April Fools' Day

by i_am_a_mole_and_i_live_in_a_hole

Summary

Tony puts Nair in Loki's conditioner. Then he finds out that the god of mischief does not do pranks halfway.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

- Inspired by Bostock by hannahrhen

Tony woke up from a marathon round of filthy, filthy sex that day (preceded by a round of trying to convince Loki to use magic to ascertain the recipe of Tony’s favorite cookies) to find that Loki had disappeared during the night.

Oh, well—that wasn’t exactly unusual. Loki did what Loki wanted, and Tony had been woken up in the middle of the night before to find him perched on tables trying to sweet talk floating globs of what appeared to be half-sentient jelly moulds back into their glass containers, so he’d learned not to ask.

He’d completely forgotten about having swapped out half the bottle of Loki’s (probably expensive) conditioner for Nair in retaliation for a particularly snarky comment the other day until he found the note taped to his coffee maker:

Stark,
You should have told me that you have some talent in magic after all! Today I found that my conditioner had mysteriously developed the ability to transform itself into something else—no doubt something better than it was before given your usual engineering talents, I’m sure.

It would be terrible of me to withhold something so wondrous from the world, so I’ve given it to your Ms. Potts to product-test. I’m sure she’ll be in touch soon to discuss the expansion of Stark Industries production into hair care.

-L.

P.S.—I took the liberty of delivering it under your name, of course. It would be remiss of me to take credit for your achievements, after all.

Oh, shit.

“JARVIS, call Pepper.”

“Already done, sir. She isn’t picking up. However, she does appear to be down in your workshop as of right now. I believe she has something for you.”

…Something? That sounded a little terrifying. Something like a pair of gardening shears aimed at his neck, maybe? If it was Pepper. IF it actually WAS Pepper, he thought, as he marched towards the elevator that would take him to the workshop. This was Loki he was dealing with, after all.

Good grief, if Loki had left something that would explode and cover him and his entire workshop in a fine layer of sludge and give him four extra tongues for the next month or something on top of this, he didn’t care how much it would make him suffer, he was going to go full Lysistrata. He wouldn’t let Loki anywhere near his pants for at least the next month.

In fact, they weren’t actually dating, were they? Maybe it was high time for him to renew his acquaintance with orgies on yachts. He hadn’t had a fivesome in practically a year—well, unless you were counting those times where Loki had cloned himself and gangbanged him, in which case he’d definitely gotten up to more than a fivesome, or that time he’d convinced Loki to try fucking, and getting fucked by, his own clones, and good grief was it hotter than it should be to watch Loki being reamed into a wailing, shaking orgasm by a dark-eyed version of himself—and damn it WAS nice to be fucking an endlessly creative and powerful sorcerer, but he was pissed off at the moment, so he was perfectly happy to decide that those times didn’t count.

…

…Well, mostly happy. He could go a month without fucking Loki or letting Loki fuck him. Definitely.

…

Definitely twenty days, at least.

…

…Okay, well, maybe he wouldn’t let Loki anywhere near his pants for a week, that was definitely manageable.
...That asshole. Tony was going to *kill* him. Murder him. Shave off all his hair while he slept. Swap his helmet for a genuine bison skull with a motion detector implanted that would make the skull moo loudly every time someone passed in front of its eye sockets and refuse to give the actual helmet back until Loki managed to get three entire families of eight all the way through Oregon Trail without a single member dying, three times in a row, without cheating.

Tony was so busy plotting his terrible vengeance that he when he got there, he nearly failed to notice the unsubtle abnormality in the hall leading to the elevator. Then he stopped dead in his tracks.

*There was no elevator.* Where there had once been metal doors, there was now only a blank expanse of whitewashed wall, with the exception of a single, taunting (and *lit!*†) lamp mounted precisely in the center where his elevator doors would normally open, a one-page note taped just below it.

