

I'll Hold My Head And Know The Streets Are Mine Tonight

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/55424791>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Marvel Cinematic Universe
Relationship:	Loki/Tony Stark
Characters:	Loki (Marvel) , Tony Stark , Thor (Marvel) , Steve Rogers , Clint Barton , Bruce Banner
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe , Alternate Universe - Vampire , Fluff , Protective Tony Stark , Good Tony Stark , Good Loki (Marvel) , Friendship , Friends to Lovers , Loki Needs a Hug (Marvel) , Not Avengers Team Friendly , Tony Stark Deserves Better , Loki Deserves Better (Marvel) , Bruce Banner Needs a Hug , BAMF Tony Stark , Loki & Tony Stark Friendship , Bruce Banner & Tony Stark Feels , Tony Stark is So Done , Confessions , Secrets
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2024-04-23 Words: 7,591 Chapters: 1/1

I'll Hold My Head And Know The Streets Are Mine Tonight

by [Wolf_Kaiserin](#)

Summary

Tony is a vampire but noone wants to admit it. He's also half of the team that proved Loki wasn't himself during the invasion, and everyone wants to talk about that.

Thor and Loki show up to prove how great the Aesir princes are when they're not trying to destroy your planet, but in Tony's view this is a mission only Loki succeeds at.

And he and Bruce will prove it to anyone watching. And maybe Tony will get a date out of it, after all...

Notes

Title taken from Vanessa Carlton - Half A Week Before The Winter (not a relevant song but a very relevant lyric).

A big fan of STARSdidathing, some inspiration taken from how they portray Loki and Tony in friendship.

Most if not all of my fics will be at best Avengers Team neutral, please bare that in mind.

Responses welcome.

Tony was minutes away from having JARVIS take control of the speaker system and start playing "Round the Twist". Possibly seconds. Nick Fury was giving him the patented 'Don't you fucking dare' stare and really he should have worked out by now that it was just an encouragement. Up til this moment, Tony had been able to take his enjoyment from baiting the pirate - will I fuck up this meeting or will I sit quietly like a good little meal ticket? Choices choices! But even that had become boring.

"Sir I really think that the negative impact on the team-

Steve's voice was fucking grating and... no, apparently Tony wasn't going to be a good meal ticket. Oooh surprises where he surprised himself were his favourite! He slammed his palms on the table with a reverberating crack and the tension in the room ratcheted to an almost suffocating level. Captain America was giving him the scowl of disapproval, both spies had hands on weapons and Bruce had gone a touch green around the neck and hairline. It would have all had an effect if only Tony cared. Or needed to breathe.

"OK, because the last hour and a half hasn't clued you in Spangles, I'm going to just condense it down for you into an easy-to-understand soundbite. Loki was cleared by Odin. Thor wants him here. Nick won't offend Thor or Odin. Nick doesn't care about your objections."

Steve opened his mouth to reply and Tony's eyes flashed in warning because honestly this discussion had been an unending loop and Tony might be undead but he did not have patience for the willfully ignorant.

"Whatever you're about to say, consider if it contravenes any of those points. Particularly the last one." Steve glared back at him mulishly.

"It would help if you actually assisted instead of agitated, Tony." Steve growled and Tony could swear there were angelic choirs because finally a new point was being made! Maybe they would get out of here before he starved!

"What makes you think I'm at all on your side?" He asked, smiling with just a hint of fangs.

"Tony-" Natasha sighed with a hint of disappointment and he couldn't help it, he actually cackled. The idea that her disappointment meant something to him was beautifully hilarious.

"The way I see it," Tony said finally recovering from his laughing fit. "There are exactly two people whose opinions matter because, against all of my advice, everyone signed a contract with Nick that only Bruce bothered to read."

The scientist in question slowly raised a hand and Tony pointed at him with finger guns.

"Shoot green bean."

"I never signed?"

"Then I humbly offer a retraction to my previous statement! There are exactly three people whose opinions matter! Nicks, Brucie's, and mine."

"Of course, your opinion matters over everyone else's." Barton snorted. "OK Mr. Ego, how do you figure?"

It was a bit unkind from the usually friendly archer but to be fair, the man was having a very very bad day so Tony let it slide.

"Umm, because it's my house?"

Stunned silence met his statement. Clint closed his eyes with a soft exhale and Nat and Steve stared at him as though they'd been gifted an epiphany. Seriously, had this somehow escaped their notice? For fucks sake!

"My tower? My name literally on the side of the building? My arc reactor providing you with electricity and hot water? My account covering the grocery bill? My Netflix account? Fucking hell do not slow blink at me! I know for a fact rent was a thing in the 1930s, did you really not realise you weren't paying any?"

"I just... Everything seemed ready for us to move in so fast I thought..." He trailed off and when it was clear he didn't plan to finish the sentence Tony goaded him some more.

