Stars Spell Out Your Name

by dls

Summary

A gamble for freedom. One lifetime of betrayals. The Trickster and The Engineer.

Or: 5 Times Tony Stark Almost Died and the 1 Time He Did

Notes

So I originally got the idea for Time Lord!Tony after writing Someday You're Going to Realize (that I'm passing you by) and thought it'd be fun to explore the idea of Tony being a Time Lord disguised as human via The Chameleon Arch. Then Loki invited himself to the party and, um, this happened?

There are little hints and references to Time Lords and the Doctor throughout, see if you caught them all. ;)

AU Notes: James Rhodes did not become War Machine. Pepper Potts did not become romantically involved with Tony Stark.

Beta-ed by Arboreal.

References/Quotes:
Title from "Cinema" by Benny Benassi & Gary Go.
One.

Tony was three.

His latest experiment was a Rube Goldberg machine made up of dominoes, paper clips, a shaken can of soda, and a wind-up toy car; all to be set into motion by a rubber ball.

Penny, his nanny, broke his concentration when she appeared with a glass of chocolate milk by his elbow. Gently, she coaxed the paper clip chain out of his somehow-always-sticky fingers and encouraged him to take a break. Her eyes were warm and attentive, happily watching her charge taking three large gulps without a breath.

Tony pulled the glass away with a frown, unhappy at the unusual bitter aftertaste.

Penny took away the half-emptied glass without a word.

Wiping his tongue with his sleeve to remove the horrid taste, Tony lined up the last of the dominoes. He sat back as he observed the pieces twisting around in an elaborate bend, it was finished and ready to be activated. Tony missed the rubber ball when he first reached for it; he blinked blearily and willed his eyes to focus. His fingers barely closed around the ball when his body went slack and his vision faded to black.

It wasn't sleep that he drifted off to.

*

Tony felt a cool breeze when he woke, quickly figuring out he was strapped in a stroller that he hadn't used since his second birthday and apparently on a tour through the gardens. It didn't take long to deduce he was being kidnapped, though it wasn't difficult with Penelope practically confessing in her attempt to talk herself down from a panic attack.

Howard's business rival had offered five million dollars for the Stark heir, an insulting amount because Tony was worth at least twice that and would have offered it to his caretaker in a heartbeat she only asked. Penelope continued to babble, ranging from hollow justifications of needing the money to the foolish belief that Tony wouldn't be harmed and ending with the false hope that everything was going to be fine. Tony listened and identified each as lies and excuses.

Having heard enough, Tony rolled the rubber ball in his palm and mapped out her gait. The ball dropped and rolled soundlessly, wedging precisely under her heel as her foot landed. At the sound of her startled yelp, Tony leapt out of the stroller before she could lean on it for support. He watched it collapse under her weight with the tray he had purposefully left vertical jabbing into her nose.

Then he ran.

*"Your escape efforts were quite impressive, young sir." Jarvis said, sitting next to Tony's bed and
wedging the corners of the comforter under the mattress to mimic a sleeping bag.

Tony preened briefly at the compliment before turning somber, an emotion unfitting for the face of a preschooler. "She put something in my milk, didn't she? It tasted funny."

"Yes, an excessively high dose of a powerful sedative." Jarvis answered truthfully, understanding that honesty was what Tony needed at this moment. "It was good that you only had a small amount, which was likely why you woke so quickly." He swallowed tightly. "Quite a discerning palate for someone so young."

Tony had a fleeting thought to correct Jarvis of a small detail, but it escaped his mind due to his exhaustion and the indignation at the misrepresentation of his age. "I'm not young, I'm three-and-a-sixth!"

Jarvis smiled, fond and unapologetic. "My sincerest apologies, sir." His hand ran soothingly through Tony's wild hair.

"Accepted." Tony leaned into the comforting touch and did his best to ignore the cold confusion knotting up his insides.

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**Two.**

Tony was sixteen.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology was a place where imagination gained form, turning the intangible into physical and impossible into reality. Blueprints coalesced from lines and curves, letters and numbers, and thoughts and dreams. Inspirations spanned across his mind like the constellations in the sky.

Tony loved it here. One particular idea shone bright like Polaris and he chased after it like a lost traveler looking for a way home.

*Artificial intelligence.*

The M.I.T. staff and students whispered that this was nothing more than an overlooked child desperately seeking attention, a lonely teen begging for approval, or a bumbling novice overestimating his abilities.