*That little shit.*

Tony immediately strode over and snatched down the note, mentally revising his Oregon Trail revenge plot to include also beating Battletoads for the NES. Without checkpoints. That was pretty brutal and probably violated the Geneva Conventions in some way, but he didn’t care. Mentally cursing Loki (having no idea if the god could hear him—*could* Loki hear it when people prayed to him? If so, would cursing count under the same rules?), he held the paper up under the light. It read:

\[
\textit{Stark,}
\]

\[
\textit{Before you get too upset, I would like to let you know that out of consideration for your mortal frailty and your downright pristine lack of talent when it comes to magic, I have used absolutely none in anything I have done today.}
\]

\[
\textit{Enjoy!}
\]

\[-L.\]

\[
\text{“JARVIS, is he saying that the elevator actually is still there, just walled off?”}
\]

\[
\text{“It would appear so, sir.”}
\]

Oh. Well, then. That was… extraordinarily nice, for Loki. Almost *charitable.* Maybe he’d start *actually donating to charity* next. He could almost picture Loki, tall, pale, and imposing, looming evilly over some poor administrator and presenting them with an oversized check written in glowing green letters, the faint howls of the damned rising in the background.

Tony felt himself calming down (somewhat). *This,* he could do. Actually, he’d done it plenty often *before* back in college, where he had been responsible for flipping the president’s office upside-down—every piece of furniture attached to the ceiling, every item normally set on top of his desk meticulously glued down in a perfect imitation of its normal appearance. Except, of course, for being upside-down and hanging from the ceiling.
He smirked at the memory. The president himself had loved it, but the unpopular dean who had made a name for himself berating students for parking in his parking space had been apoplectic.

If Loki had been nice enough to simply do a hasty wall installation over his elevator... well. He could have done significantly worse.

Had he done significantly worse?

"JARVIS. Is the elevator still working?"

"I... cannot seem to detect anything wrong with any of the machinery, sir."

"There's a 'but', isn't there. There's always a but. What's the but?"

"There appears to be something new installed. It seems to be disrupting the circuits that allow the elevator to move, sir."

Well, of course Loki wouldn't make it that easy. "And?"

"The new installation appears to consist of a computer monitor and keyboard wired into the elevator's control system, sir."

Interesting. "Aren't you supposed to prevent people from doing stuff like this?"

"Sir, you did order me to re-classify 'Loki Odinson' as 'friendly' in all protocols and permit him access to this level of the tower quite some time ago, which includes the elevator."

"Well, don't let me do it again."

"I wouldn't dream of it, sir."

"You're not supposed to lie to me. Is this because of Loki? He's a bad influence. Don't listen to him."

"Of course not, sir."

*

"JARVIS, did he take the toolbox I normally keep under the sink, too?"

"It appears to have been moved to your workshop, sir."

"God damn it."

*

"And all my standing lamps? Really?"

"It would appear so, sir."

"Jesus."

*

"Why is all my furniture nailed to the floor?"
“Well, sir—”

“That was a rhetorical question. Don’t answer that.”

“My trash can, too. My fucking trash can.”

“He would blockade the emergency stairs, too. That’s such a safety hazard. I bet he’s planning to burn me alive in here. That would be his plan, fuck me and burn me alive and then actually take over the world this time like the asshole that he is.”

“My toaster. He glued down my toaster. Loki, Loki, god almighty, if you’re listening to this, I really, really hate you.”

Eventually, Tony began smashing through the wall wielding a waffle iron. It worked surprisingly well, and was oddly relaxing. He decided to rename the waffle iron The Mighty Wafflenir out of gratitude..