"Yes? What did you think? The New York Yankees had set it up for you?"

"You've made your point, Tony."

"I mean not really, you've all been living with me for four months and none of you thought 'Hey, maybe we should treat our landlord with a smidge of common decency?' Except you Bruce, the muffins were rent enough for a fucking decade my God-"

Actual hash orange and poppyseed muffins that didn't taste fucking dreadful, really Bruce was off the hook from almost everything for the foreseeable future.

"We treat you with decency!" Steve sounded so indignant it would be funny if he wasn't delusional.

"You refuse to let me out of your sight if there are injured civilians nearby!"

"I'm trying to help!"

"How? How does that help? How are you, not doing your job because you're too busy trying to catch me out chowing down, helping?"

"That's not what I'm doing at all! I'm just-"

"Working under the assumption that I'm on a see-food diet? You know, I see food, I eat it?"

Steve flushed scarlet and Bruce snort-laughed into his elbow. Tony flashed him a quick grin. Really, it was pretty damn funny.

"Then there's the fact I never get invited to the 'team dinner' unless Bruce is cooking."

"You're always busy working!" Clint objected which, really, more fool him because now Tony had rounded on him with eyes full of the mirth he only got when he was about to verbally eviscerate someone.

"Yes, I am! All the more reason to invite me don't you think? It'd suck if I was left with the impression that you guys only wanted me around for killing stuff and working my fingers to the bone to keep you living in the lap of luxury. Pun intended"

It was Clint's turn to flush, but Tony was on a roll and he turned his russet eyes on Natasha.

"And as for you, I will say this only once and that's once more than I ever thought I'd had to - garlic cannot drive me off. Stop putting it in all your cooking. It won't save you, in fact, it makes it more likely that I'll eat you because I can't eat any of the damn leftovers!"

Natasha rolled her eyes, and smirked in a 'got you' kind of way.

"You aren't entitled to leftovers Stark, stop being so-"

Ordinarily Tony might have left the stupidity of that sentence hanging (even Steve winced at it) but the whole situation was too fucking funny to let it lie.

"They're in the communal fridge, which uses energy I arrange to run, with a note on paper I buy using pens I buy saying 'help yourself' and, and I cannot stress this enough, it's made using the groceries I fucking buy!"

Natasha's jaw snapped shut and she glowered from her seat. Honestly Tony thought this plan of Nick's was the stupidest idea he'd ever been pitched. A superhero family? Bruce had been right, they were a time bomb. Speaking of -

"Erm perhaps we should move on?" Bruce offered. Tony snorted but nodded in agreement.

"Right. So, as it's my fucking house Loki would be crashing in, and as the rest of you kindly placed your balls in Nick's purse, and as Bruce is the only one capable of corralling the guy if he goes off the deep end again, we're the three who actually get a vote and the rest of you can put up and shut up. No-" He slashed a hand through the air to cut off both Barton and Rogers as they began to object. "-Don't care, you've had an hour and a half to make your point which boiled down to 'but he's scary and I don't want to'. Well, tough shit, in the future don't sign your souls away to an evil government shadow organisation."

With the room finally under his thrall, Tony turned his head to Nick and Bruce who were both watching him warily, though for different reasons. Nick obviously thought he was about to snap and munch on someone's neck and was preparing accordingly, Bruce looked like he might be upset on Tony's behalf. That was nice.

"It's my house and frankly I don't care if I have to house another pair of freeloaders. Logistically for me, there's no distance between 4 and 6. Bruce, any thoughts?"

Bruce gave a hesitant look at the others but it seemed Tony's forthrightness had bolstered him some.

"I can handle him if he goes bag-of-cats again. And... it was me and Tony who spotted the eye change. We were the ones to figure out he'd been a puppet too, and I figure it that we've forgiven everyone else the scepter controlled-" his eyes lingered briefly on Barton but quickly slid away again. "He deserves as much of a chance as them."

Tony nodded and gave Bruce a small but genuine smile.

"You're a good man Brucie Bear. Probably the best one sitting at this table today." Steve stiffened, even bristled at the undercurrent of insult but Tony ignored him. "Right well we all know Nick's view by now, 'I want it to happen, the rest of you shut the fuck up and deal' so that settles it. What time should we expect the god brothers?"

Nick did not look happy - though which bit annoyed him more, Tony couldn't tell. Probably the disintegrating teamwork, he had a bit of a fixation on it.

"Sometime this evening." He muttered grudgingly.

"Great! So, anyone who doesn't want to share a roof and kitchen with proof of science's victory over religion, feel free to find alternate accommodations, you have your timeline!"

"Stark!"

"Tony..."

"Some of us actually have to earn money to support their adult dependents, so I'm going to work. Brucie, want a lift back?"

"Please!"

