

Chapter 1 – Being a Granddad Is Most Youthful

“-September 23, 1980 .-“

Going from roaring at orange to hearing my newborn son – *grandson* – screaming outside my sight set off my acute stress response to *fight-or-flight-or-freeze*.

I froze down to my bones, to my marrow, to my brain and then further, catecholamines flooded my brain to slow down my perception of time but my reaction went deeper than even that. In an instant I leapt all the way to that state of omnidirectional hyperawareness and equally omnidirectional double vision I only ever underwent in sleep paralysis. Past synapses and neurons to the potentials in my axons and synapses, then deeper still to the electric oscillations in my brain's fine-fibered dendritic webs, and then beyond even that to the wave interference patterns where my memory was being recorded into my soul for permanency. I experienced the memory, then the experience of experiencing the memory being recorded, and the memory of *that* memory, and so on to infinity and beyond.

I could see ahead of me, behind me, to the right, to the left, above, below, I could hear, I knew everything that was happening at a fraction of the speed of life. Meredith next to me beginning to turn towards the room. A nurse mid-way through stepping around the bend. The coffee just beginning to fly from the styrofoam cup of the startled man seated across the aisle. The rustling scrubs of the midwife inside the birthing room as she began to lift my grandson into the light. I could see and hear and *know* everything all around me like in a dream.

The only thing I couldn't do was move my body. Which made sense if my mind was running so far ahead of the rest. The order to move my muscles hadn't even reached the other end of my nerves yet. Alas that there was no bolt of lightning in sight to compare speeds.

But then... my body wasn't the only thing that could move, was it?

My astral form wrenched free with a physical lurch that would take my body... a fair while to finish at this speed, even more if I went even faster, which I tried just to see if I could. The answer was yes.

For an entire subjective hour, which lasted as long as it took the flying coffee to travel a hundredth of a millimetre, I just basked in the sensation of flight. This included me flying all

over the place and scouring the entire hospital and environs for potential threats, but mainly I was basking.

This will be invaluable when I reclaim my throne.

But I was getting ahead of myself.

I re-entered my body to halt my fall and leaned it back against the wall as if I'd not snapped out of my doze.

Then I flew out of it again and through the wall into the birthing room.

I stopped next to the midwife, allowing my time perception to decelerate to normal for a brief time. I watched the woman lift Peter up and wipe him of blood and afterbirth. I listened to him howl in indignation at being tossed out into the eye-searing and drafty world – such strong lungs! I watched her bring him over to the mother. I watched my daughter begin to glow, literally glow in the astral plane, she was so enchanted as she held him for the first time. My arms twitched with longing at the memory of doing that myself, life after life when he was *my* son instead of that *thing's*. The glow though...

That small spot in her spirit already glowed dimmer. More than the vices of mortal life accounted for. I could see it in her skull, the tumor. Indirectly at least, the place shone that little bit *less* than the rest of her, a nail tip's worth of cloying off-colour just barely distinguishable if I looked really, really closely. I floated back before I literally stuck my nose into her head. Astral forms, spirits, they were collisionless to everything *except* each other, I wasn't going to harm my little girl.

I accelerated my personal time perception again while I processed my absolute *loathing* for the aborted devil shitstain that blessed my daughter – and me – with this happiness in as little time as he cursed her with terminal brain cancer.

I need to restore her to her natural state, I thought grimly. But I can't risk using her as the first test subject for whatever powers I may or may not be able to develop.

Mundane means? Terra was too far behind in diagnostic tools for that, and their medicine makers had deliberately lobbied to have the cure for cancer outlawed, whether or not they knew it. Like they did for cures in general, because why heal people when you could make money *eternally* off mere treatments? And don't even get me started on gain of function research.

I could take her to India? Nepal maybe? Ayurveda was still practiced freely there, even outside magic. But I distinctly recall a complete lack of cancer cures despite this, both in and out of the simulation, so they probably don't know it either. Actually, cancer cases in India had been on the rise for decades by the 2020s, weren't they? Dammit, was there no life or timeline where I was a proper medic?