The elevator doors parted easily enough for him after he knocked out enough of a hole to expose both them and the call button. Once he was inside, he was greeted, as JARVIS had told him he would be, by a computer terminal and keyboard that had the distinct look of having been hauled out of the back of a storage cabinet somewhere in Stark tower, wired into the panel that held the elevator’s floor controls. Tapping on the keyboard with one plaster-dust covered hand made the screen light up, displaying text:

ようあれあもんが グラウボフペオプロエリテワエトヘ 시간で ヤエヨコトシデ ロン セレド ヨツウォヨウイヒセリ 多スレデ ヨウニヨウ ロト inspectors トレド ガッセス コンピューターデータネットワークを強化する ために レクピュアとレクピュアのコンピューターネットワークを強化する ために トモゾンセレド ヨウニヨウ ワンセレド ヨウニヨウ ロト トレド グラウボフペオプロエリテワエトヘ 時間で ヤエヨコトシデ
A cipher. Just... how very Loki.

Though, come to think of it, Tony couldn’t recall ever having consciously seen Loki use a cipher. It had occurred him to keep an eye on Loki’s habits, early on when it had seemed much more likely that the god would suddenly try to kill him, but he’d developed the impression that Loki wasn’t in the habit of ever writing down anything he wanted to be kept private. Codes weren’t really Tony’s thing either, not exactly, but SHIELD certainly liked them, and he could at least lay claim to having played with them—JARVIS was designed to run an excellent brute force hack, and with all the math he knew, he and Bruce would probably be the most qualified members of the team to find a way to solve a modern encryption through pure analysis.

And Loki had chosen to give him a cipher. That... was interesting.

*  

Tony briefly debated running JARVIS’ cryptographic programs, but ultimately, he decided against it. At this point, it seemed rather unsportsmanlike—and if Loki had restricted himself to not using magic, Tony certainly wasn’t going to let the god outdo him in inventiveness by using tech. So, he went to the kitchen, retrieved a pad of paper and a pencil, and got to work.

He tried to find a single-letter swap first, but nothing worked, so he lay that aside. Then he wrote down all of the consonants that Loki had put in the code:

G, f, pl, w, t, s, r, y, l, rsw, l, v, sl, d, l, f, r, ctl, s, f, c, l, ly, d, d, r, ll, wsw, ll, s, tly, k, ws, t, l, ft, y, s, v, ry, ght, rys, p, t, sl, rsw, v, t, l, r, ft, w, y, st, l, v, t, sl, ndt, st, sts, y, v, n, v, ll, d, p, ft, m, f, pl, t, y, w, t, y, l, xcl, gt, m, lv, s, tt, t, rw, m, v, t, sl, dk, w, llt, l, t, s, g, ph, t, sl, dt, d, dbl, y, d, pl, d, db, w, y, d, pl, dt, w, s, v, g, y, s, y, v, bl, y, d, r, d, d, pl, w, thb, w, y, d, ty, pl, w, thbl, y, w, thg, t, t, s, ll, m, w, y, l, s, r, s, k, wst, ls, ld, dr, d, b, w, d, ty, bl, d, db, w, ty, bl, d, ld, v, y, st, ll, w, d, s, n, y, llt, r, t, sl, dst, g, r, ll, wss, yst, ll, w, w, sbl, y, s, ny, v, bl, y, s, l, v, t, s, d, ly, sw, r

There was definitely a pattern, but try as he might, Tony couldn’t pull out a solution. He twirled the pencil and eyed the symbols.

Definitely from a foreign language. How did the Allspeech work, anyway? Was it like a universal translator, or did it somehow work on some kind of meta-linguistic level? Maybe it was just a language that he didn’t know and the letters were red herrings, but their patterning seemed too non-random for that.

Maybe... maybe it was phonetic. Or maybe it was partially in a foreign language. He could work with that. It could get tedious, but he could work with that.

Tony continued twirling the pencil between his fingers. Loki would have had to at least go to the hardware store to get all of this done (since when had Loki known anything about wall-building, anyway? Or electrical wiring, for that matter?), and since he obviously wasn’t intended to leave Stark Tower, it probably wasn’t cheating if he used the internet just a bit.