—

It was at around about 7 in the evening when JARVIS noted the power spike that preceded the arrival of the Bifrost, and a few seconds later a calamitous bang signified the arrival of the princes. Despite his words earlier the whole gang was there, though they did not seem hugely impressed.

That was also not Tony's problem until windows started being smashed. Thor could deal with their displeasure himself, hell, Steve was practically frothing at the bit to deliver his 'I am disappointed in you' lecture. Tony had to navigate his way past all their bullshit, now it was Thor's turn, and best of luck to him in that endeavour.

Bruce walked over to stand by him, wringing his hands a little. He looked so young in his oversized cardigan and with his tight spaniel-like curls of lightly salted hair, Tony wanted to just hug him and hide him away in the labs. He didn't though - he would never impinge on someone else's agency no matter what Steve pretended he didn't think.

"I don't like this." Bruce murmured and Tony's resolve immediately crumbled.

Slowly, making sure the other could see him at all times, he raised an arm and slung it carefully around the other scientists' hunched shoulders, til he could give a gentle squeeze.

He also carefully stepped in front of Bruce a little, preparing to be a human shield if needed. Or, rather, an inhuman one.

"Want to hear some actually useful advice Howard gave me?" He asked softly, one eye on the jovial blonde outside trying to figure out how to open the door and the other on his friend. Bruce nodded slowly. "The only power someone has over you is the power you give them."

Tony lived by that maxim, despite being a contradiction to that rule himself. Sure there were exceptions - and in this brave new world of superheroes and magic those exceptions would only rise in number - but the maxim remained incredibly relevant regardless. It was what he told himself whenever Natasha tried to poke his need to please, or Steve tried to cow him with the sheer force of his righteousness. It looked like it would help Bruce too, because he went a little more steel-eyed when the door finally opened.

"My friends!" Thor called out joyously.

"We were in one battle and he didn't even stick around for debrief." Tony muttered out of the corner of his mouth. Bruce chuckled slightly.

"Thor." Steve stepped forward, all brave-captain-standing-against-the-armies-of-darkness. "We should talk."

"You shall not pass!" Bruce muttered from behind him and God, the unexpected snark broke Tony and the man had to muffle his laughter into an asthmatic-sounding wheeze and shake. Bruce was freaking hilarious when he wanted to be.

"Gladly good captain! Let me get my brother settled and you have all of my attention."

Steve looked ready to object but the movement behind Thor stalled him, and Loki stepped in and glanced at the assembled adventures with an unimpressed expression.

"I'm sure you all remember my brother Loki." Thor beamed, and this time two breathless wheezes could be heard from where the scientists stood. Steve shot them a glare but Tony only grinned back, all teeth again. Really if the guy was going to be that willfully dense, Tony was going to laugh at him. That did however give Tony his cue.

"Two ticks," Tony muttered to Bruce, who tensed at the idea of being left alone with this rabble. "Remember, only what you give 'em."

He stepped forward, opening his arms in welcome.

'Point Break! Good to see you. Antlers, you're looking well. So you've been given lodgings at Casa de Stark, and as I'm Stark it's my job to tell you the house rules. First of all, meet my all-seeing eye JARVIS. J say hello, buddy."

"Hello, buddy." JARVIS replied.

Behind him, Tony heard the sound of Bruce smothering laughter into his sleeve. His own grin widened, life was always more fun when he had an engaged audience.

"J stays out of your bedrooms, bathroom and study but he's monitoring all the common areas. It's not because of anything you guys did, please don't freak out. It's because I'm, like, TIMES Most Attempted Kidnapped Person Of The Decade and because collectively we are a trouble magnet, so JARVIS informs us of incoming threats, tells us when to assemble, and also works as our butler. If you need shopping or take out or directions or information, just ask JARVIS. Also unless you are making questionable internet searches - how to make a bomb with cleaning fluids or how to get away with murder - he won't report to me what you're asking for.

The cleaning crew comes in Wednesday and Sunday - any trash leave it bagged up outside your door on those days and it'll be taken, otherwise toss it in the disposal. The laundry crew comes by on Friday if you want to use it, if not ask J and he'll show you the machines. Please pick up after yourself this isn't a frat house, and don't break my expensive shit - J will tell you what that is. Otherwise, feel free to add yourself to the good captain's chore chart and go wild.

Thor, and Loki, your floors are 152 and 155 respectively. Rooms are the same size, you get one bedroom, one bathroom, one study, and one hosting area. JARVIS is only active in the hosting room unless otherwise requested. I don't expect any payment for your stay, however!

Rule 1 - Never harass any of my employees. You shouldn't ever even meet them but if you do you will be on your kindest and most polite behaviour. If I hear that you are not - and I will hear if you are not - I will rain down hellfire on your asses.