Could I get her a brain scan at least? I scoured the hospital again, to no luck. They didn't have any machines for it. I wasn't surprised. I was a therapist, I'd learned the entire history of brain scanning and other mental health-related diagnostics and prescription options as part of my profession. And the fact of the matter was that it was now 1980.

It was 1980, which meant there was a single MRI in use in the whole world, the one at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. *Actually, the first clinically useful image of a patient's internal tissues was only obtained last month, wasn't it?* And it was for a tumour in the patient's chest, an abnormal liver, and secondary cancer in his bones, not the brain.

X-rays were a *bit* older, the first patient brain-scan using computer tomography was done in 1971, and publically announced in 1972. But production for mass-available CT Scanners only began in 1973. So while the 200FS were now selling as fast as they could be made, the production rate wasn't all *that* fast. There would barely be a dent in the list of institutions that wanted one. There weren't – I flew around to check the other hospitals in the state while Meredith was greeting Peter for the first time – there were none at any of the other hospitals in Missouri either. So it would take days to find a hospital that had one, and a several days-long road trip on top of that – or an expensive plane ride – just to get there. And even that would be *after* sitting at the very bottom of the waiting list, probably for years.

If we even got on it when Meri had no symptoms and the only reason for the request would be 'my daddy's gone all crazy.'

Last time it took six years before diagnosis, I recalled as I returned to the hospital room. That was half a year longer than the point of no return, and the doctors still squeezed every coin out of us they could with chemotherapy. Which would have needed to start a year *before* then to have a chance. For which we needed an earlier diagnosis we would never get.

The nurse was finally walking to the door to let us in, but I gave myself a bit more time to process everything. Being optimistic about my chances to get specialists to listen to me, in this world where I **didn't** have credentials in the healthcare field...

We were looking at four years before confirmation, at minimum.

Fuck, I hate it when emerging technologies are still emerging.

Maybe I should just drop the idea entirely and leave it for when I can get them back to Spartax? Assuming I could find a faster way than ‘wait for the Ravagers to show their ugly faces when it’s already too late.’

“What do you think, Peter?” I rubbed his chubby cheek with my ghostly finger. He twitched his little baby hands. His *spirit* hands. I could see them, it, his celestial side reaching out like a puppet of living filaments. They looked a lot like what *I* had turned my psychic body into, now that I looked closely at it. Is this where I got the inspiration from? “What does my little man think, is Daddy getting ahead of his worries, or just ahead of himself?”

My boy’s celestial... ness. It was... off-center from his everything else, though not precisely in *spatial* terms. And... incomplete? All the power generation parts without the parts to use it, maybe. What I sensed from it wasn’t hunger, it was the opposite actually, an overstuffed satiety that constantly replenished itself. But there was echo of deprivation, one that didn’t know how to translate itself into human experience. Like a phantom limb – no, a phantom *brain* syndrome that didn’t know what phantom limb syndrome even was, because it lacked the aforementioned ‘brain’ to understand such things.

Ugh, words were useless, but I could easily recognize the feeling of *lack* after a lifetime in that fake life where both my memories and my physical body were absent.

Could it be fixed? Could I just... push it until it slots in? There had to be some way, right? Ego had certainly done *something*, since those films about my boy were apparently totally accurate.

Unfortunately, that made me think of everyone and everything *else* that brought my boy to that point.

I can’t let Peter be ruined by those lowlives again. My fingers twitched to wrap themselves around the neck of a certain Centaurian piece of shit. *They gaslit him even worse than Stark was, and then Yondu had the absolute gall to claim fatherly feelings towards him after using and abusing him like a slave for the entire time he had him. The cunt was even more self-deluded than Romanova.*

I’d had more than one case where the parents abused their kid ‘for their own good,’ and not only managed to remain deluded to the end of their lives, but managed to use the deathbed

privilege to mind-fuck their kids into believing it too. Some knew they were fool of shit, some didn't even pretend at all and just liked beating or mindfucking them, and still managed to gaslight even wholly adult sons and daughters into absolving them, sometimes even *thank* them.

