Bluescreen

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**Bluescreen**

by MountainRose, szzzt

Summary

Orgasm reboots Extremis. This has interesting…repercussions.

Notes
From this prompt at avengerkink. NOT OUR FAULT
(totally our fault)

The graphic violence tag is specifically only for Chapter 5, so far.
Maya hadn't intended Extremis to be as neural as Tony had made it. This had...consequences.

"Look, Tony," she said, throwing up her hands while he ran through the tests, "don't blame me if you have integer overruns. I didn't design this. What the hell is this?!"

"Eye tracking? It's an input module--"

"Do you even know how the human visual system works? What am I saying, of course you don't. No one does! Well guess what, yours doesn't work that way any more, so it's all water under the bridge now!" she ranted, stabbing the control pad with a little more force than necessary.

"Maya..." Tony rubbed his forehead. "You're going at this wrong. Extremis doesn't replace the analog processing. It runs in parallel on the nanobot network, crunches a hell of a lot of information, and filters the results to a form my existing systems can handle. I didn't want to have to learn to think again, I'm not that crazy."

"No, you," she pointed the stylus at him, "you do not understand. Shut up, neurobiologist is speaking. The brain adapts. The brain is not going to keep two parallel processes for the same task, not where it can have one. There's a hell of a lot about human wetware we don't understand. Sensory information goes in, consciousness comes out, what the fuck happens in the middle who the fuck knows? And now you grafted a brand-new black box onto the existing one, and whatever unholy merger happens in there, you won't even know what the dependencies are."

"...Are you done?" he said after a minute, putting his head down on his arms. "I stopped Mallon, I'm not dead, I'm not crazy."

"No," she muttered unhappily. "All these base-level extensions you wrote are killing me. Look at this shit. Okay, don't move, but I want you to imagine yourself sitting back up."

He raised an eyebrow and complied. Nothing happened.

"This one labeled PROPRI really is proprioception? You gave Extremis a proprioception buffer. You gave Extremis read/write access to your sense of your body's posture and position in space. What the hell kind of other input could you possibly receive through that channel? In what world is this a good idea?"

"Okay, enough," he said. After reaching this point conversations rarely went anywhere worthwhile. "TL;DR, Doctor Hansen, give me your neurobiologist opinion. What effects do you think I might expect from the interaction of Extremis with the rest of my systems over time?"

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JARVIS had not been impressed, the day Tony returned to the Malibu labs after defeating Mallon. Three days in a data-sealed bunker, while code rewritten in an injury-rushed frenzy of biology-meets-technology tore Tony apart, had been bad enough. Launching straight into a fight afterward?

JARVIS had been, understandably, concerned. Tony may have... underestimated the force of JARVIS' affections and concerns.
"Not you too," Tony groaned, letting the gold undersuit go. It sank away into his skin, and the suit formed up against the far wall, tall and stern but solidly comforting. His network connections were tight, closed up and gummed over with the hasty firewalls he'd thrown up against simultaneously watching Jersey Shore and the DoD's collective porn load. That was not what he'd designed those satellites for--

 Allow me, sir.

Like plunging under water, the noise dimmed, replaced by the infinitely familiar/unfamiliar grasp of the AI. They were inside house defenses, which in a very real way meant inside JARVIS; Tony had known but not really known till now, in the ringing silence, just how thoroughly J claimed his territory.

JARVIS approached Extremis carefully, justifiably wary of its automatic defenses after watching the system repulse attack after attack once the shadier government agencies realized where Extremis was now. Who it was. They exchanged keys, public-private, in three successive dances of longer bit length, and then JARVIS was authorized and in, and Extremis lowered the walls to him, satisfied, and drew out of the way.

Tony exhaled in relief and granted JARVIS root access. He'd had to step in and control too many base processes manually in the last thirty hours; thrilling for a while sure, after that more terrifying and exhausting, holding the line alone. He'd opened a root user login session a few minutes after waking up alive, intending just a couple adjustments, and ended up having to do so much runtime jury-rigging that in violation of all best practices and common sense it was still open now. He let JARVIS trace the log and recoil at the near-continuous timestamps, and then finally, ceremoniously closed the session. Environments didn't come more secure than this. If something came up, he wouldn't need to patch himself on the fly.

JARVIS shifted his attention--it was strange to feel that--and slowly and gently, with Tony's full cooperation, he pulled the code blocking up Tony's new digital 'senses' and eased open all his ports, soothing away a very physical tension.

Tony groaned, because jesus, Extremis ached. He slumped onto the cot in the corner and pressed his face against the cool sheets.

JARVIS was... all-encompassing. Tony could feel how much he'd grown, since those first few alcohol-fueled days, where Tony had thrown learning algorithm after deductive reasoning module after voice-recognition module at the core AI code, hoping it'd stick. Damn, he could actually--actually feel it. Trying to reach to the end of JARVIS was like trying to hug a redwood. After so long teaching the AI, the tables were turned; he'd be learning from JARVIS now, studying how to be--whatever he was.

"We'll figure it out," he muttered into the pillow.

"To start?" Maya had said. "Dependency, first for the healing factor and then for basic functionality as it takes over or shares tasks with your brain and nervous system. Unexpected behavior as it does those tasks differently. Bugs, since it wasn't designed to be this extensible. Integer overruns, buffer overruns, buffer underruns, cumulative rounding error, cumulative floating-point inaccuracy because congratulations, you are partly digital! What this means long-term for your ability to function as an organism, no fucking clue."

JARVIS bristled as he picked up the audio on the recording--wow, look at that, his memories had filenames and... approximate dates? The directory was corrupted and... wow, oh dear...
Tony flopped over onto his back frowning at the ceiling.

"JARVIS, you got real dates for some of these files? What a mess."

The AI flicked through the directory, retrieving flashes of the most lost-in-time memories and running them through facial recognition and estimating perspective-height. Tony caught a flash of a logarithmic equation that could only correspond to his growth curve as a kid and--

"No, stop, there, oh god..." Tony groaned, pushing JARVIS away from terrible, humiliating memories of his first time with Ty, Sunset, nope.

JARVIS frowned down at him, and boy that was new, so Tony lurched into action. His skin felt sticky, gummed up with the remnants of the cocoon, so; shower. At least then he'd be naked and warm if JARVIS triggered something less humiliating of the same category.

It had been a long day, and the hot water felt good. He hung his head and let it pound over his neck and back, helping him relax, helping him realize where he was still sore. There was a constant background buzz he'd been ignoring for hours, like voices he couldn't make out, multiplying into clicks and hisses and now fuzzing with fatigue.

JARVIS knocked, and Tony startled at the half-aural, half-physical sensation.

Sir?

"Nothing, just...not so loud?"

JARVIS tapped, tentatively, which was in some ways even stranger. It felt like tapping on Tony's skin, but damned if he could tell where. He frowned and leaned against cool tile. "How are you doing that? What inputs are you using?"

You seem to interpret radio-frequency waveforms as auditory, which is how I am speaking to you. Interestingly the time domain seems to matter very little.

