of concrete, stone crashing into metal making a sickening cacophony as sparks flicker from the damage in Tony’s suit.

Banner having been out of the fight for a while, Cull now has no other target then the struggling sorcerer, who is unable to block both Maw’s blades and the projectile debris from

the tank of the Black Order. Thankfully he doesn't have to, Wong had received a distress signal from the sanctum and came to Stephen's aid. The master exiles Cull into the antarctic, the henchman attempting escape only to lose his arm as Wong closed the gateway. Unfortunately this didn't stop the catapulted block of stone from striking Strange, sending him sprawling, Cloak taking full control to protect Stephen from harm's way as it tries to flee.

Tony gets to his feet after directing a newly arrived Peter to keep Maw from capturing Stephen. The scientist making his way over to my collapsed form. Knees to the ground as he checks my injuries, nothing expressly major, but I was probably concussed, and my back was torn up from the gravelly surface of the rubble. He sets to work waking me up as Parker finds Strange now trapped by Ebony, the Cloak having caught on a broken lamp poll.

Maw's amphibian features curl mirthfully as he starts to bring the subdued Strange to the ship.

"Hey!" Peter's shout draws the goon's attention. But now the boy can only gulp as he hadn't planned any further than that.

"Wha- Where's Stephen?!" I sit up abruptly, taking a moment to locate him via my magic. Hair standing on end as his signature is swiftly increasing in distance. "Tony hurry! They've got Strange!"

He nods quickly, arc reactor flaring as I spread Balthazar's wings to follow him to the ship. The vessel swiftly rising to leave the planet.

"Peter?!"

"Oh- hey! It's a little-.. cold up here-.. Mr. Stark... hard to-.. breathe."

Tony's tone is panicked as he spots the boy clinging to the metal. He doesn't hesitate to throw something towards Parker, resulting in a suit building itself around the young honorary avenger. I don't stop, I don't have time. They've got Strange.

"Get back home Peter!" Tony orders before taking off double time. "Wait up!"

My head turns as I acknowledge my fellow hero and he blasts a small hole in the hull of the ship,

"This way."

Not like he had to tell me, I've already taken off.

*Hang in there Stephen!*



# Come on Thor~ We're in Space~

## Chapter Summary

Thor and Cate are picked up thanks to the beacon. But how will the duo get help from a group they don't know?

“I hate you.”

“Aw come on Thor~ We're in space~”

Cate twirls her body in front of the Asgardian with glee before gripping onto his arm to ensure she didn't float too far away. The thunder god huffs, clearly unamused by the situation.

“Yeah, in space, where no one knows where we are, and we don't have a ship.”

“What about the one behind you?”

“What ship behind me- Cate play dead!”

“What?”

“Be the opposite of yourself.”

“I know how to play-OW!”

“Shut up!” He hisses, Cate relenting and going still, but she's in no way *not* pissed off.

Her eyes close and next thing she knows she's under the influence of artificial gravity, and the cheap kind at that.

“Who are these people? And where is their ship?” The voice is unfamiliar, but the timber was naturally playful, even if it was toned in confusion and annoyance now.

“They may have had to evacuate, depending on the failure.” A strong female voice, but it seems Mr. Playful had a quick response.

“Then where is the debris from the ship?”

“And who is this.... very attractive man?” This voice was also male, but was lower in tone and was from a much mellower person.

“He is rather nice.”

The female's remark is followed by a splutter from Mr. Playful.

"He's not that great. Stop touching his muscles please..."

This man seems insecure...

"Are they dead? And if they are, do they have any cash on them?" This male's tone was gravelly, and had a snarky quality ingrained in its inflection.

"Do not harm them! They are perfectly alive." A light feminine voice chirps in.

"This man is perfect." Mr. Mellow adds, Cate fighting a snicker.

Mr. Playful seems even more unnerved.

"Look! Let's just figure out where they're from and what they need from us. That beacon was directed to us specifically, must mean they know of us."

Beacon? Cate was greatly confused, but figured it was Stephen's and my doing and let it roll off her thoughts.

"Yeah, it also said they were rich nobles." Mr. Snark cuts in.

"The money is not why we are doing this. Don't be a bad influence." Mr. Playful seemed to be forcing a scolding tone, but it picked up realism with his next remark. "Also, if they were nobles traveling together, they're probably together, so if you could stop massaging his arm that would be great."

While she mentally recoiled at the statement, Cate saw an opportunity for acting, and she *took it*. She sits up with a start and has a small coughing fit. Everyone jumping in surprise as she did so. Her gaze flickers around the environment, putting on her strongest drama mode.

"Wh-where am I? Where's the ship?-and... OH GOD THOR! Thor are you alright?!"

She goes to stand only to be stopped by a woman with green skin and sculpturesque features.

"Hold on! You shouldn't stand just yet. We're the Guardians of the Galaxy, you beamed us when your ship had a mechanical failure. What happened?"

Cate put on her distraught face.

"It all happened so quickly after we set the beacon it's all kind of a blur, all I know is we were sent flying from the ship and Thor managed to slow us down but it was cold... so cold and I guess I just lost consciousness."

The woman before her knit her brow, seeming to analyze every detail until Cate spoke once more, not wanting the stranger to dig too much into her story.

"But Thor is-is he okay?" She quickens her breathing for extra effect.

“Your husband’s fine.” Mr. Playful replies.

Oh god gag reflex, control yourself Cate. She makes a quick nod.

“Oh thank Asgard!”

“Asgard? Is that where your from?” Ms. Green inquired.

“Y-yes.”

“You’re really far from home then Mrs..?” Mr. Snarks voice, which came from... is that a racoon? No matter she had to respond.

“Cate. My name is Cate.”

“Huh.” Mr. Playful seems amused.

“What?”

“Just thought you’d have a name that fit better with Thor.”

Speak of the devil, the god lets out a groan as he sits up slowly. And Cate knows he’s heard every word, and is probably not amused that they have to play couple. However his acting is more subtle.

“Took you all long enough to get here.”

He grumbles.

“Sorry we’re late oh humble sire-ow!” The racoon hissed at Mr. Playful, but after a quick exchange of glances, Mr. Snark lightened up. “We apologize, came as fast as we could.”

“It’s alright.” Cate chimes in, Ms. Green getting a questioning look on her face.

“So what happened to your ship.”

“Thanos.” Thor responds quickly

“Oh boy.” Mr. Playful sucks in a breath.

“You know Thanos?” The goddess quirks a brow, knowing they obviously did by the reaction.

“Yeah.... that’s Gamora’s step-dad.”

His tone uncomfortable as he points to Ms. Green. So that’s one name figured out. Gamora’s eyes get a haze of concern as she looks toward the man who just exposed her. Thor deciding to pick up the conversation to avoid the building awkward silence.

“The end goal is we need to get to the Avengers on Earth, but I’m assuming they’ll need more firepower than they have already.”

“And where would this fire-power be coming from?” The Racoon asks, striding up to Thor curiously.

“I assume you’re the captain?” Thor addresses Mr. Snark in a respectful tone slightly out of character for his usual persona, must be playing Nobleman.

“Why... as a matter-a-fact I am~.”

The racoon puffs out his chest and by the look of Mr. Playful-Most-Likely-Real-Captain’s face, Cate knows this rodent is lying.

“Great, we need your assistance terribly rabbit.”

Cate’s brows furrow.

“Honey that’s obviously a racoon.”

Her body rejects the pet name, but she needs to keep up the noble woman wife act she started. So much regret. Thor seems to have the same knee-jerk desire to recoil, but he attempts to not miss a beat, playing off his grimace as his annoyance from being corrected.

“Forgive me, we need your help Mr. Racoon.”

Mr. Snark doesn’t even seem to care, having his ego stroked seems to have him overly docile towards the two newcomers.

“I’d be happy to help.”

“We need to get to Nidavellir. Eitri the dwarf king makes some of the deadliest weapons known to the galaxy.”

“Oooh~ I like the sound of that.”

“Hey! What are you doing?!” Mr. Playful shouts as Cate had walked over to a panel and started punching in numbers.

“We’ll need a pod.”

“No, you all aren’t going anywhere.”

As Mr. Playful gets more emphatic, Thor just raises his posture with a smirk.

“I think that’s up to your captain.”

“*I* am the captain!” Mr. Playful lowers his voice, failing terribly to mimic Thor’s smooth accent and deep timber.

Mr. Snark takes immediate notice.

“Are you lowering your voice?”



“No this is how I always talk.”

“Yeah you are! You just did it again! Anyway! I’d be happy to assist you on your quest.”

“Hey that’s my backpack.”

“Sit down Quill~” The racoon muses as he punches in the code for the pod, Cate and Thor eagerly stepping inside as Mr. playful, finally identified as Quill, is only able to gawk and stammer as a tree-like creature also boards the pod before the group is launched into space.

Cate’s shoulders drop to a relaxed position.

“Okay, clearing the slate now. We aren’t married, and we aren’t nobles either.”

“Yeah I figured.”

“You’re very perceptive Racoon.”

“*heh.. ‘Sir’*, Call me Rocket, please.”

Thor nods. And the trip is silent for a while until Rocket speaks over his shoulder from the controls.

“So uh- who *are* you guys then?”

Of course The fire goddess jumps at the opportunity to explain.

“We’re with the avengers, a friend of ours named Maddie sent us to find you so we could get your help in defeating Thanos, and apparently Thor knows where to get us some sick weapons. Not sure if that was in the wizard duo’s plan...”

“They sent us to get help, and to be completely honest, I won’t be much help on my own without some new equipment. It has to be in the plan somewhere. And if not. Then we’ll be extra prepared.”

“Hey- I am *not* complaining about getting a cool weapon.”

“I’m with you there.” Even with Rocket’s added enthusiasm, Thor’s energy remains lackluster.

“It takes a great deal of strength to wield one of Eitri’s weapons, you two may explode due to the sheer magnitude of power.”

“Am I crazy if I say that makes me want to try it more?” Rocket smirks, getting an insta-high-five from Cate.

“SAME!”

Thor rolls his eyes and leans back in his chair, glancing over to the tree creature next to him.

“What are you playing?”

“I am groot.”

“Sweet! Used to have that game as a kid.”

Rocket seemed surprised.

“You speak groot?”

“Yeah, it was an elective.”

“I’m assuming basic animal identification wasn’t?” Cate sneers.

“Shut it!”

His snapping retort is only met with giggles.

~\*~\*~\*~

Back on the vessel with Tony.

Iron Man is currently trailing behind me as I weave through the ship, following a gut feeling of where Stephen is being held.

“Hey, we should really come up with a plan.” He starts, only to ram into my back as I stop abruptly. “Ow-”

“Shh.”

I cover his mouth as I look below me. My blood boiling at what I saw.

Maw has Strange suspended and rendered immobile by what looks to be thousands of shards, the Amulet of Agamotto hanging around his neck unable to be removed from him due to a deadman’s spell. Ebony seems to be speaking with Stephen, who is most likely making a confident cocky retort if his expression is any indication. I almost smirk at this, until I notice the shards moving towards him, and a scream of pain echoes up to where I’m standing.

“Squeaker..”

My fists clench and just as I feel Tony’s hand on my shoulder, I’m gone. Ripping a piece of metal from the ship as I leap down. My feet pound against the floor as I howl a battle-cry that shakes the walls. Maw whirling around bewildered as the shard I’d brandished buries itself in his chest. Shards barely an inch from my sides as I twist the makeshift blade before yanking it out of his body, watching with pure satisfaction as his form slumped to the ground and a pool of blood grows over the floor. My gaze flashes to Stephen, seeing the shards had retracted. It’s then I notice the absence of his cloak as his jaw lays half open in a stupor.

“Maddie? How did you-?”

“Instinct.” I answer, briskly moving to get him down to the ground as a now panting Tony caught up with us and... is that Parker? Oh boy... Stark only lets himself be surprised by Maw’s body for a moment before addressing me.

“Good to see you’re alright.”

Stephen’s gaze is locked on the boy as he reached the ground, the cloak having been right behind Tony to reach our position before settling over its master’s shoulders.

“Who’s the kid?”

“That’s Tony’s son.” I tease, getting a small eye-roll from the billionaire as Parker jumped at the opportunity to introduce himself.

“Hi! I’m Peter Parker!”

Strange regards the infant’s outstretched hand a moment before shaking it.

“Dr. Strange.”

“Oh we’re using our made up names! I’m Spiderman!”

I can hear Stephen internally screaming across the few feet of distance between us. Distance I quickly close as I correct the baby avenger.

“No that’s his real name.”

“Oh, sorry.”

Tony steps in before I get the chance to retort at the child.

“So what’s the plan now?”

“Obviously we wait to see where the ship is taking us, that’ll mean we find Thanos.” Stephen explains, his smooth tone making me take a subconscious step toward him that neither of us noticed but Tony and Parker definitely noted for later reference.

“I’m gonna take a nap then!” I chirp, walking down the corridor to find the living quarters of the ship.

“Guess I’ll join you.” Strange replies before following behind me.

I only catch a small snicker between the two males we left behind as I just wave them off. That’s not what he meant and they know it.

When we left earshot is when a hand meets my shoulder, Bal curving his collar back to let me see Stephen’s concern.

“Back there-”

“I did what I had to do.”

“You could’ve been injured.”

“We’re heroes. That’s the job.”

I can only shrug as I find a promising door, behind it are a few cheap cots, enough to rest on. The grip tenses, and my step halts. Blue eyes glaring at me.

“He could’ve killed you.”

“He could’ve killed *you* .”

“That’s different.”

“-” I sigh in exasperation, pulling my shoulder from him before striding to adjust the blankets on the bed.

“You need to take your magic back.”

“This again?”

“Yes. This again. You can’t fight like this, it’s too dangerous!”

“I handled myself just fine before I learned magic. I helped in Avengers Tower you know.”

“You were an assistant. You didn’t actually *fight* anything.”

I go rigid. The slap that echoes off the walls followed by my heave of air. Stephen holding his face. Looking for Sarah when she went missing, while fruitless, was no cakewalk. Just because I never talked about it doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. He never asked me any further and at the time I didn’t want to talk about it. And that’s not even mentioning the assistance I leant to Tony and the others before Loki reappeared on Earth and we retried this whole mess. I didn’t take my magic then. And I won’t now.

“I didn’t tell you everything, Strange. I’m done talking.”

I lay down and pull the blanket over my head. A presence over me making me curl up in a ball.

“Maddie-”

“I said I’m done talking. You’re forgiven when I wake up just leave me alone.” When there’s only a shuffle. “Don’t even think about it.”

Stephen retracts the hand he almost reached with. Turning to settle on the cot furthest from me to give me space.

“Get some sleep.” He mutters. My brows knit. We can’t rest like this.

“I’m sorry.” He doesn’t respond. Seems he’s just listening. “I know you’re just worried, I *am* rather frail at a glance, but I’ll be okay. If my life is in absolute danger, I will take it, but until then, helping you is more important to me.”

I open my eyes to meet ice blue.

“Promise you’ll take it when you need to?”

“I swear it on my family name. Please don’t worry so much. You’ve sparred with me enough to know I’m capable.”

“Most of your success is because I refuse to harm you.”

“Hmph- sore loser. Most of my restraint is because I know you won’t. If I can handle a thousand pound animal. People are not a problem.”

“Yes yes. Miss legs of steel.”

“You can’t beat them.”

“What do you want me to say to that?”

“Grovel, bow to my superior lower body strength.”

“I cower in reverent fear of your power your highness.”

“‘Your Highness’? Really?”

“What would you prefer?”

“Not that!”

We’re laughing again.. I’ve missed that. But one more thing needs settling.

“So you promise not to worry about me?”

“I could never promise that.”

“At least don’t bark at me in the middle of battle?”

“Don’t know if I can swear that either.”

“Don’t throw yourself in harms way because of it?”

“Maddie you’re asking too much of me.” He snickers.

“Guh- alright.. At least I know it’s the same you you’ve always been.”

“Is that a compliment?”

“ ‘*Do you want it to be?*’ ”

Stephen scoffs a snicker. His own words tossed back at him. He responds in kind.

“ ‘*You’re Rude.*’ ”

“I learned from the best.~”

“Get some sleep.”

“Goodnight Stephen.”

It’s not really night, but it’s habit. If he notices he doesn’t mention it.

“Goodnight.”

# Star Spangled Tight-Ass Warned

## Chapter Summary

Taking care of important details that need addressing. Like Vision and Wanda and Cap and the gang. As well as the rest of the guardians.

## Chapter Notes

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

“Vision Hold on!”

Wanda dashes over the hard ground, racing to her partner’s aide, a gash in his abdomen she immediately begins to mend.

“He kept me from phasing.”

“How?”

“I don’t know.” The robot hissed discomfort through his teeth.

The witch doesn’t want to move him, but she doesn’t have much choice as Corvus Glaive and Proxima Midnight are recovering from her blast, quickly approaching their position.

“Come on we need to go!”

Wanda helps Vision to his feet and the pair narrowly escape an attack from Midnight, but the blow separates them enough for Corvus to knock Vision a good distance over the ground. The robot getting to his feet and luring the Black Order member onto a nearby rooftop to give Wanda space to put down Midnight. A golden beam is aimed at his opponent, only to be deflected by Corvus' glaive, the concentrated energy sparking as it struck the concrete below, slashing between Midnight and Wanda. The forced separation was short-lived however, and they soon return to the clash, red whisps dancing around the witch's fingers before her attention is drawn elsewhere by a cry of pain. Only narrowly regaining focus to block a strike from Proxima, sending the black order member sprawling backwards as she lunged to Vision’s position. Corvus had the Mind Stone pressed under his glaive, sending waves of agony through the other man as he was unable to move. Thrown back by a red pulse, Corvus was quickly replaced by Wanda as she kneels beside her partner, soothing his pains until Midnight had them joining Corvus in falling through the glass ceiling of a building. Soon realizing they were cornered, Wanda stands protectively in front of Vision, readying herself to block an attack before a familiar shield sends the black order flying backwards. The witch has recognition cross her eyes and quickly turns to see Steve emerge from the recesses of dark in the building, allowing Wanda to properly care for Vision as soon the recently revealed Sam and Natasha join in to take on the enemies that had caused the pair such grief. Two of

the three victorious heroes now approaching the two crouched on the ground, their looks slightly disapproving.

“You swore to keep in contact.” Steve starts, the normal stern mom voice creeping into his tone.

Vision winces, guilt obvious in his face.

“I’m sorry. I just thought we needed time.”

“I understand, but time isn’t something we have much of at the moment.” Natasha chimes in warmly.

Sam lands behind the other two with a cocky smirk.

“Let’s get the lovebirds on the ship.”

Steve smiles a little.

“Aw, bucky wore off on you. You made a bird joke.”

“I-! I did.. son of a-”

“Language~.” Star Spangled Tight-ass warned, having Sam just fly off to the ship.

Natasha follows on the ground, leaving Steve to offer a hand to the duo.

“Come on, let’s go home.”

~\*~\*~\*~

Having met up with Rhodey and Bruce, the Avengers are discussing their options.