Machines weren't alive, they were *operational*. Programs couldn't learn, they were *updated*. Robots weren't friends, they were *tools*.

Then came DUM-E and their merciless condemnations turned into mercenary commendations.

Tony was declared the winner of the 4th Annual Robot Design Competition, to absolutely no one's surprise.

* Jarvis was unable to attend but sent several congratulatory cakes, none of them chocolate. Howard made a *chip off of the old block* comment before departing. Maria was at another engagement though she promised a celebration at a later date. All in all, Tony's first college accomplishment felt a bit underwhelming.
When Ty, despite not winning the award himself and weathering a truly impressive rant from his parents, insisted on throwing Tony a party to celebrate, Tony was thrilled and appreciative.

That night, alcohol flowed freely and music blared loudly and people danced wildly. It was an intimidating introduction to adulthood as imagined by intoxicated teenagers.

At school, Tony knew he was the youngest and it didn't bother him, relying on his intelligence to even the playing field. At the party, Tony felt he was the youngest and it did bother him, fretting about his inexperience and ineptitude. It was unnerving to feel inadequate among people he had previous felt superior to, so Tony did the only thing he could – he faked it until he made it.

Tony gulped down every drink Ty handed him with an unimpressed toss of his head and decisive flick of his wrist. All the while boasting about his superior physiology as though he had any clue what he was saying. Before his eyes drooped closed, Tony caught a glimpse of Ty's smirk and heard the faint click of a camera shutter.

*  

The photo of the Stark heir in a pool of his own vomit aired on the morning news, followed by footage of Tony being rushed into the hospital to have his stomach pumped. His blood alcohol concentration was near fatal. An investigation was already launched, along with an awareness campaign funded by Stark Industries.

The nurse must have brushed his teeth, because Tony woke with the taste of mint in his mouth. It was far preferable to the sickening sweet-and-sour of stale vomit and distracted him from Howard's diatribe and Maria's disappointment but not from Tiberius' blatant disregard for Tony's health.

Tony developed an aversion to being handed things.

Three.

Tony was thirty-seven.

Despite the many bouts of unconsciousness, the brutal injuries, and the lack of sunlight, he knew with certainty that it had been fifty-two days and nine hours and seventeen minutes and nine seconds since his chest was littered with shrapnel. He should hate the crude contraption in his sternum, but the idea of a back-up heart sounded especially appealing after what he had endured and fueled his all-or-nothing desperation.

This was a very important week for him.

So Tony invented, adapted, and built. The pounding and drumming of his tools echoed the tick and tock of his internal clock. A metronome keeping pace with the melody swelling from both of his hearts, one of flesh and one of metal. The grind of gears, the buzz of a saw, the whir of a fan, the roar of the furnace, and the groan of metal. Together, they formed a magnificent symphony of creation that made the rest of the world fade to a dulled buzz.

Tony swayed as he composed his masterpiece, dancing and humming along to the music only he could hear.

*  

Rhodey clutched at Tony's hand the entire plane ride home. Pepper masked her tears of joy with
friendly sarcasm. Happy got him three cheeseburgers because he was the best. Obie gripped his uninjured shoulder a bit too tight.

These were the people Tony fought to come back to after ninety-seven days and five hour and twenty-nine minutes and one second in a terrorist camp. The relieved joy was short-lived, however; because Tony then immediately announced his decision to shut down the weapons manufacturing division of Stark Industries.

While he had expected dismissal and objections, Tony forgot to factor in how badly he would hurt when faced with these reactions.

Rhodey kept an arm's length between them. Pepper's demeanor was all professional. Happy frowned with concern. Obie ordered Tony to his room like a misbehaved child.

Tony wondered why he was being punished for finally acting responsibly.

It had been two minutes and forty-six seconds since the sonic taser was activated.

Stane delivered a monologue reminiscent of a classic villain's victory speech. He confessed his crimes, revealed his plans, and wove in fairy-tale references, family history, and music metaphors.

Tony, the intended and unwilling audience, seethed as he listened to the same voice that once had read him bedtime stories announcing betrayals like latest military upgrades.


When Stane threw him onto the glass roof, tearing off the Iron Man helmet in the process, Tony felt a sharp twinge in his unprotected neck and tasted copper in his mouth. There was a lull of quiet before Tony blinked back into awareness when his mangled helmet bounced into his line of sight.