He went to the kitchen, pulled up a screen, and started researching “non-Roman alphabets”, comparing the results to Loki’s puzzle. The letters did appear to all be from the same language, and
they weren’t Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, Cyrillic, or Sanskrit. It wasn’t made from Western European special characters or ligatures. It didn’t have the complicated look of the Chinese or Japanese characters he saw. For a moment he thought it might be Korean, but upon closer inspection, they weren’t a match. It wasn’t Bengali or Devanagari or Gujarati or Gurmukhi or Oriya or Tamil or Telugu. It wasn’t Hungarian. It wasn’t the Proto-Bulgarian Runic Alphabet. It wasn’t Japanese Katakana. It wasn’t “Thai Alphabet 5”. It wasn’t the hieroglyphic-looking curvy loopy hooky thing. Or the Carian alphabet. It was—

WAIT—he spied something, at the upper left-hand corner of the page. Was it that? He thought he recognized something, a loop around a central cross…

It was. It was… Hiragana.

There were three Japanese alphabets?

Foreign languages were so not his thing.

But that was fine with him, for now, because directly under the characters, rendered in red, mercifully Roman characters, were sounds.

He started copying down the syllables onto his piece of paper. The process was irritatingly slow—he had to search the sprawling chart every time he wanted to copy something—but it looked like he’d gotten it right, because:

You are among a group of people with assorted eye colors who live on an island. All of you are perfect logicians—if a conclusion can be logically deduced, you and your fellows will do so instantly. No one knows the color of their eyes. Every night, a ferry stops at the island. Any islanders who have figured out the color of their own eyes then leave the island; the rest must stay. Everyone can see everyone else at all times and keeps a count of the number of people they see with each eye color, excluding themselves, but they cannot otherwise communicate. Everyone on the island knows all the rules in this paragraph.

On this island there are 100 blue-eyed people, 100 brown-eyed people, and the Guru, who happens to have green eyes. So any given blue eyed person can see 100 people with brown eyes and 99 people with blue eyes (and one with green, but that does not tell him his own eye color; as far as he knows the totals could be 101 brown and 99 blue. Or 100 brown, 99 blue, and he could have red eyes.

The Guru is allowed to speak once on one day in all their time on the island. Standing before her fellows, she says the following:
“|I can see someone who has blue eyes.”
Tony read it twice, and started to grin to himself. Oh—this was great. This was perfect. He so knew the answer to this one. Riddles were much more of a Loki thing than a Tony thing, especially when Loki was feeling his witchiest, and Loki could be very Rumpelstiltskinian about the deals he made, asking questions that were impossible to answer without cheating, but he so definitely knew this one.

He put down the pad of paper and pencil, walked back to the elevator, to the ancient computer system, and typed “Yes” into the terminal.

As soon as he hit “enter”, the elevator’s chime sounded, the light for the workshop floor lit up, and it began to move.

As the elevator went down, Tony wondered if there would be more puzzles waiting for him at the end. Since Loki thus far appeared to have adhered to his self-imposed ‘no magic’ rule… a laser maze with the deactivating button hidden somewhere on the far side of the workshop? Something hidden that would require impromptu engineering to reach?

He kind of hoped so. He was kind of having fun. Maybe he should encourage Loki to wall off his elevator and glue down his toaster more often.

When the elevator’s doors opened, however, he caught no sign of anything out of the ordinary in his workshop. Everything was, as far as he could see, exactly where he left it. There was also no sign of anyone else there.

“JARVIS, when did Pepper leave?”

“It appears that she did so about twenty minutes ago, sir. She seems to have left you a note on your workshop bench.”

That… was that bad?

Tony made sure to step carefully as he entered the room, just in case there was something spread on the floor or hanging from the ceiling ready to be dropped onto his head, but nothing stirred.

“Loki, if you’re actually there waiting to suddenly become visible to scare me or something, I’ll have you know that I might actually kill you.”

There was no response.