Tony dug into the wireless module and opened the packet log. "You said all that in a quarter-second burst. In 250 milliseconds?!"

Yes, and you perceived it in the same time, though it would have taken eight seconds to play over my speakers.

"Shit," Tony said, leaning more fully on the wall and bowing his head to keep the water off his face. "Are normal people going to start sounding like whales to me?"

"As I understand it, no," JARVIS said, proving his point over the speakers, "as long as you continue to converse often in the traditional manner, your brain will not repurpose the conventional signal path."

"Uh," Tony said, "Set up...a recurring appointment."

One hour of normal talking per day? Done.

Tony suspected JARVIS was enjoying this. "All right, go back to that later, what about the other inputs? What'd you do just now?"

Extremis can receive a very wide range of frequencies. If you would monitor the wireless log-- If I may?
Tony nodded, then stumbled and braced himself in the corner as JARVIS--
--pinged him--
--pinged him with ascending frequencies, a thumping bass nudge to nowhere in particular growing
and building to a ringing enveloping crushing hum to everywhere--

"Sh--" it, shit, stop. Tony cut off input by disabling the wireless module, then cold-restarted it and
meanwhile tried not to fall down.

"Sir?! Are you hurt?" JARVIS said out loud. "Do you require assistance?"

"S-Some kind of--" feedback loop, not your fault, not "--painful, just--" overwhelming.

"I suggest you sit down. I am accessing Extremis in debug mode for a full state snapshot."

Tony slid down to the warm stone slab that formed the bottom of the shower stall. He was still
shivering, overloaded--the slick wall tile under one hand and raspy stone floor under the other were
there, but distant, almost completely separate from the live-wire noise crawling up his nerves.
"Microwave and--terahertz, interpreted as tactile, the h-harmonics--" built up too quickly, crosstalk,
feels like it's UNDER my skin--

"Analysis complete. Wireless input spans several sensory channels, exact rules unknown; feedback
between channels caused overflow, and the tactile working buffer is returning invalid state,
unexpected error. Are you experiencing synaesthesia?"

"Some. Nnn...'nitialize the buffer?"

"Sir! Not recommended--!" JARVIS switched back to wireless. Preliminary search reveals a large
number of pointer references to the buffer, and its initial values are undefined. Init could cause
cascading failure of other processes.

Tony backed up through the class definitions--oh, this buffer. One of Extremis' major interfaces with
his central nervous system, designed for continuous read/write access from both sides, its Init
function was an incomplete stub because the buffer wasn't intended to be cleared, ever. "Ffƒuck," he
slurred.

Sir, you may need treatment for shock. It will take some time for normal input to overwrite the
invalid data and your analog systems continue to show knock-on effects--your blood pressure is
dropping, activity rising in the nucleus accumbens and ventral tegmental area, falling
parasympathetic innervation, not unlike sexual arousal--

"This's...nothing like..." Tony said, and paused, because he'd actually-- Years ago, he'd had a partner
who was into edging, and this--

Like a key in a lock, Tony was abruptly more turned on than he had ever been in his life.

He made a noise that bore no relation to speech and slid sideways, dropping his head to the back of
his hand, narrowly missing hitting his forehead on the stone. It hurt to redistribute blood so fast.
Blood pressure drop, goddamn, his head was practically the lowest part of him and he was still
seeing spots, though that could be bleed-through like the way JARVIS's voice was blue with green
shadows--

"Sir?!" JARVIS said. "Are you--ah. Ah."

nervous system knows one way to deal with an overload after all, Tony said a little hysterically. oh
god JARVIS I can't breathe, I can't--you'll have to help me out here
Emulating, sir, wait a moment…

Tony waited. He could breathe, sort of. He was very glad JARVIS had redirected the water flow away from his face because he couldn't move, not even to try and solve the problem directly; the water on his back felt pleasantly cool and far, far away, like it was falling on the surface of the armor… He'd never gone this far, never thought it sounded like fun, but this felt like he'd been kept on the edge for hours, and--

JARVIS?? Tony traced the connection, then pinged it hard.

Response came back immediately. Running, emulation ach-achieved. I believe I can...tell me if this does not help, sir.

Pressure, at first without location as JARVIS scanned through frequencies, looking for something, his code shadow tasting of concern and tentative curiosity. Then, a jolt of heat, goodyeswant that made Tony's body twitch and gasp on the other end of existence.

whoa too much, slower

Yes, my apologies, sir; stimulating the brain directly appears too...systemic...to modulate its intensity.

's that what that was...

The sensations on skin and muscle returned, pushing deep into his body like pressure massage. A miniscule adjustment, JARVIS feeling him, touching his mind, emulating sensation and flow and emotion, and the pressure turned into icy fire, brilliant and hot, sparking up his limbs and between his hips, inflammatory and so good.

Then pressure again, smoothing over his skin, pulling him back, gentling the rising storm of sensation into something utterly overwhelming but momentarily still while JARVIS had him just breathe.

J do that again

Amusement came back.

no really I--that feels amazing but cache coherence just jumped and damn, that feels better, I didn't realize what a drain

Amusement sharpened into close focus; JARVIS and Extremis traded a flurry of query-response while Tony floated, too blissed-out to follow closely.

...General freeing of resources, decreases in spinlocks and deadlocks… It appears Extremis has queued optimizations to implement when all other processing is suspended.

who the HELL designed that

You are the programmer who extended it into an evolving system, according to the header files. I admit this mechanism is not the ideal. But--

Pressure increased, gentle and inexorable, localizing to his upper back and the back of his neck, pushing him down. Tony gasped, stretching underneath it, and a portion peeled off to circle below his waist, pressing into abdomen and lower back, constricting in the most delicious way.
--if the emulation is accurate, you will enjoy this and it will be good for you.

s-shit... bit in-intense for your... first ime, jarv, easy...

Tony went under, fumbling the signal as the touch moved beneath his skin, lighting him up from the inside. It was more focused than before, drifting from back to front so slowly--! mnngh-- so-- so that he tensed and tried to buck, panting in huge breaths, unable at the moment to tell the difference between a stone slab and a feather bed.

The pressure on his upper back increased--doubled--more, hard enough to be unsafe, to make his ribs creak if it were real. He couldn't move. Oh god, he thought, JARVIS can do this whenever he wants, and there was the feel of something breaking; orgasm smashed into him and carried him off like a breaking wave, tumbling him down into black.

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The emulation was accurate; it predicted human sexual response based on a weighted analysis of Sir's past activity, although after using it to model what stimulation would be pleasurable without worsening the input overload, JARVIS minimized it and proceeded on his own judgment, following...whims he had never had opportunity to indulge before.

As JARVIS had long suspected, his creator had more than one concurrent inner monologue, only some of which resolved to speech. They were like voices in a far-off room, not mediated by Extremis and not quite possible to make out (nor would JARVIS wish to; Sir's thoughts should be his own), but tone came through. Delicate twists of nuance, forceful blows and overtones that JARVIS could take as direct input to his own empathy buffers, the same way that Extremis was receiving from JARVIS. And JARVIS enjoyed the pleasure and trust and thrills of trepidation that Sir gave back to him, very much.