It wasn't until after the fight had ended, with Stane tangled lifelessly in strands of electricity, and they were preparing for yet another press conference, did Tony notice the dark, almost black, bruise along the column of his neck. A contusion like that usually accompanied broken bones, yet he was able to rotate his neck fully, albeit stiffly. Tony prodded at it gingerly, wondering how he had dodged yet another too-close-for-comfort call, before the makeup artist arrived.

Four.

Tony was forty-one.

The flight across the ocean would be calming if he weren't on his way to intercept a nuclear missile. Deployed by a group of shortsighted jackasses and aimed at not only the city but also the Avengers who had assembled to protect the world. He hadn't even known he trusted these people to safeguard this world until they broke it. The sting of betrayal prickled along his spine and burned in his mouth, making him gag at both the realization and the reminder of Rhodey's theft of the armor two years ago. Their friendship, though somewhat salvaged, never quite recovered.

His earlier speech to Loki seemed mocking now; there would not be an Earth left to avenge if this missile detonated. Tony's thoughts logically drifted to Loki, the crazed god who started this magnificent chain of chaos and seemed wistfully amused at Tony's offer of a drink, then promptly shifted away. It would be infuriating except Tony couldn't bring himself to be bothered. He
wondered if it was some kind of magic, a glamour enchantment or diversion spell, and dismissed it because it bored him. Which set off a series of alarms because Tony had never met a mystery without further investigation. Yet it was like he knew something wasn't quite right but he also didn't want to know.

Instead, Tony began calculating how many words it would take for him to bring down this pathetic excuse of a security council. Tony's mind was the sharpest and most dangerous weapon he possessed, yet so many overlooked it for the flair of explosions and shine of armor. He felt a vicious satisfaction when he decided that eight words should suffice, a small comfort when all he could taste was cinders and ash.

*

"Sir, shall I call Ms. Potts?"

There had once been something subtly suggestive between them, a soft haze of near-romance, but it had dissipated with every step not taken. Something had rooted Tony's feet in place, aside from his self-sacrificing tendencies that somehow hurt everyone else around him and more than her sky-high expectations that he couldn't meet even in a flying suit of armor.

It was an instinctual truth, undeniable and inexplicable. They weren't meant to last. He did not belong to her and she would balk at the thought of belonging to him.

Despite, or because of, their lack of romantic involvement, their working relationship thrived. Pepper was a fantastically competent CEO and corralled board members with an expert hand. Stark Industries would flourish as the leader of green energy and accessible technology under her guidance.

Tony considered JARVIS' offer. It would be remiss of him to leave her without one final quote of reassurance to the board and shareholders and employees, but he had no clue what to say and no desire to spend his last seconds working.

"No."

*

The nuclear explosion was every bit as spectacular as Tony imagined, made even more so against the glittering backdrop of an endless abyss. If this was to be the last thing he saw before he died, Tony supposed it wasn't the worst view. Waking up to the Hulk's fearsome roar wasn't the worst sound, but Tony much preferred JARVIS' wry imitation of the weather channel. It was depressing, though, to realize he now ranked experiences based on the scale of not worst instead of the best.

Tony attributed the bright flare of emerald flitting across the edge of his vision to the sun reflecting off of the Hulk's green skin.

The Iron Man armor was not meant to withstand ionizing radiation, yet Tony remained unharmed. The best explanation offered by world renowned doctors and scientists was the unknown factor of space travel. Which translated to we have no idea. Which somehow morphed into karmic miracle once the press found out.

Iron Man's Sacrifice Led to his Survival was the front page headline on The New York Times.

When he slept, Tony dreamed the countless stars in limitless space. When he woke, Tony wondered worryingly why that vacant vastness thrilled instead of terrified him. Eventually, he managed to find some comfort in his discomfort about it all.
Five.

Tony was forty-six.

The clock that had been ticking in his head shifted from keeping pace to counting down. The former calmed him while the latter propelled him into an overwhelming panic that he was running out of time. It was all so fleeting, this human existence. Tony built at an almost reckless pace and destroyed his creations just as quickly. The multiple suits of armor went up in flames, culminating with him throwing away his symbolic and literal second heart. The peacekeeping program turned out to be anything but, resulting in billions worth of damages and one hundred and seventy seven lives lost.

One hundred and seventy seven.

Their faces were featured prominently and consistently in Tony's every nightmare. All these lives un-lived. All that potential lost. All those left behind. The dreams of floating among stars had long faded.

Tony knew, on some level, that the blame did not rest entirely on his shoulders. But any mention of Bruce's involvement in designing the program or the influence of the scepter sounded like empty excuses. He had enough of those in his life.