“Thanos is after the Mind Stone... the only way I can think to stop him is-”

“Vis no. We’ll find another way.”

“What if there is none!?”

“I think there is!” Bruce butts in with an expression that has everyone else wondering what he has in mind, “The mind stone is only part of who you are. Most of the best parts would do perfectly fine without it.”

“I understand that, but how would we remove it? It’s currently ingrained in me isn’t it?”

Steve seems to have the answer to this one.



“We may not be able to *here*. But I believe there is somewhere that has the technology to figure it out. Let’s head for Wakanda, it being hidden gives us more time anyway.”

He seems overly esteemed with this plan, so the rest go along with it. Time to pack for a long trip.

~\*~\*~\*~

Informed of Thanos and thinking it best to try and stop him early, Quill, Gamora, Drax and Mantis arrive on KnowWhere after discerning that The Collector is the location of the reality stone. It’s oddly quiet, too quiet.

Quill keeps himself alert, surveying the situation. Thanos is interrogating the Collector for the stone, and he doesn’t seem to have noticed them yet. However this does nothing to make Drax think he should remain under cover.

“He pays now.”

Everyone goes to stop him but Drax the Destroyer is unwavering. Desperate, Mantis puts her hands to either side of his skull.

“Sleep.” She murmurs and the male goes down with a deafening crash.

Thanos is instantly alerted as the other guardians go to hide. Quill pressing his back to his current cover, panic is evident as he goes to speak.

“Gamora, Mantis you go right and see if you can-”

By the time he’s spoken Gamora has already gone to the left instead, and Drax is still lying on the ground

“Guys! The other right!” Quill hisses, to no avail as no one listens to him.

Gamora runs right towards Thanos, a purple stone glimmering in the first knuckle of the gauntlet as he looks down at his adoptive daughter with a mixture of warmth and pride. Quill is unable to see much more than a small red glint as Thanos groans in pain. Gamora’s brows furrowing with conflicted emotions as she holds the knife with now trembling fingers, watching the titan fall to the ground and pass away with a final grim expression, his lifeless eyes on Gamora as she took a step back turning her face away from the corpse in the dirt, pain weighing down her eyelids until Quill felt something was wrong. That was easy... too easy. What if Thanos already got the-

“Gamora!”

Quill races to his feet as the world around them begins to morph and change. Cases broken, fire licking at the walls as it casts an orange glow over the space. Worst of all, Thanos is

standing completely unharmed, power stone glittering purple in the gauntlet, right next to the red reality stone.

“I knew you still cared.” The titan muses, Gamora’s upset disappearing quickly as she is grabbed and trapped by her adopted father.

Quill raises his gun as he approaches.

“Thanos! Let her go!”

“Peter.”

“I told you to go right.”

“Peter...”

“Let her go!”

Thanos couldn’t be more calm.

“Ah~ The boyfriend.”

“Peter. Now.” Gamora pleads, Quill freezing in place.

“No!”

“You promised!”

He had promised, right before they left the ship Gamora made him swear to kill her if she got caught. But with each passing moment he regrets the decision more and more. Thanos getting a prideful smirk as he watches the two go back and forth.

“You ask too much of him.”

But his words are silenced as Quill raised his blaster level with Gamora’s skull. His arm is shaking, rejecting the idea but he forces himself steady.

“I told you to go right!” Quill whimpers. His finger twitching reluctantly as his eyes dart to the side a moment to gather himself before meeting Gamora’s gaze. “I love you more than anything.”

“I love you too.”

Her words are punctuated by a gentle smile that made him want to be anywhere but here, he wanted to bask in that smile, not have it be the last thing he saw of her. But he swore to her, and he keeps his word, his finger flexes, the trigger pulls, only for Gamora’s hair to be softly carried on a small breeze accompanied by bubbles that escape the gun’s muzzle. Thanos chuckling as his gauntlet has a red sheen around it.

“I like him.” The titan mutters and before Quill can do anything, something crashes into his skull.

When he next awakens, Gamora is gone.

“NO! No no no!”

His fingers clawing at the dust he manages to crawl to the spot she once stood. A delicate touch turning his gaze to Mantis.

“We’ll find her.” She tries to reassure her captain, eyes wide and sympathetic.

“What happened while I was out?”

Mission mode. He needs every detail to track the bastard.

“Drax woke up in time to try and stop him, but he got thrown.”

“I failed.” The destroyer’s self hate is evident.

“No, Drax, you’re lucky he didn’t kill you.” Quill stands himself up with Mantis’ help. “After he threw Drax?”

“He took a spacecraft and dragged Gamora with him.”

“A spacecraft? So he doesn’t have the space stone yet?”

“No?” Mantis isn’t exactly sure of the question, but shakes her head.

“Good..” He has to stop and wince. “That’ll slow him down. Let’s go.”

## Chapter End Notes

I sincerely apologize for this chapter. I never could get it to where I actually liked reading it, but the bits can't just be cut out. So if it feels rushed. It's the least rushed I could get it to sound without going completely flat.

Also note this chapter was written before an official script for infinity was out for reference. Which is what we normally do when stuck. So thus this result even later work couldn't repair. Next chapter is my BABY though. And from then on I have more life. This one just... necessary evil really.

# Why Do You Call Her Squeaky?

## Chapter Summary

Stephen and co. Figure out where this big ship is headed. Perhaps even a shortcut?

“So where is this thing headed anyway Mr. Stark?”

However Infant wasn't replied to by 'Mr. Stark', instead Stephen emerges from the halls of the ship, followed by a groggy me he'd dragged out of bed when he'd woken up. The doctor cutting in quickly.

“Probably a pre-set meeting place.”

I decide to add to that vague answer.

“More specifically one of emotional importance to him. Villains like him tend to not only have a false sense of justice, but usually attach to places emotionally.”

Stephen gives me a look of 'well done' while Tony is tapping away at what looks to be the control hub of the ship.

“So this thing is taking us to his home planet?”

“It would seem so.” Stephen confirms, Tony shrugging.

“There kid, Squeaky figured it out. We're heading to Titan, Mr. Univ's home planet. Get it? Univ, exactly half the letters of universe?”

I snicker. “Well done!”

“Why do you call her Squeaky?” Strange and Infant seem to ask at the same time, the two exchanging a look as Tony goes to answer only for me to reply first.

“No Idea~”

My voice trails into a yawn as my arms go over my head. Lungs stretching as the action results in a squeaking sound. Tony clapping his hands together before gesturing to me abruptly with an exasperated expression of 'BOI!'. Strange seems to catch on, getting a small smirk, but it quickly drops as he gives the billionaire a sharp look. About to speak when I piped up, nudging the body that was still on the floor, the blood around it now dark and tacky.

“What do we do with this? Just leave it? Oh wait, hey Stephen can you check if he's clean?”

“He’s covered in blood what do you-?”

“I mean check for disease.”

“Ah. Okay... May I ask why?” He questions me, as expected, but his hands are already weaving the spell, and I feel the magic wrapping around his fingers as I catch myself focusing on it.

Eyes almost closing before I brought myself to my senses and put on a smirk.

“You’ll see.”

He rolls his eyes at me before he finishes crafting the magic and scanning the corpse of the un-missed Ebony Maw.

“He’s clean.”

“Good! May I ask you to make a gateway to the sanctum’s basement please?”

“Sure.”

His gaze lingers on me a moment before he does as I ask. Nodding my thanks I rush off to the dorms I’d found earlier and ripped the cheap sheets from one of the cots, bringing it back and wrapping the body in the fabric before dragging it through the gateway and maneuvering through a few corridors, ending up in my monster sanctuary, where I whistle and toss the sack of meat to my trusty pals. Fenris taking first pick while the Ragnarocc dragon, that I named Alistair, waited in the back with my appropriated Indoraptor, Ender. No worries it’s docile as long as I will it.

My return to the ship has me met with two confused looks and one understanding amused smirk. Stephen greeting me first as he releases the magic to dissipate the gateway.

“They enjoy their treat?”

“Oh yes very much so.”

“Squeaky? What does he mean by they?”

“I rescue magical beings from slaughter and imprint them to me as their mother.”

Stephen nods and gestures to me proudly,

“One would think she’s an elf with how well she tames them. No magic required.”

“Thanks Steph.”

“Can I ever see them?!” Infant Parker bounces in place at the prospect of meeting magical creatures.

“Maybe...” I hum, “But it’s not a petting zoo, if I ever let you see them you will respect them, understand?”

The boy just nods with the energy of a sugar-high toddler. Tony giving me a look due to my slightly snapping tone, but seeming to appreciate my willingness, however hesitant, to let the child meet the creatures.

Silence follows for a while as Stephen takes it upon himself to clean the blood from the floor. Finally, Tony clears his throat.

“So, if I could be so bold. If you know where we’re headed? Why don’t you teleport us there with one of your little magic circles?”

“That would make sense to do, however making a gateway requires making a clear picture of your destination in your mind. Seeing as neither of us have been to Titan, it would be dangerous to make a gateway there.”

“Oh, don’t try to frighten them Steph! It wouldn’t be *dangerous* per se but it would be rather difficult.”

“Any way to give you wizards a clearer picture, say, maybe an actual picture.” Tony muses as his fingers fly over the keys and bring up an image of Titan.

“That *should* help, but I’ll have to be careful about imagining it as a place, not a picture of a place. I don’t know what the ramifications of that would be.”

“OOH we are definitely doing a short on that later!”

“What are you on about Maddie?”

“Nothing. Go on the make the portal. I don’t feel like waiting for hours for the ship to get there. On top of that we don’t know how to land this thing. So... I’d rather not.”

“Alright one moment just let me focus.”

His eyes close a moment, and I get small flashbacks from when he’d crinkle his brow when he first struggled to make gateways. But this time his fingers are steady in the air as he made a precise and clear circle, sparks lingering in the air until finally the gateway opened. I decide to test it and stick my arm through and look at the screen, we’re all good. This was the real Titan.

“Do we just walk through?”

Tony watches the sparks curiously.

“How do we get back?”

I exchange a look with Stephen as the words left Parker’s mouth before my partner and I seem to passive-aggressively stare some sense into him

“Oh... hehe. My bad, so are we going now Mr-”

“Doctor!”

“Mr. Doctor?”

Oh dear fuck not again.

“His name is Dr. Stephen Vincent Strange!”

“Where did you get my middle name?”

“In your career file you left on your desk.”

“I-! Thats-! We’ll talk about this later.”

Peter’s apology had been cut short by our bickering and now he is awkwardly looking between us.

“Ummmm.”

“Oh! Sorry kid, after you! Don’t you want to be the first human to step foot on Titan?”

I put on a bright smile and glance over Peter’s shoulder to catch Tony’s appreciative gaze sent my way.

Parker quickly jumping through the gateway.

“I’M THE FIRST HUMAN ON TITAN!!!”

Unable to help a small smirk, I watch Tony step through before I follow with Stephen close behind.

“So how much time did we save by doing this?” Stephen asked.

“If I read it correctly... about 4 hours give or take 20 minutes.”

Great, I exchange a look with Stephen, so we have around 5-6 hours before the rest of the guardians arrive. Peter gave the barren planet landscape a look over before quirking a brow.

“What should we do while we wait?... and- hold on. What are we waiting for exactly?”

“We have what Thanos’ wants, so he will have to come to us. This gives us an advantage, so we are waiting here in order to keep that advantage.” Stephen explained.

“So we’re gonna get the drop on him? What’s the plan?”

“Kid, you heard your father. We’ve got 4 extra hours, I’m not planning squat at the moment.”

Tony noticeably shifted when I called him Peter’s dad, but by the warm smile on his face, I don’t think he minds. Peter however, seems a little deflated.

“Oh... so what are we doing instead?”

His question trails off as his arms go over his head, stretching himself in a yawn as his eyes try to stay open, like any child fighting to stay awake. Despite the effort, Mom-Tony catches on immediately.

“Hey kiddo? You alright? We can find a place to relax, it’s been an exciting day for all of us.”

His gaze flicks over to me pleadingly, and I use maternal instinct to find a spot sheltered from wind and sun by distinctive rock formations that make crescent overhangs above the dusty ground. My feet take me to the darkest corner as I feel Stephen take his own seat close by. My attention is on the other two instead to make sure they were comfortable. Silence settles comfortably as the next few minutes pass without much event other than Peter giving into fatigue and resting himself on Tony, who was all too willing to be a pillow for his honorary kid, he was practically a second sun with how bright his eyes were. His loving smile infectious as I find myself watching over them warmly before glancing instinctively to my left. Stephen’s head is practically on a swivel, alert and aware as his blue eyes scan the barren landscape. My hand meets his shoulder before I can think things through.

“Easy~” I whisper, watching the shock on his face soften to an appreciative grin, though I still caught him glancing about every now and again.

Parker’s breathing evens to gentle snores before Tony broke the silence.

“You remember the last time Cyclops sent us on a stake out?”

I visibly perk up, a smirk taking over my expression as it curled my lips.

“You mean the one where you broke the air conditioning trying to boost the radio signal?”

“That wasn’t my fault! And no I mean the one after that. The one we took my Audi for.”

“Oh yeah! We were waiting for the target to leave a party but we got impatient and decided to sneak in.”

“Nick was ‘fury’ous.”

I can’t even respond as I devolve into giggles. My gaze flicking over just in time to see Stephen’s intrigued expression.

“How long *have* you two known each other?”

Seems he’s curious since I informed him of just how little I’d told him before. I still have a terrible sense of time. Not to mention I feel awkward. I’ll toss this to Stark.

“Oh wow... um.. Tony you’re marginally better with dates than I am.”

“Well over two years, we met around the time Loki tried to take over New York.”

“So you were one of the unnamed ‘informants’ in the papers?”



Well, that finally tells him what I was doing at Avengers tower. His expression twists, a guilty glance thrown to me in apology. I take it. He didn't know.

"Yeah. Cyclops saw it best to keep the fact a trio of civilians saved his ass as special information for a group of 'need-to-knows'. But honestly he'd be dead if it weren't for Sarah. For more reasons than just Loki..."

"No kidding. I thought you were going to strangle him a few times."

"We're on okay terms now at least... kinda."

Tony chuckles as I dip my head, tagging out of the conversation a moment as he turns his attention to Stephen.

"How long have *you* known her?"

"A year and change."

"Ah, so you must've met her on her quest of revenge. Now you being a doctor makes more sense. How *did* that quest go by the way?"

I visibly recoiled at the mention of my mission, and Stephen takes notice, moving closer to me to where I barely felt his knee graze mine as he breathed. Tony takes the hint to move on.

"In other inquiries, now that you defeated Dormammu, do you have a specific job?"

"We guard the New York sanctum while I keep an eye on threats to the planet."

"Do you live there?"

"Yes, we each have our own rooms upstairs."

"How's that compare to Stark Tower?"

I quirk a brow at the odd question.

"It's fine. Honestly the bed is better, and it's not as cold at night."

I miss the smug grin that takes over Stephen's face but I do see Tony stumbling to continue.

"O-oh. That's good. Glad you're comfortable."

His attention flips back to my sorcerer companion.

"She easy to live with?"

"I wouldn't say easy, but we get along fine. She cooks most of the time, and a lot of the day is both of us in different parts of the sanctum being quiet. Usually with me studying and her working on her art."

"She was quiet at the avenger's headquarters too. When she wasn't bugging me that is."

“Hey!” I cut in, slightly offended.

“Or throwing a suit out the window before I activated it so it smacked me in the face.”

“At least it knocked you into the building again and slowed your fall! That was skill!”

“Wait what am I hearing about?” Stephen looked more than a little puzzled.

“Cate chucked him out the window and he dropped ten stories before I saved him. I saw those air quotes Snarky Stark!”

My tone attempts to scold but can only be amused. I missed this.

“Hm.”

Stephen.exe is still processing this information. Tony just sniggering before changing subject.

“So any secrets you can give me for blackmail? You live in much closer quarters.”

That was a little bit of a lie if he counted... no I don't want those memories popping up.

“I-”

Steph put a hand to his chest, almost feigning offense.

“Come on! Just one! Squeaky doesn't mind.”

“I very much do mind. Stephy don't you dare!”

His eyes widen a fraction at the diminutive I'd slapped onto the end of his nickname for no reason but the fact it was easier to slide up an octave on 'ee' sounds. The moment of shock leading to a terrifying smirk ever so slightly curving his lips.

“I suppose I learned a few things~”

“Stefen...”

“Oh do tell~.” Tony grins leaning forward like a gossiping school girl and wiggling his brow.

And I thought Cate and Sarah were bad. Kill me now.

“I know she chews on her pencils more than most people do their nails.”

“It's a nervous habit!”

“Yeah, I caught that one too. Come on gimme something better than that.”

“Sometimes I catch her purring and rubbing her face on her cloak balthazar when she thinks I'm not looking. And we always run out of peanut butter because she just pours Hershey's syrup in it and eats it with a spoon.”

“STEFEN!!”

“And, she, even though she’s shy, loves to sing.”

“Oh I knew that! We’d do drunk Karaoke all the time!”

“TONY!!”

“Really? I have to sneak to get her to keep singing. She’s really reclusive about it at the sanctum.”

“She is usually, but on 4 tequila shots...” Tony makes a motion with his hand like a missile shooting off into the distance. “Shyness goes out the window. On many things~”

“What do you mean?”

“He means absolutely nothing!”

“I mean she’s much less... restrained.”

“Restrained how?”

I wave my hands frantically.

“He’s just teasing! Can we move on?!”

“No! You’re getting defensive now so I want to know what’s going on!”

“It was years ago. We don’t have to go over it.”

“Do you wish it didn’t happen or something?” Tony’s expression looked a little put off.

“No that’s not what I’m saying.”

“Because I don’t remember this kind of resistance back at the lab.”

“Tony please!”

“The lab?”

“Stephen drop it!”

“Yeah, the lab~. You dense?”

“Yo-you’ve?”

“We’ve *what?* ”

Tony taunts.

“Tony don-!”

“Slept together?” He finished, Stephen’s brows rose abruptly.

“What? And you didn’t think to tell me?”

“I-! It was a long time ago I didn’t think it would come up...”

“Well you still go to see him so, yeah I think that would’ve been nice to know just how *close* you were.”

“We’re just friends!”

“Are you sure?”

“Stephen!? I don’t lie to you!- and you know what? Why would it matter?”

“Because I-”

“I don’t *belong* to you!”

“Geeze, possessive much?”

“Tony you aren’t helping.”

“I’m trying to lighten the mood Squeaky.”

“On that note, ‘squeaky’ it’s not just the yawn is it?”

“It-”

I go to defend myself only for Tony to chime in and cut me off.

“So what if it isn’t? What if it is referring to something else? What’s it to you? Jealous you never heard it?”

“Tony enough!”

“I- I’ve had just about enough of you provocateur!”

“Ooh! Big fancy words, really milking that degree aren’t you. Which is funny seeing as it’s useless.”

“Stephen don’t!” My fingers tighten around his arm. Eyes wide but my vision remains walled with water. “Both of you stop it!”

My tone cracks and I swear I could’ve heard a pin drop if it weren’t for my own choking on words.