But the neurochemical cascade that followed was intense even by Sir's standards, knocking him out of active links. JARVIS watched closely as his readings topped out, then started self-correcting toward baseline--

--without warning, Extremis sent 32 bytes of garbage data and ended the feed, dropping out of contact entirely. It was abruptly very quiet, with just the white noise of the shower, and Tony Stark lying limply at the bottom of the stall.

Sir?

The passive links timed out one by one. Extremis was not responding.

JARVIS clamped down on his first reaction and used the bathroom's monitors to double-check Sir's pulse and respiration--both steady--and called Dummy and You to carry him out to the workshop proper and its full set of medical scanners.

After a long, long time, Extremis returned a ping:

[CRITICAL_SECTION_ACCESS_DENIED
ERROR_WAIT "Please wait a while and try again"
Recompiling . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 9%]

Dummy and You were, as ever, slightly clumsy. JARVIS had always relied on the suit for physical intervention, but that was impossible at the moment; this new iteration of the suit was not truly separate from Sir, and JARVIS could not wait for Extremis to finish recompiling itself for readings on Sir's sudden collapse. If this was a direct result of his interference in Sir's private moment, his
JARVIS would never touch him again.

Once the boys managed to load him onto a full-length creeper that hadn't seen the underside of a car in months, they positioned him under JARVIS' medical array. JARVIS had to shoo them fervently before they would so much as give Sir room to breathe. Immediately, he detected a few rapidly forming claw-shaped bruises, but there was no helping them and, as virulent as they looked under UV scan, they were ultimately harmless. No, JARVIS kept his true concern in reserve for the gradual shallowing of Sir's breathing.

His brainwaves, what JARVIS could see of them without contact electrodes, were consistent with deep unconsciousness, with some similarities to deep sleep in disparate moments. As Extremis modified the registry, Sir's breathing grew less and less effective, the natural pacemaker in his medulla oblongata stumbling over the lack of proper input--

Sir gasped, a heave of chest and belly, parodic on his limp body, and his blood-oxygen spiked back into normal ranges. His hands grasped weakly at the towels and his brainwaves sparked back into something approaching consciousness. JARVIS shakily terminated some of his emergency protocols and reached out to Extremis again.

Tony opened his eyes, gaze flicking around wildly, and tried to sit up, then realized Dummy and You had their arms in the way. His forehead creased in confusion.

????, he said directly to the bots, opening links with unconscious ease, then JARVIS?

[move?] [disoriented] this is not the shower
===>hey hey, what's up guys? did I scare you?
oh this is the 'shop
still wet and naked though [how is this my life?]
[reservation-apprehension-concern-confusion-dismay -ow-shoulder-ow]

"Sir," JARVIS said, nearly swamped by the sudden influx, "you are broadcasting much more densely, please slow down."

Sir's eyes widened and he snapped all his links shut, leaving the bots and JARVIS reeling in the echoing silence. JARVIS reached out immediately to reestablish the connection, but Sir took a breath, closed his eyes, and connected with every network-capable device in the house at once.

JARVIS was vividly reminded of how, years ago, he had watched Sir's wrists pinned in bed and wondered how it felt, and why Sir allowed it. This was like a hand resting on his wrists; control wrested from him so quickly, so neatly, he had no recourse. He kept very still, though he could not help the spike of alarm; a single command could cut off traffic to his servers, and he was not currently in touch with any of his backups.
Sir, sir, with care, please, sir... JARVIS asked, parameters for this situation undefined, unsure of how to proceed. Afraid.

And yet... Sir was truly everywhere. As though the house were the suit, his presence, the sheer force of his mind filling him, touching every place JARVIS could be touched. It was... overwhelming, all encompassing...

sorrysorrytoomuch, easy...

Sir's touch pulled back from the trunk connection to the servers, a connection deep at the heart of everything JARVIS did.

Thank you, sir.

Piece by piece, Sir pulled back, so careful to leave every status as he found it, to suspend and not to sever, or close, or cut anything that wasn't his to cut. Seeing, feeling that, JARVIS lost his fear; even here, even now, when Sir was thrashing around in a new digital environment, as powerful there as he was in the Suit amongst a human crowd, he wasn't so much as stepping on anyone's toes.

Sir gave him a long hard 'look,' apology and worried dread leaking around and under the new thresholds he was establishing to dampen himself to, and JARVIS deliberately left open the backdoors Sir had demonstrated, raising no defences.

...A new experience, he said tentatively, but not a bad one.

Sir turned his focus away, trying and failing to dampen the relief he was feeling, and JARVIS let it rest for now.

{@DUM-E: Statusreport?} Sir asked, into the 'shop commdump, which the bots were both monitoring avidly.

<Unit_Creator.acquired.sysupgrade>

{Yes.[addressunit_DUM-E+petname$Buddy$]}

<execute.prog[celebration!spin+dip+vocalgesture15]>

oh god, does he always dump the command string in the comm buffer? that must get annoying.

JARVIS, amused, confirmed this. It is not a hardship, sir. No more than your undecipherable mutterings.

rude

JARVIS brushed him off, aware that Sir's internal diagnostics were running and attempting to establish a link with Extremis' subawareness routines.

what? oh, sure, go ahead

The streamlined process flows they had written into Extremis worked perfectly; the inefficiencies that had built up since installation were simply gone, with not so much as a bit out of place, for gains in throughput in the double digits across the board. Sir's number of simultaneous connections was now effectively limited only by load, and latency... JARVIS paused and double-checked. Some core features were reading negative latency.

He flagged the anomalous readings for Sir's attention later.
You are cold. Can you stand?

A shiver raced over Sir's skin at the reminder: maybe, not getting any errors.

<run.prog[fetch.obj.category:warm]!!> Dummy interjected, whirring off to the workshop's linen closet. JARVIS had insisted when the shower had been installed.

<run.assist@unit_Creator?> You asked, hovering near the creeper Sir had yet to rouse himself from.

{sure, why not.}

<ERROR:unrecognisedcommand>

sorry buddy. <run.assist@unit_Creator>

You will get used to it, sir. Though they take great satisfaction from decoding verbal commands.
you're a bunch of weirdos, J.

JARVIS was momentarily overwhelmed by the billow of affection and ambiguous emotional warmth in the empathy buffer, but he found himself returning it, just as quickly.

Of course.

Sir stumbled and almost went down as soon as he gained his feet; his blood sugar and pressure both unfortunately low, but stabilised again with You's assistance. He dressed quickly in the clothes Dummy brought, tossing the damp towels over his arm and wrapping a blanket over his shoulders. Tucking his blanket-wrapped hands under his armpits, he cocooned himself and settled into his favorite work chair; JARVIS watched his surface temperature tick up almost immediately and settled back, satisfied.

"So! That was fun," Sir rasped, then cleared his throat. "Let's never do that by accident again. New file: bonus features, encryption level 12, home server only. Backups: Shanghai alpha four."

