

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Thaddeus journeys back to Earth.

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“... I think our best bet is having me go down. I can talk to She-Hulk and the rest of the Avengers and if we can get them off of our backs, then the X-Men will have to fall in line as well. Only one group is government-sanctioned after all.”

Emma grimaces, even though Thaddeus knows that she knows its objectively the right call. Waiting up here for everyone to eventually figure out they're not on Earth and come in guns blazing was... well, it was bound to end in someone getting smacked down. Sending Kitty, meanwhile, was really just that first option but faster. She wouldn't be able to negotiate effectively on their behalf, not in the same way Thaddeus could.

Thaddeus was the only option that offered some degree of... diplomacy. There was no certainty that things wouldn't come to a fight still, but it was their best shot at everything working out peacefully.

Emma knows this... but she still hesitates before finally letting out a quiet confession.

“I just don't want anything to happen to you.”

Then, just as quickly, she winces.

“... Of course, the only time you've died so far was because of me, so what do I know?”

In an instant, Thaddeus is at her side, holding the blonde psychic in his arms. Cradling her, he presses his forehead against hers and stares into her blue eyes.

“Hey now, none of that. I didn’t die because of you. The Phoenix killed me... and hopefully she’s very, very sorry for that.”

Emma’s lips thin out and she huffs.

“She is. She’s incredibly apologetic. But no amount of regret will ever be enough for me to forgive her.”

Thaddeus smiles crookedly.

“I’m here, Emma. I’m right here... and I’m not going anywhere, even if I go down there. We’re connected at this point, you and I. No matter the distance, no matter the range, we’ll always have each other.”

It’s true too. Emma empowered by the Phoenix Force and their psychic strength at this point means that even the literal astronomical distance between Earth and the Moon was no consequence to the two of them. It was how he and Emma had been in contact with Natasha while she dealt with SHIELD, after all.

Admittedly, Thaddeus’ psychic defenses were still quite... thorny, like those of a metaphysical porcupine. However, through the Reality Warping abilities he’d picked up from Wanda Maximoff, he could make an exception to the rule for Emma. Thus allowing her access to connect with his mind so they could never fully be apart.

He reaches out through that connection now, a mental hand reaching for a mental hand as he surges *intention* through their connection. Emma lets out a gasp followed by a shaky breath before nodding.

“Just... stay safe down there, Thaddeus. If anything DID happen to you... well, I think that would be my one way ticket to flying off the rails. And unlike Jean Grey, I’m not sure I’d let anyone put me down before extracting my pound of flesh either.”

Thaddeus chuckles, even as they both reluctantly pull apart.

“Message received. I won’t let anyone touch a single hair on my head; you have my word.”

Emma bites her lower lip, looking like she wants to say something more... but in the end, she just nods instead.

“Go. Before I try to keep you here against your will for real. Go and clean up this mess... so we can get back to normal shady things like dealing with our enemies in the Hellfire Club.”

That last line draws a bark of laughter out of Thaddeus. It was funny to consider, wasn’t it? The Hellfire Club and all its politics had seemed like the biggest thing on their plates for a long time, especially when Thaddeus had gone and killed the Black King like he did. Not to mention the knowledge that the Black Queen had untoward intentions.

But in the span of mere days they’d gone from the political machinations and maneuvering of the Hellfire Club to orchestrating the worldwide takedown of an international terrorist organization, followed by a complete retreat to the MOON of all places. It was frankly quite ridiculous to consider... and yet, here they were.

“I’ll keep the line open so you’re with me every step of the way.”

Emma just nods, lips pressed tightly together, clearly not trusting herself to speak at this point. Thaddeus offers her one more smile... and then drops through the floor, teleporting from the Moon to Limbo to Earth in one smooth motion.

He doesn’t do so blindly, to be clear. As mentioned before, both he and Emma had the psychic strength to span not just the entirety of Earth, but as far as the Moon at this point. Meaning it wasn’t at all difficult for him, with a little help from Emma in terms of precision, to reach down and find one specific mind. And once he’d locked onto that, it was easy enough to teleport directly to her.

