From The Heart

by kuro

Summary

Tony Stark doesn't do Christmas. That's for people who have a heart.

Tony Stark might be very good at lying to himself.

If there is one thing that everybody knows, it's that Tony Stark doesn't do emotions.

He does parties and drinks and seduction, but he doesn't do emotions.

Sentimentality is for people that have nothing better to do. Tony Stark is the future, he has no time for the past.

He won't appear for family dinners. He forgets birthdays. And he sure as hell doesn't celebrate Christmas.

That is for people who have hearts.

“Sir, you-”

“OUCH!”

“Oh well, it seems I am too late,” JARVIS sighs, capitulation evident in his voice. “May I advise you to take a break?”

“JARVIS, you know just as well as me that this project needs to be finished, pronto,” Tony grumbles, prodding at the burn he has just acquired and blowing on it when it, as expected, hurts.
“Cold water usually helps with burns, sir,” JARVIS reminds him. Tony can almost hear the eye-roll in his voice.

“You've gotten way too sassy for your own good,” Tony grouses, but he follows JARVIS' suggestion and walks over to the sink, letting icy cold water run over the burn.

“I only do as I am taught,” JARVIS remarks primly.

“Way too sassy,” Tony mumbles to himself. He turns his hand under the water and stares at the burn. The idle playboy act has brought him fame and notoriety, but his hands definitely speak a different language. No matter how many creams he uses and how many visits to the manicurist he books, he can't get rid of the traces of hard work. They're not hands that are desirable for a man like him. They are hands that build the future, but no one likes to be reminded that the future is built on blood, sweat, and tears.

“Sir, it seems the items you ordered have arrived,” JARVIS announces. It takes Tony one moment to remember because honestly, he orders a lot of things every day. But then, a smile spreads over his face. Oh. These items. Time to get down to work.

He strips out of his workshop gear and heads towards the elevator, promptly ignoring JARVIS' snarky remark of “Sir, I thought you needed to finish your project as soon as possible.”

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Clint stumbles into the hallway, bleary-eyed, and for one moment, he's pretty sure there was another villain attack on the tower and he kind of missed it. Hallway, living room, hell, even the kitchen is decorated to resemble a tasteful winter wonderland, complete with fake snow, beautifully decorated trees and frosted baubles everywhere. It's beautiful and frightening at the same time.

“What the fuck?” he asks as he bursts into the kitchen. “What happened to the Tower?”

Steve stops stuffing his face with a whole mountain of pancakes for all of one second and shrugs. “It's pretty, though.”

“And hopefully not dangerous,” Clint says, looking over at Thor. “This isn't your brother playing a practical joke on us, is it?”

“No, my friend,” Thor serenely replies. He seems distracted by the glittery snow and the softly gleaming lights, smiling happily. “While my brother can control ice and snow, he prefers a more destructive kind. And there is far too little green for his taste.”

“JARVIS, who did this?” Natasha asks. She tries to look unimpressed, but even she can't help but take one of the cute figurines that are placed in the middle of the table into her hand, studying it curiously. It glitters as she turns it.

“I do wonder, milady,” JARVIS mysteriously answers.

Natasha scoffs, carefully putting the figurine back on the table. She takes a sip of the orange juice she blatantly stole from Clint, kicking him when he tries to wrestle it away from her. “Well, it's clear then. There is only one person in this house that can ban JARVIS from giving a clear answer, and that is our resident playboy genius.”

“Tony?” Clint laughs, crumpled to the floor (where Natasha cruelly left him). “No way, that guy
has no taste. Have you seen that flashy armour of his?”

“Says the person wearing Iron Man boxer shorts,” Natasha shoots back, blatantly staring at Clint's lower half.

“Whoops?” Clint tries, weakly. Bruce snorts into his morning tea.

Bruce and Tony are peacefully working alongside each other, absorbed in their own little world. At some point, though, Bruce stretches idly and takes a break, watching Tony poke at some kind of mysterious apparatus for a moment.

“Nice Christmas decoration on the upper floors, don't you think?” he asks conversationally.

Tony shrugs, still halfway absorbed into poking at the circuits of whatever dangerous contraption he's currently building. “I guess. If you're into that kind of thing, anyway.”

Bruce rolls his eyes. He hasn't actually expected anything less, but Tony can be so utterly stubborn sometimes. They are completely confident by now that it must have been Tony who put up the decorations. The lighting is nothing that you can simply buy in the next hardware store, that was a custom job. By someone who really knew what they were doing.

It's also rather conspicuous that the only one who has been notably absent from the upper floors ever since the decorations have been installed is Tony.

“Sorry for asking you about useless things, then,” Bruce grumbles. “I'll leave you to...whatever you're building there.”

He gets up and leaves, not sure if Tony even realises that he's gone. He's completely in the zone.

Bruce finds Thor sitting in the living room with an overly large tea pot and mug next to him. He's still staring at the decorations, seemingly content to do nothing but take in the view.


“It is a 'Christmas blend,' as they say,” Thor says, inviting Bruce to sit next to him with a smile. “Midgard has some truly marvellous beverages, I am enjoying them very much. Would you like to have some?” Without waiting for an answer, he procures another mug from seemingly nowhere, fills it, and hands it over to Bruce.

Bruce's eyebrows rise as he takes a sip, because yeah, this blend tastes like Christmas in liquid form. Thor has excellent taste.