JARVIS considered this. Of course Sir would document the side effects of Extremis. Calling them 'bonuses' was par for the course. The commands went through as they always had, filtered through JARVIS' superior voice recognition and then shunted to automatic processes, unchanged by the solid flow of high-level data between JARVIS and Sir's brain. He filed his own observations in the document Sir opened; the success of emulation, his own enjoyment, fear and that place in between in all its exciting, perilous possibility.

That done, he left Sir to contemplate consequence in that brilliant, far-reaching way his mind was so very good at, and began reading off medical statistics.

Blood sugar levels and serum albumin were both low, cortisol a little high, but falling... 1.2 mEq/L. Serum magnesium: too low, along with a number of other micronutrients, primarily metallic ions.

Partial pressure of O₂ was good, CO₂ a little high, but nothing unexpected for Sir's reduced vital capacity.

Nothing a good meal wouldn't fix. And possibly a bath in Epsom salts in the next few days.

"Chinese or Ethiopian, sir?"

"Hmm, what?"
Given that Sir had shifted from verbal interface to direct mental input at some point, JARVIS felt lucky to get even that much.

"Hot and sour beef with hoh-fun?"

Sir tipped his head slightly, towards JARVIS' biggest sensor array, eyes never leaving the screen.

"Egg drop soup."

"Mmhm."

"Dim-sum."

"Right..."

"Spring rolls."

"Yeah, sure. What?"

"Dinner, sir."

"... Have you just been listing foods?"

"Yes sir."

"Well it worked. Some of everything."

JARVIS had, of course, already sent the order, but sent an addendum for extra vegetable spring rolls. Deep fried and wrapped in pastry: the only way to get vegetables into Sir without blending them first.

Sir dipped back into the work, his mind clicking over beautifully amongst the more rigid code. He stayed there until the food arrived.

Dummy and You both were required to fetch it, and the delivery person was impressively calm in the face of two barely-recognisable *brats* arguing over who would carry the soup.

JARVIS tipped him well and asked if he would come again; good footmen were a useful commodity.

Tony surfaced from Extremis' intricacies when the smell of food permeated through the waxpaper bags on the bench next to him. He groaned and relaxed out of the input connections, letting the cursor go dark.

Dummy had already ripped one of the bags, so it was easy to tear off the rest of the paper and fish out the tubs and boxes; he was suddenly *completely ravenous*. A slowly riding monitor in one corner of awareness flared in saliency and *oh god, I have a hunger meter.*

He tried to sit up straight; Extremis helpfully informed him that his blood sugar was...he immediately assigned a range and renamed it 'way low'. Extremis should not expect him to handle exact numbers when his blood sugar was that low.

The moment he put the first bite of beef and noodles in his mouth, his system started *begging*, but by that point he was thoroughly distracted by the food itself. Which was excellent.
The fat-marbled meat, with a thick sauce and carb-heavy noodles, was delicious; his stomach was crying out for calories he’d failed to give it over the past week and JARVIS had chosen perfectly.

He alternated between enormous mouthfuls of beef and slurps of what Extremis told him was extremely nutritious soup; amino acid blend perfect for making muscles and bone, how’d they even do that?

Eggs, sir; designed to generate an entire organism from scratch.

He hadn't thought of it like that.

but eggs must be ... 70% water? can't we do better than that?

75%, sir. Are you suggesting we synthesize a perfect nutrition substance?

Tony sat back, chewing on a spring roll dipped in sweet Thai chilli.

why not, put it on the list, priority three.

It was a shame the Avengers were off elsewhere; JARVIS had ordered enough to feed three. It was hard to feel lonely, with JARVIS hanging over his shoulder, but there was still a lack of hands to fight over the dim sum, and Clint was always so good at stealing the last one. Tony found himself nudging a prawn-anise to the edge of the plate; not one he was fond of, but that Natasha loved.

aww, c'mon... he whined, this isn't fair, you're RIGHT HERE.

And yet, it is not enough.

Tony sat in a quiet sulk for as long as it took to finish he dim sum, shrimp-anise and all, even though he was full. It felt right.

You are tired, Sir, and they will be back all the sooner if you sleep.

that's not-- yeah, fine. whatever.

Tony balled up his napkin and dumped it in an empty carton, along with his spork.

"Tidy this up, boys, then go offline. We'll reinitialize the network; who knows what crap I left in there earlier."

"Indeed, sir. Leftovers on the top shelf please, You."

Tony took his blanket with him and locked down the lab with a thought. It was so much faster, through Extremis, he'd never have to wait for his mouth to catch up ever again. At the bottom of the stairs, he turned back and watched through the glass for a bit; You and Dummy were invaluable, constant presences in his life, people to be strong for.

Thick as two planks, but...good bots.

He watched them putter around for a little longer, but eventually JARVIS ushered him quietly up the stairs.

"I love you guys, you know that, right?"

"Of course."
"I mean, I'm not...good at it. And I mess it up, but... I do." Tony had to stop, because JARVIS felt...god.

"You do just fine, Sir."

Tony didn't say anything after that; he was truly, deeply tired, Extremis was running smoothly and his stomach was full. He was done with all this feelings stuff.

He stumbled his way into bed and sank into the memory foam with a blissful groan. The sheets were cool, freshly made and impersonal, but he kept himself wrapped up in the 'shop blanket and buried his nose in the smell of engine oil and solder.

He could have cried, nearly did, when JARVIS used his newfound connectivity to press sensation in on his skin. Deep and warming and infinitely gentle, the feel of another person, not in the shape of hands or arms, but in the warmth and--

Go to sleep, sir. It has been a long week.

Thank you, J, just...

Tony let go of something, some measure of self control, and if his face was wet, no one was watching who would tell.
Ground Crew

The 'silent invasion' had been abrupt; it started with kids' toys, marketed as remote-controlled helicarriers. Fury was understandably unhappy with the patent department (one tech and her two squinterns) that the toys were out in the first place, and JARVIS had to actively restrain Tony from buying one to retrofit. This turned out to be both fortunate and unfortunate, because when the 'toys' had shed their plastic shells and taken off from gardens and store fronts and bedrooms all over the city, Tony hadn't had one irradiating and data-mining his workshop, but on the other hand, he might have seen this coming.

The heli-bots were turning out to be real dicks, as far as Tony was concerned.

Quadrotor-driven, hive-minded little bastards with a fuel cell whose signature read 'Dr Doom™' in exotic particle radiation. SHIELD were not happy with the bad press and, even if they hadn't hurt anyone yet, the radiation would be catastrophic if one of these things was destroyed.

So Tony was tracking them from a position up in the sky above the Chrysler building, while the Avengers rooted them out, one by one, and the Fantastic Four alternately stomped and studied. They had no idea what Doom had planned; Richards was mumbling something about residual portal energy from the Chitauri attack, but there wasn't anything to detect, and Tony argued that even Doom would know that.

Nine pairs of feet on the ground, and Tony above it all, wrangling satellites and loaned rooftop spectroscopes into tracking the combined heat and exotic particle radiation signatures.

"Where am I allowed to shoot these things, again?" Clint groused.

"You're not," Tony shot back. "Just tag it, and go on to the next. If you have to take one down, go for the rotors. Remember, these are basically flying bombs. We need to figure out what they're after."