Because you don't kick someone when they're down, don't you know, and you certainly don't speak ill of the dead! Let's all toast to the fuckers' completely fictitious kindness and greatness instead, we can't ruin the funeral! When else will the family come together again? Let's even make it a cultural trend in everything from news to entertainment, until nobody at all can recognize abuse and gaslighting anymore. Or they can but *don't*, because we bullied them all into being *cowards*.

After all, why should a lifetime of evil matter if you're a tiny bit sorry about it at the end? And if you're not, just pretend! If you're lucky, someone will show up who's just a bit more monstrous, or even just just a bit less charismatic. Then you'll come out smelling like roses, even though you're a child-kidnapping, abusive, soul-destroying, psychopathic mass murderer slaver trash.

The people of his era are imbeciles.

"Or perhaps the evil ones are just that effective," Yao said as his astral form landed behind me. "The likes of me haven't been around to check their influence."

Because Hydra and whatever other lunatics had been killing them all young, and the mystics had withdrawn from mankind to the point where they only cared about every plane *other* than their home one. "Wanna bet you'll come around to my way of thinking?"

"Betting on such a thing would be rather unsightly."

"Give it time." I turned around. The man looked the same as before, but brighter. "How are you?"

"I am as well as can be. I appreciate that it was an earnest question." He stepped to stand next to me at the bedside. "You should be careful. I am not reading your thoughts, but you broadcast. Even without that, you are inviting risks. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that consistent interaction with you on this plane will induce a change in the child's extra-physical attributes. I will not pretend that I will not lend my aid if he awakens the power cosmic, but I'd rather not have to."

I tried to imagine Star-Toddler with the powers of a celestial. Yeah, no. “Warning received and heeded. I’ll keep it strictly to the prime material.”

“Thank you.”

We both stepped away from the bed and watched the frozen world.

“Sorcerer,” I walked around the frozen midwife and nurse to read the patient chart. “I remember what I *believe* are all my past lives, except the one where we apparently met the first time. What about you?”

“I remember all of mine, including that one. The reality existed briefly, barely half a year from the day of your heir’s abduction. But you underwent significant evolution in all ways. Not nearly to the heights of power as Peter himself, but you became a fair sorcerer, and your particular psychic structure harkens to that as well. In fact, it went much further, you could unspool and reweave it at will, even had many ears and eyes grown on the individual threads, which could be detached and attached to other objects or people, for various purposes. It was a very interesting foundation for further development.”

“Sounds dead useful.” It really did, I was already getting ideas. “How can I remember? Or did Stark lock them out?”

“I see no such bindings or obfuscations. If I were to speculate, I think he assumed I would see to it, or he believed you could do it yourself. You probably could, with sufficient inward meditation.”

“If I don’t have to, I won’t waste my time – specially if the memories have the information and experience that would let me do it properly and quickly. Do they?”

“Quite so.”

“I’ll impose on your goodwill for that then.”

“It is no imposition, my debt to you is still considerable. Do you wish to do it now, or would you rather wait?”

“Now as in here?”

“The Astral State actually makes such workings much easier.”

Sounded really good, didn’t it? A bit too good, but if I couldn’t even trust *this* man, I was objectively paranoid. “Alright, let’s do it.”

Yao invited me to the roof where there was no risk of catching anyone else in the invisible ritual circle. I waited for him to conjure it. It was quite the complex setup of floating perimeter lines, words in languages I still didn't know, and pictograms. I stayed quiet so I didn't invite catastrophic consequences in case of spell misfire, even though I was sure *this* Sorcerer Supreme was too experienced for such things.

Finally, he was done. "Now we need but wait for the ritual to synchronise with you. Please do not experiment with any Soul arts while this occurs."