“Why are you doing this now?!”

Stephen recoiled,

“Doing what?”

“Why are you just now giving a shit about my personal life? My relationships never bothered you before!”

“Well I didn’t know about them so how could they bother me?”

“Exactly her point. You didn’t need to-”

“Tony shut it! You took it too far! Don’t backpedal to get on a moral high-ground.”

My shoulders began to tremble. He seemed so upset that I’d been with Tony, when he didn’t so much as acknowledge my own affections towards *him* . And now out of the blue I’m his property and he needs to know all my secrets. I wouldn’t mind being his but he never claimed me!

“And you! What am I to you?”

“You’re my partner, my assistant.. I-”

“There! There it is! Assistant! What about me being your assistant makes me your doll to show off as some sort of pet!?”

“Pet? I never thought- I didn’t notice you fe-”

“YOU NEVER NOTICE ANYTHING STRANGE! You don’t care what I’m doing until it threatens the little world around *you* ! Otherwise my actions don’t mean anything to you. So long as spells get done, books get put away, and *your hands stay steady* . I mean fuck-all to you!”

“Ma-”

“DON’T TOUCH ME!”

In that moment he reached my magic snapped. Disconnecting from him as it returned to my body in sparks around my frame. Barely registering his widened eyes as my gaze is focuses on his trembling fingers hovering just over my arm. My knees shaking as I sense something in my chest scream in protest and I feel completely *alone*. My heart beats faster and faster until I can’t take another moment around him and I run, not hearing him call my name as I conjure up an image in my mind of where I want to be, and it’s *anywhere* but here. Someplace dark and secluded. I don’t even know if I summoned a gateway to a real place, but even the thought of just disappearing from existence doesn’t give me pause as the magic closes behind me. Sparks landing on the ground in silence

The breeze goes unacknowledged as Stephen stands there, expression blank. Eyes fixed on his hands as they quiver in the air. But the pain in his chest was more gnawing than any tremor as crippling isolation seems to have walls closing in around him. His jaw stuck in that half-open position but no sound escaped. It’s only when his face meets the dirt that he notices

he's collapsed to his knees. Tony can't breathe, still processing what just happened before him as he fights to answer the questions he's only hearing blurred bits of from Peter. A sound similar to a wounded animal drawing both to look at the curled up figure on the floor. Stephen gripping at the ground as his fingers leave wavy lines in the dirt. Choking on a barrage of apologies and pleas that all want to escape at once, leaving him a whimpering mess as specks of dust begin to cling to wet streams down his face. His cloak squeezes on his shoulders, trying to reassure him. But it's not the soft touch he needs or wants. His voice a rasp when he finally forms words.

“Don't go...”

# **She Causes Every Grey Hair I Have**

## Chapter Summary

Rocket wants more information from the Space God Duo. Their arrival to Nidavellir is not smooth sailing however

“So how did you two end up in the middle of space anyway? There was no ship around, nor debris of any kind.”

Rocket steadily guides the ship as he talks over his shoulder, not giving a damn that Cate had her feet propped on the dash. Thor looks up from watching Groot’s video game.

“That would this one’s fault right here.”

“Hey!- Look! Maddie said we had to be ejected into space!” Cate retorts, smacking away the pointed finger.

“Who’s Maddie?”

“My best friend, she’s a wizard now. Just under the Sorcerer Supreme, and I’m pretty sure she doesn’t steal the title for the sole reason that she doesn’t want to deal with all the extra work that comes with it.”

“Uh-huh.... so this wizard sent you into space because... she said you had to?”

“Pretty much. That and I wanted to because it meant I’d be in space.”

“Ah. Alright. Well Thor, your partner is quite impulsive isn’t she?”

The raccoon’s grin was met with a relieved sigh from Thor

“Yes. Thank yo-”

“I like it.”

“Ugh...” There goes his hope. “She causes every grey hair I have.” The god mumbles.

Cate bites her tongue, wanting to call him a drama-queen but also knowing exactly how it would be received. So she merely put her hands in her lap, leaving the pod in silence before Rocket speaks again.

“So, any stories to tell?”

“Well, my father died, which in turn released a sister I didn’t know I had from imprisonment. She cut out my eye and then I had to kill her, as well as destroy the only place I’ve ever called home.”

As Thor spoke, Cate went silent. The weight that Ragnarok must’ve held to Thor suddenly hitting her in a unexpected wave. Her fingers twitch in her lap as she refrains from reaching to comfort her partner, he’d probably dodge her anyway. Rocket’s ears dropped a bit, feeling the atmosphere thicken with grief and uncertainty.

“I-... I’m sorry to hear that.” He mutters, grip loosening on the controls a moment.

Seeming to think before he presses a button on the dash, he puts the ship on autopilot as he hops down from his seat. Stepping towards Thor as he rummaged in his vest for something, his paw clasped around a small object he offers to the god.

“I think you need this more than me. I stole it from a sap a few months ago”

“Thank you Ra- Rocket.”

Thor reached and lifted the prosthetic eye to his face for closer inspection, a warm smile now gracing his features.

“It’s the right colour, that’s a nice coincidence.” Cate points out as Thor removes his eye patch, the female winces a bit as she’s thrown back onto the ledge, gripping the marble to catch herself as she hears him call her name. Only to look up and have blood spatter across her face. She shakes her head a little to clear it, and by the time she comes to, Thor has the eye in place. Rocket’s words jarring her further out of her mind.

“I would’ve washed that. In order to sneak it out I had to hide it in my-... nevermind.”

Cate jolts.

“Thor!” She scolds. “Take it out!!”

“It’s fine.” Thor plays it off, waving a hand to his partner dismissively.

“Take it out or I will.”

For a brief second, she realizes she was tempted to say it as “eye’ will’, and when she realizes this she gets a strong urge to throw herself back out into the vacuum of space. But she refrains as she sees Thor comply and remove the eye, handing it to her.

“I’m not touching that. It’s been in too many holes.”

“We have a kid in the pod!” Rocket barks.

“I AM GROOT!” Cate yells back with a sarcastic tone, Thor tucking the eye in his thumb as he covers Groot’s ears.

“Do you know what you just said!?”



Cate rolls her eyes.

“Whatever it was you deserved it.” She huffs, eyes glancing around till she spotted a rag, picking it up. “Alright, hand it here.”

She covers her hands with the rag as Thor gives her the eye. She then runs over to the sink and cleans it thoroughly with soap and water. Once it’s dried, she hands the wet rag to Thor.

“You should clean your eye too.” She mutters, taking a moment to study the prosthetic so she wouldn’t have to look at the space where Thor’s eye was missing.

“Done.” He announces, knowing why she was avoiding looking his way.

Cate hands him the eye and he puts it back in, now clean. As it calibrated, Thor waves his hands.

“Happy?”

“Never, but you don’t have raccoon butt germs in your face now.”

She goes back to her chair and twists it to look at the stars. Thor’s brows creased as he follows her movements. He knows she’s just playing, but her words worried him a little regardless. Before he can act on his feelings however, Rocket calls his attention.

“We’re here.”

Thor moves to stand, stepping between the two cockpit chairs as his arms settle on the backs of them. His left bent to keep his hand accessible to talk with, while the right rested over the whole back of the chair. A subtle gesture, one he’s sure she won’t notice, as she never has before. He turns his attention to the front of the ship after he caught himself looking right.

“I don’t think this eye works, it’s dark.”

“It’s not the eye.” Rocket explains.

Thor’s brows furrow.

“Something is very wrong. We should hurry.”

“So what exactly is this place?” Cate asks, looking over to her Asgardian companion who eagerly answers, looking over with a smile as he enjoys the return of bifocal vision.

“It’s a giant forge. Eitri crafts some of the strongest weapons in the galaxy there. He made my Mjolnir...”

His face falls at the mention of his lost friend. Cate herself has to stop a wince. She’d tell him soon, they just haven’t had time. The thought then hits her that if Thanos succeeds she might never have time, but she quickly shakes it off. She believes in Thor, she believes in her friends. They can win this. As Cate clears her thoughts, Thor drags his gaze back to space as Rocket lands the pod.

“Alright ‘married nobles’ we have arrived.”

Both Cate and Thor jump and narrow their eyes at the wording, but they also both move to exit the pod. Upon arrival, the darkness unsettles Thor. He’s never seen the forge off before. It felt wrong. He takes up defensive posture and moves a little to the right to guard his partner. Cate too busy looking around to catch on, she whistles in awe of the weapons scattered around.

“This place is awesome.” She whispers, Thor would’ve smirked, but his gut is rolling with unease.

Rocket and Groot lead the way through the grimly dark metal. The Asgardian tries to piece together what’s wrong.

“The star is dark and the rings are frozen..”

“Maybe they realized they lived on a junk island and left.” Rocket jokes.

Thor, not in the mood, doesn’t grant a response, his gaze searching for answers.

“The forge hasn’t gone dark in centuries.”

He follows the group slowly as they weave through junk and old weapons until Cate calls to him.

“Hey Thor! Stephen said Thanos had a gauntlet right?”

Thor follows her gaze as he froze in place. Something was *very very* wrong.

Heavy footsteps put Thor on edge and he quickly steps between Cate and the sound, accidentally bumping into her.

“Hey! Look down! You have your eye back now you have no excuse.”

“Oops, sorry, I forget to check below my knees sometimes.” He jokes before returning his gaze to the source of sound.

“Why I oughtta- mpphf!”

He claps a hand over her mouth gently. Ignoring her grabbing at his arm in vain and trying to bite him.

Thor peers into the darkness, trying to see.

In moments a large figure rammed into Rocket and Groot, tossing them into the air. Thor removes his hand in order to hold them both in front of him.

“Eitri wait!”

The dwarf charges him at full speed, knocking the air from his lungs, but Thor still checks to be sure that Cate moved out of the way.

“Thor!”

The call of his name settles his worries a bit, staggering to his feet.

“Eitri! Stop!”

“Thor?”

The dwarf seems to study the Asgardian a moment before leaning himself on a pillar. His eyes sunken and face weary.

“Eitri what happened?”

Thor takes a step toward his friend, seeing him flinch he paused.

“You were supposed to protect us.” Eitri’s face took a look of betrayal. “Asgard was supposed to protect us.”

“Asgard is destroyed.” Thor explains, and Cate once again, fights a wince.

Eitri’s eyes widen a fraction but he falls silent.

“Eitri, the glove... what did you do?”

“300 dwarves lived on this ring. I thought if I did what he asked, that they’d be safe.”

His eyes close a moment before he continues.

“I made what he wanted. A device capable of harnessing the power of the stones. And he killed them all anyway... all except me.”

Thor’s expression softens as his heart falls like a brick. Eitri’s voice rasped with grief.

“‘Your life is yours’ he said ‘but your hands are mine alone.’”

“Eitri, this isn't about your hands. Every weapon you've ever designed, every axe, hammer, sword... it's all inside your head. Now, I know it feels like all hope is lost. Trust me, I know. But together, you and I, we can kill Thanos.”

Cate watches the exchange closely, Thor was a born leader, and this was definitely proof of that. The warmth and sincerity behind his words make her smile just slightly, but she stays a spectator for the moment. Eventually Eitri lets out a sigh and stands, heading over to a pile of metal and grabbing something. Rocket, having stood back up with minimal injury, looks at it and jeers.

“That’s the plan? We’re gonna hit him with a brick?”

Eitri’s brow furrows.

“It’s a mold. A king’s weapon. Meant to be the greatest in Asgard. In theory it could even summon the Bifrost.”

“Did it have a name?” Cate asks, getting more excited with every description.

“Stormbreaker.”

“SWEET!” She cheers, and Thor can’t stop a chuckle as he asks.

“So how do we make it?”

“You’ll have to restart the forge. Awaken the heart of a dying star.”

Thor looks down at himself, Cate watching his face closely for any signs she can read.

“Thor?”

“I have an idea.”

~\*~\*~\*~

Rocket sat in the pod, a skeptical look on his features as Thor brought him into position with a rope like one would a balloon.

“I don't think you get the scientifics here. These rings are gigantic. You wanna get them moving... you're gonna need something a lot bigger to yank 'em loose.”

“Leave that to me.” Thor smirks, Cate stands a ways off with Eitri, anticipating a show.

“Leave it to you? Buddy, you're in space. All you got is a rope and a-”

Rocket’s protest is cut off as Thor swings the rope, and therefore the pod, in a circle, hitting high speeds almost immediately.

“Fire the engines!” Thor bellows, giving the pod as much momentum as he can before he’s sent skidding over the metal of the ring he’s standing on, catching himself and digging his feet into the track he’s continuing to gouge in the panels. His arms strain as he held onto the rope. “More power, Rocket!”

Rocket pushed full throttle and little by little the rings begin to move, Cate clapping uproarious applause as they aligned and the star awoke with a flourish of light. Colours swirling on the surface in a truly stunning display. Eitri smiles.

“Well done, boy.”

“GO THOR!!” Cate hollers.

Meanwhile Thor had flown off the ring, currently on Rocket's windshield. Pointing to the star with the widest grin he's ever had as the sight sparks memories from a long time ago.

"That's Nidavellir!"

Rocket watches the pillar of light drawn towards the eye of the forge. Until with a sickening metallic groan, the eye slams shut, and the beam cuts off.

"Damn it." Eitri growls. Cate looks over at him

"'Damn it'? What's 'damn it'?"

"The mechanism is crippled."

Thor looks over with confusion, jumping over to be closer to the conversation.

"What?"

"With the iris closed, I can't heat the metal."

Thor seems to get an idea. An expression that deeply worries Cate and she almost knows what he's about to say.

"How long will it take to heat it?"

"A few minutes, maybe more. Why?"

Cate looks away as if somehow that'll make him not say it.

"I'm gonna hold it open."

"Thor no! That's suicide!" She cries, stopping Eitri's words in their tracks.

"So is facing Thanos without that axe." Thor replies, turning to leave.

"I'm not letting you do this!"

She grabs his arm, fingers tensing as she struggles to keep a good grip on his wrist.

"We'll think of something else! What about my fire! It'll do the same job won't it." Her other hand erupts into flames as she spoke. "Dammit Thor you have to remember I can help!"

"Cate please! Your flames won't heat it fast enough, we have no more time!"

She falters, if he does this he'll die. She isn't going to just watch it happen. But despite her efforts, she can't come up with another solution.

"But-!" Her words catch in her throat. Frustration making her lash out, her fist hitting him in the chest as her magic fades to sparks. "NO!"

Thor grimaces, looking down at Cate with a lost expression. There really was no more time.

“Cate I have to go. I’ll be fine. You know me.”

She looks up at him, eyes narrow as she fights down her emotions.

“If you die I’ll kill you!”

Thor lets out a dry, coughing laugh. His hand twitching to reach towards her.

“Deal.” He agrees, her grip reluctantly letting go of his arm.

With a final look over his shoulder, he’s off, propelling himself towards the Iris. He can only hope this’ll work.

# I'm Such an Idiot

## Chapter Summary

Time to see Where Maddie ended up.

My whole body trembles as I press my back into my stone cover for any illusion of comfort. Magic pulsing as it itches to seek out the person it called home. It felt foreign in my own body, and my spells are weak and unsteady. The only reason the gateway was strong was due to sheer willpower, like it was when I first started. Later on Stephen helped me learn the easier way to cast spells and it wasn't as taxing on my strength. And with the crutch gone I excelled: Astral projection, transmodification, even a disguise spell was no difficulty as I picked up abstract spell concepts exceptionally quick. Strange excelled at more practical litany, and of course his healing magic is worlds better than mine, but right now he's gone. And he's not going to just show up to comfort me, to bring me out of this panic I'd brought upon myself. Not this time. He didn't know where I was, *I* didn't know where I was. Even if he knew, I doubt he'd want to follow me after what I said to him.

"I'm such an idiot"

My knuckles meet the rocky ground as pain shoots up my arm. I deserve this. I deserve to be trapped here where I'll never be found. Why did I tell him he was-? My fingers become tangled in my hair, pulling at the roots slightly as my face presses into my knees. My magic sparking a warning to call him to my aid, only completing the task of reminding me of my mistake. Balthazar and Sabine squeeze my shoulders, the former wrapping itself around me in a warm cocoon. The stone in my vambrace glowing softly as Kyre also tried to comfort me. I couldn't just go back, I doubt he'd want me there, and my magic is unstable as is, trying to conjure another gateway might actually kill me, as I have no idea where I'd end up. It's fine. I'll stay here, these craggy rocks remind me of the shell I had around myself years ago anyway, it'll just be a bit more permanent this time. For all I know that's a good thing, keep me from hurting anyone else.

It's when I bury my face in one of balthazar's corners that voices jog me out of my head.

"Welcome, Thanos, son of Alars. Gamora, daughter of Thanos."

I get up to peek at the source of the sound. A figure in a dark cloak, and two others, ones I identify as Thanos and Gamora. I decide to stay hidden and just listen to the conversation unfold between Thanos and the hooded figure, as Gamora was silent beside the titan.

"You know us?"

“It is my curse to know all who journey here.”

“Where is the Soul Stone?”

“You should know... it extracts a terrible price.”

“I am prepared.”

“We all think that at first.” The voice paused. “We are all wrong.”

It is then that I hear footsteps leading away. If Thanos has found the soul stone than I have to follow him. Thus begins my long trek up the mountain, darting behind rock after rock and avoiding detection as my occasional slips and gasps of breath are cloaked by the howling winds. Eventually Thanos speaks once more and I am forced to stay in place with no where closer to hide as my targets walk towards a precipice between two pillars.

“How is it you know this place so well?”

The response from the hooded figure is bitterly nostalgic.

“A lifetime ago, I, too, sought the stones. I even held one in my hand. But it cast me out, banished me here. Guiding others to a treasure I cannot possess.”

It was when Gamora looked over the edge that she makes her first words in the encounter

“What's this?”

“The price. Soul holds a special place among the Infinity Stones. You might say it has a certain wisdom.”

Thanos is growing impatient, and it's obvious in his tone following the figures cryptic wording.

“Tell me what it needs.”

The figure looks away a moment and I recognize the face as Red Skull. Never thought I would see him outside of a database entry, but here I am, might as well pay attention.

“To ensure that whoever possesses it... understands its power... the stone demands a sacrifice.”

“Of what?”

“In order to take the stone, you must lose that which you love. A soul... for a soul.”

Thanos falls silent and looks over the cliff. Gamora gaining a confident stride as her shoulders pull back triumphantly, her words dripped with poison.

“All my life, I dreamed of a day... a moment... when you got what you deserved. And I was always so disappointed.” She takes a step closer to her adoptive father. “But now... You kill



and torture... and you call it mercy. The universe has judged you. You asked it for a prize, and it told you no. You failed. And do you wanna know why?"

When her expectant look is met with Thanos remaining unmoving with his back towards her, she continues.

"Because you love nothing. No one."

His reply is quiet, barely audible to me over the wind.

"No."

He turns to face Gamora and I can see the wet streams on his cheeks. Makes me want to punch him even more to be honest.

"Really? Tears?"

