

Chapter 87 - Polite conversation

Natasha and I made record time down to the detention cells, though I was holding back considerably. We arrived at our destination just in time to see Loki sit up and swing his legs over the side of the cell's basic bed through thick ultra metal bars. My armor was deployed and surrounding me by the time he noticed us.

"You... are not who I was expecting to wake up to." He said, looking between myself and Natasha. "How did a useless mortal find his way to me?"

"I'm surprised you were expecting to wake up at all," Natasha said, ignoring his question. "You looked pretty close to death when we got to you."

"Gods are harder to kill than weak little mortals," He explained as if Natasha was a particularly slow child, turning slightly to focus on her. "I-"

Quick as a whip, Natasha pulled a small disk she had hidden somewhere in her coveralls and whipped it at Loki, only for it to pass through him and stick to the foam mattress. It crackled with electricity, singeing the linens. Meanwhile, the illusion of Loki sitting on his bed burst into familiar green and gold magic, the real Loki appearing in the opposite corner of the cell. Immediately all four of the stationed battle bots had their guns trained on him.

"In my defense... you'd be surprised how often that works," He said with a cocksure grin. "How did you figure it out?"

"Your bed didn't shift when you moved," Natasha responded.

Annoyance flashed over his face for just a moment, but he remained silent. I extended my hand and activated my scanner, the screen popping out the side of my arm. Natasha watched with a curious look, peeking over my arms to read the screen.

"That's new."

"Yeah, I built it last night, after you went to bed," I explained. "I got sick of pulling out my scanners."

I worked my way through the information, noting that he was in perfect physical health save his still missing arm. Beyond the physical though... well I had nothing to heal metaphysical damage. He was almost completely drained of magic, barely enough to stay conscious for a normally magic fill being like a frost giant. His divinity was all messed up, twisted, and cracked. What that really meant I had no idea, but the comprehensive scanner seemed to think it was from him pulling and leaning on it, using it to keep himself alive while being brutally tortured.

I also pointed out to Natasha that he was recovering from minor mental influence from the scepter. Seems like he wasn't protected from the whammy field it put out.

"Wow... that's all sorts of fucked up," I said, despite the fact that I had very little idea of how bad it really was. "You really messed yourself up, didn't you?"

"Someone didn't like that you left an Infinity Stone behind, did they?" Natasha asked. "You-"

"I'm sorry, did you just say Infinity Stone?" Loki asked, pushing off of the wall and stepping forward. "Those are myths, legends. Tales told by old men with nothing better to do but fantasize about what they would do with unlimited power."

"You didn't know?" I asked, getting a scowl in return. "The scepter you were waving around, that hunk of blue crystal it drew power from? It contained an Infinity Gem. So does the Tesseract."

Loki began to pace inside his cell, crossing back a few times before he realized he barely had three steps to pace before he was being forced to turn around. With another scowl he stopped and sat on the edge of the bed, visibly trying to not seem like he was having a meltdown.

"Why would they hand me an Infinity Stone?" He asked, seemingly to himself.

"Probably equal parts overestimating you and underestimating us," I answered, ignoring that his question was probably rhetorical. "I mean they made their own kill zone with the portal. If it wasn't for the massive ship coming through the standard military could have handled it. Still might have if we had a little more time."

"Fools! There was a reason I was targeting New York City!" Loki ranted, mumbling to himself but still plenty loud enough for us to hear. "It would have been impossible to gather a military force there in time to stop from forming a beachhead!"

Natasha and I were silent for a long moment before I pushed out the restraints I made the night before. I tossed them into the cell, passing them between the bars and onto his bed.

"Put those on,"

"I don't think so," Loki said, tossing the restraints back out.

"Listen here you son of a bitch." I said, leaning against the bars, having lost any and all sympathy for his condition when he admitted New York would have been ground zero for an

invasion. "You either put those on or I make you not a threat some other way. And considering how dangerous I know frost giants can be, it will probably involve evening out your left side."

The god just shook his head, chuckling to himself.

"Really? You, an empathetic sap expect me to tremble in fear from an empty threat?" He said, scoffing and looking down at his fingernails nonchalantly. "Beings infinitely more powerful than you have offered even more severe threats and-"

I pulled out my revolver and shot into the cell in one smooth movement. The blast of energy slammed into the bulkhead between Loki's legs. The god of mischief shouted and cursed before looking back up, glaring daggers at me, clenching his teeth. I openly met his stare, not backing down an inch.