Guess we can talk a bit more after all. "How did it all happen, anyway? You said that reality lasted just six months before Stark ended it. I'm thorough and I remember what I learn very well, but I don't learn any *faster* than the average Terran. Was the Time Stone involved?" I didn't think so, I could recognize the signs of my own experience with Soul, and even Mind from lifetimes ago – and this one, technically – but not others.

"No." Yao's face turned nostalgic. "Iron Man's Mind Stone usage worked so well because it leveraged what souls do naturally. After death, ascension or whatever else, a soul often awakens on its own plane of the Astral, and many times it doesn't even realize that it is not alive in the flesh. Much time can pass in that state of dream. And after that dreaming state has been internalized, and the soul finally looks outside itself again, it is common for them to pay many visits to its plane of origin, or others. Making and renewing old acquaintances and relationships, or just manifesting the activities quite natural for a human being under such circumstances."

Another thing that sounded familiar. "Like the personal divine planes in Buddhism and Hinduism? When you're the god of your own afterlife for what seems like ages, only to get reincarnated back as the base state you rose from because you used it all up instead of *building* up?"

"Depending on attachments, yes. Alternatively, souls can explore whatever ideals they had during their life. Things for which they had hoped, and dreamed, prayed and longed. The higher on the planar scale, the more advanced the nature of the ideals. But the principle is the same. I call it the 'Idealistic State.'"

"That sounds *really* familiar. A déjà vu almost."

"The Idealistic State is essentially the next incarnation of the soul, except in the Astral plane, not the material. Rather than spending most of the time reacting to the world around it, the soul

instead lives out all of its unrealized personal ideals, hopes, expectations, desires, ambitions, aspirations, longings, and inclinations. This takes place in vivid imagination, or realistic dream-like states, according to its nature.”

“Sound like a delusion.”

“Revelation is frequently dismissed as such,” Yao shrugged. “Delusions are only delusions if they are false. Even then, if they do not harm, they are the most fulfilling and revealing dreams. Dreams are true while they last even here, on the material. On the Astral plane, the experience of the Idealistic State is more vivid and realistic than anything you experience here, where understanding manifests as slow and easily contaminated chemical reactions in the brain. And when you are the only thing available to explore, self-actualisation is fastest.”

“What are you getting at?”

“In that incarnation that Iron Man locked out of your mind, you agreed to me inducing this state for the purposes of learning and self-actualisation. It wasn’t the countless lives of infinite varieties of the real thing, so you didn’t achieve anything close to true Enlightenment. However, it was one *complete* life, which your family all agreed to share in. The aim was actually centered on your heir down there.” Yao gestured at the roof below them.

I looked through the floors into the ward room. Peter didn’t react. He was still frozen in place like the rest of the world at the speed we were operating.

“Iron Man did not tell you this, but you were not his first attempt at delegation of responsibilities, let’s call it. That reality was centred around Star-Lord remembering his past life, much like how you cheated your way into doing this time in spite of the Infinity Gauntlet. Unfortunately, he quickly went down the path towards rather unfortunate subconscious misuse of his celestial abilities, mostly to his own detriment. The life he lived was not conducive to sanity, and it became much less so when it was recalled by an eight-year-old.”

No shit.

“The Idealistic State was primarily induced for him. You certainly didn’t waste the time, however.”

That all sounded *extremely* useful. It also made me long to *finally* have a proper life with my son – grandson – but I was more than willing to do that normally now. “Are you saying you can do that again? For real this time?”

“It was real then also, and yes, though naturally we’ll have to wait for the child to grow some. I’d recommend waiting until then to involve your wife and daughter. Too much time living in a dream can jeopardize one’s ability to recognize reality. Even if it doesn’t, reliving the same years isn’t quite the same blessing the third time, never mind more.”

“I can certainly agree to that.” Time loops can suck. I turned my attention to the hallway where my wife was frozen in the act of shaking me awake. “But what if I, say, happen to go through past life regression first?”