Rule 2 - Do not harass Pepper. You will see her, it's unavoidable, and if she so much as hints she is unhappy with you, your invitation to my home is expired. Do not upset any of my friends in fact, I am very particular about my buddies and upsetting them will upset me.

Rule 3 - Stay out of my lab unless you are invited, or I will use you in my next testing stages.

Rule 4 - See the mini fridge there?" Tony pointed at it and when the two Gods nodded he continued. "That mini fridge is mine, do not touch it. I have a special dietary requirement, and that holds the food I can eat so if you so much as open the door a klaxon will go off and I will punt you out of the nearest window.

Rule 5 - Do not attempt to kill my other house guests, never if they have previously used you as a rag doll. It's impolite and we are all starting afresh here, so no grudges and no vindictive murder attempts. It's rude and it makes me uppity and we really don't want me more uppity than I already am.

Are we all clear on the rules?"

Both of them nodded their heads, though where Thor was relaxed and open, smiling broadly at everything Loki was the one actually listening. Tony catalogued the slight look of concentration and the grateful nod of his head. Tony nodded back.

"Cool. Well, here's your key cards-" Reaching into his breast pocket he tossed first Loki then Thor a small metal square with a plastic card in. "You need it to get the elevator to stop at

your floor and to open your apartment door so, you know, don't lose it or I have to change the locks. Now me and Bruce are off to the lab, have fun kids!"

"Wait - Tony!"

Steve spluttered slightly, finally knocked out of his daze by Tony's easy acceptance of their first major enemy. Tragically for Steve, Tony did not give a damn. He waved over his shoulder, a hand between Bruce's shoulderblades pretending to steer

"Science waits for no man, Steve! Also Loki there's a welcome basket on your coffee table, let me know if you need help with anything!"

—

A quiet conversation the next morning revealed that Bruce had seen what Tony had last night - Loki was distinctly not comfortable in a tower of blonde, white, straight jock privilege. So, with the knowledge that Bruce also felt sorry for the bastard, he carefully set up a proposition.

He had proposed to onboard Loki into the science squad and to his relief Bruce had no complaints. The pair established some ground rules about messing with ongoing experiments - but honestly, much of what happened in the shared lab was for fun and so was hardly anything that couldn't survive being messed with. They also included some general safety procedures that they disregarded on the regular and a few genuinely important rules regarding respectful behaviour.

So with a long overdue set of lab rules sloppily taped to the wall and a thrusting undercurrent of excitement at maybe making a new friend, two days later Tony asked JARVIS to deliver their invite (you've got to give him time to settle in, Tony!) and set the stage for a light and friendly introduction.

Unfortunately, it took less than five minutes for their carefully staged scene to descend into chaos, and neither scientist noticed the opening lab door because they were far too busy chasing DUM-E who had absconded with the latest prototype for the Hulk pants.

"DUM-E, be a good boy and give that the daddy."

Tony cooed, edging around from the tight. The mounted lens tilted and focused on him a moment, looking for all the world like a toddler debating giving up mayhem for a nap.

"Come to your favourite uncle DUM-E. " Bruce encouraged gently. "Who always brings you a new tennis ball huh?"

The lens turned to face Bruce and the bot trundled a little closer to him instead.

"Who always changes your motor oil?"

"Who brings you Christmas lights for your charging station?"

"Who made your charging station?"

"Who brought you glitter so you'd always have something to clean?"

"Who brings - Oh my God that was you? Bruce you bastard!"

The sudden change of pace had the bot charge forward past both of them and make a break for the door and the person in it. And to both scientists' surprise came to a halt in front of their leather-clad visitor before tentatively handing over the bright purple and slightly shiny shorts with a cheerful whizz of motors.

The silence could have been cut with a knife before Loki took the pants and reached out to pat the bot on its arm strut.

"Thank you. These are very nice."

DUM-E whirred happily and trundled off to cause more chaos leaving the three to stare at each other, wondering who would crack first. Inevitably it was Tony.

"Well that settles it, you're definitely one of us. Hey Loki, come on in." He grinned, waving him inwards. "You're letting all the science out, standing there."

Loki raised a bemused eyebrow but stepped inside regardless.

"This is... not at all what I imagined." The god said, slowly looking around.

"We get that a lot." Bruce smiled semi-apologetically and grabbed a stool to sit on.

There was a little tension in the air but with the well-timed intervention from Tony's oldest bot-son, most of it had dissipated. Tony grinned and motioned Loki forward to a chair beside him

"Welcome to the clubhouse." He said as Loki perched uncomfortably on the edge of the indicated school. "JARVIS will update your keycard so you can come down whenever you want."

"I don't know why I'm here now." Loki narrowed his eyes slightly at the pair.

"That's because Tony's hands work even faster than his brain," Bruce smiled reassuringly.