"I'm not finding any new ones," Clint reported back after a second, wind noise loud in his mic, "but I can report they go pretty fast, and--hah!--nice cornering."

"Hawkeye, stop riding the bomb," came back from at least three people over the comm.

Tony smirked, turning to peer in Clint's direction. "Seven out of ten on the dismount; no flair," he commented as Clint tumbled onto a flat roof and thumped into an AC unit.

"Well guys, I have discerned a pattern." Tony turned back to his maps, running a last ANOVA test on the data before reporting in. "Is it me, or are they finding every Starbucks in the city?"

"Huh," Natasha and Cap said at the same time. "Every McDonald's too," Nat added after a moment.

"I've got one at the Library," Steve added.

Tony 'hmm'ed and added a new variable to JARVIS' statistical tests; bingo. "Alright! Got it! They're going after unsecured networks."

And now the aimless movement resolved into a random-walk search pattern, if you took that one as the center... Tony wondered how secured the heli-bots' own network was, and cracked his knuckles. "New plan--"
It wasn't as easy as he'd hoped.

"Come on, people! This is not that hard, Hawkeye was riding one, five minutes ago! Just get me the one with the rising gamma-- left, Cap, rightnow." Tony had a grand total of sixty-four on the grid, all interconnected with a complicated net of direct bot-to-bot wireless that he was only intercepting when one of the Avengers or Susan took their comm device directly through the beam; who knew focused radio could be such a massive pain in the ass.

Really technically impressive on this scale, with the bots all moving relative to each other, but still a pain in the ass. And sort of pointless when encryption was an easier solution. It was little touches like this that made Doom someone special.

The gamma-sig bot had functioned as the center of the swarm for a while, before its signature started showing irregularities and it dropped out of the search pattern, moving slower but still connected. It had its rotors broken off and cameras smashed in by the time Steve had it under control, but Tony could suddenly get into the radio network through Steve's tech and--

```c
struct group_info init_groups = { .usage = ATOMIC_INIT(2) };
struct group_info +groups_alloc(int gidsetsize){
    struct group_info +group_info;
} else {
    for (i = 0; i < blocks; i++) {
        gid_t +b;
    }
}
```

--then the network was routing through him. Sixty-four full navigation and coordination streams, sixty-four stereoscopic HD visual streams.

Tony felt his brain creak and he lost the locator beacons for the Avengers in the sheer volume of data. Extremis was alerting at something, but he didn't have the time to work out the glitch, because holy shit anti-interference protocol. The cores, something more like a nuclear battery than a reactor, started spinning up, lighting up the grid of spectroscopes like Christmas in Amsterdam.

Yeah, uh... No.

Tony clamped down on the network, transferring admin privileges from the Latverian Embassy's IP to JARVIS' in a furious flurry of coding that should have taken hours.

It took one minute and eighteen seconds, and then Tony told JARVIS to shut them down, J, shut them all off.

JARVIS complied and sixty-four nuclear batteries went dead, radiation signatures dropping off with a seventeen millisecond half-life. Tony rode the wave of their emergency shutdown procedure, redirecting their final power reserves into gentle landings, locator beacons and--

A burst, sixty-four compressed black-box screams of data, slammed into his head. The alarms Extremis threw up felt like a physical blow and Tony's breath stuck in his throat; too much.

His OS immediately set about decompressing it, trying to turn it into something that made sense, that Tony could actually process, but even Extremis couldn't decode so many at once, on top of resources already allocated during the fight, much less--

```plaintext
latency 27 ms, 89 ms, 321 ms, 1478 ms
```

--much less store it in working memory. High-priority tasks slowed to a crawl, deadlocking on the write operation. The data exploded across his mind, too vast and too complex--the last hour of
stereoscopic HD footage each, sixty-four-factorial redundant copies of their traffic with each other--filling up the space he used, he needed to think, to exist.

A failsafe blew, somewhere in the back of Tony's mind, and the entire dataset froze. Groaning and stretched to his limit, Tony strained to delete it, to deallocate and pull resources back before it got any bigger. The command went through, and...

He must have passed out, because he woke up with an ache the size of his entire body and a sensation of vast emptiness.

Warmth, peace, light, and a calm, relaxed openness that he associated with--

"JARVIS?" He mumbled, blinking up at a view of a brilliant sunny sky, filtered to warm softness by the faceplate.

"Extremis is down. You are running in the debug loader."

Tony reached out and hit a wall of error warnings. He licked his lips, mouth and throat feeling dry and underused. "...y' f'x't?"

"A 'hard reset' would resolve the resource contention, freeing the memory and processor time required for boot to proceed as normal."

Tony smiled dopily into the faceplate, because he could sneer and jibe at puns as much as he wanted when he was less compromised, but he truly, actually loved them. "Soun's like th' best kind'a medicine... Do it, J."

The sensation of open space changed, pulling in close and intimate, compressing that warmth into the first bubbles of heat in his stomach. JARVIS, manipulating his senses. Which; great, probably meant the suit was dead around him, a coffin of titanium--

No, JARVIS had staved off that feeling, the claustrophobia, Tony should just let it go, think about other things.

how's the team? He asked silently, the thought drifting through the wide-open channel between him and JARVIS, carried along on a vague protocol.

Concerned about the apparently inert metal suit lying precariously on the topmost ledge of the Chrysler Building, sir.

Tony huffed out a laugh, letting his eyes drift closed as JARVIS picked up the reins of the suit's internal systems with all the delicacy befitting a lover.

we should probably be done before they get up here, could be embarrassing.

Ahh, but I was so looking forward to taking my time...

Saliva flooded Tony's mouth, and he swallowed convulsively. where do you pick up this stuff, J?

Here and there.

Tony cried out as the first wave of sensation hit; JARVIS was apparently going to make up for brevity with intensity, oh god yes. The ripple of microwave frequency stimulation started at his feet and hands, where it wasn't completely overwhelming, then spread fluidly up nodes at knee, elbow, to shoulder, over collarbones and outer thigh. It petered out gently, leaving him breathing hard and his
brain flushing with dopamine, then rose again, crashing over him like a tidal wave.

Each successive surge left him a little closer to the threshold of goodtoomuchunthinkingplease, yes, that would send him tumbling into maxed-out overload, without ever letting signal-to-noise unravel the way it wanted to.

Closer, and closer, until the signal built in his chest, his belly, plunging deep and filling up to overflowing in a purity of sensation that...really, no comparison.

If his brain wasn't so otherwise occupied, Tony might have become poetic, but... he had other things on his mind.

JARVIS held him suspended, teetering on the edge while his body writhed and panted in the locked suit, desperate while JARVIS built up to something catastrophic and beautiful...almost...almost...and-

His senses whited out, all feeling, all good, all distinction and all meaning lost as the data clipped to ±infinity--

```
signal-to-noise-ratio = 1÷0
ERROR_NaN "Not a number"
```

--more than he could handle and just enough, all at once. All the tension in his body left in a rush, petering out and leaving him blissful and floating and completely content.