“Then you will remember everything you gained last time, allowing you to reap even further benefits when we do the ritual again this time around.”

“It can’t be that easy.”

Yao gave me a serious look. “The risks lie in the spirit being insufficient – it’s not a matter of power, necessarily, the spirit isn’t a battery, it is a *body*. And because it is a body, it has an equivalent to both mental burnout and general muscle failure. You could bear it easily, after your empowerment. But for anyone else? Past life regression is not something I recommend for just anyone. When lacking the spirit to hold and process all the returning experiences, the brain will have to make up the difference. I’m sure you can guess why this usually goes rather poorly.”

“Traumatic changes to neural connections is a good path to dementia. Paradigm-shifting changes to brain chemistry due to what is technically a hallucination – that’s mania. And Stark mentioned MPD, that can happen here too, can’t it? When the ‘past life’ tries to destroy or subsume this one.”

“And other things. It is why past life regression is generally sought only as a side benefit of other, proper spiritual experiences.”

Alright, it had taken some doing but I’d managed to keep up so far. “That past life, during that bespelled fake life, did I happen to learn how to do the past life regression ritual myself?”

“No, but it will be simple to teach. There are several paradigms that can enable such a spell. Perhaps you will even develop one of your own with your new affinity for Soul Arts.”

Hmm. “Say, in theory. If I could strengthen – or, well, *expand* someone’s soul-“

“*Spirit*. The soul is their identity, their foundational self-concept, it can grow and die purely on its own merits, whether through self-improvement or self-abandonment. It can otherwise

be affected only indirectly. That includes imprisonment and sensory influences, but not injury, in layman terms.”

“But you *do* have ways of your own, you said it yourself.”

Yao looked through the floors and walls, at my wife and then back to me. “... Technically, the process for it exists already in the soul. It is the reason it normally happens in small bursts over a long period of spiritual journeys. Each recollection induces self-actualization, which in turn strengthens the spirit – trauma and fear notwithstanding – which in turn allows for more of the Self to reassert itself without the mind fracturing from the stress. Generally, if the experience is not identical to recovery from amnesia, or at *most* a very vivid dream, it has gone wrong somewhere. But for all these reasons, the journey generally has to be done by the person, you cannot walk it for them.”

“That’s not what I meant.” I gave myself a lightning strike’s worth of time to come up with better words for my very dashing and cunning plan. “Say that, even if I can’t strengthen someone’s spirit *right now*, but I *could* meld with theirs *just* long enough so they can use mine... would that make past life regression safe for them?”

Yao gave me a hard stare. “Attempting to graft a tree will fail if the graft is larger than the tree. Possibly the tree will outright bend and break from the added weight. Or wither, if the graft is particularly ravenous. Past lives aren’t *small*. But if you could entwine yours with theirs for the duration of the self-actualization and bear the burden, it should be possible. Perhaps you can even learn to infuse additional power and accelerate their growth, enabling them to leap forward in development and scope in a short time. The Soul Stone easily did both. Perhaps, having absorbed some of its power, you will be able to do the same.”

I looked down to my wife, who was mid-way through the motion of softly stroking my cheek to wake me up, then back to Yao to give a hard stare back. “So, if I and another... person... were to become sufficiently *entwined*, they could experience themselves through *me*. And then just... receive... the finished product without negative consequences. Because their spirit will have sufficiently grown after the... self-actualisation.”

“Vishanti save me from ravaging koryos.” The Ancient One’s self-control finally lost the fight with exasperation. “Yes, your past life did include learning tantra.”

Well.

Wasn't that absolutely *fascinating*.

“-. .-“

The first thing I did on returning to my body was join my wife in seeing Meri and Peter and congratulating the both of them.

The second thing I did was spend the rest of the visiting hours with them, trying and failing not to monopolise my boy at their expense. Fortunately, though Meri told me in no uncertain terms that *she* was his mother and I would therefore hand *her* boy back right now or else, she thought my clinginess was adorable.