"You're here because we thought you'd struggle to find much common ground with the others - I know Thor and Steve are pretty similar and the spy twins are a bit of an acquired taste-"

Tony snorted at that but he picked up from Bruce's explanation and pressed on regardless.

"Me and Brucie are the scholars of the group, and as your seidr seems to have more in common with our science than the others punch-throwing. Not that your seidr can't throw a punch because what little we saw was pfft-" He clenched a hand and expanded it out. "Mind-blowing. And we totally want to see more because, you know, it breaks our science and that's terrifying and awesome-"

"We were hoping to get your opinion on a few things as well." Bruce stepped in artfully as Tony continued to ramble under his breath and grabbed a tablet to start working on...

something. "And I'm also hoping to convince you to want to do some work down here, because if you do you need a workspace and I can finally get rid of Tony's 'storage space'-"

"Hey!"

"-To do so." Bruce casually ignored him. "Would that suit you, Prince Loki?"

The respectful question seemed to stun the god who had been watching the two with an expression of increasing surprise and confusion. He opened his mouth, closed it again, and considered before drawing himself up to a height.

"I shall observe how you work and see if it is similar enough that it won't grate in my own."

"Great!" Was all the other geniuses cheered, before the pandemonium of science descended.

—

It seemed that they were compatible workers because by the end of the week, Tony's storage space had become Loki's seidr sector, and after two days of feigning only mild interest the excitement got too much for both human scientists. Loki had smirked to himself in delighted amusement when Banner and Stark had been pressed up against the plexiglass shielding the latter had designed, and were chatting animatedly to themselves and showing readings on handheld devices that apparently meant a great deal to them.

From then on the three were as thick as thieves as the saying went. If either scientist had thought getting Loki on board would have been a chore they were quickly proven wrong - the god thrived in their environment. There were teething problems of course - the three had enough triggers to outfit the guns of a good-sized army - but it was so easy to see where one person's snappish retort or personal withdrawal came from that avoiding it or adjusting for it became just as easy.

Tony and Bruce knew each other of course, it was Loki they needed to learn. Several things became rapidly apparent, and on the odd days Loki wasn't with them they spoke to each other about their findings in grim, furious tones.

Loki was utterly unused to praise for his seidr. Tony and Bruce were both masters of their craft and regularly had colleagues gushing about their work, but Loki had no clue what to do with their excitement for his work. He was also distinctly unused to being thanked - the former problem might take a while to resolve but the latter at least they could address immediately.

The other problem was that Loki seemed sure that the scientists wouldn't want to be seen with him around others. The first time this problem occurred was in the elevator of all places, and on their way up from the labs the three had been discussing the methods of channelling magic when the lift stopped to let in Steve from the gym level.

Loki had all but leapt to the opposite corner of the elevator and had fallen immediately silent. It had thrown Bruce and Tony so completely they'd been silent too until Loki literally fled

from them as soon as the door had opened on his floor. When the humans had discussed it later and realised the problem they began a campaign of attrition.

Normally the two wouldn't emerge from their rooms until noon, but they'd learnt from Loki that the prince was an early riser and 'broke fast' with Thor and, consequently, with the others. So at the inhumanly early time of 9 am the next morning the two scientists stumbled downstairs and into the loud and boisterous communal kitchen space. The room fell silent as the two stumbled in and, with a determined nod at each other, collapsed into chairs on either side of the self-isolated second prince.

The first ten minutes were just grunts of appreciation as the two passed each other what they needed, but Bruce rallied quickly enough to draw a now very confused-looking Loki into a conversation, and Tony joined in as soon as he was able. The rest of the team looked on in a mix of confusion and horror, and it took 40 minutes for Loki to either relax or give up on their social virtue (or whatever he thought he was protecting) and actually lead the conversation.

After that, Loki couldn't shake the two if he tried. During movie nights they commandeered the three-seater sofa - once Tony actively wrestled Barton off it so Bruce and Loki could sneak in. They made efforts to ask Loki's opinions on what they were watching, or how a type of magic was portrayed, and just made sure to defer to his greater knowledge when at all possible.

Thor trying to tell Loki to 'spend time with his teammates' had become a summoning spell in its own right, without or both scientists popping up out of nowhere to inform the older brother that Loki spent plenty of time with his teammates, he didn't need Thor's intervention. That could be why Thor was seemingly annoyed at them lately, but when Loki pointed that out the two friends had stared back at him until Bruce finally broke the silence with a

"So?"

Loki didn't comment again. Though he was significantly more confident after.

The spy twins were silently fuming, any and all attempts to isolate the second prince and work their own brand of magic on him had failed utterly because after a quietly expressed discomfort one late night in the labs, Tony and Bruce were always available to go to the common floors with him, and for some incomprehensible reason, the spies could only analyse so much when he was in company.