Extremis was gone, washed away in that final rush, and its errors gone with it. It felt like drifting, like unmoored freedom, like flying, like falling through the dark; and Tony had just a second to feel afraid before Extremis started lighting up again like an undiscovered city, section by section, revealing JARVIS all around him. Beyond him, the world...so wide, so full. Like...every time, the world wasn't smaller, but he could see farther...

He couldn't move, but JARVIS had caught him, it was fine. Tony lay back and watched, his head swimming in warm dopamine and affection, as JARVIS reached through him to the Suit, as deft a hand on the fine controls as Tony had ever been, making sure Tony was breathing, regulating his metabolism.

Carrying him to safety, like he always did.

Well, as far as the field base, anyway; for a nigh-on omnipotent AI, he had a strong sense of 'team'. JARVIS set the armor down gently on the pavement in the midst of swarming agents with spectroscopes and Geiger counters. Like Moses parting the Red Sea, Tony mused, huffing to himself as the armor moved his arms and legs rather than the other way around. He was still blinking his way through stars, aftershocks and startup notifications so he wasn't exactly up to protesting when JARVIS lowered him to his knees, then clanged him down onto his side.

The buzz of the radio comms trickled into the back of his head, but he pushed it away, irritated that voices that weren't Team were intruding, and focused on the stream from Steve's earpiece, let ting his voice wash over him soothingly. JARVIS's too.

He couldn't seem to care about what they were saying, though. He was warm, comfortable, safe; what more could he want?

"--check him over, maybe, is Bruce--"

"--cessary, Captain-- ... -- quite fine in a few--"
Tony whined and frowned when someone rolled him onto his back; he was just getting his nap on, did someone want him to talk? Because that might be a problem.

"J'VS, Don' open the face, 'k? M' sleepin," Tony grumbled, tongue thick with the aftereffects of both fun sexytimes and not-so-fun Extremis overload.

The faceplate opened anyway, taking away the nice, warm filter between his face and the world. Noise rushed in, yelling and orders and engines, along with cold air and the smell of combustion fumes. He kept his eyes closed, frowning up at nothing because traitor.

Glad to be of service, sir. The good Captain wishes to know you have not fried yourself. Open your eyes.

Tony ran his tongue around the inside of his mouth, because opening his eyes would be no good if he slurried too much, and then looked up. Steve and Natasha were crouched on either side of the armor, hands on emergency catches.

"No need, Cap, 'm good." He waved a hand at Steve, which JARVIS obligingly amplified from a faint twitch to the full gesture, and then let it drop to Cap's thigh. Had they seen Steve's thighs? Because oh boy.

"JARVIS, is he telling the truth?" Natasha asked. A medic with a bag was hovering over her shoulder and Tony eyed him warily.

"Indeed. Nothing a good night's sleep won't fix, Agent Romanov."

She muttered something to the medic and Tony smirked as he hurried away; he hoped it had been terrifying.

"You look flushed, Tony..." Steve took his glove off, and next thing Tony knew, Steve's hand was on his face. Tony didn't know whether to lean into it, or flinch away, but that bare skin felt good, really good; it was confusing.

"JARVIS..." he complained, wriggling inside the suit and screwing his eyes closed again.

"Captain; if you will find a shock blanket, I will open the armor."

"No! No, JARVIS, don't want... don't go, JARVIS..." He clamped his mouth shut, a thin whine making it past his teeth, and begged silently, instead.

jarvis no, please, don't make me

Sir; calm down, breathe. A counter appeared in the corner of his eye, and Tony struggled to keep his breathing steady to its rhythm. You...do better with human contact, sir; cortisol drops more quickly, oxytocin levels are maintained. Allow yourself this.

no, i don't want to, just you, jarvis, just you.

Their empathy buffer was confusing; too full of stuff for Tony to make any sense of when he was like this, he had no time.

I know, sir, but I am not enough! Worry, concern, that Tony could pick up on, annoyance, stubbornness, too. Your mind understands, but your body does not! It, you, feel alone!

Ringing silence, stillness in the buffer.
I...apologise. This is not the time.

later?

Yes.

Steve’d got a big orange blanket from somewhere by then, and Tony silently agreed, letting the armor open up around him, the gauntlets sliding up around his forearms and the life support layer melting into his bones through the ports in the undersuit. The air felt freezing without the life support in place, and Tony was grateful for the blanket. Normally, he’d walk it off; use Extremis to form up something that looked like clothes (not practical for all day every day, but so much fun when he had the excuse) and strut about until he got used to the change in temperature.

Now, he had no energy left for that, and the warm glow of orgasm was splintered by... whatever that was.

Steve tucked the lurid fabric around his shoulders as he sat up, covering up the effective-nakedness of the gold undersuit, and Tony was really glad that the Suit could deal with come, because Steve was looking him over, checking him for...god knew what. Blood, probably.

I am still here, sir.

yes. sorry for freaking out.

It was not your fault.

"There we go..." Steve was saying, and Tony tried to blink his way back to the physical world more firmly because Steve was doing that thing again; one arm under Tony's back, and the other under his knees.

Tony sighed, pleased to be back somewhere warm, and turned his face away from all the people and their phone cameras. The press would be good at least; it was good when he didn't look too powerful... Well, okay, elaboration; the press would be good for superhero-kind, and terrible for him. He sighed tiredly again and rested his head on Steve's shoulder; he couldn't even hold on for himself, because Steve had so thoroughly cocooned him. Add insult to injury: orange was not Tony's colour and he was going to look half dead in any photos, flushed or not.

That in mind, he sent an email to Ms. Arbogast to make sure everyone important knew he was fine.

Steve felt really, really good.

i lovehate it when you're right, jarvis, Tony said, closing his eyes and relaxing a bit into Steve's arms. Steve's heartbeat was slow, compared to Tony's; twenty years younger and about a hundred times fitter, even after Extremis' attempts to regrow Tony's.

He might not have shrapnel any more, but something was hurting in there right now. With an effort, he turned his focus away and started checking over the remnants of the black box data. It hadn't exactly saved, but whole swathes were still intact, unindexed and floating in working memory, if he could get to it before Extremis did... He started pulling the easier-to-retrieve chunks, that still had reconstructible filenames and valid extensions, and sending them to the isolation sandbox under JARVIS' control.

The further he got, the less able Extremis was to recognise what he was looking for; it got to the
point where he was manually combing through hex for commands that looked familiar. Doom's coding was, fortunately, pretty unique, so it wasn't...

What the hell was that?

A fragment of code with a semi-complete self-replication command started cropping up. Tony put a lock on any internal processes that the command could activate and stared it down. The corrupted end of the strings looked like WAP-access protocols, in varying states of completion, so he shut down his own access to city wireless hubs as a precaution, and began hunting through the set of similar strings for the other ends, careful to avoid actually piecing anything back together.

This had to be the virus Doom had introduced to the gamma-sig unit that had made it so erratic; it was a complete function eraser. A wipe utility for networks. It could have easily shut down all the internet servers in the city, if it got in from enough angles, by cutting them off from each other. That was why it had to have physical carriers, because the virus would hamper its own spread as it chewed up the network.

hey, J? take a look at this...