She was completely wrong about that also meaning I was suddenly soft on the wastrel devil that done beguiled her, but baby steps.

The *third* thing I did was leave ahead of my wife to get the van ready, because this was Missouri in the 1980s. Which meant that window tint laws didn't exist yet so I'd have absolute privacy at the wheel.

The moment I was inside, I restored myself to my prime, and with it to the peak human ability characteristic of every space human. On account of us all making it off Earth *before* the assholes turned it into a deathworld of pestilence.

Terrans were up there in the top 0.1% best disease resistant of any species, but it came at the expense of their biology constantly devoting almost all its energy and biomass towards immune responses and cell replacement, instead of cell regeneration and strengthening.

The benefit of this was that it made Terra practically invulnerable to what passed as biological weapons everywhere else in known space. If anything, aliens came *here* to harvest local bacteria and viruses as ready-made strains, as it allowed them to skip millennia of gain of function research. This was the real reason aliens held the planet in contempt, it was almost 90% copium. It was also why Terrans who *did* make it to space were subjected to the most stringent decontamination and quarantine procedures. Or, failing that, had to take refuge wherever they could find it outside the law.

Conversely, infiltrations were doomed from the start when your immune system was complete crap. The Skrulls weren't the first ones to consider shadow war against Terra, they were the *only* ones among the current expansionist jackasses whose immune system wouldn't instantly

fold to the flu, never mind tuberculosis or salmonella. The Kree were an outlier in that they had developed immunity boosters for their operatives, but there were limits, and their preference for brainwashed human double agents had its roots in the same place. As for us Spartoi, well, if we stuck around for too long, we began to lose our strength and longevity as our biology speedran the switch to the Terran survival mode.

Yao had explained it as a consequence of our similar astral bodies and genetics – we were technically the same subspecies, both materially and immaterially. Which meant we didn't register the Terran collective unconscious as foreign, and vice-versa. Theoretically, a Terran on Spartax would go the opposite way to gain peak human ability and live a few additional hundred years.

I was personally more interested in how the Infinity Stones could make the same mistake about us – it was why I wasn't automatically shunted to the Soul Stone when Stark went on his 'only simulate the Earth and none of the aliens' spree.

It was kind of tragic how people on the homeworld were still stuck in this survival mode. In addition to my personal, perfectly justified irritation with the Terran Effect. What *native* bioweapons hadn't been defeated by the human immune system had mutated into less harmful or asymptomatic strains well before the latest iteration of written history. It was why human population and civilization was able to recover at all.

If the collective human species wasn't given an atavistic shock every century when one of the old plagues resurfaced – like when a bunch of pillaging morons decide to bombard a city with the corpses of people who happened to recently explore an isolated environment – everyone would have a body like Captain America. *At least.* Asgardians weren't magically, genetically or technologically enhanced compared to humans, they were what all humans were like in the Golden Age. There was a reason giants and heroes of great might still popped up from time to time as recently as the Viking Age. Even outside the Aesir lineages left over after Asgard withdrew from Earth for good.

That's how it had been with the other cycles of human civilization that preceded the Mycenaean too – the Thurian, the Hyborian, even during the cataclysms that felled them. Humans were bigger and so much mightier then, and some always escaped to other worlds and galaxies during the end of their days. Where technology failed, magic didn't.

Us Spartoi were just the most recent to escape this petri dish, during the Trojan War. Though I liked to think we gave our assholes the worst black eye of all, in the doing. The usurper gods certainly hadn't planned on still being here for the Bronze Age collapse they caused, that's for sure. Zeus' depopulation plan succeeded, but he reaped precisely none of the benefits of the mass sacrifice ritual he'd paired it with.

Good fucking riddance.

Being optimistic, human biology *might* switch back to mighty quasi-immortality in three or four hundred years. Ironically, the growing prominence of cancer was a sign the change was already trying to happen – after all, the main issue with cancer cells is that they're *immortal*. Theoretically, with the world *mostly* explored again, isolated environments were very sparse, so the risk of new outbreaks setting back this progress *again* should be minimal.