“It is very calming, is it not,” Thor says, more to himself than to Bruce. At first, Bruce thinks he means the tea, but then he realises that Thor is still staring at the decorations. “It reminds me of the Asgard of my childhood. Those were...happier times.”

Bruce takes another sip of the tea and kind of wishes he had memories of happier times.

He smiles when he realises that he does, now.
When Tony wakes up on Christmas morning, it's to a whole lot of noise. He imagines the Avengers have found their presents by now, so his mission is over. He can keep lying in bed for the rest of the day.

He definitely, definitely is not reluctant to get up because he doesn't want to face them on Christmas, of all things. Tony Stark doesn't do emotions. Tony Stark does not expect presents, and he sure as hell doesn't want to spend Christmas time with his family of choice.

That is for people with a heart.

And Tony Stark doesn't have one.

Everyone knows that.

“Sir, I believe Captain Rogers is requesting your presence,” JARVIS informs him.

Tony groans into his pillow. Of course Steve would. But Tony really doesn't want to leave the safety of his bed. He was able to enjoy it far too rarely lately, anyway. “How are the chances that if I just keep lying here, he leaves me alone?”

“Not good, I'd say, sir,” JARVIS replies with a hint of satisfaction in his voice. Bastard. “Mr. Barton and Mrs. Romanov are already fighting over who gets to drag you out of your room if you refuse.”

Well. He's not sure what would be worse, Clint or Natasha dragging him out of bed.

That would probably a good reason to make at least a short appearance.

He clings to his pillow a few minutes longer.

“Merry Christmas!” Rhodey exclaims and wraps Tony into an enormous bear hug as soon as he sets foot into the living room.

“Ouch,” Tony complains. “Merry Christmas to you too. Why are you even here, I don't remember inviting any of you. I was looking forward to an actual party.”

“You say that, sugar mouse,” Rhodey says with a huge grin, “but for some reason, there are presents and food waiting for us every year. Way to keep us away.”

Tony is ready to reply with something rude and snarky, but then the others come over, each of them wishing him a Merry Christmas and giving him a hug. His team (plus appendage) is here, Rhodey is here, Pepper is here, even Happy is here. Dum-e, wearing a large Santa hat, rushes around the central Christmas tree, beeping excitedly. Tony wonders how they got him out of the workshop. He certainly did not allow that.

Someone hands Tony a cup of hot tea and cookies, and he gets a little caught up in the noise, the smiles, the music, the snacks. Everyone is in a really good mood, and Tony finds himself desperately wishing that they won't get interrupted by some kind of stupid, world-ending incident. He realises with sudden clarity that he's having fun. And he doesn't want it to end.

“Can we open the presents before we eat?” Clint whines after a while, turning his puppy eyes on them all. “I might not survive the tension otherwise.”
Natasha rolls her eyes, but she picks up a small present and throws it at Clint. “There you go. With all my love.” Her smile is positively murderous, but Clint doesn't seem to mind. He tears into the wrapping without hesitation and beams when he pulls out a custom-made Black Widow pyjama.

“Badass level +20,” he shouts.

That's the signal for the rest of them to start unpacking their presents, and Tony, sitting on the couch and nibbling on a cookie, notes with satisfaction that all of his presents seem to really find favour with their recipients. He's really a genius.

All in all, it's everything you could wish for.

“Tony, don't you want to open your own presents?” Steve asks him, startling him out of his thoughts.

“My presents?” Tony asks dumbly, because his brain kind of refuses to compute Steve's question. His presents have already been unpacked by everyone?

Steve sighs, a kind of weariness in the sound, and Tony thinks, *Yeah, sooner or later, they all sound like that.*

A small parcel is dropped into his lap. Tony looks up, and Steve is smiling down at him, a little embarrassed. “Sorry, it's nothing big.”

Tony simply gapes, not knowing what to reply to that. A present? *For* him?

“It's amazing that someone as bright as you forgets that presents work in a reciprocal manner,” Pepper notes, giving Tony another present and a kiss on his cheek.

In a matter of seconds, he is buried in at least fifteen presents, and he can't help but sit there, staring at the presents and thinking this must be some kind of elaborate joke.

“Come on, open them,” Clint urges. Apparently his curiosity is not only limited to his own presents, but includes everything that's wrapped up. He's positively wiggling with excitement.

So Tony numbly starts to unpack the presents, and one after another, lots of different things emerge. Everything, from the custom-design work gloves (*from JARVIS, of all things*) to the photo album are things that are self-made or can't be easily purchased. It's almost as if they wanted to get Tony Stark, the man who has everything, things he can't simply purchase with money.

Thor raises the Polaroid camera he received from Natasha. “I see there is still some space left in this album. We should take some souvenir photos of this magnificent feast.”

When they fall into bed after a full day of eating, playing games, eating (again) and trying out their new presents, a whole lot of polaroids with silly captions have been added to the album.

One of the pages features a photo of Tony beaming at the presents he is nearly buried in. His face has been captured in a perfect angle that clearly shows that he has tears in his eyes.

The caption, in Pepper's writing, reads:

*Proof that Tony Stark has a heart.*
This time, the sentence has been underlined with two fat strokes.

On the last page of the album is a photo that shows Tony, now dozing on the couch, cuddled together with Rhodey, Steve, Nat and Darcy, while Sam is standing in the background together with Dummy, laughing about something.

The caption reads:

Avengers family.

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