*

Tony was a futurist, always looking ten, twenty, even a hundred steps ahead. Possibilities unfolded before him like sets of scrambled code waiting to be deciphered and he had always loved puzzles. It was exhilarating to see the futures blooming from each splintered path. Sometimes, though, all roads led dishearteningly to the same destination. No detours or turnarounds.

The Accords loomed, fixed, at the end of the line. Proposed and approved by one hundred and seventeen countries.

One hundred and seventeen.

After years of destruction that stemmed from both the supervillains' invasions and the superheroes' interventions, the introduction of an international oversight legislation was logical. It would be irresponsible and idiotic of the world's governments to leave the Avengers unchecked.

Tony worked to minimize restriction and maximize flexibility. The world was run on compromise and concessions, not ideology and ignorance; a loss in the present allowed for a win in the future. The priority was to alleviate the panicked and appease the frightened. A show of good faith would accomplish that easily.

The Accords was better than an oppressive registration act, surely the Avengers would recognize that.

They did not.

*

In the dim Siberian bunker, the edge of the vibranium shield gleamed menacingly.

Tony raised an instinctive hand to protect his face but was unwilling to fire a defensive shot at his
friend, his leader, his \textit{childhood hero}.

Rogers, however, did not suffer such sentimental hesitation. His jaw was stubbornly set, the same rigidity as when he spoke of shadowy government agendas and metaphorically tied hands, ignored every good will gesture and peace offering, and justified lies and betrayal. His fingers flexed and arms tensed, then the shield slammed down.

With horror-widened eyes, Tony felt the blow that destroyed his symbolic heart and crushed his actual one. The taste of metal rattled his teeth as his internal organs struggled to function properly within a shattered rib cage.

"That shield doesn't belong to you, you don't deserve it." Tony coughed out, his throat burned with a silent scream. "My father made that shield." He watched it fall from Rogers' careless fingers with barely opened eyes, easily discarded like Tony's friendship and his parents' lives. The darkness felt like an old friend and he welcomed it with open arms.

Tony was coaxed back into consciousness by the smell of snow and taste of ice. There was someone else in the bunker. Tony blinked and locked gaze with a pair of glittering green eyes that danced in the darkness like stars, like a promise fulfilled, like a gamble won.

\textbf{One.}

"Stark." Loki cataloged the traces of dried and fresh blood with attentive eyes. "It seems you've found yourself in quite a bit of a mess."

Tony shrugged, the motion imperceptible in the disabled suit of armor, though the lack of pain was a perplexing but promising sign. "You know me, go big or go home."

*  

"That's quite an impressive bit of chaos you've started." A round of applause.  
An assessment. "I could say the same of the architect who constructed its frame."

"Tsk, tsk." A playful correction. "The Engineer."

"Well met."

"Likewise." A whistle. "Got a name for yourself there, mischief-maker?"

"The Trickster."

*  

Tony should feel more fear, more panic, more confusion, just plain more in Loki's presence but all he felt was a sort of numbed calm. Maybe he was in shock, physical or emotional or possibly both. The strange sensation of being pulled off-center whenever he tried to focus on Loki didn't help either.

Loki paced the perimeter, fingers tracing patterns in the air and illuminating the occasional stray snowflake. "Why did you not blast the Captain with your technology?"

Tony leveled a glare but found it skewing annoyingly to the left of where Loki was standing. "Why can't I just \textit{look} at you?"
"A perception filter." Loki said matter-of-factly, offering no further details or explanations. "I answered your question, now respond to mine."

*

"You know, we should stop meeting like this."

"Have you lost your taste for pandemonium?"

"Never!" A mocking gasp. "Just worried that people will start to get ideas."

A smirk. "Let them."

*

Tony chewed his bottom lip, tasting copper from where it was split. "The world needs the Avengers and the Avengers needs Captain America."

"This world has no need for those buffoons." Loki's entire body shook with barely restrained anger. "Do you not see? They may mourn the loss of Steve Rogers but they will suffer the loss of Tony Stark."

Tony was suddenly glad to not be in direct line of sight of a fury with that level of intensity, even if it was on his behalf.

"And suffer it will." Loki pronounced darkly, sending a blast of energy at the shield and charring its surface before casting it into the blizzard outside with a forceful throw. "This pathetic world will suffer for the deaths they have inflicted upon your body and the betrayals on your heart."

*

"You seem. Hm." A contemplation. "Different."