He walked over to the bench, almost tiptoeing. There were two notes lying on it, not one, both weighed down by the same wrench. On one, he recognized Loki’s handwriting; on the other, Pepper’s.

He picked up Loki’s note first.

Stark,
I’ll be back this evening. Those desserts of yours are in a box on top of the refrigerator.

-L.

Desserts? What desserts? Tony didn’t remember—

Except, wait. He did. The recipe he’d been haranguing Loki about yesterday.

That was... possibly the most disgustingly sweet thing anyone had ever done for him, much less everyone’s favorite super-maybe-not-so-villain. Or, more accurately, it was the most disgustingly sweet thing anyone had ever done for him because Loki had done it for him. Loki, the Prince of Asgard who made a habit of laying hundred-year curses on people who disrespected him. Maybe in a few days news was going to get out that Loki had... burned down South America or something and make the reason for this niceness obvious in retrospect, but Tony... Tony didn’t quite think so.

He stood there for a moment, probably with a very stupid mushy grin on his face, before picking up the other note.

Tony,

Don’t worry, your stunt with the conditioner has been completely forgiven since your boyfriend Loki was nice enough to help me get all the paperwork you’ve been slacking off on taken care of. Your friends and I are all waiting for you at that Indian place you’ve been going on about wanting to try. We’ll wait until you get here.

-Pepper

P.S. Loki also said he’d take care of whatever mess was made in the floor he walled off, so don’t be late trying to program Dummy to do it.

P.P.S. Loki was a great deal of help in planning for this. I didn’t really do anything—just told SHIELD that the directions wouldn’t lead them straight into a snake pit as far as I was aware. You should twist his arm next time to get him to actually come. I realize it’s going to be awkward, but this is going to get out at some point, and having him actually be seen around them will help with all the public relations work I’m going to have to do afterward.

Right. Tony snorted, putting the call in on the intercom for Happy to bring the car around. As if Loki would ever be caught dead around the Avengers in public.

Then again—it wasn’t as if Loki would ever be caught dead giving cookies to Iron Man, either. Maybe the god had missed one too many annual check-ups.

Or maybe he actually…

That was a really dangerous line of thought. But just then, Tony felt like maybe he could push his luck. He’d practically made two careers out of pushing his luck and living to tell the tale, after all. The number of times he’d taken enormous risks and failed to die should say something.
Okay, there was always that piece of metal in his chest to remind him, with all its attendant nightmares, of how close he had come. There was always that. But… well, somehow the nightmares just didn’t affect him as much when it was the warm, soap-smelling weight of everyone’s favorite supervillain he woke up to, instead of cold sheets and the lonely red glow of a digital clock.

And it was obvious that Loki was sticking his own neck out too, at least a little bit. Tony had seen the look on his face when Tony had nearly been killed during that fight the Avengers had gotten into with Dr. Doom—and had certainly been around for the sudden influx of Loki-originated deliveries of magical suit upgrades afterward. And he’d noticed that Loki almost never verbalized any kind of regard for Tony at all more sentimental than “At least you can suck cock passably, Stark.” That had to be a good sign when it came to Loki.

So—maybe. Maybe they could do something. Maybe he could get Loki to come to dinner with him wearing his own face, at least. Loki seemed like the persnickety type that would appreciate French food, and there was this one place that Pepper considered top quality down in Manhattan. Maybe Tony could take him there. And maybe they could do more. Maybe they could be—

Something.

End Notes

The riddle Loki uses is called the "Blue Eyes" riddle. The text I used for it was lifted almost directly from XKCD here: https://xkcd.com/blue_eyes.html I made a couple of minor changes to have Loki address Tony directly, but the bulk of it remains intact. (And yes, I know Tony doesn't have blue eyes!) XKCD has an explanation of how to solve the problem, but I personally think this one is a bit easier to understand: http://math.stackexchange.com/questions/489308/blue-eyes-a-logic-puzzle

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