Steve had a constant look of perturbation whenever he saw them together. Tony hypothesised that it was because he wanted to be glad Loki was fitting in - after all he was a Good Man (tm) - but he also realised it was like leaving a gas can next to a warehouse filled with fireworks. Even if the display was incredible, explosions were still guaranteed.

Then, just when Loki had gotten used to the idea that they would be friends visibly with the other Avengers, the scientists stepped up their game. During the missions they made sure one if them was nearby to act as backup. After Avengers missions the two made sure to stick close to Loki, even to be photographed chatting with him. Interviewers would ask about their

seemingly odd friendship, and Tony and Bruce would happily talk about the 'Science Squad' until the reporters got sick of asking.

They did anything to prove they weren't ashamed of him, and to Bruce and Tony it was like watching a flower actually get sunlight. Loki blossomed. However, even between the three, there was a somewhat open secret. Several months after Loki's arrival, on those odd days, the God wasn't in the lab with them, it was no longer dark grumbling about their friend's prior treatment they discussed - instead it was Bruce ribbing Tony for his (in Bruce's words) frankly embarrassing crush.

Thor and Loki's arrival had coincided with an uptick in Avengers incidents, and between those and getting used to the new constant presence of the alien Gods, group sparring sessions had been put on something of a hold. It meant that the first group sparring since their arrival was an... experience, though Tony blamed Steve for that.

For Tony and Bruce, group sparring was always a bit awkward. Bruce didn't participate at all, and the spy twins were the only non-enhanced so often trained with each other. Steve oversaw all, occasionally sparring with either them or Tony, if Tony wasn't boxing with Happy. None of them particularly wanted to spar with Tony alone due to his... condition. Really it was HR-worthy, but as the closest thing to the Avengers HR rep was Maria Hill, Tony didn't bother.

Besides, Stark men were Iron Men, and whining had no place in that.

In the end, adding Thor and Loki to the training roster should have made it all a little less awkward but for two things - one, nobody had bothered to tell their resident Norse gods about his vampirism and two, all of a sudden Tony wasn't the least wanted sparring partner. After the warm-up and Thor deciding that he and Steve should spar, Loki sulked off to a corner to practice throwing knives. Given that the second prince never missed, Tony didn't think he needed the practice.

So Tony jogged over to him, making sure the god saw him before he got close (Loki didn't enjoy being surprised) and standing by him. He was overwhelmingly happy that Loki didn't look around to see who was watching. He was also happy to see the god in less than four layers, just a thin, airy green tunic, and loose black trousers, and a strange sort of cloth sandal over his feet.

"Want to spar?" Tony offered shoulders relaxed and face open. "I know you're way stronger than me but -"

"If it is all the same to you," Loki spoke softly, and the interruption almost made Tony do a double take - Loki was normally unfailingly polite in manner even if what he was saying was the opposite. "I rather wouldn't. It would be... difficult."

He glanced at Thor, just a flicker of the eye as though trying to avoid the older brother's attention. Sadly it was too much, and Thor just laughed in return.

"My brother fights with naught but tricks, Man of Iron. "Bad enough when it is with our own warriors, but to resort to such to defeat Midgardian soldiers would be even more demeaning! He means no offense!"

As usual, Thor paid less than zero interest in his brother's discomfort. Or anyone else's, the spy twins had stopped sparring to give the group a wary look, one of Bruce's eyes had opened from his meditative trance, and even Steve had gone thin-lipped at the disparaging comments.

By the look of Loki's clenched fists he didn't mean any of that, and feared the reactions his brother had earned from the rest of them. But Tony could see clearly enough exactly whose prejudices were on display here, and they weren't Loki's. His eyes took a glint and Bruce let out a soft groan from the soft mat he was sat on.

"Tony be careful-" He tried to warn but Tony brushed it off with a one-armed shrug as he stalked towards Thor. "Oh, that's gone and done it."

"What's happening?" Loki materialised next to him and Bruce worried his lip with his teeth.

"Tony's going to fight dirty." He muttered. "It's going to be a show alright."

Thor was still chortling to himself as Tony approached with his usual swagger. Only... it wasn't his usual swagger. It looked more like a predatorial stalk, long strides with surprisingly quiet steps. When he was before the Thunderer, he looked around the room as though bored, assessed his audience, and smirked. In that moment he could have been the devil himself.

"Let's go a round Thor." Tony said sweetly, too sweetly by half or anyone who knew him.

"Tony-" Steve spoke in a warning voice but fell strangely silent when Tony snapped his head to stare at him.

"Got a problem, Cap?" He asked quietly. "Is there something unbalanced in our power levels?"

"You-"

"Are just a Midgardian soldier." He said lightly. "No glory in beating me, right Thor?"

"My friend take no offense! It is simply that we are gods! It would be like beating women!"