I was greatly identifying with Gamora until Red Skull silences her.

"They're not for him."

The titan takes a step forward, Gamora matching with two steps back. Her voice gaining uncertainty.

"No. This isn't love."

"I ignored my destiny once. I cannot do that again. Even for you."

Thanos seems pained as he takes another step, but thankfully Gamora is fast on her feet, dodging his hands. In a metallic flash she grabs the knife from his belt and her form hunched forward as I can only deduce she's attempting to stab herself. But all I see are harmless bubbles floating on the wind. Thanos takes another step with furrowed brows.

"I'm sorry, little one."

His hand incases her arm, and she thrashes to escape his grasp. Body writhing as she fights to remain in place while Thanos effortlessly drags her toward the cliff's edge. Her screaming blending in to the grim howling cries of the mountain as her form is tossed to the abyss below. My chest tightens when the screaming stops. She's dead... the pillars set alight in a blinding flash but my feet are already taking me back to my previous hiding place down the mountain. Thanos has the soul stone. I have to stop him... but how can I? If Stephen was here we could-. My heart twists... my mind's eye having his image practically burned into it as my magic flickers around my body in another attempt to call for him. To distract myself I focus on how I can fix the situation, coming up empty until one idea both presents a solution, and presents a problem. I know how to save Gamora, but I *need* Stephen to do it. My eyes squeeze shut as a choked mocking laugh escapes my throat. My entire body shaking at the thought of confronting him now. Eventually a squeeze from Balthazar jogs my brain off of its loop of self-generating paranoia. It doesn't matter how terrified I am, if I don't save Gamora there will be no fixing any of the things I've said. And despite the tremor in my shoulders, and the doubting in my mind, my heart was calmed by the idea of returning to him, and my

magic sparked at the opportunity to reconnect what I so foolishly severed. Taking a shaky breath to set my resolve, I raise my hands and curl in my ring finger and pinky of both. Holding the left steady and upright as I picture the desert surface of Titan and bring my right hand in a precise circle. An orange ring flashes to life before me. And through it I see a very familiar set of shoulders, settled beneath a red cloak, my expression becomes fearful and relieved all at once as something skips in my chest. Taking a step through the gateway and letting it close behind me.

“St-stephen?” I mutter, not at all sure how to start.

He stiffens, shoulders raising before I see his feet hesitantly lift to allow him to turn and face me. His face both shocked and pained as he seems unsure if I’m real.

“Maddie?”

His voice is so dry it makes my stomach twist with guilt.

“I-”

I can’t spit out the words I need to say, but there is no time.

“Thanos has the Soul Stone!” I yell.

Tony and Peter noticing my presence and giving me partial attention while Stephen’s face goes blank, losing all hints of emotion under a layer of professionalism. He’s looking at me like he would’ve analyzed a patient all those years ago. It feels like a stab to the gut, and I swear to myself that I will amend what I’ve done as soon as this crisis is avoided.

“What’s the plan?”

His tone is unfeeling and his eyes, usually meeting mine with a familiar softness, are icy shards that seem to look through me, like they did so long ago. If I stayed silent one more second I would’ve been back in that fluorescently lit hall, bombarded by the scent of bleach.

“Could you take off the eye of Agamotto for a moment?”

A gentle request, given in a quivering uncertain tone, and for a moment I swear he flinched. His fingers trembling as they grasp the amulet and remove it from his neck. I have to swallow hard as the tang of bile creeps up in my throat in disgust with myself for every tremor of his hands. My eyes look for what I need to be there as I focus on Sabine’s energy. A monochrome amulet hangs around Stephen’s neck and as my hands move to open the tear, it gains colour and becomes visible to the sorcerer himself.

“What is this?”

The amazement in his tone is there, however dampened it may be, and it eases me a bit.

“An alternate Amulet of Agamotto, this one should not rely on the time stone, but have power of its own. I’ll take this one in case I’m captured to ensure Thanos does not gain another stone.”

In a moment, he nods and removes the alternate amulet from around his neck before offering it to me. My hand reaching to take it as my fingers graze over his own slightly, making us both jump. My gaze dropping to the ground as I put the amulet around my own neck as the corner of my vision catches him re-equipping the original Eye.

“I will return once I fix this.” I mutter, turning to summon a gateway before two words freeze me in my tracks.

“Be careful.”

Having to close my eyes a moment I look over my shoulder and smile warmly,

“I will. Look out for yourself Stephen.”

His responding nod is quick and subtle, and directly following it I return my gaze in front of me and portal my way back to my hiding spot.

The chill of the wind nips at my skin as I travel down the mountain to the place below the cliff, where Gamora still lay, spine snapped from the impact. It becomes clear that I will be unable to take the Soul stone from Thanos just yet, but I can rescue Gamora... to an extent. If I turn back time as a whole, I'll be toying with causality. So instead I kneel down beside Gamora, and focus energy around her body. My middle and ring fingers press against their opposites before my hands pass by each other and the Eye is opened. Pulling from memory I manage to weave the spell and only reverse time on Gamora as a singular object. Much like Stephen did the apple, but as she is much more complex, and my technical litany is leagues below Strange, the effort has me exhausted, slipping into old habits of forcing the energy to my will prolongs the process further, consuming almost an hour of time. With her spine repaired and her heart restarted, Gamora's chest began to rise and fall steadily, but with her soul in the Soul stone, she will be trapped in a deep sleep until I can find a way to return her soul to her body. At least that stops causality from breaking. Small blessings.. So for now.... my breathing goes ragged as I stop time for Gamora completely. Putting her into a stasis while making her still movable. The effort more taxing than the one before, and it consumes yet another hour. With nothing short of a miracle I heave the female onto my back and make another gateway to Titan. This time I see Starlord, Drax, and Mantis have joined the group. I must've missed the moment they all met. A small frown crossing my face before my fatigue hits full force. Stephen notices my portal, most likely watching for it all this time. The thought warms my heart a bit, but does nothing to stop the blurring around the edges of my vision. I fall through the gateway as it closes behind me. Starlord rushing my way to grab Gamora as he shouts her name in what I only hear as blurred noise. My head lifts to see Stephen's worried face, and the world goes dark.

# Either You Trust Me or You Gamble

## Chapter Summary

Maddie made it back to Titan, but she's drained. Currently unconscious as Tony and Stephen have to be a team. Stephen remembers something less than savory.

“Look. I’m the one with the medical degree! How can I be sure you have any idea what you’re doing?!”

Stephen stands between Stark and the unconscious female by holding her close with his shoulder turned, spitting retorts at the engineer as he fought to keep the gap between them as wide as possible.

“You don’t! But I’m the one with the equipment. So either you trust me, or you gamble whether she wakes up or not.”

Strange narrows his gaze at Tony. Blue orbs like ice shards striking at the other male with every word. He doesn’t trust Stark in the slightest, but he wasn’t about to stake *her* life on his stubborn attitude.

“Alright, you can check on her, but so help me if you screw this up I’ll-”

“I wouldn’t harm her.”

Reluctantly, Strange gives her to Tony, and watches carefully in case he drops her.

Stark first asks his AI, Friday, to scan her over before looking to Stephen for something to set the girl down on. A quick gateway later and a blanket is set on the ground to settle her in. Tony getting a wet rag to begin getting the dirt off her face, leaning a little too close for Stephen’s comfort, but the focus and care in the billionaire’s expression made him refrain from speaking up about it.

“You aren’t the only one who cares about her you know?”

The comment made Strange jump.

“Hm?”

Tony has his hand on her forehead, stroking gently as he shifts her hair out of the way, the action making something twist in Stephen’s gut.

“We aren’t as close as we used to be...” Stark continues when Strange raises a brow in interest. “I was an idiot. She was trying to protect me and I just ignored her advice, only to

make her my scapegoat when things went wrong. She'd always come around before, so I'll admit I took advantage of that. Eventually she had enough and then she was gone."

"Are you still...?"

"Do you really want me to answer that?"

Stephen nods at first, but after a disapproving look from Tony, he retracts his reply to replace it with a shake of his head. Slightly flustered, the sorcerer looks away. Stark taking the chance to quickly peck her on the head so Stephen wouldn't blow a gasket, quickly standing afterwards. Tony addresses the wizard.

"Let me know if her condition changes."

With a nod, Strange steps over to his partner's side, keeping a watchful eye for any sign of distress as he prays she'll wake up soon. Praying... she really was rubbing off on him. His brow knits in focus, only to twitch as Tony addresses him, tone soft and stern with a hint of resentment. Each word got a special spot in Stephen's memory as he turns his attention back to his vigil.

"I promise." He mutters.

She has to wake up. He needs to make things right. He can't lose her, not like this.

~\*~\*~\*~

He had just gotten up from his chair. Only refraining from pushing the table over because any pressure hurt like hell. He'd ignored the paper drifting to the floor. He'd ignored the clink of the pen rolling off the table. He'd even ignored the sound of the door clicking open. He knew it was Christine by the sound of heels. Maddie always wore flats. But if it weren't for that, then the question would've given it away.

"Hey! How're you feeling?"

Like fish with his gills sewn shut and fins clipped, like a blind owl with no wings, like he'd lost his only purpose on this damned ball of dirt, how the *fuck* did she think he felt? He refused to answer.

"Practicing getting back into writing?"

He winced, looking at the floor as the woman behind him takes his silence to keep prying.

"It's looking better."

*Stop* The letters are shaky and childlike when they're recognizable at all.

"Have you finished researching that new surgery?"

*STOP!* He'd stopped halfway through because his hands started hurting so bad he'd almost doubled over.

“Is rehab helping?”

*Leave!*

“Those stretches can help you recuperate some strength.”

*Please just **Leave***

“If you want, I can get you something to practice more at-”

“Why are you here?” He finally snapped, turning around to give her a cold glare.

“I wanted to see how my friend was doing. Check in... Let you know I care... Like friends do?”

*And yet every word from your mouth has poked at something I absolutely don't want to talk about. And before this happened our only interaction was the hospital. With your Strange Policy:*

His fingers twitched, half flexing into a fist as something begins to burn on his tongue.

“Friends?” He rasps. “Are we? Are we friends?”

“I'd like to hope so.” Her voice wavered.

“Because you've come running when I finally can't stand on my own?”

Blue eyes seared through her and she took a step back.

“Because you finally have a chance to treat me like some other Charity Case?!”

“Stephen you're hurting, and I know that, but don't take it out on me.”

Stephen almost chokes on his hoarse bark of laughter.

“Oh, too difficult for you? Does it hurt too much?”

“It breaks my heart to see you this way.”

“Then why come at all? If it hurts so bad than go see Nic!”

“Stephen-”

“But no- you won't do that. Because finally. Finally the one man who's never had to completely need you has fallen in the dirt! ‘He finally needs me.’ Another dreg of humanity for you to work on. Fix him up and send him back into the world, heart's just humming... You care so much! Don't you?!?”

Her eyes are walled with water. He crossed a line and he knew, but anger.. it's the only way he had control. It gave him power over something.

“We aren’t friends Christine... We were barely lovers.”

Her face turned from him. Biting her lip before she took a breath.

“Fine, I can’t watch you do this anymore. Goodbye Stephen.”

Turning fast on her heel, she left. The door clicking and that small bit of control wasn’t worth it. His shoulders slumped, tossing the remains of the burned rope bridge he’d just destroyed as he harnessed the energy from his frustration to sit at his laptop and finish his research.

It’s a few hours before another click of the door and softer footsteps trot in.

“Hey Stef!” Maddie greeted, taking the chair next to him and sitting down, leaning to peer at his screen. “Studying for an exam?” She smirked.

“New surgery.”

“Cool. Wanna see some concepts for this new game I’m working on? Need some doctor know-how on how the brain disease this developer wants would manifest itself.”

“Sure.”

This kind of conversation was just like what they had before his accident. No pointless questions. She just acted like he was Stephen. It was nice. Nice to know someone was there that could make things feel... normal. In the whirlwind of his tormented thoughts, normal was a rope to cling to. She stuck by him, they formed trust. He doesn’t want to lose that. He needs to make things right.

~\*~\*~\*~

The world around me refuses to come into focus, brief moments of light quickly fading into the inky blackness of exhaustion. My only anchors being anxious footsteps and the gentle touch from someone I know all too well. Low voices creating echoing murmurs in the scape my mind can cobble together at its current capacity, but it’s enough to nearly triple my guilt as I feel every tremor of his fingers on my skin. Stephen... I should never have taken my magic back. I should never have left. I know my lips are moving, but I have no idea if any sound is leaving them. As my vision finally begins to clear, it immediately lands on Stephen.

“Maddie!” A dry cough of relief passes his lips as he grasps my shoulders. “You’re alright!”

Before I can respond I’m enveloped in a strong pair of arms I thought I’d never feel again. My eyes go wide to the verge of tears as Cloak joins in with its own gentle squeeze, its collar wiping my cheeks before I saw a familiar figure approach.

“You gave us quite the scare Bearcat!”

At the voice Stephen quickly retracts, gaining a sharpness to his features. They must’ve thought I was in terrible shape. Must be the reason for the hug earlier. I can’t bring myself to look at the doctor for fear of any disappointment in his gaze. I shuffle myself to stand, only to wince as my head starts to spin. Stephen kept his distance as Tony catches me.

“Easy. You just woke up.”

“I’m aware Astro Boy.”

“Yeesh! That’s an oldie! What’s the occasion?”

“I’ve got an idea to kick Thanos’ ass.”

“And damn, wouldn’t you know it! I don’t have any alcohol!”

“Amen to that! I need you functioning!”

“Hey! I’m being nice enough to keep you standing. The least you could do is not insult me.”

“Hmmmmmm. I’ll think about it.”

With a shake of his head, Stark brings me to where Parker and the guardians were sitting. Noticeably missing one of the men I’d seen in the moments before I blacked out.

“Quill is with Gamora in the pod.”

“You can still read me huh? Well, that’s fine, he can sit this battle out the way I have it planned.”

“Care to explain?”

“Absolutely”

Over the next hour I divulge all the ideas that have been rattling in my head to get the gauntlet from Thanos, the whole time keeping a persona in front of my actual emotions. I can never meet *his* gaze, my own trailing over each person in turn as I lay out the plan *we* had made, with a few tweaks of my own. When the mock meeting came to a close, I begin a new role to ensure preparations are underway. Just as I went to talk to Mantis about playing with the gravity, a familiar weight met my shoulder. Stephen...

“Maddie. Can we talk?”

My head turns with a downward angle, neglecting his gaze as my heart sinks a little further into my chest. Guilt weighing down my neck as I force out a sound.

“There’s no ti-”

“Please?”

My magic sparks, feeling foreign in my own skin. Before I even register my actions, I nod and follow him away from the bustle of the guardians. Tony’s gaze burning into my shoulder as I can’t help placing my steps directly behind Strange, Balthazar squeezing at my shoulders in comfort as I watch Cloak give Steph the same treatment.



As steps slow, awkward apologies overlap as we attempt to toss ropes at the same time to repair the bridge, neither prepared to catch. The corners of my lips twitch, but insecurities keep them locked flat, and I submissively lean to give Stephen the first word.

“Are you alright?”

Three words had my heart twisting. Was *I* alright? *I’m* the one who abandoned him. Like... like *she* did. *I* broke my promise and fled and instead of being angry he’s *worried* about me.

*“So long as spells get done, books get put away, and your hands stay steady. I mean fuck-all to you!”*

Those words creep into my mind like bile.

I want to take it back.

I refuse to answer until hands meet my shoulders and my eyes are forced to meet his own. Ice freezing me in place and sapping my will to remain silent.

“I’m-fine...” I breathe, his responding look letting me know he doesn’t believe me.

“I realize I’ve been distant, and I apologize.”

“Stephen you’re fine.”

His shoulders flinch at the sound of his name and I soften my voice before continuing.

“I shouldn’t’ve left.”

My fingers graze the wraps on his arms, Stephen’s brows raising as it catches his attention. With a flush I back off.

“I-”

Before I can get the words out a shadow casts over our position, sending everyone into a bustle, my head turns to see Tony close the mask of his suit.

“Alright everyone, time to fight for our lives.”

Looking back, Stephen’s brow is firmly creased in concentration, gaze upward, we’ll finish our conversation later... maybe.

# Dire Circumstances

## Chapter Summary

Everything begins to weave this episode. Buckle in little ones.

Thor's Plan

The Titan Crew finally face Thanos

And a very important reunion occurs in Wakanda

Welcome to the ROLLERCOASTER!!

Loki's footsteps feel heavy, brows set firm as he nears the hall where the Wakandan king would hear out his offer to assist in the oncoming war. The door is solid, shoulder tensing as he pushes it open, his gaze drags down the hall, eyes circled with the dark of fatigue. He sees the fabled T'Challa, a few of the king's bodyguards and... his heart leaps into his throat. Long dark hair framing a face he knows so well.

"Sarah?"

He calls, all hushed conversation coming to silence as her shoulders jump at the sound of his voice, her eyes meeting his and he can barely feel the ground beneath his feet as he seems welded to it. Lost in the depth of her gaze. The soft curve of her brow as she takes a step towards him, hesitant, almost unbelieving. It's been so long... too long.

"Loki?"

Everyone else in the hall seems to fade away at that single word. His breath faltering though he does his best to conceal it. Whatever held him to the spot snapping away as he takes the swiftest strides he's ever taken to pull her into his arms. A familiar warmth to ground him as his fingers get lost in her hair, head bowed to press to the top of her head, her scent washes over him like a tonic to soothe all his aches and woes. She's here. He grasps the curve of her shoulder blade, her own delicate fingers slowly dancing around his waist to map out the small of his back. His eyes squeezed shut as this is all he wants, all he's wanted for a long time. Lost in the sea of her presence as a small drop of salt-water makes its mark down his cheek. His chest heaves a sigh of relief.

"I've missed you.." He mutters needlessly.

Just sound to fill the space so he can tell himself he had some semblance of thought. She laughs quietly into his chest, it makes his heart flip.

"I've missed you too."

He can hear her embarrassment, ever the one to be aware of her surroundings. Usually he's the same, but when it came to her, no one else mattered. She was always at his back, a

support and a comfort he can rely on to tether him in the storm.

“At-hem.”

Everything around him nearly spins as the world reminds him they’re not alone. His head lifting as though woken from sleep as his gaze meets that of an elegant woman at T’Challa’s side, eyes stern and sharp as her posture is enough to create an air commanding respect. A warrior no doubt, and of high-rank without question. Loki fights every cell in his body as he lets go and steps back from Sarah, feeling cold without her contact as he bows dutifully to the Wakandan king.

“Forgive me, it’s been some time.”

Loki hopes that sounded as put together as it did in his head. His response is a warm smile from the male before him.

“No worries, I understand many are being reunited today. Shame it must occur in such dire circumstances...”

T’Challa, while he keeps his gaze connected with Loki’s, lowers his eyes enough to convey his remorse. An admirable skill in the god’s book. Though just as clearly, a spark of recognition crosses the king’s face.

“Ah- where are my manners? T’Challa.”