"Must be the new body." A slow pivot. "Well, a newer version of the same model."

A realization. "Regeneration."

"Mm-hm."

"I was unaware that your kind could retain your previous form."

"They cannot. It's just little special old me."

A snort. "A few centuries hardly qualify you as old."

"It does when you've lived as many lives as I have."

"...how many?" A concerned frown.

"Four." A feigned nonchalance. "To be fair, the first three happened because I was bored."

"You do realize that 'bored to death' is an expression and not a suggestion?"

A surprised laugh. "You know, you're pretty hilarious when you're fretting over me."

A hard pinch.
"I do not fret." A dignified sniff. "Merely securing the source of my future entertainment."

"Possessive and planning ahead? Be still my hearts!" A lascivious wink. A hint of sincerity.
A poorly hidden blush.

* 

"Whoa, what? What deaths?" Tony shouted in alarm, though a part of him settled at the confirmation that something hadn't been right for a while, a long while if he were honest with himself. "And what the hell is a perception filter? Because I'd really like to see your face when you say random crap like that."

Loki withdrew a pocket watch from seemingly nowhere and tossed it at Tony's dented chest plate. It landed in the concavity left by the broken arc reactor. "There."

Tony glanced down awkwardly, his reclined position unsuitable for a closer examination. It was an ordinary thing of dulled gold, dimly shimmering with strands of red and faintly glowing with green along its rim. It resembled both a gaudy Christmas ornament and an antique work of art, neither of which held any interest for him. Tony rolled his eyes toward Loki and was pleasantly surprised to be able to concentrate on the god's impassive face. "Well. Okay. Now that's fixed. What deaths, Rock of Ages?"

* 

"You've depleted half of your regenerations, you infuriating imbecile!" A stifled scream.

A scowl. "Gee, nice to see you too." A harsh huff. "I didn't come to fight, if I wanted that I'd have stayed on the battlefield."

A shaky sigh. "Quarrel was not my intent either, I apologize. I simply find myself unwilling to entertain the thought of your brilliant fire extinguished in this Last Time War of your people."

"Latest, more like." A sneer. "How can anything be considered the last while simultaneously also be never was, has been, and will come?" A pause. "Wait, did I hear an apology and a compliment?"

"I concede your point. War is eternal, that is the one constant throughout time." A mischievous grin. "I will not dignify your other statement with a response."

"Aw, c'mon!" A playful whine. "I thought you liked me."

"A bit too much." An unintentionally voiced murmur. A paled face. "I."

"That's good, because I like you." A step forward. A hand outstretched.

"Oh. That is...pleasing."

"It's about to get a lot more pleasing."

An upward tilt of chin.

A downward bend of neck.
A kiss meeting in the middle.

*Loki snapped his fingers and the Iron Man armor vanished, leaving the pocket watch resting innocently in the same spot on Tony's chest.

"I better get my suit back." Tony grumbled half-heartedly, gingerly sitting up and shivering in the wintry climate. The pocket watch slid to the ground behind him. "Answer my question!"

"During the forty-six years of your Midgardian life, you have suffered five betrayals." Loki raised one delicate hand and counted with elegantly long fingers. "Caretaker, friend, family, government, and hero."

The tremors rolling violently over his body now had nothing to do with the below freezing temperature. Names fell from his lips like a still bleeding wound. "Penelope, Tiberius, Stane, World Security Council, and Rogers."

*I hate this war. Destruction for destruction's sake is just-" A frustrated huff. "Destruction!"

"Your redundancy is endearing." A smirk. "Though I do agree with your general sentiment. It sounds unimaginative."

"I know!"

"Then why continue?"

"I'm bound to Gallifrey, until the end of my lives." A sigh. "Which is approaching depressingly fast."

"That it is." A brush of skin against skin. A comfort. "What are the terms of your obligation?"

"Um, pretty straight forward. I serve Gallifrey until my regenerations run out."

A contemplative hum. "Then you'll be free?"

"Then I'll be dead." A crooked grin. "I suppose there is freedom in death."

*"Yes." Loki nodded though no confirmation was needed nor asked. "What you did not know was that each of these betrayals resulted in your death, and that each time, my magic has revived you."

Tony rubbed a tired hand over his face, the friction bringing some warmth. "This is either the best or worst hallucination I've had."

Loki looked vaguely offended though mostly amused. "I assure you, I am very real."

"That's exactly what a hallucination would say."