Out of Tony's sight, Natasha gave a particularly violent twitch. Tony gamely ignored that and spun to face Steve, eyes still flint-like and strangely redder in the bright fluorescent lights of the gym

"Hear that? It's not my fault I'm just so weak, Cap. He's just... genetically superior. A superior race, one might say." Steve swallowed thickly but raised his hands.

"Alright. Just play fair-" Sometimes you had to give Steve Rogers points for trying, but Thor apparently had the self-preservation of a particularly dim lemming.

"Nay, let the Man of Iron fight however he needs!" Bruce muffled a groan into his hands and Loki began to get a rather bad feeling. Every word Thor spoke seemed to make Tony stand straighter, look hungrier, and made his eyes just a shade more red.

"Oh I wouldn't dare fight you. How about a game? Just a small one, a little... rough play. We'll put a small wager on it. A meal. How's that?" Bruce hissed in ... was that sympathy? But for who?

"I am oft told I have a bottomless stomach friend!" Thor grinned "It could prove a costly bet!"

"And I have a very... particular palette. So. My game is that we take it in turns to wear some sort of token that the other must remove. Whoever loses theirs the quickest, owes the other a meal. Simple."

"Aye, a children's game I've not played in many years! We can do so without harming each other too much." Tony just smiled that same secretive smile, like he was playing some sort of marvellous prank.

"Brucie! Got a handkerchief?"

Bruce sighed, apparently resigned to whatever Tony was planning, and balled up one and threw it to Tony who caught it with incredible ease and handed it to Thor. Thor displayed it bravely tucked into the neck of his shirt, which had Bruce smacking his hand against his face.

"JARVIS, timer."

"Bout commencing in 3, 2, 1-"

They both moved, and Loki instantly noticed something was wrong.

"He's fast." He muttered as Stark darted in quickly. A blow to the chest pushed him back but not as far as it should and he didn't so much as stagger, back in again and knocking aside a second blow. "And strong."

"He likes to play with his food." Bruce sighed.

Loki frowned - that had made little sense to him. The meal was for after the bout wasn't it? The maxim went over his head until after twelve minutes Tony's hand curled around the handkerchief and yanked it free. Then, in full view of everyone while Thor was mid-congratulating him... he licked the Thunderer's neck.

In the room silence fell, tension so thick you could cut it. Tony's footsteps echoed as he walked away and Thor finally broke out of his stupor.

"What was the meaning of that Man of-"

"Just getting a taster for my meal." When Tony looked back his eyes were suddenly far closer to red than brown, and his teeth - before almost professionally neat - now had two elongated fangs that showed between his lips. Thor froze, face contorting in horror and Loki stiffened.

"He's a revenant?!" He turned to Banner who shrugged.

"If that's your word for vampire."

"A dead man that walks and sustains himself on the blood of other beings, taking portions of their power and knowledge when he feeds?"

"Then yup."

Loki sat down in a careful flop beside him.

"Thor you idiot!"

"I think it's likely to be an overly spiced meal," Tony spoke coldly now, eyes locked on Thor who had a rage in his eyes that Loki was intimately familiar with. "Poorly seasoned, poorly balanced. All meat, no vegetables. No different to a dozen other meals I've partaken-"

"I didn't know!"

"No, you assumed." Tony's eyes narrowed. "You came into my home, you partook of my hospitality, and then you dared to demean me, my race and my friend, and you assumed I would let you get away with it- why? Because we are so much weaker than you?"

It took Loki a long moment to realise it was himself that Tony was returning to. His soft gasp made Bruce give him a sad smile.

"Rule 2." He said quietly, reaching over and patting Loki's arm. Tony continued.

"Well, we are NOT weaker than you. And now you have 12 minutes and 8 seconds to save your own neck. I wonder, if I get a few good mouthfuls of your blood, will I be able to wield that fancy hammer of yours, too?"

With a frustrated roar, Thor lunged at Tony with both arms outstretched to tackle him, but Tony just stepped lightly out of the way, tutting.

"And you didn't even wait for the buzzer. Never mind. Start from when he moved, J."

The twelve minutes seemed to grind by, but without even seeming to try Tony danced ahead of Thor, sidestepping, ducking and leaping out of his hold. Thor might have played softball during Tony's turn, but Tony was clearly doing the same - he didn't so much as strike Thor once. Just kept away, and in turn, enraged the Thunderer more. The buzzer went for the time up, and the handkerchief was still firmly in Tony's grasp.

"Well," Tony said coolly as Thor came to a halt staring at him in horror. "I've certainly worked up an appetite."

"Tony, Fury said-" Steve tried to intervene and Tony snarled fangs on full display and so animalistic Steve took a step back.

"Fury said I was never to force any of my teammates to let me feed on them. Were you forced, Thor? Did the weak Midgardian soldier overwrite your will? Command you to play our game?"

"Tony!"

"I wasn't forced." Thor bit out. Tony huffed.