The hand extended gives Loki’s slender fingers a firm grip, the kind that leaves you wondering if it actually hurt or if it’s really just the shock from how fast they jerked your hand in greeting that has your skin rejecting itself.

“Loki, temporary figurehead of Asgard in my brother’s absence.”

Sarah flinches in Loki’s peripheral vision, but he pretends to not see it.

“What brings you to Wakanda in such times as these? I understand you have quite the number of refugees from a recent catastrophe. My condolences to you all.”

“I am here to offer the soldiers we have left to aide in defending the country, with me at their helm.”

A gentle pressure on his arm has Loki’s gaze flicking down at his left, Sarah’s expression pulled to one of worry, her voice final.

“I also offer my marksmanship.”

It almost pulls a chuckle from him... always at his back. T’Challa glances between the trickster and ambassador with only slight question in his gaze.

“For fights such as this, We’ll need all the help we can get. I gladly accept your service and await to fight at your side.”

Loki smirks as he shares a final deal-making shake with the king, but as soon as he can he pays a respectful farewell and bids Sarah to follow him. There is much they need to catch up on.

~\*~\*~\*~

My head is tilted back to watch the shadow grow darker overhead as everyone readies for a fight in my peripheral view. The titan dropping to the ground with a snarl etched in his features. With a brief glance to Strange, I step towards Thanos, putting on a confident smirk.

“Well you took your time. Not easy to travel without the Space stone huh?”

The giant takes a threatening step forward, a familiar scarred hand clasp my shoulder. Stephen’s form towering over me as he stood to my defense. This was part of my job in the plan, to piss Thanos off. Coincidentally, it’s the part Stephen and Tony agreed upon... as a terrible idea. With a quick reassuring glance over my shoulder the weight leaves my back and I lean to look at the soul stone.

“Oh and is that your badge of filicide? Very shiny.”

The titan takes a step in my direction with every word, his gaze training on me and forgetting everyone else... just as planned.

“So when you picked who to kidnap all those years ago, did you intentionally pick other cool colours to make a gimmick? Or were you trying to hide the awful pink tones of your complexion?”

Stephen moves directly behind the giant male, Tony going around the other side as Balthazar tugs on my shoulders, I refuse to move. Thanos’ voice is commanding.

“Give me the stones.”

“I don’t have any stones! Not even the euphemism kind! My cloak isn’t *so* reflective you’re mistaking your chin is it?”

That was the cue, the world shifts like fractals of broken glass, reflections distorted and disjointed as reality flips to the other side. Thanos’ head flicking to observe his changing surroundings.

“Speaking of reflective, welcome to the Mirror Dimension and unfortunately, without a means of transport. Awwwww nuts! You’re downright stuck!”

“MOVE!”

A blur of red passes my right and my back soon hits the ground. Arms on either side of me as I freeze beneath a familiar set of stern blue eyes. Voice forced from my throat.

“Did I overdo it?”

My sheepish question is met with a heavy sigh as Cloak lifts to show me the indent where Thanos’ hand had landed.

“Aw, we’ve been crushed by bigger hands than that!”

“Well there’s no time loop to save us this time so please... Be careful.”

“Only as careful as you’ll be.”

My gaze softens and Stephen can only stare in disbelief. I feel the urge to lean up towards him, but am snapped back to myself with the clang of metal on metal. Tony grunting with effort as he saves us yet again from a moment of distraction.

“Get up! Hurry!”

The strained order is quickly obeyed as we scramble to our feet, Stephen’s motions practiced as he summons a rune to help Tony push back the Titan’s blow. A glow of purple warning me to shout to Strange as I make a shield to defend him and push my way forward as his vanguard, arms straining as my magic nearly cracks under the force and I see Stephen’s eyes widen in worry. His fingers weaving magic with a subtle quiver as his spell bolsters my own and we beat back the attack together in a flurry of green shards.

~\*~\*~\*~

“Can you separate him from the stone?”

Bruce asks worriedly, looking between Vision and the renowned Wakandan scientist Shuri.

“Sure, but it’ll take some time. The structure is polymorphic.”

“Well we had to attach each neuron non-sequentially.”

“Why didn't you just reprogram the synapses to work collectively?”

Bruce pauses.

“Because we didn’t think of that.”

Shuri simply smirks.

“I’m sure you tried your best.”

Timid as Banner is, he becomes rather flustered with being made to feel stupid by a teenager, T’Challa stepping in to derail his sister’s gloating.

“How long?”

“A while, there are over 2 trillion neurons here, one misalignment could cause a cascade of circuit failures.”

“So?”

“As much time as you can give me.”

A worried holler has the king glancing over.

“Something’s entered the atmosphere!”

Here we go.

~\*~\*~\*~

With every hit I become more fatigued, not accustomed to doing more than channeling my magic to Stephen. I can conjure spells just as powerful as my partner, but I’m a little out of practice. Thus my gratitude when the Guardians pull the titan’s attention to let the runes dissolve a moment so I can collect myself. Strange taking more initiative as he draws his hands apart before kneeling and hitting the ground, splintering it in cracks that surround Thanos and isolate him before I become an axe for the doctor to wield. Seamlessly caught in his hands as he takes advantage of the high ground to send a strike down on the titan. It’s deflected by the gauntlet with a flare of Purple, but it’s enough of a distraction to let Mantis leap to his shoulders and start to break through, however it’s in vain as she’s thrown down moments later.

“Maddie I need my hands free.” Stephen mutters, letting me go as I shift back to land on my feet in time to look up and watch Stephen duplicate himself tens of times over.

The bewilderment in Thanos’ gaze makes me smirk.

*That’s right buddy, you’re facing the man who defeated the destroyer of worlds. I’d like to see you boast better than that. -No time!*

Tony throws a device at the titan’s arm, nanobots expanding to hold Thanos’ gauntlet hand open, neutralizing the power of the stones as Parker keeps him busy with something to swat at. It’s when the group moves to get the gauntlet that Stephen’s clones take action, hundreds of red glowing light whips drop like a scarlett web, encasing Thanos and restraining him in place. It’s a brilliant light show, but I know my partner can’t keep this up, the crease of his brow deepening with the strain. Luckily Mantis gets her hands on the Titan’s skull, and while she has to hold on to counteract his writhing under the magic rope, she manages to get into his head. Stephen drops as the struggling ceases, clones disappearing into mist as Cloak steadies him. Meanwhile my feet take me to Drax, Tony, and Parker’s side as we pull at the gauntlet, Stephen catching his breath.

~\*~\*~\*~

Cate looks up in worry as Thor steadies himself to open the iris. Eitri ready at the forge.

“Ready!” The dwarf bellows.

In moments Thor is straining at the metal, the mechanisms grinding with sickening clangs before the beam of light from the star begins to reform, heading straight for- A hand goes to her chest as Thor looses a blood curdling howl of agony, her eyes squeezing shut as she can't bring herself to watch him writhe under the power of a neutron star. The heat emanating from the forge as the metal is poured in a rush. Eitri's booming voice her only gage to how much longer Thor has to be up there.

“Come on come on! Hold it! Hold it, Thor!”

Unable to stop herself she puts all the power she has behind a pillar of flame she sends to aide the forge, hoping to speed up the process just a little more to get him out of there.

“Done!”

Thor doesn't respond, but the eye closes anyway as his body falls to the ground, his skin charred black. Cate's never run so fast as she reaches his side, hesitant to touch him as fourth degree burns would be a generous estimate to the level of damage, but he's not moving and that worries her more than aggravating his wounds a bit. She shakes him by the shoulders.

“Thor! Thor Say something.”

She gets more insistent, shaking harder as panic begins to flood her veins.

“Come on. Thor, you okay? Talk to me!”

Rocket comes up behind her to help wake him. Groot not far behind him as he looks over the motionless thunder god with disbelief.

“I think he's dying.” He mutters and her blood runs cold.

“No no no no no! Thor! GET UP RIGHT NOW!”

Eitri breaks the mold on the ground to free the axehead.

“He needs the axe!” He bellows, scrambling to find something in the junk surrounding the work benches. “Where's the handle? Tree, help me find the handle!”

Groot jumps as he's addressed, frantically glancing between the downed god, and Cate's attempts to move him getting more and more frantic.

“Thor you Oaf GET UP! I’ve fried you worse than this.”

A lie.

“Come on! DAMMIT!”

Groot’s face sets in a stern line as he runs over to the still red hot blade, wincing as he reaches an arm around it to create a handle before chopping off the smoldering limb with a grunt of effort. Another grows in its place not long after as he drags the axe to Cate who grabs it and forces Thor’s hand to the handle.

“YOU GOT YOUR STUPID AXE! NOW! GET! UP! YOU BLOCK HEADED IDIOT!”

~\*~\*~\*~

The metal begins to slide as Mantis begins to tire of telepathically wrestling Thanos into submission.

“Hang in there! We’ve almost got it!” Tony groans, his suit creaking under the force he’s exerting on the armoured glove to get it off.

In the corner of my eye I see Strange approach to help. Nearing right as Mantis slips in her control and Thanos throws his arm at the sorcerer.

“Stephen!”

I let go of the gauntlet and on instinct manipulate the landscape to block the blow, the force tossing Mantis off balance, but I don’t let Thanos get free as with a force of will I roll the very ground to pin him down. Rendering him immobile as the metallic sound to my right tells me we won.

“IT’S OFF!” Parker hollers wrangling the thing as he has to fight the momentum to stay upright.

“His goonies are still going to attack the Earth! We have to go!”

Tony quickly supports Peter as Stephen looks to me. I can’t let Thanos up or we’ll never get out.

“Stephen! The gateway!”

Stark only gets more incessant. Strange roaring back at him angrily. Gaze flicking between me and the engineer.

“Hold on! L-let me think-! I-”



“It’s okay.” I assure him, brow creased as I have to keep pressure against the thrashing titan to keep him still.

“She can handle herself Strange! We have to get back to protect Vision!”

Stephen is about to bark at him again when I catch his icy gaze.

“I’ll catch up with you...”

The longer we stand here the more Thanos struggles, and the harder it is to hold him. It’s simple, we’re out of time. Strange knows that as he looks at me reluctantly, Tony hollering at him.

“Go.” I mutter, unable to look away from my work any longer.

As I hear the portal open, one by one the guardians leave the mirror dimension. Thanos grows more aggravated which each teammate that escapes which makes my job infinitely more difficult.

“Maddie!” Strange booms, and I lift my head for him to continue. “Make it out alive!”

A smile softens my face at the unfiltered worry in his voice.

“I promise!” I holler and soon he too leaves the dimension.

The portal closing as I release the ground. Falling forward as Balthazar cradles me in the air. Once I catch my breath, I’ll go meet them. Just hope it doesn’t take too long.

“How noble, staying behind so the rest of your team can escape. The other sorcerer didn’t seem too keen on it though.”

I grit my teeth. I really don’t want to talk to him. But I suppose it *will* pass the time.

“I’ll do whatever I have to do to ensure we stop your idiot plan.”

“I assume you’d call me a genocidal maniac?”

“No. I call you an idiot.”

He chuckles a bit.

“Alright then. Seems we’re here for a while. You call this the mirror dimension?”

“Yes. I picked it for our battleground. You can’t leave without being able to use one of these.”

I hold up my hand with the sling ring.

“You never got the space stone, and you don’t know the mystic arts. Even if you did. There is no adjustment that would make this fit your giant fungus fingers. Unless you used a reshaping spell, which is magic that manages to best my partner half the time. Abstract is *my* forte.”

“You see it as the perfect trap.”

“It *is* the perfect trap. You’re still here. And my comrades in arms are decimating your black cult as we speak.”

“You sound so sure.”

“I trust them.”

“You seem very sure about every word you’ve said so far... Especially my lack of intelligence.”

“Well it’s easy to be sure when I have heaps of evidence.”

“Would you care to share?”

“Why not. Where to start? You believe everything should be in perfect balance. Is that right? That’s where you think everything can flourish.”

He only nods.

“Even that core is incorrect. Things survive in balance. Things thrive in flux. The moon’s uneven orbit creates high and low tide, a needed mechanism for an abundance of creatures in the sand and sea. The imbalance of heat in the air, creates wind and airflow, that carries spores and helicopter seeds, allows birds to ride air currents. The tilt of this planet, creates varying climates and seasons, leading to variety in plant life and lifestyles, making way for an abundance of culture that makes Earth so beautiful. How about times of war? War, and the threat of it, leads to faster advancements than mankind ever sees in times of peace. Something that can always be improved upon is how one man can kill another, but with these advancements come technological leaps in daily life as discoveries are broadened to more ordinary situations. Art flourishes in times of unrest, music, visual arts, performance arts, film. Balance creates stagnance. Like a scum covered pond. Balance leads to boredom which leads to a push to unbalance, back to flux. Your solution is not only temporary, but pointless. There is a natural system for what you’re attempting. It’s called a carrying capacity. So the world isn’t all pretty, and things aren’t perfect. Adding broken homes and broken families won’t fix anything. You want to throw the world into a depression. Sure, that’s the way to do it. The issue with Earth isn’t a lack of resources, it’s distribution. However with the presence of the human condition, evenly spreading out all the resources and wealth will slip right back into systems of extortion with haves and havenots. And even if this happened to do what you planned, something I learned time and time again, there is no true random. There’s always something causing a lean, something causing a bias. Like you intentionally taking and adopting gamora, and you leaving Tony alive and alone right on this abandoned rock.”

“But he’s back on-”

“I’ve seen this before! Hundreds of times. Stephen and I sat and looked for a way to stop you. He didn’t want to turn back the clock, he was afraid of how the world might be negatively affected. The closest he got, was letting you win, only to be defeated later by Tony sacrificing himself to leave his daughter. We had to go back.”

There's a small smirk beginning to curve his features, bringing my anger to a boil.

“I did my damndest to kill the man who killed my father only to find he’d run away and died before I could reach him. And now I have the ability to end a man whose choices will create possibly hundreds of me. I Will Not Let Him Leave Her Alone!!”

“There it is... behind all the logic, all the heroism. That’s your true motive. A broken little girl.”

“This ‘ *broken little girl* ’, turned time back to before Odin’s death, just so I could set a clock in motion to ensure you *never* win. You didn’t kill the Asgardians, you didn’t get the space stone, and you aren’t going to make it to Wakanda! You will sit in this dimension on Titan and Rot! And *Good Fucking Riddance* !!”

“And you?”

“I’m leaving as soon as I’m fit to fight.”

“Leaving me unguarded?”

“You don’t have the gauntlet, your army will be in shambles within the hour, your power has been nullified.”

“Except your trap isn’t perfect.”

I pause, he’d jumped back in the conversation quite a ways. He’s trying to disorient me. Shake it off.

“You have no way off this rock, and no way out. Sounds pretty perfect to me.”

“Don’t I?”

“No. You don’t-”

“Except the warden left the keys right at my feet.”

Thanos moves to stand, and I flinch. I realize I’m not high enough way too late. Abort!

~\*~\*~\*~

Loki watches the converging floods of the black cult collide with the Wakandan army, the barrier altered to funnel the immense enemy force to a manageable number. Quickly signalling the soldiers of Asgard to pick up any slack before cutting down a few of the beasts himself, a gunshot rings out beside him as a corpse goes flying to his feet. Loki’s gaze flicking to Sarah as she heads toward him, gun in her hands with the muzzle pointed away.

“Thanks!” He calls, grin wide and wiley as he feels her press her back to his own, her shoulders set to take aim. Emerald gaze flicking over her before surveying the flood of incoming goons.

“Got my back?” He asks.

“Always and forever!”

A brief chuckle leaves his lips and soon time is a blur as he slashes down foe after foe, getting more cocky with each consecutive kill as he becomes more showy with his attacks. Sarah opens her mouth to warn him against doing so before she pushes him to the side with the sickening sound of a blade rending flesh. Her vision hazing as Loki pushes back to his feet to grab her, soldiers having come to his aide after seeing him on the ground.

“Sarah! Sarah talk to me!”

He checks her for injury to see her holding a hand to her side, red seeping from under her fingers. Her gaze following his as she pulls her hand away.

“Oh...”

Her head falls as her eyes roll back, legs buckling.

“SARAH!”

# Now They Break In

## Chapter Summary

The Battle of Wakanda!  
Avengers. Assemble.

Loki's eyes are wide as a howl of fury tears from his throat, backed by a feral growl as he pulls Sarah to his chest, holding her upright as spears of green are sent through any cult member in the vicinity, all beasts within a 30 foot radius falling dead in an instant. The haze clearing from his mind as the weight on his arm brings him out of his anger, and in a moment Loki's hands are pressed to Sarah's side, a green glow enveloping his fingers as he pushes down to staunch the bleeding while mending the tissues beneath. Any black cult member unlucky enough to get past his soldiers being diced clean through without a second thought.

He stops the blood-flow, and is nearly done sealing the wound, but the battle is growing weary. Warriors faltering with fatigue as the stream of enemies seems to be endless. Ranks beginning to thin before the sky is split with a crack of thunder loud enough to shake the ground. Loki looks up with a knowing smirk.

Lo and Behold, sparking blue with triumphant axe to the heavens Thor descends on the battlefield. Cate's arm over his shoulder as she swings a chain scythe encased in flame, a cone of fire forming in the air before Thor charges it with a crackle of purple lightning, embers fly as it collides with the ground sending out a blast that clears thousands of cult members in one fell swing. The thunder god making contact with the ground moments later as groot and rocket drop from his right shoulder to go join the fray, Cate easing on his left to howl with victory. A groan draws Loki's attention back down to Sarah as she seems to be waking up, of course he couldn't be happier with her timing. With Thor's arrival the battle would be subsiding in minutes, his thought already being executed as Blue and Red swirl into lethal Violet to clear row upon row of the collective nuisance.

"Welcome back." He hums, hoping he sounded more put together than he actually is, she'd scared him to death. With a small huff of effort, he lifts her into his hold. "Let's get you off the battlefield."

Before she can argue, he heads for the tree line where they'll both be safer, that's the idea anyway.

~\*~\*~\*~

Tony swerves the jeep as Stephen's knuckles go white, holding on to anything stationary in the vehicle. Realizing in that moment just how few people he trusted behind the wheel after his accident. One, and it wasn't himself.

"Are you sure you know where you're going?." The doctor growls, hiding his nerves.

"Of course! I've overheard Cap talking with Fury and Sarah in their classified meetings."

"Aren't those supposed to be-"

"Classified? No shit Sherlock, but does it look like I care about what they're telling me to do in *my* tower."

Tony takes one hand off the wheel to talk with his hands while Stephen scoffs under his breath.

"Tony." Stephen warns, gaze through the front window.

"What? Gonna say it's Avenger tower? Or that I should stop being such a-?!"

"TONY!"

"Shit!"

Stark slams on the brakes as he looks up to see his path headed straight for a tree, only to drift through it into an open space.

"What?"

Strange looks around, not detecting any runes or artifacts anywhere.

"I meant to do that." Tony plays it off, crossing his arms to hide his now trembling shoulders. His gaze tossing nonchalantly to the outside world. "Welcome to Wakanda."