But alas, gain of function research.

The silver lining was that the same environmental pressure incentivised the survival of the most clever, which was why Terran humans were by far the smartest humans everywhere in the universe. Not just on average, the peaks on the curve were the highest by far as well. Hell, even their idiots were better than everyone else's.

Unfortunately, due to the side effect of Terran lifespan being reduced to a *tenth* of the original lowest common denominator – a result of the much faster rate at which cells are discarded and replaced – smart people never lived long enough to make good on their full potential. Which was why Terra hadn't caught up technologically to us spacefaring cousins, despite that it very much *should* have. Even with the periodic losses of knowledge due to purging of intellectuals and book burning.

It's not like us space off-shoots don't periodically experience tech regression and book burning due to overpowered or overly charismatic morons. Well, not us Spartoi, but it's probably just a matter of time, all the others definitely did. We all *certainly* don't mentally adapt to new information so easily or quickly as the average nerd on Earth, never mind freaks of nature like Tony Stark or Reed Richards.

Don't even get me started on the idiots who do even dumber shit to themselves – any biologist will tell you that's it's impossible to evolve from a bird to look like a human, but the Shi'Ar somehow live under that mass delusion now. How the hell that happened when they literally

genetically crippled their imagination by removing their ability to *dream*, I have no idea, terrible next door neighbours, would not recommend.

But look! My wife has finally appeared. Just in time for me to regain the red in my hair.

Time to ride home in more ways than one.

“-. .-“

That very night, my wife’s sudden and cumulative trauma from dying the same murder a dozen times over was swept away in the throes of the mythical female orgasm.

And then we finally made it through the front door.

“J-Jason!”

Pressure and rhythm, I thought viciously as I shouldered the door open so hard it literally flew off its hinges. “You’ve – put on – weight – woman!”

“Y – you – b – boor!” She moaned into my mouth as I clutched and thrust in her, clawing at the back of my neck as I breathed her gasps. “Finally – remembered – how to – celebrate?”

“Never – forgot,” I growled as *pressure and rhythm* continued unabated on the way in. “Was – depressed – as – *fuck!*”

“Where’s – your – royal – words!” She moaned, biting my neck, her bite was still as soft as the cheeks I squeezed in my hands, both kinds, Terran women I swear - “Finally – gone – native!”

“Like – *fuck* – I – have!” I grunted as *pressure and rhythm* added the porch, hallway and stairs to the list of ground and derivatives that Meredith hadn’t touched since we left the hospital.

“You – know – why?”

Meredith opened her mouth, only to moan when I hit her good spot.

“Because I still need to fuck you on every surface of this house!”

My wife heaved sharply as I threw her on the bed. “You – ah – f-filthy liar, this is still the same bed!”

“I’m sorry, who is it that always passes out?” I threw off my jacket.

“You despicable rake, after you – and our daughter – we’ve just become grandparents!”

“Exactly!” My belt followed, and my pants next, and the rest. “This is the last time we have the house to ourselves.” I climbed over her and proceeded to rip her clothes off because she always made me do all the work, the witch! “You’re in for a long night, woman, don’t say I didn’t warn you!”

Instead of responding, she lunged at me, attacked my mouth with hers, raked her nails over my back as I entered her, scratched so deep that she drew blood, her fingers began to draw runes and symbols on my skin with it even as she returned every last lunge and thrust, an instinct from a life I hadn’t gotten around to, she was a bloody natural and I was a bloody mess.

“Now – this is – hng! – new!” I snarled as her supersensory spell shuddered through both of us. “How – many – of our lives – did you – keep secrets!?”

“Like – you – don’t!”

“Have you – finally – remembered – then?” I moved and moved and *moved* my body, even as my mind was looking through her flood of returning memories for her idealized self-image.