Appearing in front of one Jennifer Walters, Thaddeus arches a brow and smiles as the big, green lawyering machine stops dead in her tracks, eyes widening in disbelief at his sudden appearance. She-Hulk's jaw drops open even as Thaddeus takes in their surroundings for a moment. They're in a hallway... and he suspects within the Avengers' Compound if he isn't mistaken.

Turning his eyes back to She-Hulk, Thaddeus tilts his head to the side.

"Hey Jen. Figured you might want to talk to me."

His flippancy knocks her right out of her shocked stupor and in an instant she's practically on top of him, reaching out to grab at him. Thaddeus... lets it happen, though not without caveats. For one, he activates his own copy of She-Hulk's power, growing stronger and a bit bulkier even as her hands land on his arms. For two, he reaches up at the same time, grasping her on the forearms right back, turning an initial grab on her part into some sort of weird two armed wrestling motion.

Setting himself in place, Thaddeus grunts at the same time as She-Hulk, even as cracks spider-web out from their feet. For a moment, she narrows her eyes and starts to wrestle for control of the hold... but to her credit, she realizes the foolishness of that action a handful of moments later and starts to relax and pull back.

"T-Thaddeus. You... you're here. I... I'm sorry, I acted without thinking. Just didn't want you to... disappear on me I guess."

They're still holding each other as Thaddeus raises a brow, though there's no muscles bulging anymore, the physical nature of the dual grasp being reduced to merely gripping at one another's forearms.

"I'm not going anywhere, Jen. Though admittedly, if I didn't have a purpose here, I might have disappeared when a literal She-Hulk came charging at me with reckless intent."

She flushes a bit at that, before huffing in slight indignation.

“I mean... what else was I supposed to do? Last I'd heard, you were taken prisoner by a Phoenix-possessed Emma Frost!”

Thaddeus nods slowly.

“Which is why I'm here, Jen. Rumors of my kidnapping were greatly exaggerated... almost negligently so. The X-Men are jumping the gun in a big way and they've dragged your team into things without having anywhere close to all the relevant information.”

Relaxing a touch further but still loath to fully release him, She-Hulk nevertheless looks interested in what he's saying.

“Such as...?”

So far so good, he supposed.

“For one, I'm not Emma's prisoner... I'm her friend, ally, and subordinate. Of course I stuck with her during what is obviously a massive moment of upheaval for her. She IS possessed by the Phoenix to be clear... but unlike Jean Grey, she has control over it. No need to freak out or contain her... she's not a threat.”

Narrowing her eyes, She-Hulk frowns.

“You know that for sure? You can say with- no... you know what, come with me.”

“Uh... come with you?”

Nodding, She-Hulk gestures down the hall as best she can without letting go of him.

“Yep. I was on my way to a team meeting with the other Avengers just now. Come with me and talk things out with all of us so you don't have to keep repeating yourself. Convince me and my team to help you.”

Thaddeus slowly nods. That all sounded pretty good, yeah. In fact, it was exactly why he was here. There was just one small problem from where he's standing.

"Sure. But, uh... you're going to have to let me go first, Jen."

She-Hulk glances down at where they're STILL clasping each other's forearms. She frowns in consternation.

"... But then you could just teleport away on me."

Seriously?! He had no idea she'd gotten so... attached to him. No pun intended. Huffing, Thaddeus shakes his head.

"Yes, I could. But I'm not going to, obviously. I'm here to parlay Jennifer, not show up and then flee like some scared little chicken at a moment's notice. So long as neither you nor your team try to detain me, we'll be just fine."

She-Hulk STILL doesn't look convinced. But then her eyes light up as if she's had an epiphany and... to Thaddeus' disbelief, she slides her hands down his forearms and promptly intertwines one set of her fingers with one set of his. Only once she's tightly grasping his hand in her own does she fully let go of his arm with her other arm, allowing it to return to her side.

Silence reigns as Thaddeus stares down at where they're holding hands for a long moment while She-Hulk studiously looks straight ahead instead of anywhere close to him.

"Right. That's settled. Let's go."