Stephen is not buying Tony's girl scout cookies but does enjoy the view, albeit quivering from a post-traumatic stress attack. The jeep slowly starts moving again as everything seems too quiet for a war to be raging, it's unsettling, so unsettling that Tony stops the car completely.

"This'll draw too much attention. Let's leg it."

"You sure Mr. Stark?"

Parker looks about nervously, gauntlet in his lap.

"Of course I am kid now come on, shake a leg. We shouldn't be out in the open with a gauntlet holding 3 infinity stones."

"Wasn't the plan to remove them for safe keeping?" Quill pipes up, jumping from the back of the Jeep before he looks at the pod they have strapped in the back twenty ways to Sunday.

“And what about Gamora?”

Tony thinks a moment before nodding to himself.

“You, Drax, and Mantis guard her while I take Doc and the kid to hide the gauntlet and possibly have the stones removed with Wakandan tech.”

“Are you trying to get rid of us?” Quill challenged.

“No, just want to make sure there is enough people in each team to ensure nothing goes wrong if either is ambushed, and since you three have proven to work well together...”

“You really think I’m that stupid?”

“Just didn’t want to separate any one from their *Captain* is all.” Tony puts his hands up innocently.

Quill knows he’s being played, but he lets it slide, allowing Stark, Strange, and Parker to head towards the city. But first, they have some dense foliage to cross through.

~\*~\*~\*~

“How much longer on the stone Shuri?” Wanda asks worriedly as she glances out the window.

The battle seems to be turning in their favor, but she doesn’t trust it.

“Just... about... done!”

The stone comes free as the witch nears her companion. Vision opening his eyes.

“Did they do it?” He asks, Wanda nods and Shuri echoes the movement proudly.

“Good, now let’s destroy it.”

The pale stone glimmers in her hands, closing her eyes to focus when a clicking gurgle cuts through the space, a weight pushing her over as her eyes snap open at a battle cry from Shuri.

“*Now they break in!*” She groans, vibranium armor up as she bashes a shrieking flunky over the head, firing blasts at another.

As soon as Wanda gets to her feet, her hands poise and crimson begins to surround any object heavy enough to do damage. Shuri clicks and hisses a negative.

“Nu-uh not my equipment. I’ve got this! Just Go!”

“But I can-”

“Get out of here and break the damn Stone!”

Wanda is about to fight anyway when a hand meets her arm and urges her to listen. Turning to Vision with an exchanged glance, the two head out to find a safe place to destroy the Mind Stone.

~\*~\*~\*~

I’m breathing hard as my feet pound against the ground. I have to warn Stephen, things have gone wrong, horribly wrong. I went to leave the mirror dimension and- everything happened so fast. Kept just far enough through the portal that I couldn’t close it without tearing myself in half. Next thing I know I’m straining to get free from Thanos’ clutches as he crossed the illusion field. I managed to swing my leg just right to hit him between the legs so I could scramble free. Using Kyre to break his line of sight as I slithered through the tall grass, before switching back in the woods. Now I’m racing between the trees with my eyes open for any sign of Strange. A flicker of red gives me hope, sending out my magic and, to my relief, it’s Stephen. His form stops when I assume he feels his hands steady. His head turns my way as the others stop behind him, but he’s the one to speak as I break through the dense underbrush to meet him.

“Maddie?”

“Stephen you need to get the gauntlet out of here! I don’t know what happened but Thanos managed to follow me ou-!”

I’m grabbed from behind, a single hand wrapping around my midsection and pinning my arms down as I thrash and writhe. Stephen tensing to strike when suddenly the titan’s grip increases and I struggle to breathe.

“Hands down... *doctor* .”

With reluctance Strange obeys, worry in his brow even as I’m able to take in oxygen again. Gasping in air when the fingers loosen enough to allow it. Even now I take every free ounce of my strength and turn it towards struggling to get out, none of it to any avail. Tony pats Parker’s shoulder urgently.

“Get out of here kid, and fast!”

Peter does his best to follow instructions but the trees are thick, he doesn’t have a lot of room. Weighed down by the metal, Parker swings too close and gets swatted like a fly, gauntlet flying from his grip to where Thanos can repossess it as Peter skids over the dirt, the breath knocked out of him. Tony rushes to the boy’s side to help him up. Stephen taking a step for the stones only to freeze when I swallow down a rasped cry, ribs compressed.

“I wouldn’t if I were you.” Thanos warns, sighing relief as he takes the gauntlet.



“That’s three back in my possession.” The titan muses, the armor slipping back onto his hand.

Switching me into the grasp of cold metal so he can suffocate me easier, that’s my best guess anyway.

“There, you’ve gotten what’s yours. Let her go.”

Stephen’s voice is low, and commanding, but the underlying quiver does not go unnoticed to me. And unfortunately, not to Thanos either.

“Give me the rest of the stones... and I’ll spare her.”

“Not much of a choice is it?” Strange notes darkly.

“Oh no it’s an ultimatum. The stones, for her life.”

“Stephen no! If he gets all the stones then none of this mattered!”

I can’t let him do this. I can’t-! Even as the Power stone charges and it gets harder to breathe.

“I could die anyway! *You* could die! Just run!”

Despite my efforts and the frantic tone of my voice, Stephen doesn’t listen, his head bowing as his brows crease deeply. My ribs creak, and even bitten back I yelp.

“I can’t... let anyone die. Not this time...”

There is a spark of green and I howl in protest.

“No!”

Thanos merely grins, taking the time stone from the air to place it in the gauntlet with a metallic clink that makes bile rise in my throat. Heart dropping to my stomach as I see Loki approach with Sarah, both looking at me mortified as the god puts her on the ground to shield her behind him, his hands going to his knives protectively.

*Sarah don’t.*

I mentally plead, but the titan already gives the trickster his attention.

“*You* took the space stone.”

The grip on my chest tightens, purple searing into my skin as I bite my cheek so hard it bleeds. Sarah flinches visibly.

“Loki.” She begs simply, and the god doesn’t know what else to do.

I see him reach behind his back, all my contained howling turned to my panic.

“SARAH!! LOKI DON’T DO THIS! WE’VE ALMOST WON!! YOU CAN’T LET HIM-gh-!”

But the tesseract is already in Loki's hands, glowing blue before it's crushed to pieces in Thanos' other hand to free the stone.

"5 down."

His narrowed gaze trains on Stephen, who quickly speaks.

"We don't- have- the mind stone. Just let her go."

I hang my head in defeat, eyes shut tight as I wait for the pressure to snap my ribs, but instead I'm dropped to the ground, hands shooting out just in time to catch myself as Bal slows my fall. Stephen by my side in seconds.

"That's fine. I know who does."

"We've got Company!!!" Loki warns.

Knives at the ready and standing shoulder to shoulder with Tony. Stephen's gaze falls.

"I'm sorry."

My features soften, even if for just a moment.

"It's alright. Let's have faith in Wanda for now."

~\*~\*~\*~

Vision glances about impatiently, his nerves getting the better of him as he catches Wanda's arm.

"We're out of time! Do it now!"

At least she seems to agree, kneeling with him as she sets the stone before her, setting her hands around it to start a steady current of magic as she builds to match the frequency. It lets out a whine as it weakens, cracks spider webbing across its surface. Not a few moments later a blast wave of amber lights up the space. Silence. Well, except for Vision.

"We-we did it."

They sure did, but they made a beacon to their location.... why were they so close? The witch is about to reply they should move, when she's cut short.

"Congratulations."

The tall stature of Thanos towers over them, Vision rushing to guard Wanda only to be swatted away with a hand. He nears the remains of the Mind stone, gauntlet glowing green before crimson sends the Titan sprawling. Trees brought down to pin him. Red refusing to let

his hand close. Thanos only growls as he catches Vision's ankle to throw him at Maximoff, putting her off balance as his makeshift prison is thrown from his body. The commotion has drawn Cap and Bucky to come to their aid the former helping Vision to his feet as the latter rushes to cross the distance before it's too late. The moment the Witch's attention is turned, a blast of purple knocks her and Barnes to the side, violet shifting to green as Thanos turns his hand counter clockwise. Work undone as the final stone once more sits gleaming in the moss, it clicks into place, the final piece.

But we aren't about to let him use it.

"Tony! The nanobots!" I shout, forcing myself to stand as Stephen attempts to steady me.

"Just worry about *him* ! We can't let him close his hand!"

~\*~\*~\*~

Thor and Cate stand in the middle of the battlefield, the black cult a smoldering mass around them as their attention is drawn by every remaining soldier rushing into the tree line.

"That looks important." Cate remarks uselessly.

"Thanks captain obvious." Thor retorts.

"Shut up!"

And Cate's off, not waiting for a reply, leaving the Thunder god to tail behind her.

~\*~\*~\*~

The nanos are no use, Thanos's grip shattering them into useless dust, almost closing his fist before Steve rushes him with a roar, hands grasping at the gauntlet with his teeth clenched. Stephen and I are grabbing Thanos' arms with every magic restraint we can think of, but they all snap like twigs. It seems the titan's near victory also called yet another wave of the black cult army as they begin to flood the small clearing. There is no way my magic will be enough to be of use.

"Stephen!"

His gaze turns towards me and I turn to an axe, once more growing used to the clangs of metal as Strange meets every new opponent head on, hoping to clear the field enough to keep our rebellion alive. A torrent of flames make charred flesh of the wave of cult before us, thunder crashing as those behind them are sent to heaps in the grass. The relief is short lived

however, a grunt draws everyone's attention, Steve thrown in a heap against a nearby tree as Bucky rushes to his side.

The wind halts, trees still as pounding feet and shouts are a rumble under a now ever present ringing, Thor pushes himself into Cap's place, Axe burying itself into the titan's chest, and bearing down as blood oozes over the blade. Thanos froze, gaze dragging to Thor before speaking slowly. Fingers poised. Light steps are crisp in the grass, my visual perception blurs.

"You should've gone for the head."

"NO!"

There's a slash. Thor's blue eyes drawn wide as his fingers tremble. Thanos' hand has fallen limp. Red seeping through in a seam around the titan's neck before his head falls forward to roll off his shoulders with a wet thud, eyes half open and glazed, unseeing. Stephen stood with his arms in full afterswing, axeblood smeared crimson and catching the final golden rays. His eyes narrow and sharp as his chest heaves.

"Thanks for the tip."

Silence holds as the air is thick with disbelief, a small flash as I collapse to my knees.

We did it...

My head tosses back into a victorious howl that starts a chorus of victorious shouts, cacophany whoops and hollers as blood brother leans on blood brother. Clapping each other on the back as everyone slumps in relief.

Thanos, is dead. Now let's get those stones out of that damn gauntlet.

# Just You Wait

## Chapter Summary

### Tying up a loose end

The stones are locked away in various parts of the world that won't all be disclosed, but of course the time stone stays with Stephen. The soul stone's contract extrapolated and negotiated before Gamora's soul was returned to her body, in exchange that the stone disappeared to a new hiding place. Gamora and Quill now roam the stars with their merry band of guardians more free than they ever were before.

Plans were made in Norway to take some uninhabitable space and create a kingdom for the remaining Asgardians. Of course, never one to go the easy route, I made my own form of government for it that I affectionately call 'The Madegarcy'. The kingdom is split into two between the brothers. Thor the reigning king of the northern half, dubbed Norðri Nyrheim, while Loki is crowned the king of the southern half, Suðri Nyrheim. Those who came to trust Loki over his rule stayed his subjects in Suðri Nyrheim voluntarily.

Tony threw a huge celebration party, which everyone attended and got very drunk at, and then regretted the next day.

The news began to settle, and eventually life seems normal again, but there is one thing left to do to put this timeline perfectly where I want it to be.

So that's why I'm standing here with medical tools in a makeshift operating theater while Stephen makes a bubble of time around us and turns back the clock. I pray my calculations are right and with a swift motion of my hands, a portal opens and I catch a swiftly fading Frigga in my arms. With the gateway closed I can steady Stephen's hands once more as he drops the time spell and sets to work on keeping her alive, having me assist in every way I can until finally, after 3 hours and almost 5 pounds of sterilizing wipes later, we get her stabilized. Within a few weeks she's back on her feet and asking to see her sons. And now I can let her. I couldn't be more excited.

I call an important meeting for the monarchs of Nyrheim and their right hands, who at the time are Cate and Sarah. No context, just urgency and a shroud of mystery. When I peer into the meeting hall, Loki is poorly disguising his pacing as Sarah follows him with a comforting hand on his arm, and Thor is talking to Cate about what sounds like an issue involving Thor's chosen council. I'll have to get caught up later.

"At hem!"

I have never seen a man turn faster than the raven haired god did at my noise.

“I bet you’re all curious as to why I called you for a meeting.”

Looks of ‘no duh’ all around,

*Just you wait guys, just you wait.*

“Well, I have a surprise for you. I’m certain you’ll love it.”

It is then that I open the door and let Frigga step in. You could’ve heard a pin drop. No one moving for fear it was an illusion or cruel trick, that is until Frigga stepped forward and smiled warmly. Every barrier broke down, and soon the former queen is enveloped in 4 sets of arms to where you can’t even see her. Thor bawling like a child, while Cate and Sarah are laughing with relief as tears of joy run down their faces. Loki... Loki has the most tears running down his face, but is completely silent, Frigga giving him a return hug first while she’s in the center of the pile. I decide to let them have their privacy and close the door, Stephen studying my expression.

“This was the right thing to do.” I whisper.

Their family was whole again... at least, as whole as it ever needed to be, and I’m glad I could help.

# A Long Time Coming

## Chapter Summary

Now Soki Laufack was put to bed two books ago. Time for another pair of oblivious idiots to figure it out.

Her feet take her down the halls quickly, excitement setting a bounce in her step as She knocks on the door.

“Steph?” She chirps, knocking once more.

A brief shuffling later and the handle dropped, the door creaking open to an unkempt Stephen. His hair is going just about every direction and his eyes are half lidded in a groggy, ‘why are you up?’ expression. It is then that the female remembers that it is 4:56 in the morning. Her face twisting in a cringe before she looked up at him again.

“Sorry about the hour, guess my excitement got the better of me. That’s a good look for you by the way.” She jokes, gesturing to the salt and pepper whirlwind over his brows.

Brows that furrowed just slightly before his entire expression shifts to curiosity. He couldn’t exactly be upset with her. He’d done the same not too long ago when he found a really intriguing two person spell at 3:42.

“What’s got you so excited then?” He inquires, eyes glinting with amusement as he watches her nearly bounce on her feet before him.

“I finished The Surprise!”

This sent his brows upwards.

“Really?”

His interest was piqued now, he couldn’t count how many times he’d caught her hunched over a desk fiddling with something, only to have her hiss and send him away. Eventually he began to refer to it as ‘The Surprise’, frequently bringing it up at breakfast to check her progress. The response he’d get was usually cryptic, but always coated with disappointment and frustration, though he wouldn’t dare offer to help as he remembered how feral she’d get when he tried to sneak a peek. Now though, she seemed through the roof.

“Close your eyes and hold out your hands!”

She’s quivering and it’s adorable, so he does as he’s told. His palms up like a shelf as he waits patiently, but actually impatient because he’s been intrigued by this ‘Surprise’ for

months. He tries to heighten his senses to gain as much info as he can before he opens his eyes, feeling her hand over his before his palms meet a small object. It's hard material, but it's warm, probably from her death grip on it. It doesn't take up much space, so he wonders how something this small could take so long.

"Open."

The word has his eyes snapping wide like a toddler on Christmas morning. His gaze falling onto a small metal circle in his hands. He lifts it to his face to examine the intricate etchings over the surface. He recognizes them instantly, these are runes. He turns the ring in his fingers, words are engraved on the inside. A cheesy inscription, some could argue.

*'May Our bond be as endless as this circle'*

His lips curve in a smile, but his brows remain quirked.

"What does it do?"

She seemed to be waiting for this question.

"Why don't you put it on and see for yourself Mr. Man."

He rolls his eyes at the name before trying to decide what finger to put it on, it's wider than most of his fingers...

"I made it for your right thumb, but it should work on your left as well, and if you prefer a certain finger I can easily resize it with a quick scaling spell."

She was always better at form altering spells than he was, he still had no idea how the scaling spell worked. No time, he had to figure this out. He quickly slips the ring over the knuckle of his thumb and is greatly impressed by the snug, but comfortable fit.

"You never measured my hands. How did you fit it so well?"

"I'm an artist, matching proportions from a distance is part of my job." She grins, before looking up at him expectantly.

"Feel any different?" She asks.

"No."

His face falls, highly puzzled.

"Good, watch this."

Maddie puts on her sling ring and opens a gateway.

"Look down."



Her voice softens as her own gaze lowers, spreading a smile over her features. His eyes flick where she was looking and he takes a step back. His fingers are... steady. But she was holding open a gateway, that shouldn't be possible as he still felt her magic with him. He gave her a questioning look. A look she responds to warmly.

"We're both used to my magic being with you, so I didn't want to sever that. So instead of making a relic to steady your hands by itself, it syphons magical energy from me to keep the effect while I'm free to make my own spells. You won't have to worry anymore."

Her eyes are searching his face as she speaks, looking for any sign of a reaction. When he remains silent, her expression falls, body starting to turn before he finally forces a word out.

"Maddie!"

She turns her gaze back to him.

"Wait..." He breathes. "You~?... You've been working on this for months... for me?"

His hands gesture to his chest, features etched with an unreadable emotion.

"Of course."

She takes a step towards him.

*{I love you.}*

That code never seemed to hit its mark.

"Why?" He sounds exasperated, like he's been slaving over a puzzle for months only to find he's missing a piece.

Her own tone gains desperation.

"I've said it before.. I want you to be happy."

*{I love you!}*

"But you didn't have to forge a new spell for me, just for my comfort. I-"

"Damn it Stephen! ***I love you!*** "

Her eyes are wide and walled with water, her hackles raised as her breathing is heavy from the outburst. Recognition of what she'd just done has her trembling, but she's not taking it back. She's completely exposed to him now.

"You-?...." He stumbles. "I-."

His eyes squeeze shut a moment before he violently shakes his head, pulling her towards him, her chest against his as his arms wrap around her body to grasp at her shoulders. Her form tenses and he fears she'll run away, so his grip tightens until she seems to give in, arms

flying up around his body to pull him closer as she buries her face in his neck, a few of her frightened tears leaving wet spots on his skin as she nuzzles into him desperately.

Minutes tick by slow as hours before she pulls away from him, his hands still keeping her from going far. Her face softening as she looked up at his still unbrushed hair, fingers trailing up to fix it as she smiles. Quiet chuckles shaking her chest as her eyes meet his own. Her feet steadying beneath her as she shifts them over the floor. Eventually the feeling of his warmth makes her gaze drop down, heat rising in her face as she lowers her head. But a quick motion from him has her face cupped in his hand, fingers tracing the shape of her jaw. Now forced to look at him, her gaze flicks anywhere and everywhere, but frequently just below his eyes. Her expression almost going to a pout before she tosses herself forward and unceremoniously smacks her head against his, she forgot to tilt. Her eyes widen and she quickly acts as though she hadn't moved. Remembering she did this in another timeline, he just chuckles and ignores the slight throb of discomfort in the bridge of his nose, tapping her cheek with a finger to draw her attention.