"You, Loki Laufeyson, caused an invasion of my planet. *Planned* on having that invasion take place in one of the most populated cities on the Earth, where innocent people would have died by the thousands, thousands of people who just happened to be my neighbors. My empathy for you has long run out," I explained, pulling back the hammer of my revolver and shifting my aim slightly. "Put on the bands or I will shoot you until you're unconscious, and put it on myself."

Loki kept staring at me for a long moment before finally reaching down and grabbing the connected bands, examining them closely. He eyed me for another moment, almost as if he was pushing me, testing my limits. After a moment he started clipping the bands on, racking them up his arm until the final one was secure. He now had six bands of metal around his arm, the first around his wrist and the last one wrapped around his bicep.

I pulled out the controller, a small cellphone-like device that showed all of the options for the restraints. I selected Loki and turned on the weakening and slowing effect while watching him closely. The change was immediate, the trickster god letting out a groan as he sunk into himself. While his physical body remained the same you could see his strength leave him. He tried to stand, but it was slow, almost like he was worried he might fall over.

"What... what have you done to me?!" He said, his voice rising in anger. "What have you done?"

"Nothing permanent," I said, toggling the effect off, watching as Loki stood straighter. "Just need to keep you from doing anything stupid until we get home."

I could feel Natasha shift next to me, just barely enough for me to notice. Loki on the other hand tilted his head slightly in confusion.

"Are we not already on Earth... Interesting," He said, looking around his cell. "I wonder..."

He stepped away from the bed and put his hand flat against one of the walls. For a moment nothing happened until suddenly streaks of glowing green magic started to gather around his hands. The second they started to gather I pressed the controls and a zap of electricity caused him to seize and stumble away from the wall.

“S-S-Son of a bitch!” He shouted, the shock fading after a moment as he struggled to get back to his feet.

“Oh, sorry, did I mention the taser function?” I asked, reactivating the slowing and weakening effects as well. “Just in case you try to do anything other than sitting there and sulk.”

“How dare you treat a Prince of As-”

“Do you really think they will let you be the prince after what you did?” Natasha asked

Before he could say anything I switched on the anti-lying effect of the restraints, causing him to stumble through his words, cough, and struggle to speak.

“Oh right, I can also prevent you from lying,” I explained, talking over his spluttering and cursing. “I can also force you to tell the truth, though that has the unfortunate side effect of brain damage.”

His spluttering stopped as I explained the nonexistent function. He eyed me warily, glancing at Natasha as well before sitting back down on the bed. I could see him move his right arm as if he was going to rub his left, only for him to realize he no longer had a right arm.

“You wouldn't dare,” He said, his voice filled with contempt. “Even if I can no longer claim my rightful place as prince of Asgard, Odin would never let me be tortured, especially not in a way that may be permanent.”

“Really? Are you sure? Cause it kind of looks like he already did,” Natasha pointed out, stepping closer to the bars. “I would think anyone who cared to save you would have when they started cutting off your arm.”

Once again he was silent, his glare now focused on Natasha, who seemed to drink it in with a confident smile.

“Here is how this is going to go. You are going to answer our questions, and we will know you're telling the truth,” She explained in a sweet, butter wouldn't melt in her mouth voice. “If you don't... Well, by the time we hand you off to your brother we will know exactly the same things, but you'll be a drooling idiot, with barely enough intelligence left to remember your name and which hole you put food in.”

The way Natasha delivered her demands, her tone, her body language, everything screamed that she was serious. For all I knew she was.

Loki on the other hand was silent, watching her closely as she explained his options. Eventually, he nodded, doing his best to seem as if he had a semblance of control, of either his fear or the situation.

“Good. First things first. Who were you working with?”

“I was-” He started, coughing oddly, almost deeming to choke before he recovered, cursing as he did. “I was working with a nameless entity. I was never told their name.”

“What was the deal?” Natasha asked. “They clearly weren't satisfied given how we found you, but what was supposed to happen?”

“The Tesseract in exchange for the Earth,” He responded simply. “I would conquer the planet, use the Tesseract to bring the Chitauri through. When I sat on Earth's throne, the Other would-”

“The Other? Who is that?” Natasha asked, easily leading the god through her questions. “And who are the Chitauri?”

“... He was the middle man. I never met the real benefactor, the Other was their mouthpiece,” He explained reluctantly. “When the earth was conquered, the Other would come and take the Tesseract away. The Chitauri was their army. Disgusting creatures, a warrior hive mind species that lives for war.”

“Why did they want it? Did they know what it was?”