As she takes a step forward, beginning to tug him along, Thaddeus considers for half a moment setting his feet, standing his ground, and demanding that She-Hulk stop treating him like... whatever she was treating him like.

The only thing that stops him, in all honesty, is Emma's amusement flitting through the back of his mind. The blonde has been 'watching' this entire exchange through his eyes and while he'd felt a spike of stress from her in the

beginning when She-Hulk had all but attacked him, now she seems to be enjoying things... even if it's a bit at his expense.

Still, if Emma is happy, then he's happy too... he wants her to be comfortable all the way up there, even if she can't be down here at his side. So, with all of that said and thought out in the split second he has before She-Hulk is firmly tugging him along... Thaddeus doesn't resist. He lets her pull him down the hall, walking hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, eye to eye with the big green woman.

Eventually, they arrive at an already full conference room. Just as She-Hulk said, the Avengers have assembled for a team meeting and Thaddeus has to quickly get over his own shock and awe as he takes in the view.

Admittedly, the Avengers Line-Up DID change a bit now and then from what he understood. For instance, at one point it had both Ant-Man and the Wasp, the latter of whom he knew as Janet Van Dyne... but neither was a member anymore.

There was also a couple members who weren't present... Thor the God of Thunder. He was often off world though given he was literally not from Earth, so that made sense to Thaddeus. And the other was the Hulk, She-Hulk's cousin... and from what Thaddeus knew, a lot more of a fair-weather member than She-Hulk herself.

In the end though, that just leaves four people waiting for them. Some of them Thaddeus knows by name, others he only knows by moniker. Iron Man and Captain America, for instance, are Tony Stark and Steve Rogers respectively. Meanwhile the other two, Ms. Marvel and Hawkeye, he only knew by those titles.

All four turn as he and She-Hulk enter the room. All four of them react in surprise and consternation at the sight of the two of them standing there together. Captain America immediately steps forward, eyes narrowing in confusion.

"She-Hulk, who is this?"

Clearing her throat, She-Hulk nods to Thaddeus.

“This is Thaddeus Cummings everyone.”

Hawkeye, lounging in a chair off to the side, raises an eyebrow at that.

“So he escaped then? That’s resourceful of him.”

But She-Hulk shakes her head thankfully.

“No, he didn’t escape... he came in to tell us he was never a prisoner in the first place.”

That brings a pause, prompted by a derisive snort from the billionaire behind the Iron Man suit.

“Alright sure. So why the hell are you holding hands?”

She-Hulk grimaces at that.

“... He’s a flight risk.”

Ms. Marvel promptly narrows her eyes while crossing her arms over her ample chest and the lightning bolt emblazoned on it.

“A flight risk you say. Shouldn’t we be doing more to lock him down then?”

Deciding he’s just about done being talked about like he isn’t even there, Thaddeus interjects with a wan smile.

“You can certainly try.”

If you’d told the Thaddeus of even a year ago that he would one day be staring down the majority of the Avengers and daring them to try and ‘lock him down’, he would have laughed in your face... and maybe given you a swirlie given the kind of person he was at the time.

But right now, even if he is a *little* awestruck at being in the presence of some truly great heroes, he's also more than a little done with the whole being treated like a criminal thing. Hell, it had barely been any time at all since Thaddeus and Emma had helped these very people chase the Head of HYDRA all the way down to the Arctic where they'd taken him into custody.

So yeah... they could try him if they wanted. They wouldn't like the results though.

Still, before anyone can bristle too much at his words, especially Ms. Marvel, She-Hulk steps in and clears her throat, squeezing his hand reproachfully.

"It's fine, he's in my custody and he will remain in my custody. More importantly, he has actionable intelligence for us. So please... listen to what he has to say."

To their credit, the rest of the Avengers seem willing to take She-Hulk at her word. Thaddeus almost expects them to keep questioning her judgment, but no... they all settle back to listen, even Ms. Marvel.

Well then... guess it was his time to shine. Just gotta convince Earth's Mightiest Heroes that Emma Frost wasn't a nail for their overly sized hammer to smash down. No pressure.

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!