"A shred of humility at last, but it seems my captain still has some qualms."

"It was hardly a fair fight -" Steve tried but Thor seemed to hate that insinuation all the more.

"It was entirely fair!" He yelled back, thunder crackling outside.

Loki actually started to shake with laughter. How many times had he himself felt that indignation, said those words in just that manner? Demanding he had fought with honour while Thor and his friends had mocked him for it?

"Finally we agree. But you would still rather duck out of paying the piper hmm? A pity. Well, how about I offer you another chance? Not to avoid your forfeit exactly. But you can ask one other person in this room to play a round in your honour. If they can't get the token in 12 minutes and 8 seconds, they can take on your debt. If they do, I'll take them out for dinner. And you will suffer a far less unpleasant forfeit instead, something utterly mundane."

Thor thought it over for a moment before nodding. There was relief in his shoulders from Tony's concession, and he immediately straightened up and gave his answer.

"I choose Loki." Thor said, proud in that irritatingly distant way he was whenever it came to his brother. Tony's eyes flashed in anger.

"No." He said fiercely, and Thor frowned.

"You just said-"

"I said you could ask!" Tony spat back. "Not declare it as though it's your god-given right to have your chosen champion leap in to save you. That means you can walk your princely ass over to whoever it is you would like, and you can politely ask them to take on this burden, and they have the choice to deny you. I do not take from the unwilling, no matter what Cap just tried to imply-"

Steve winced, knowing he just put himself firmly in the doghouse (bat-house?).

"- and you won't change that. So, go on. Ask."

And to everyone's shock and trepidation, Thor swallowed and turned and slowly walked over to the meditation mat where Loki and Bruce sat. Against his conscious will Loki's jaw dropped because yes Thor had begged him to get him out of trouble before, but to fight in his honour? That was-

"Loki." Thor swallowed thickly. "Brother. I... I ask that you fight on my behalf. You are the only one I know who might have a chance of beating the revenant at his game. Please."

It was so humble, so chastised that Loki almost thought it was a fantasy he made up. But no, Thor was absolutely still standing there, head hung like a puppy caught peeing in someone's shoe. Norns what a mess! He cleared his throat.

"Sit down you oaf." He muttered standing up to give him room. "Before you find more trouble. Let me deal with this."

Rather than complain Thor did, and Loki walked across the gym. He heard Barton mutter

"Can you imagine Stark with some of Loki's power?" and the Widow reply

"Better hope Loki wins. Never thought I'd say that."

The god in question smirked to himself before standing in front of Tony and watching the anger of earlier bleed out of his friend. The revenant smiled at him, eyes back to russet brown.

"Looks like we get that spar after all."

"You'll finally be able to get me that drink."

Loki replied and Tony gave a lively laugh, full of glee and mirth before asking JARVIS to start the timer.

"Bout commencing in 3, 2, 1..."

In the end, it took Loki four and a half minutes, and two of those were while he worked out how Tony was seeing through his illusionary doubles (heartbeat, he could have cursed himself at the obviousness when it finally hit him). Far from being upset Tony was beaming.

"Damn, that seidr of yours is amazing." He whistled, gladly taking Loki's proffered hand to help himself up off the floor. "Alright looks like your brother saved your ass Point Break, doubt it's the first time either."

"Nay friend Stark," Thor said, sounding relieved himself. Did he really expect Loki to struggle against one fairly young revenant? "It is not. So what will be my forfeit them?"

Tony hummed to himself, but the second match seemed to have taken the edge off his anger.

"Once for every year you're alive, when you sit down to tell a story about your glorious victory over whatever, you have to tell this one first. How you had to ask your brother to come to your rescue, and how it was through his glory you didn't end up dinner to a... what did you guys call me?"

"Revenant." Loki offered helpfully.

"Revenant." Tony agreed, looking back to Thor. "Seem fair?"

"More than." Thor agreed, standing up. "I hope you and my brother enjoy your meal out, I have a sudden need to tell my lady Jane and the good lady Darcy a heroic tale of my youth. Mother and father too, I think. And my friends, Heimdall... there's a lot of people I think need to hear a good story."

Loki was gaping again as Thor wandered off, and Bruce came to join them grinning. With the danger (relatively) over, it seemed everyone was smiling.

"Well fought Loki. And well-played Tones." With a grin, Tony slung an arm around each of their shoulders.

"I think I'm done with training for today! How about some lab time, Bruce can describe all the different cuisines he's tried so you can decide where I'm going to take you out on our date." Tony winked at Loki, who chuckled before the words actually registered and he came to a sudden sharp stop.

"I'm sorry, date?" He repeated dumbly. Tony beamed back.

"It would be my absolute honour if you'd consider it one." The vampire shot back, and Bruce groaned loudly.

"Oh my God how could anyone think you're smooth?!"

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!