"You're impossible." The fondness in Loki's voice should have been jarring, but it wasn't.

*
"I may have a solution to your freedom and death dilemma."

"Oh?"

"Are you familiar with The Chameleon Arch?"

"You want to turn me human?" A skeptical glance.

"Midgardian."

"Whatever." A wave of hand.

"Our goal is give the illusion of your regenerations without actually triggering them." An excited glint. "If we were to infuse a watch which will contain your essence with my magic, then spell it to activate upon your death while posing as a Midgardian-"

"It would be considered a regeneration even though I'm not."

"Precisely. It is near impossible to halt your regenerative instinct when you are a Time Lord."

"But not as a human." An inspired gasp. "You're hacking the system with magic!"

*

"Tell me something I don't know." Tony snorted. "Alright, I'll bite. What's next?"

"For you to open this." Loki bent over, picking up the pocket watch and placing it in Tony's hand. "And remember."

Tony squinted at it. The pocket watch looked broken, but he supposed he could fix that. He did like to tinker with antiquated technology from time to time. The weight felt comfortable in his hand, as though a part of him he hadn't known was missing returned. "What happens when I open it?" He arched an eyebrow. "What will I remember?"

*

"You look terrible."

"Communing with my magic can be draining. I will be well after some rest." A stifled yawn.

"Then get to it." A tug at a sleeve. "I'll even tuck you in."

"And I look forward to that." A firm press of lips against lips. "But I must first inform you of the terms."

"Terms. Of bedding you?"

"You're incorrigible."

"Why thank you." A preening grin.

A serious look.

"Okay, okay. What are the terms?"

"The laws of nature demand balance for bending them so. Low odds grant high prizes. Greater risks yield greater rewards."
"I'm listening."

*

"Yourself." Loki's answer was blunt yet ambiguous, it rang full of honesty but hollow of details. "How charmingly vague of you." Tony studied the circular patterns engraved on the casing with muted interest. "How can I trust anything you just said?"

Loki shrugged, loose and graceful. "You can't. Take a leap of faith that greater risks yield greater rewards."

*

"We must mimic the effects of five regenerations within one Midgardian lifespan."

"Okay, a time limit." A nod. "Makes sense, I don't really recommend repeated use of the Chameleon watch anyway."

A concerned tilt of head.

"Let's just say it literally rewrites my cellular biology." A wince.

"I see." A furrow of brows.

"Hey, none of that." A gentle kiss. "What else?"

"The deaths cannot be by either your or my hands."

"Okay, no tampering."

"Nor by those who are strangers or mere acquaintances. Nor by those who are your enemies."

"Eliminating random chance and high probability options." A widening of eyes. An understanding. "But that leaves only-"

"Those that you would call friends and family." A pained sound. "Those that you trust."

"So, betrayals then."

"Unfortunately, yes."

*

A hint of recognition flickered in Tony's mind, the thrill of a gamble flaring to life along with the burning thirst for the unknown. A fire roaring within, searing away all doubts for one gloriously bright moment of reckless abandon.

"I do love a mystery." Tony's gaze was fixed upon Loki, completely riveted at the novelty of finally being able to stare at the god. "And you're a puzzle wrapped in an enigma hidden inside a bag of cats."

"Bag of cats?"

"Never mind." Tony shrugged and rested his finger lightly on the release latch. "Here goes nothing."
"Here goes everything." Loki whispered.

*

A click. A hum. A machine coming to life.

A pair of suddenly anxious green eyes. "If this failed—"

"It won't."

"How can you be so certain?"

"Faith." A soft kiss. "I'm a follower of science but if I had to choose one thing, just one, to put my faith in. It would be you."

"I, I am humbled." A clearing of throat. "I've spelled the watch to find you as soon as the magic for the fifth revival is consumed. It will be kept on my person at all times, so it will take me to you as well."

"I like the thought of you keeping me." A deeper kiss. "See you soon."

"Not soon enough."

An inhale. "Here goes nothing." A watch sliding into place.

"Here goes everything." A loving correction. A prayer. A pull of the lever.

*

The pocket watch opened with a simple press that belied the gravity of the situation.

Splendid brilliance spilled outward, cascading smoothly over his hand like fine sand and flowing weightlessly into the air. The glow warmed his chilled skin and gilded the brown of his eyes. It caked on his skin and gathered in his hair until his entire being was dusted gold.

Tony Stark died for the first and last time as the Trickster breathed life back into the Engineer with a kiss.

End Notes

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