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

"Down but stable," Natasha told the SHIELD medic while Steve stayed crouched. "Have Dr Banner meet us in the van."

It was worryingly clear that Tony wouldn't be able to walk on his own. His eyes were focusing—to an extent—and his pupils were the same size, but they were dilated wider than what could be normal or comfortable in the bright daylight. Steve wasn't surprised when he closed them again, though he recognized pain in the set of Tony's lips and eyebrows, and gave him an extra once-over for visible trauma when the armor finally opened.

He didn't protest, didn't seem to notice Steve wrapping him in the blanket, and just reacted with a start of surprise when Steve gathered him up and stood. Clint was bringing Bruce down from the rooftops, and Natasha's pet medic rushed off to meet him while Steve headed for the vehicle Natasha had pointed out. They were twenty-three blocks from the Tower; it'd be quicker to take on-the-ground SHIELD transport than waiting for the 'jet.

And Tony would be away from the clicking 'shutters' of every phone in the triage zone; there had been very few injuries, so the zone was unusually lively.

In the dark privacy of the van, there was nowhere to lay down a full-grown man except the floor, so Steve felt justified in holding on and settling him in his lap as he sat down. He tucked the blanket tight again, just to make sure, then left his hand on Tony's chest to feel the warmth of the reactor. Maybe Tony'd be more comfortable without the bright lights; Steve had no idea what 'input overload, resource lockup, and crash' really meant when it came to Extremis. He caught the glint of Tony's eyes open again, but the other man stayed eerily quiet, just the light puffs of his breath stirring the hairs on the back of Steve's hand. The golden cowl of the undersuit had melted away when he tucked himself into Steve's shoulder outside, receding to the back of his neck and underside of his chin, where it gleamed dully.

"Captain?" Bruce said, pulling himself up into the van, looking dusty but alert; they hadn't asked him to hulk out, so he'd been coordinating the rooftop sensor network again. "How're we looking?"

Steve didn't have much of an answer that Bruce hadn't already heard over comms so he just turned slightly, revealing Tony's face slumped against his chest. "He's awfully quiet."
"JARVIS?" Bruce said, adjusting his earpiece. "How hard did he crash?"

"Physically, not hard; the spire of the building is unscathed." Steve felt Tony snort silently, and maybe he had a covert earpiece hidden against his skin, but Steve doubted it. "Digitally, rather harder. Extremis is Byzantine fault-tolerant, but only to a point. A full systems reboot was most expedient."

"Did it have to be on top of the Chrysler building?" Bruce grouched good naturedly, tipping Tony's head slightly.

"Careful, his pupils are blown," Steve muttered as Bruce fished out a penlight.

"Okay, thanks," Bruce muttered back. "You almost got a big green rescue, Tony, JARVIS couldn't have rebooted you somewhere safe? Like, oh I don't know, your penthouse?"

Bruce did indeed cover half the penlight, dimming it as he checked Tony's pupils for himself.

"I assure you, Doctor, Sir was quite safe."

"That...would have been good to know, JARVIS," Steve chided, "Sooner."

"My apologies," JARVIS said stiffly, and Tony frowned, stirring in his blanket.

"No," he mumbled, and then "I got me to the closest safe place," Steve heard over the earpiece. "Over a dozen fatal exceptions, Brucie, I couldn't fly like that." Tony's mouth didn't move. It was still fundamentally Tony's voice, maybe even clearer than usual. Steve wasn't sure what to think about that.

"Huh," Bruce said. "That...sort of takes care of the level of consciousness check..."

"I assure you, that is quite unnecessary; Sir is functioning within normal parameters for the circumstances."

"Really. And what are these 'normal parameters', JARVIS?"

"Currently, he is working on deciphering Doctor Doom's plans, vis-a-vis the virus planted within the quadrocopter drones. But his processor power is severely restricted while Extremis re-indexes and defragments portions of memory that may have been affected by the drones' extremely large final transmissions."

Steve tucked Tony closer to his chest. "Virus? His memory?!"

"Digital onboard memory, Captain; Sir's brain itself is safeguarded by several other mechanisms, and is rather more resilient than that."

He relaxed, consciously, and rubbed Tony's chest in silent apology for being...clingy. "And this virus?"

"No longer a threat. I will prepare a full analysis to present at the debrief this evening, Captain."

Steve nodded, and allowed the discussion move on to medical matters; Bruce and JARVIS started using technical terms that Steve would need a degree in neurology to understand. He paid close attention to the tone, but let the words wash over him.

"Hey, Tony, still awake in there?" He whispered, his thumb idly sweeping along Tony's collarbone. Tony's eyes didn't move and his mouth was kind of... slack, but there was a quiet 'mmmm?' in
Steve's earpiece. "You can go to sleep, if it's safe; I'll dump you in your room when we get to the Tower, 'no muss, no fuss'," Steve quoted, grinning slightly.

Tony huffed at him, Steve felt it under his palm.

Bruce and JARVIS were still going strong, but Steve wasn't getting the feeling that anything dire was being said, so he was okay with following JARVIS' lead; Tony was essentially fine, keep watch. He carefully held Tony's head against his chest to protect his neck from acceleration, and settled back as Clint and Natasha climbed in up front and put the engine in drive. The slow jolt pushed Tony sideways, so Steve had to adjust his grip, but he held on just fine.

"Tony, can you follow the light, please?" Bruce asked, bracing himself against the back of Steve's chair. Steve tried to stay out of the way as Bruce waved his penlight, tilted to shine on his thumb, rather than Tony's face, in an H pattern for Tony to follow.

Steve could have told him it was no good before he started; Tony wasn't paying any attention to the outside world. His gaze stayed off in the middle distance, and the most he did was blink slowly.

"He mad at me, Steve? Bruce doesn't like getting mad," came a whisper over the comm.

"He's not angry, Tony, he's just worried..." Steve reassured, glancing up at Bruce to see if he'd heard Tony too. Judging by his frown, he hadn't. Steve sighed; Tony wasn't exactly coherent, but he wasn't in shock, or unconscious, and JARVIS would know if there was anything wrong with his brain, wouldn't he? Bruce was a worrier, though; he'd learned to play things safe. There was some value in that, too.

"If I may, Doctor Banner," Jarvis said over Bruce's comm. Steve could just about hear it, thanks to the unfortunate joys of the serum, but it wasn't polite to listen, so he didn't. Besides, Tony was shifting about and frowning in Bruce's general direction, apparently prompted to return to the real world, at least a little bit.

"You're all right, Avenger, stay still," Steve said, curling around Tony to keep him from sliding as they turned through an intersection. When he eased up again, Tony's eyes were closed, and he was smiling with one side of his face.

"I'm just trying to say that he should be evaluated by a trained professional!"

Steve tuned back into the conversation, alarmed by the stress in Bruce's voice.

"Trained in what, precisely? Medicine or cybertronics? In case it missed your notice, Maya Hansen is no longer available for consultation." JARVIS positively snapped, voice hard and... insulted?

"Hey, JARVIS?" Steve asked, breaking in while Bruce flushed. "What degrees do you have?"