"It's alright~" He whispers before leaning forward and closing the distance.

Her lips remain still under his own, unable to move. However, he takes this as a cue to retreat, pulling back as he sees her eyes are wide and unblinking.

"Maddie?"

No response. He decides to use the nicknames he's had on his tongue for months but not used.

"Mads~?"

"Lin?"

This one was a bit of an experiment, and it popped up once he learned her full name, it just sounded cool. His brow quirks at a story she'd told him about her parents choosing her name.

"Marty~"

No response, he waves a hand in front of her face. Nope, still broken. Time for the big guns.

"Chl-"

"Finish that and I'll choke you."

"There you are~" He chuckles, noting her furrowed brow and pouting expression.

"That's now my niece's name. So no. Never!"

"What about the others?"

"You can't just call me Maddie?"

Her face skews a little.

“I-...”

His gaze flicks away from her and he brings a hand to his neck.

“I could.” He mutters, and instantly she feels guilty.

He wants to call her something different like she calls him Steph. Despite it being the nickname for Stephanie, he didn’t seem to mind it, in fact he seemed rather fond of it as a special thing they shared together. She could understand his want to reciprocate something similar, however her name was difficult to shorten without going with another name entirely, and she wasn’t very keen on Marty.

“Look, try a new nickname whenever you think of one, and we’ll see what sticks.” She offers, smiling softly at him.

When his blue eyes meet hers once more he seems to be asking her to confirm she means it. Which she does as she puts her arms around his neck and nods. They stand in place just holding comfortable silence until a light golden glow through the window has them both startled.

“Oops.” Maddie mutters.

“It’s fine, let’s just go to bed. There’s nothing pressing to do today.”

He smirks before proffering her to follow him. Her steps stutter, as does her tongue.

“B-but.”

She quickly decides to metaphorically hide behind her mother.

“Mother said to wait for marriage.”

“Alright, say the words.”

“Wh-what!”

Her eyes widen. What is he saying?!

“Go on!”

“I-I do?”

“There! Come on!”

He promptly sweeps her off her feet, and steps away from his door a bit.

“I’ll carry you over the threshold~.”

“STOP IT!”

She cried, but she's laughing so he kept it up, stepping into his room before placing her on the bed. Her face getting a fearful look instantly. His expression falls only a moment before a mischievous smirk crosses his features.

*This oughtta settle her in~*

His hands go to tickle her sides.

“ACK! NO!!!!”

She squirms and thrashes in vain as she starts to lose her breath to laughter.

“Say the magic word~”

“Please?”

“Nope!”

“How am I supposed to know it- AAAH! STO-OP!”

Her hands start to smack at his arms playfully as she rolls over the bed, only to be trapped under him, he catches her hands above her head with one hand, but decides to stop tickling her with the other. He didn't want her to pass out unable to breathe. They both catch their breath a moment before she seems to go into a bit of a euphoric giggle fit, and it curves his lips in a smile.

“It's my name.” He explains, and her chuckles slow, her eyes tracing his features.

He does the same before continuing.

“Say my name.”

Her brows curve inwards.

“S-Strange?”

“No, that's *your* name. What's *my* name?”

Her cheeks flush before she finally answers.

“Stephen.”

A warmth spreads across his chest and he can't stop his smirk.

“Bingo.”

# Finally, The Weeding, an Epilogue

## Chapter Summary

Took us a hot minute to upload this, but it's finally here. The end of the main story!  
From here we'll be uploading shorts!

## Chapter Notes

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

“I wouldn’t worry about it too much!” Thor smacks his friend on the back, perhaps a little harder than necessary. “After all, you’re in love aren’t you? She wouldn’t be marrying you otherwise!”

Stephen flinches, smile strained as he chuckles dryly.

“Thanks..” He trails, nerves not at *all* hidden.

Loki, who was warned to try and be on his best behavior, does not follow that advice, slightly bored after being quiet all evening.

“Thor’s right. And think of it this way; if you mess anything up, then the worst that can happen is she leaves.”

He then casually flips a page in a random planner he ‘borrowed’ earlier. It was free but he felt a need for mischief. Stephen froze, jaw jumping as he tenses.

“Well, not the *worst*,” Thor jumps in, quite unhelpfully. “She could try and-“

Natasha holds out a hand to stop him from continuing, “Whatever you’re about to say, maybe rethink it.”

Stephen silently thanks Natasha for her common sense.

“Yes!” He almost wheezes, eyes darting around, knowing he won’t be able to see who he wants to see but he tries anyway, anticipation and anxiety mounting. “And um, thank you Loki for the uh- peace of mind.”

The appreciation is hollow as porcelain, cursing his stumbling words.

“Oh, no problem. Let me know if you need any more words of encouragement.”

Loki barely glances up at the sorcerer, a tiny smirk pulling the corners of his lips up. Stephen making a small noise of confirmation as he again looks off to the side, gaze searching uselessly once more.

Thor scrambles to think of something even *more* encouraging to say to outweigh his brother's 'advice'.

"But really, it'll be fine! You're going to get married and be in love and live together and maybe even make some more wizards."

Stephen turns red, jolting a bit.

"Thank you Thor!"

{SHUT! UP! PLEASE!}

"Okay, that's enough!"

Clint, the only married one in this group of... interesting individuals, throws out an arm.

"Leave the poor man alone. If you keep bothering him, Maddie won't have a man to marry. He'll have a heart attack."

Stephen takes a relieved breath, looking to Clint for some sort of guidance.

"Y-" He stops himself, insisting he stop stuttering before he continues. "You've done this before right?"

He worded that awkwardly, but he's a little disheveled, pulling at his suit collar. He wonders if it's hot, no, probably just his nerves.

"A long time ago, kid."

He realizes Stephen isn't much younger than him, but oh well.

"And I was just as nervous. But trust me, you won't regret this if you really love her. And from what I've seen, you definitely love her." He laughs sharply. "Sarah supports you. It says a lot."

"What's Sarah have to do with it?"

Stephen draws the attention off of Clint possibly saying something about him that'll make him embarrassed.

"Well, think about it."

Clint gestures back toward the building where the girls are getting ready.

"Out of the two friends, which one is more likely to kill you for hurting Maddie? Not that Cate won't set you on fire. I've seen her in action too."

Well that certainly is a confidence booster for the sorcerer supreme. Maybe he should've dealt with the embarrassment.

"Ah... yes I see that now. So... you really think it'll be alright?"

His gaze drops a little, again glancing in empty hope towards the door of the building, then to the closed window he knew she was behind.

“You'll be fine.”

Clapping him on the shoulder, the archer sighs heavily jerking a thumb toward the two Asgardians.

“You definitely shouldn't listen to those two. They're fish out of water they're so far out of their element.”

“Hey-!”

Loki's head jerks up, but there's not much to say when he's right.

“We know how weddings work!” The Trickster blurts as Thor jumps to his own defense.

“I'm sure they're the same here, and love works the same way on *any* planet regardless of wedding customs.”

Stephen glances about, happy to let the conversation drift off without him, drift like his gaze to the window, like a wave hopelessly smacking against the brick wall and shuddered glass.

Not appreciating the jab, Loki focuses on the sorcerer, catching the look. Smirk going wily.

“Stephen, shouldn't your focus be on the preparations before you go inside?”

Stephen almost growls at the trickster.

“There's not much I can do for now.” Another tug to his collar. “So Clint? These nerves get any better?”

Bruce, who's been looking between the conversation this entire time just looks apologetically to Strange.

Clint thinks for a minute.

“They're bad when you're waiting, but once you see her, you'll know it'll all have been worth it.”

He finds he is staring into the distance, thinking of his own wife, and he chuckles, cheeks going slightly red.

“S-Sorry. That was a little cheesy.”

“No you're alright. Not nearly as bad as I am right now...”

“The wedding night is going to be the most cheesy night of your life. I'll bet you.”

He elbows the sorcerer playfully, offering a gentle smile.

“What’s that supposed to imply?”

Stephen eyes the archer warily.

“It implies that you’re going to be significantly head over heels for your girl.” Clint winks, letting out a huff of breath when Natasha elbows him in the stomach.

“Not now, Clint.” She sighs. “One step at a time. First the wedding, *then* the sex.”

“You’re right... That first step is very important.” Even without air, he chuckles.

Stephen nearly spits, coughing a dry ‘please end me’ laugh as he once more glances over to the window.

*Maddie make them stop.*

“Why are we talking about sex?”

Thor butts in, demanding to know why sex was so important all the sudden. Stephen shooting him a look of ‘please shut up you oaf’ with another futile attempt to call for aid from the woman in the building. Loki turns to look at his brother with disbelief painted across his face before he rubs at his temples.

“You’re an oblivious fool.”

Meanwhile, off to the side, Natasha and Clint had taken to chanting in unison.

“Sex... Sex... Sex...”

Stephen whips around to them before backing away, throwing up his hands to find somewhere secluded. Bruce raises a hand,

“Maybe you went *too* far?” He almost whimpers.

~\*~\*~\*~

Meanwhile inside.

I’m pacing, which is inconveniencing the woman trying to make my hair not a frizzy mess.

“Okay, so we have 30 minutes. 30 minutes. 30. Is 30 enough? What if it’s not? Oh god is he even still out there?”

My chest depresses but doesn’t come back up as I neglect basic bodily functions.



“And breathe.” Sarah gets up to go to my side, putting a hand to my back and guiding me to a chair. “It’ll be plenty of time if you sit still and let me finish your hair. Cate, tell her to sit still.”

Cate grabs my shoulders, trying to hold me in place.

“Sit. Stiiiiiiiill.”

I take in a breath, reluctantly sitting down as my feet shuffle back and forth on the floor, clicking and clacking as my boots hit the tile.

“You sure he hasn’t left?”

“Positive.”

Grabbing the brush, Sarah takes up her previous job of carefully running it through the tangles that typically make up my hair. Being as gentle as possible, like her normal attitude.

“But what if-”

Cate marches to the window and leans outside, whipping back around and declaring.

“He is still there! Where else would he be??”

“I don’t know!” I wail, before putting my face in my hands as I nearly start crying.

Sarah wraps her arms around my neck after pausing momentarily.

“Hey, it’s going to be okay. Stephen isn’t going anywhere. He loves you.”

I know that. I really do, I’m just panicked.

“You think he’ll like it?” I gesture to my clothes briefly, consciously inhaling again.

“Of course he will, it’s gorgeous.”

Cate assures me, before wiggling her eyebrows.

“Besides, I’m sure he’ll like *you* in anything.”

Sarah rolls her eyes briefly at her friend’s tone before nodding.

“She’s right. Just look at you. You’re beautiful.”

I just mumble incoherently under my breath.

“I know, I’m just.... paralyzingly nervous. What if I can’t get the words out?”

“Maddie, you’ve been with him all this time. You’ll see him standing there and everything will fall into place.” She brushes a strand of hair out of my face. “Believe in yourself a bit more.”

With a sigh my gaze travels to the shutters, I just want a small glimpse of him, to put me at ease, but I know I can't. Sarah notices, a calming hand stroking down my back before she pulls back and returns to her work.

"You'll see him soon enough. Patience."

"But I want to see him now." I murmur, adjusting the fabric on the cloak hood that lay around my shoulders as it settles down my back.

"You'll be fine. Here, do we just need to practice saying 'I do' over and over?" Cate suggests, before launching into a chant. "I do! I do! I do! Say it with me! I dooooooo-"

My face feels on fire.

"Stoooooooooop!"

"...oooo?" Cate trails off, seeing that her methods aren't working. With a final tug, hair brushing is complete, and Sarah sets it off to the side.

"Maddie, it's normal to be embarrassed. But you're gonna have to go out there."

"You know I have stage fright! Like from when m- oh! F-! She's out there too! She doesn't-! Oh nononononono." I devolve to incoherent mutters.

"Maddie- Maddie!" Sarah spins me around, hands on my shoulders, kneeling down to stare into my eyes. "What's wrong?"

"I may have neglected to tell my mother what she was invited to." I mutter nervously, hands shaking.

Sarah's eyes go wide, gaze darting to Cate and back again.

"How-?"

She quickly realizes that's not the best road to take and just pulls me into a hug.

"Listen, everything's going to be fine. Your mom likes Stephen, right? Cate and I will handle it."

"That's just it. She's never.... *Met* Stephen." I assert, panic obvious in my gaze.

Sarah freezes, unsure what to say, but the determination doesn't leave her gaze.

"Maddie, don't worry. We'll find your mom and... figure something out from there so she's not caught completely off guard."

"I think I'll be fine finishing up with Cate... could you... introduce them....? Please?"

It's a quiet plea, looking up at my close companion with fear and an ever so slight desperation.

"Yeah... Yeah, sure. I can do that." Sarah offers a small smile, stroking my hair before standing. "I'll get going before it's time for you to walk."

"Thank you. Sorry to put you in such a mess."

"Like I said, don't worry. It's no problem. Cate, I leave her to you."

The shorter girl leaves with a soft squeeze to my shoulder, my gaze watching her go with gratitude as a weight lifts from my chest.

~\*~\*~\*~

Stephen had escaped from the ragtags who were harassing him, calming his thoughts with the new quiet around him. A rare commodity. He debates a weak drink to calm his nerves, he decides against it. Preferring to just stand and watch the wind blow the leaves of the trees to and fro.

Sarah, however, finds him soon enough.

"Hey, Stephen!"

The female looks... worried. Stephen taking immediate notice when he looks up, recognizing the voice with surprise.

"Sarah?" He steps over with all haste and hushes his voice. "Is something wrong? Does she need something?"

Please god give him something to do, while he was able to act calm, he is still just a bustle of nervous wreck.

"Um... you could say that. She-" Her voice cuts out for a second, hand rubbing at the back of her neck. "She might've... maybe forgotten to tell her mom about you... that you exist... and that you're getting married."

One could almost hear a creak as his jaw tenses.

"H-Wh-What?"

His fingers begin to quiver, she must be joking. Just riling his nerves. Right?

"Her mother doesn't know."

Her story doesn't change, and Sarah isn't one to make something like that up. He knows this. He just thought praying would make Sarah's character do a one eighty and have her chuckling 'Just Kidding!' so his heart could restart.

"I know we've never met but she- Maddie didn't tell her?"

"No..."

She rubs at the back of her neck, only spurring the doctor's frantic tone.

"So. Is her mother here? How would she be if she didn't know about the- What exactly do I need to do?"

"Well, I'm going to introduce you. I don't think Cherlynn will freak out..."

Then again it was her daughter's wedding.

"I'm toast."

"You'll do great. Come on and um... work your magic, I guess."

She's trying to be comforting. It isn't working. Stephen gestures that he'll follow, even as he mutters 'I'm dead' continuously to himself. Sarah ignoring it until she spots the target and takes in a long breath, summoning a grin to her face.

"Hi Cherlynn!"

The redhead perks up at her name, turning to spot Sarah with a wide smile. Secretly just glad to see a familiar face she actually likes to talk to.

"Hey! I haven't seen you in a while. Heard you work for the Avengers now. How's that going?"

"It isn't easy, and they're like children most of the time, but I love it." She holds nothing back, nervously twisting her wrists beneath her fingers. "So, how have you been?"

"Stuck being completely normal isn't so bad. Less people to talk to. -but my programs at the Science Center are going well."

Behind Sarah, Stephen remains as externally composed as he can manage. Acting like a random face in the crowd as his gaze trails over the woman. There was a familial resemblance in looks and speech pattern. So this is her mother...

Sarah attempts to get to the point as quickly as possible, but she'd be lying if she said she hadn't missed the older woman. So, after a while of catching up, she finally brings it up.

"So, Maddie sent me out here to do a couple things before everything starts."

"Did she help a friend plan their wedding? She sent an invitation with bare minimum details. Is it someone I know?"

Stephen is internally screaming, and actually takes an instinctive step away. Sarah has to hold back an awkward grin, pulling at her wrists even more.

"Not, um, not quite. But before I get into that, she'd like me to introduce you to Stephen."

She gestures to the tall man behind her. A man who jumps as he's addressed and Cherlynn's gaze flicks his way.

"Hi, I'm Cherlynn. Maddie's mom."

"So I've gathered." Stephen almost chokes. "Stephen Strange."

Cherlynn paused. Seemingly reassessing his face. She knew that name, subtract the goatee and-

"Dr. Stephen Strange?"

"Y-yes"

"The one from the accident?"

"Yes?"

What on earth did a neurosurgeon have to do with her daughter?

"How are you related to Maddie?"

Stephen's throat tightens, only a high wheeze escaping as his gaze flicks to Sarah. Help. Only she looks as worried as he does, though impossible considering the situation. She clears her throat.

It wouldn't hurt to... rip off the bandage... right?

"He's getting married to Maddie today."

"-!!" Stephen looks shot in the chest.

Brows flying up as Cherlynn makes a similar sound of surprise, albeit, while Stephen looks embarrassed, Cherlynn looks hurt. A smile kept on her face only for the fact her daughter managed to find a partner.

"Ah.... explains the."

She brushes a thumb on her chin with a weak chuckle. Stephen having to think a moment before nodding. Right, he used to be clean shaven.

"Oh. That. Yes she was rather insistent."

"Sounds like my daughter."

Steph laughs out his nerves.

"Stubborn indeed. But that's how she kept me from the deep end after the.. After the accident. Your daughter is- very dear to me. And while this is more a bumbling mockery of a

gesture. I can only plead your approval..."

His legs are tense. A way to hide his nerves as his dress slacks hide any evidence he feels the urge to turn and run. Brows creased inwards as he can only hope he's made a decent impression.

"I'm sorry to just... throw this on you. I wasn't sure how to tell you." Sarah looks between the two of them before bowing her head in apology. But at least she knew now, right? "Maddie was so worried and freaked out when she realized you didn't know."

"She forgot about me. Well she has been off on Heroic adventures lately. Saving the world doesn't leave much time for moms I suppose." Her face is masked disappointment mixed with a gentle warmth. "I'm happy she found someone she loves. She always thought she couldn't."

Stephen grimaces. He knew that all too well. Words he regrets springing to mind as he's sent back to that dark living room with rain racing down the windows. Shaking the memory as he focused on the relationship he has now.

"She put up with a lot."

That's a way to put it. Her mother nods slowly.

"I'm sure you're busy." And then she turns to leave.

Stephen watches her go with a feeling of guilt, looking over to Sarah. Who, despite the victory in telling her, feels guilty for springing it out of the blue. But the wedding *was* about to start.

"You better get to your place, Stephen. If Cherlynn didn't approve she would've told you. Don't wanna make Maddie wait."

"Right." He straightens his coat, the tails shifting as his posture straightens. Hand messing in his hair. "How do I look?"

"Perfect."

She'd be surprised if Maddie didn't jump him on stage. Just kidding.

"Don't worry so much. You look great."

With a stiff nod, he takes a breath and strides away. Steps quick and only barely restrained from a jog.

Loki approaches Sarah from the back, a hand on her shoulder.