“Or – do we need – to keep – trying?” *There it is!*

“Make – good – ohhhhn your – p-promises!” She gasped thickly. “I – still – won’t – tell!”

“Worst – incentive – IN SPACE!” I *roared* as I seized the moment of her second climax of the night to grip on our conjoined spirit *just* the way she needed.

“Oh my GOD, *JASON!*”

Meredith Quill arched her back and *screamed* in ecstasy as her body returned to its absolute prime in her moment of rapture.

Look at that, the same myth proven true twice in one day.

Finally, my wife collapsed under me, whole body going slack while she stared up at me with wild and wanton eyes. The lines on her forehead were gone. There were no crow’s feet at the corners of her doe-brown eyes. Her cheeks were full and rosy. Her skin was soft and fine as polished marble all over her body. And her hair was as vibrant as when we first met, gleaming like polished teak in the full moon’s light.

I breathed harshly on top of her, my whole body sheened in sweat and my spirit sore in a way I’d never felt before. But there was one thing left unfinished. “I hope you enjoyed that, wife, because I still haven’t gotten mine.”

“You – you ravenous *brute!*”

But she gave as good as she got for as long as she could. Which *still* wasn't nearly long enough to finish the whole house, but we did at least do the bedroom.

She fell asleep, then. Of course she did, the prime of a Terran was nowhere near *mine*, I had endurance for days no matter what I was doing.

I laid next to her, awake for hours, watching her face and thinking. About many, many things, but mostly the fact that my daughter had brain cancer and I didn't have the power to heal her yet. Or a ship. Or any ideas for how to immediately solve the problem, alas for the discussion that my wife will begin the moment she wakes up because she's the opposite of a neglectful mother.

And, of course, there was the matter of Tony Stark, the Infinity Stones, and Thanos. In that very specific order. Because I'd not lied once during Iron Man's therapy, and I certainly wasn't joking at any point when I made my goodbyes.

I rolled over on my back and stared at the ceiling. Then through it and the attic and roof at the stars. Because if I could astrally project, why shouldn't I be able to use all the benefits of that state without leaving my body? I began to unweave and reform my psychic body one thread at a time, growing new eyes and ears on a whole bunch of them in preparation of sticking a strand to everyone in my family. And omnidirectional perception for me, that too. Because I won't feel at ease unless I know they're alive at all times. And where. Even my son, fuck, what was I going to do with him, a pair of pretty eyelashes and he turns into such a pushover!

Still though... He was doing great until that *whore* got her claws into him. At this point in time he'd still be merrily building a good life as a bachelor. He wasn't married yet. He wasn't engaged yet either, thank stars. I'll avert that disaster of a marriage fraud even if I have to call that hussy out in front of the priest on pain of him never speaking to me again. He never spoke to me or any of us again anyway.

Thinking for a moment, I began working on another few of my sensory strands for the VIPs I'll also be seeking out in the future. Since it was past mid-way through September, I even knew where the first one was. And would be for most of the next four years. Tony Stark. Philips Academy Andover, Massachusetts.

I blinked and then froze.

Wait! Philips Academy offers high school courses, grade 9 at least! That means Howard sent his kid to Highschool at age seven when everyone else is at least fourteen!

...

Holy hell, holy shit, what the fuck, over? What was Howard Stark thinking? Was he even thinking? Was he mind-controlled? Was there some sort of threat or conspiracy that made him toss his son as far away from him as possible? Was he just absolutely insane? Because extreme acts like this went a *long* way when making mental health diagnoses! Forget short-term convenience, long-term that's the opposite of psychological safety for a kid! And – you don't throw so many variables even at the most controlled experiment, never mind a person!

If I'm not pleasantly shocked in the morning to find out that Philips Academy also offers middle school courses in this reality, I might have to commit home invasion just to explain to Howard Stark his complete failure as an empiricist.

As you can see, it's not paranoia. The universe really is out to get me, God said so himself.

Trust me, I'm a therapist.