“I... do not know,” Loki admitted, the admission of ignorance seeming to be more painful than anything else. “He never spoke of it being anything other than a method for traveling, a way to reach distant worlds for conquering.”

“Oh good, not only were you willing to kill innocent people on earth, you were fine with giving evil conquering bastards a way to expand their repertoire?” I asked, shaking my head. “You're a real piece of work Loki.”

“I... my reasoning, the anger... It seems foggy now. I wanted a throne of my own... but conquering Earth, just to spite Thor...” He said, shaking his head. “There are easier places to conquer, and easier ways to control.”

“Who exactly was the Other?” Natasha asked.

"I... I don't know," Loki admitted. "They never revealed themselves to be anything other than the Other, leader of the Chitauri. They pulled me from the void and offered me a chance at redemption. Said if I could prove myself..."

The Asgardian ice giant was still clearly annoyed that we were forcing him to answer with the threat of what was essentially mental mutilation, but he also seemed to be having an epiphany of sorts as he stared down at his remaining hand.

"The bastard manipulated me!" He said, his anger rising again. "They played me with their words! ME, LOKI! I will make him rue the day that he-"

I tapped on the controls for his restraints and suddenly Loki was silent, even as he kept talking, raging, and shouting. He gestured and cursed, even shaking his fist in the air. He continued on for a full minute before his rage petered out, his artificial weakness seemingly swamping him all at once. I clicked the silencing effect off.

"You done? Good." I said, ignoring the heavy breathing glare he sent me.

"No, I won't be done until their blood drips from my own dagger." He said though he failed to lead into another rant.

"Do you know anything about who held the Others' leash?" Natasha asked.

"...No. I never met them," Loki admitted, shaking his head ruefully. "They were tools, stepping stones on my path to greatness and power."

Natasha watched him for a moment, silence filling the detention center before she eventually turned and left, nodding subtly to get me to follow her. I paused for a moment before passing a second control unit to one of the stationed battle bots.

"Test to make sure he hasn't replaced himself with another illusion at random intervals between zero and ten minutes," I ordered. "Have him stick his hand through the bars and touch it. Use the taser function if it's an illusion. If he escapes, call me on the communicators immediately."

The bot nodded and I followed after Natasha, who was waiting for me outside in the hall.

"So, how badly did I mess up?" I asked as we walked down the hall, the security door shutting behind us.

"Not bad, you actually did pretty well. Letting him know we aren't on Earth was just giving him the information he didn't need to know. I could have used my mask to pretend to be a naive agent to eke out more information," She explained before shrugging. "I still might, but the option

is more limited. Though your lie blocker on that brace made a lot of the advantages of that kind of act kind of pointless. Would you have actually shot him?”

“No. There are voice commands that knock anyone in the cells out like my sleep rings,” I explained. “And the band doesn't actually have a way to force the truth out of anyone, especially not at the cost of brain damage.”

“I figured,” She said with a shrug. “No offense but I don't think you're capable of that in these circumstances.”

I honestly didn't know if she was correct or not. I wouldn't want to cause brain damage, but if my materials were a bit more restricted, and I couldn't figure a way to get the truth out of him...

“Either way, you did good, especially for your first interrogation,” She said, giving me a smile as we walk. “So... what's next?”

“Next is we head to the Tesseract containment room and get it in its place. After that, we can see if my portal projector can get us home.” I explained, leading us to the bridge, where I had left the Tesseract.

Natasha nodded and it didn't take us long to get to the bridge and grab the Tesseract, which was still stored inside one of the ornate containers. We headed back through the ship, stopping in front of a set of heavy-duty security doors. The doors opened as we stepped in, the room completely empty save the raised platform and plinth in the center of the room.

I quickly made my way to the center plinth, unceremoniously opening the Tesseract's containment vessel, pulling it out with my still armored hand, and quickly sliding it into the perfectly Tesseract-shaped receptacle on the plinth. Immediately the ship began to hum and vibrate with energy, the room glowing with blue energy as the energy of the space stone was drawn out of the Tesseract and distributed throughout the ship. Lines of glowing blue energy ran from the Tesseract, down its containment, and into the floor, as if it was wired directly into the *Void Skipper*. After a long moment, the ship settled, the vibration and humming fading as it did. The room felt like it was brimming with power.

“C'mon. Back to the bridge,” I said, stepping down from the raised platform and out the door. “We need to see how the ship is handling all that energy.”

I took Natasha's hand and traveled back to the bridge.