"Ready?"

She jumps slightly, looking up at him before leaning into the touch. Seeking the reassurance.

"Yeah."

"You handled that beautifully My Dear~" His voice is smooth, soft to her hair as he extends an arm.

"Not so sure about that... but thanks."

Her voice is quiet as she takes the offer, muscles losing some of their tension.

"That had the potential to be an utter train wreck. You did well. Handled like a Queen~ one might say."

The tease is light, though still in tune to his trickster nature as Sarah is led up to where the others in the service are gathered. Clint already leading Laura in as he throws his coworker a wink and grin before crossing the doors.

"Only *you* think I'm a queen, Loki." She sounds exasperated, but even as she waves at her friend, it is obvious that isn't the case. Grin widening, even if only a bit.

Quill and Gamora give each other a nod of encouragement, both more for Quill's benefit, before they strode inside. Bruce was nervously looking around as Natasha kept an ear out for their cue, Nearly breaking the doctor as she took his arm and led him in. Vision and Wanda went in like a duo of cavity tier cuteness. Loki flicks his gaze inside as his foot shifts, a light tug signaling they need to go.

Sarah hopes against hope that her ankles stay on her side during this endeavor, nodding that she had realised as well. Grip tightening just in case as his arm adjusts to support his partner and lead her inside and down the aisle. It wasn't a long walk as the service was closed to friends and family, as well as a few coworkers from the tower. Loki soon releasing Sarah to stand on Maddie's side as he stood just a short distance from Stephen. Cate and Thor entering with a small crackle of electrified fire. The purple flickers drawing attention before the lightning traces the floor and the lights lower. The pair taking their places as Peter swings from the ceiling to rain petals and flowers over the space, weaving a web to refract the glow from the stained glass windows. Rocket uses the lightshow to make it up to Stephen's side discreetly.

I am already standing at the altar. My back turned to Stephen as my form is cloaked from view with a simple spell. My gaze focused on Sarah and Cate for mental support as I set my resolve. The illusion falls with a show of glowing green butterflies that obscure my form a moment longer as I train my face from one of fear to a calm smile. I hear the familiar breathing behind me pause. This is where I'm supposed to turn around. My knees tremble as Sarah gives me a gentle nod. Cate grinning ear to ear at me. Small chuckles from the small crowd follow my visible heave of breath. I close my eyes and turn, lids lifting as I freeze once more. Frost blues catching me like a web so tightly I miss the warm amused cough from the pastor. My gaze rests on Stephen's face. His expression soft as I'd ever seen it. Eventually the spell weakens so I can look at him completely. Pinstripe coat shaped to his shoulders, vest and shirt buttoned neatly as his collar is matched to a black and red tie. I take a step forward,

a hand reaching over as he takes it without a word. This wasn't practised, he just knew I needed the tether. As words go unregistered to me, I blink when they stop and the building goes quiet. Two words.. just say two words.

"I-"

I swallow and settle my nerves with a smile,

"I would love to."

What can I say. I was never one to follow instructions. Stephen's expression couldn't be warmer as the same question was sent his way.

"I do."

That moves us to vows...

I hope my practice was enough. We'd decided to practice our vows separately. My voice beginning with a quiver.

"If you'd told me. I'd be standing here. I would've called you crazy. But right here, right now. There is nowhere else I'd ever wish to be. So if you'll forgive any stumbles... I have my vows.. in a poem."

His lips curve upwards, fingers brushing over the back of my hand. Encouraging.

"To be human, It's fickle.

I've made memories.

Habits.

Mistakes.

To be human,

Stumbling into you in the middle of a hospital,

Words fumbled,

Jokes tense,

But I stayed.

To be human,

Is to be incomplete.

Half formed while a

Mask covers the imperfections.



To be human,  
A mess in every way,  
An absolute amalgam of errors and quirks  
Yet you stayed.  
A friend,  
A guide,  
A protector,  
...  
A partner.  
Days went by and being human  
Became being with you.  
There for the laughter...  
There for the tears.  
For the breaking of every Kamar Taj rule.  
Hands so used to covering my flaws  
Only longing to reach for you.  
Exposed and unmasked.  
Safe as your faults compliment my own.  
You're a mess in every way.  
But I find myself admiring,  
Cherishing,  
Adoring.  
Because you're my mess. And  
I'm yours.  
To be human,  
Is to be incomplete.

To be whole,

Is a life with you.

And that means all of it.

The sick and the well,

The calm and the rowdy,

The safe and the dangerous.

Do I truly choose to take

Stephen Vincent Strange as my soul companion?

With words I could not better craft... I do.”

I caress over his scars with tender fingers. Hazel meeting blue in an embrace without contact.

“With this hand, I will lift your sorrows.”

Stephen’s gaze only warms as my hands go to the items on the table.

“Your cup shall never empty, for I shall be your wine. With this candle, I will light your way in darkness. With this ring...”

I glance down as Rocket steps my way, offering the silver band. My fingers lifting it tenderly.

“I ask you to be mine.”

He lifts his hand so I may slip the band over his knuckle. Now it’s his turn.

“Well now I’ll be underwhelming no matter what I say.”

There’s a resonating chuckle through the floor, groomsmen and bridesmaids- mostly Loki- as Stephen clears his throat.

“A series of Promises, as an attempt to deserve standing here.”

I feel the urge to step forward, to take his face in my hand and assure him he deserved every second.

“I could promise to never come home late, to never miss an important date. I could swear to never do anything to step on your nerves, to never forget a single detail. But of course, you wouldn’t be with me if you expected such. I’m a workaholic, I can be completely oblivious. I know there will be days where you’ll sooner want to punch me than look at me. But I *can* promise this. I will stay at your side, I’ll protect and care for you to the end. My arms will always be your safe place. And no matter what.. I will never take you for granted again.. So as you have decided to take me, a bumbling fool, as your companion. It would be an honor, to take you as mine.”

I... my knees are trembling, fingers wavering in the air as he takes them in steady grip, helping me still to slip the cool metal over my knuckle, my eyes start to water. Fingers entwining with his if only to give my emotions somewhere to go that isn't the tears threatening to spill over. I don't even hear the next words from the pastor, however amused they sounded, only feeling a pull to my hands, touch smoothing up my arms and over my shoulders. One perching as the other tipped my head. A favor I'd asked at practice so I wouldn't bonk him on the nose. His contact is warm, soft, safe. I whine the most silent whimper as I can't stop myself. I start crying. Burying the hot tears in his chest as my arms reach around his back and I hide in the crook of his neck. Peter must've pulled the rigging in the ceiling, as I feel a few of the maple leaves hit my shoulders on their trip to the floor. One settling on the top of my head as Stephen strokes over my hair to brush it away, shoulders pulled forwards to offer the nook he knew I needed. There were uproarious cheers from behind me. From Cate and Sarah no doubt. To be fair. I *have* kept them waiting- Kept *him* waiting... for a long time. To finally have his arms around me like this... and knowing it would be forever. That he did *choose me*. I only cry harder into his jacket. Feeling only a little guilty when I left a small spot where my tears hit his lapel.

"Easy."

The word is pressed to my hair.

"Time for the Steal The Bride Gag!"

I know that voice. Tony.. I can't stop a smile.

"Absolutely not! H-up we go."

"Eeep!"

My squeal of surprise only devolves to laughter as Stephen takes off down the aisle, escaping Tony by a wide margin, only to stop in the middle.

"You're lucky I don't have my sling ring Stark."

The pastor takes a step backwards. If this turned into a fight... But Tony just puts up his hands and both he and Stephen share a genuine laugh. I almost can't believe it. The tension dissolves in an instant, my feet meeting the ground as being carried bridal had exposed my knee high boots and I had to rearrange my skirts. Only throwing Stephen a slight pout. At least we weren't doing the whole garter belt throw. Nor the bouquet toss. It's when my sock slips down that I glare daggers at the pinstriped man who's just standing next to me. Cool and collected, though a warm smile has yet to leave his features. Blue meets hazel and he knows what he did. Bastard even pats his pocket. I'll need that back to dance... When I lunge for it he just catches my wrist and brings me up to kiss him. And while I smack his chest with a hand, the contact settles my anger ever so slightly... he's lucky. When I relax in his hold, his chest rumbles with a chuckle before he releases my arm and offers to lead me out. Even as I pout, I just take in a breath and follow.

~\*~\*~ Reception ~\*~\*~

The venue is nicely lit, a steampunk theme mixed with slight aesthetic of Kamar Taj, our home away from home. People mingling and enjoying the atmosphere of quiet lively music and an open dance floor. Dining tables set with chairs holding bags and items as seats are claimed.

The main table is set aside for the Main Crew, Stephen and Myself, Loki and Thor, and Cate and Sarah. My mother and Frigga also placed with us. A tear filled reunion and sobbed apologies closing some of the gap with my mom. I felt awful that I'd forgotten to introduce her to Stephen, but once I realized and I was sending out invites, I panicked. Sending mom an invitation with just a date, a place, and a time. Thinking I'd tell her when she arrived like a surprise party. How much a fool am I thinking I'd have any time to do anything of the sort in the bustle? The good thing is that Mom knows me, and we're close. So even as she still felt a little hurt, she understood the intention and tried to not take it personally. She was getting along with Frigga well, and it brought a smile to my face when I heard her laughing with the former queen. Stephen spoke with her a bit as well. Opening up a friendship as true to form, Mom took him under her wing.

The other avengers came over to talk and kept everything bustling, Cap unable to come over long as Sarah's father was talking his ear off 99% of the time. Cate's parents, while there, didn't interact with me. Which was fine. They were invited as a courtesy anyway, that and Thor was pointedly avoiding mentioned mother, as she'd made a couple passes at him before the service. Class-act, don't ya think? Parker and Tony were on the dance floor, Tony showing his son some moves before Peter taught him some of his own dances. Like the shopping cart and the whip. I came over to teach proper dab form before Stephen pulled me away in embarrassment. Everyone involved sharing a good laugh.

Halfway through, the buffet opened up, and each table was discreetly signaled to go up, preventing the usual massive line that tended to happen at events like this. I knew everyone had gone through when conversation quieted a little to just table chatter. It's another 45 minutes before Cate leaves the table. Speech time. I stand up and step up with her, taking the mic and clearing my throat to get the room's attention.

"Testing. Testing. Hi! I'd like to extend the deepest thank you to all of you for coming out today, for everyone wondering when cake is, as that would be me, and still is.. It's soon. But for now, my closest friends have done their best to embarrass Stephen and I as much as possible with spoken word. Yes, speeches. First up, my ever theatrical dear one, Cate Sweadner."

"Thank you for the intro!" She grins, waiting for me to take a seat before starting.

"Well, well, well... Stephen and Maddie. Maddie and Stephen. Good friends of mine, both of them, although Maddie I've known for a good deal longer. We've been friends since we were thirteen and have been inseparable from then on, and it's thanks to her that I met Stephen. I remember getting the call from Maddie that she'd met someone and gone on an adventure to

ascend to wizardhood, and I made some jokes about her and Stephen getting together. So I'd just like to formally announce: Called it.

Watching them interact is always such a joy. Even when they dropped one of my friends through a portal and made us go hunting for answers in their hellish labyrinth of a sanctum, I still had fun hanging out with them. I mean, *anyone* can see that they work well together. Usually they work as a team to mess with me, however. While I was spending some time on Sakaar- if you don't know where that is, don't bother googling it- they took it upon themselves to watch over me to make sure the timeline went right. How thoughtful, right? Wrong. Maddie here decided to torment me with awful memes the *entire* time I was there, but I guess in hindsight I guess I have to thank her for making my trip a little more lively.

Although, if you want to talk about livening things up, I guess I have to trace it back to the time we broke into Stark Tower, which was, guess what? Maddie's idea. Naturally, I was completely on board, but had we not done that, I wouldn't have had *nearly* as many brushes with death, so thanks for that, Maddie. I'm afraid I don't have very many stories about just Stephen, but he fixed Loki's hair when he threw him through that portal, and for that I am eternally grateful.

Stupid anecdotes, aside, I really do love these two together. It's about time, honestly, but we've all been so busy saving the world and each other, I guess we never had time to worry about silly little things like eternal love. Every time I see them together, they remind me of how well they fit together. If years ago, Maddie had told me she was going to marry a doctor-sorcerer one day, I would've laughed, but now I couldn't imagine a better husband to one of my best friends. Obviously I have to wish these two lovebirds the best, as well as my most heartfelt congratulations. Go love each other, you dorks. You have *lots* of missed romantic moments to make up for."

I roll my eyes even as Stephen puts an arm around me to pull me closer, giving in a nook to relax in as the stories are sure to continue.

"Following me, hopefully with equal flair! WELCOME MIDGET SARAH!!!"

Cate waves her arms to hype the floor, Sarah looking about ready to deck the other female with the most affectionate promise of murder on her face.

"Thank you.."

Only half genuine before a smile overrides her expression.

"Hello everyone! Now before I start, I'd just like to say... Finally! It's taken them a while, but here we are! Maddie and Stephen are married and all's well with the world for a night! I've known Maddie for so many years we might as well be sisters; I've seen her grow and change and struggle and I'm proud of the person she's become. Even if I've had to play the 'mom' friend all these years. All my grey hairs were worth it. Worried all this time, especially when I got the call that Stephen was a doctor. But now, after everything I've seen of both of you, I know I don't have to worry anymore. Doesn't mean I'm not going to, but it's a start.

Now, lets see... Maddie, Cate, and I have done a dozen things that we've sworn never to speak of, probably because we'd have to kill anyone who found out. But some things I can talk about... Stacking pillows on one another in Maddie's living room while her mother thought we were breaking everything in existence. Maddie's and Cate's calculations into the sonic dick thrust. Not to mention summoning spirits late into the night until we couldn't distinguish who was who anymore."

"What?!"

Stephen's confusion is met by a laugh from me, a hand to his shoulder to ease him as Sarah continues.

"We've done so much weird stuff it's hard to even think of examples anymore, but that covers a lot of it. Maddie is one of the two people I've known the longest, who I've told the most to, and who I trust the most. If our 'Strange' adventures don't prove that, I don't know what will."

I can't stop my chuckle at the classic pun as the brunette paused briefly.

"Before I leave off, there are two things I need to say from here. One being toward Stephen. Stephen, everyone here who knows me will tell you that I am extremely protective, but I've seen how you are with her. I trust you to take care of her. But if you make her cry, believe me when I say you won't just have to worry about an angry god with fire powers.

Now that that's out of the way, for the second thing I'll need Cate to come back up here, as we've decided to give a message to our dear friends *together*."

Cate wastes no time getting back in the spotlight grinning ear to ear with an impish gleam.

"Alright. Now, this is for you two."

The two look at each other as I get nervous. The microphone squealing as they shout

"AW~ YOU'RE IN LOVE~"

My face nearly catches on fire. Stephen is not much better. They just keep going.

"LOVEY DOVEY CAVITIES~! AWWWWW~ STEPHEN! KISS HER!"

The floor is turned against us as Cate's theatrical background has her rallying everyone to chant along.

Even My *Mother*. Betrayal.

"KISS HER! KISS HER! KISS HER! KISS HER!"

Stephen rolls his eyes as he leans over to steal a kiss. Making me squeak as despite the mob I was still caught off guard. The venue lighting up with cheers and hollers and applause as I figure,

*Eh. What the hell.*

And wrap my arms around his neck to pursue him in a longer, sweeter contact. Hands meeting my cheeks as I reciprocate by tousling the back of his hair. When we pull back, hoping we appeased the masses. Cate winds up to shout something else only for Stephen to drop the two ring leaders in a void for less than 10 seconds.

“Enough.” He barks sternly.

The two troublemakers heading back to their chairs, giggling deviously.

Thor lets the room settle a moment before going up next.

“Good Evening.”

Now he has attention, he clears his throat. Speech time.

“I know for a fact that the only reason I’m here is because I wield an axe.”

There are small chuckles from the different corners of the room.

“Regardless, I will say what I can. I never had the pleasure of meeting the good doctor until I needed to find my father with my brother Loki. I can say he lives up to his name, and his partner couldn’t adopt it any faster. Yes I’m saying you’re weird, because you are. However, without you most of us would be dead... so thank you for that. I’m glad you found your own good end. As Cate said. It’s about time!”

Short and sweet. He smiles and waves to pass the crowd to his brother. The raven haired god stepping up proudly. Grin carved in his features.

“Now how could I possibly beat that eloquent speech brother? ‘I already have’? correct! Maddie is a friend to Sarah, and is always helpful when it comes to pranks and general mischief. Cate is too, but unlike her she isn’t a monster I made with my own two panicked hands. There were times in the beginning that she had every right to attack me, and I’m sure she wanted to. For some reason however, Sarah defended me and by graces above Maddie listened. *Then* she paired up with this sorcerer and she has gotten her revenge in full with interest. Locking me in a porta potty, dropping me in the void, making me fall on my face. A charming couple indeed. I will not even touch on how the Doctor allowed her to torment me on Sakaar. That aside I do believe they have decided for the best to just make official the relationship they’ve had for years, oblivious though they may have been to it. So with the best wishes I can bestow... Please let me live in peace.”

“Never!” I call out jokingly over the applause, stepping up again, Stephen close behind to take over the mic.

“Now that you all have an idea of how low our standards were to be a part of our wedding. It’s time for Cake.”

That got about as much applause as I expected, and by that I mean a standing ovation. Mood though. Smile seemingly glued to my face today, I walk over to the cake. And with Stephen’s

hand over mine on the handle of the knife, a slice is taken out and put onto a plate. The room goes quiet as Stephen takes a fork. I can hear my mom muttering ‘Don’t’ Under her breath. He takes a piece of the cake and brings it up, blue eyes gentle as I take the bite with enthusiasm. Audibly saying nom as I encase the morsel.

My turn.

My mother makes eye contact, what kind of monster does she take me for? I take the fork from his fingers and grab a generous piece, and hold it up for him to take. Which he does without incident. I then tip my head and focus my gaze.

“What?” Stephen mutters.

“You’ve got a little icing~ right~ here~.”

With a small bit of the chocolate icing on my finger I poke the bridge of his nose and transfer the sugar to his skin before getting up on tip-toe to kiss it away. I feel his face heat under my contact as the reverberating ‘Awwwww’s echo through the room. His tone softens.

“Then you have a little right here.”

He repeats the gimmick to me but taps the icing directly on my forehead. Kissing it away as now the crowd’s exclamations have me blushing.

The whole tradition wraps up when we get a second piece for our plate and another fork so we can share as we head back to our table and Sarah takes up cutting slices.

My portion is finished quickly before I nuzzle against Stephen’s chest. An arm wrapping around my shoulders as I curl up and close my eyes. Safe and sound as the bustle of the crowd fades to whitenoise.

All I can hear is Stephen’s breath and heartbeat, until he leans to kiss my hair.

“I love you Mrs. Madeline Strange.”

“I love you too Mr. Stephen Strange.”

“Doctor~”

“Let me indulge a minute.”

“I suppose.”

“Thank you... Doctor Stephen Strange.”



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