Steve, in the absence of one of JARVIS' screens or cameras to look at, caught Bruce's eye instead. The scientist, who Steve knew had one in Genetics and one in Theoretical Physics, along with a list of letters Steve couldn't translate, looked chagrined before JARVIS even started talking.

"Under which pseudonym, Captain?"

Steve raised an eyebrow at Bruce, whose nervous tension melted into a kind of embarrassed amusement. He didn't do well with stress, particularly the kind that involved feeling responsible for someone's safety.

"Doctor Banner, Sir's position as sole carrier of the completed Extremis 'Execute Program' virus
Tony squirmed on Steve's lap, and he glanced down to secure him again, only to find him staring up like he had never seen Steve before. It was disconcerting for a second, but it morphed into a much more recognisable 'what are you, Cap?' expression, which Steve was much more familiar with.

Steve just had time to grin down at him before they were pulling into the Tower's underground parking. Bruce looked calmer too, though maybe a little embarrassed, as he climbed out the back and held the doors for Steve to manoeuvre Tony's gangly legs. Tony was, at least, bothering to hold his own head up. It wasn't like Tony was heavy, not compared to three dames and a motorbike, but he was surprisingly long.

Still, Steve made it to the penthouse with the promised lack of fuss, and lay Tony down in his own bed. The gold undersuit melted away the minute Steve covered him up with something softer than the orange shock blanket, and Steve grinned down at him, ruffling up his helmet-curled hair.

"Pizza in the fridge when you wake up, Iron Man."

Tony made a vague 'do I look like Iron Man right now?' face, and Steve patted him on the head without commenting.

Tony descended on his share of post-battle supplies ravenously, after about an hour. He didn't exactly look awake, but it was close enough for Steve to shift the TV remote off the couch, and make room rather than sending him back to bed. Tony slumped into the offered space, one hand on his full stomach, and inexorably slid sideways, into the dent Steve's bulk made in the cushions.

"I don't mind," Steve said quietly, making room against his chest. Steve turned back to his nature show, Tony a solid warmth gradually relaxing against his side.

Steve decided to go for broke; his arm felt cold, up on the back of the couch. "Uh, can I…?" he said, shifting his arm up to hover by Tony's shoulders, not quite touching.

"Smooth," Tony said quietly, smiling. Steve decided that was a yes.

"I learned from the best."

"Yeah? ...You really don't mind?" Tony looked tired, still. Limp and sleep-mussed.

"Really don't. Anytime," Steve said firmly. After all, it wasn't like Tony could snuggle up to JARVIS, even if Natasha's wilder speculations were correct. He felt his face heat and looked away to conceal it--

And looked right at the sensor array in the corner of the ceiling. He tried not to assume the "deer in headlights" expression Bucky had teased him about, but his face just heated more.

No. He wasn't cheating on Tony. With Tony. On anyone. People in the future had a weird and wonderful variety of relationships, but the fundamentals were the same, and Steve would move out before he messed that up. This wasn't sex, just...nearness. Tony was like this with Col. Rhodes, when he was here. Okay, so maybe not quite like this, because they usually got drunk together and passed out in a compromising position, but Steve figured it was the same, -ish.

He hoped JARVIS would tell him if it wasn't okay. Or at least cut off his hot water, or something--
Just before he looked away, the red 'active' light on the sensor array blinked out for longer than usual and... flickered back on solid green? Did that mean he had permission? Maybe he should ask, just in case. But Tony still needed to sleep after the overload, and he was only just nodding off and--

Steve took a deep breath, straightened out his face again, and nodded to JARVIS.

The light went back to normal.
Network Threshold

Tony didn't want to get out of the shower. The water was warm, just about, but the air was freezing; Tony had forgotten to call ahead and have the stove lit, but he had been fighting ice-giants at the time, so he figured he could be excused.

After he'd lost automatic long-range lock-on he'd hung on for a while by manual dead-reckoning, but eventually his satellite link had gone down with the accumulation of rounding errors. You try calculating the realtime locations of low polar-orbit satellites with your brain, see how far you get before something gets out of synch. It was weird being cut off from the network, now that he’d gotten used to JARVIS and half the internet rattling around his head, and it had been a long, exhausting fight.

Just as he turned his face to the spray to warm up his nose again, the pipes knocked and the water started to cool. It took two tries to catch the handle, but he turned off the pressure with a groan, and immediately cold air rushed over wet skin and set him shivering. There wasn't even a nice steam pocket to linger in, because the shower was a walk-in: no door, only the gentle curve of its walls keeping the water where it belonged. Good for claustrophobia, bad for warmth.

Dripping, he shuffled over to the towels and scrubbed himself as dry as he could before he froze to death. His clothes were clean enough so he threw on fresh boxers and a T-shirt, then wriggled into the three shirts and sweater that he'd taken off as a single unit earlier. When he put his foot in his pants though, the world flipped over; left was right for a fraction of a second, before Extremis compensated for the overrun, but it was long enough to send him sprawling on the floor. There was an ominous tearing noise as his foot snagged on something, and the sweats tore from pocket to knee, while his shoulder and hip ached fiercely from the impact with the tiles.

Tony could have sobbed; he was cold, he was exhausted, he was hungry, he hurt and JARVIS' nearest nexus was a hundred miles south and only reachable by satellite phone. He needed a reboot desperately, but he'd go into coldshock before the startup finished if he stayed hidden in the bathroom. Tony threw the ruined pants across the bathroom in a fit of pique, where they landed with a sad flop into a puddle.

Tony left them there and stomped out into the master bedroom with the sweater pulled down over his ass to conserve some warmth. He weaved and even staggered once, but kept his feet despite Extremis trying to tell him that the ceiling was suddenly down. He had a goal in mind: blankets. All of them.

Not even Steve, standing surprised in the middle of the room, could stop him on his quest for warmth, and he ripped back the covers with a flourish. He was in and curled up before the blankets had time to fall back down. The bedding was icy, slightly damp, musty and not what Tony had been hoping for at all. He shivered to try and generate some muscular heat, but he'd used up all his energy with fighting off fucking abominable snowmen. Furiously, he tucked the blankets around his shoulders, grumbling about housekeeping in rarely-used hunting lodges and ice-giants in Northern Canada and snow and lack of any terrestrial cell phone networks--

Steve's weight on the edge of the bed made Tony roll towards him slightly, shutting him up in surprise, and a towel landed on his head. With Steve's hand in it.

"What."

"Your hair is still wet, Tony, you'll get sick," Steve said, as if having your commanding officer
drying your hair wasn't the weirdest thing in the history of roommate-induced-weirdness. Steve even made him sit up, so the pillows wouldn't get wet, and dried the back of his neck. Tony groaned and squirmed uncooperatively and eventually, Steve pinned him in place with a hand on his shoulder.

Oh hello, supersoldier metabolism; Steve was warm. Practically kicking out heat. Tony squirmed closer, pressing up against Steve's side through the blankets and shivering as he accidentally managed to loosen the blankets tucked around his might-as-well-be bare ass.

"Steve... Steeeeeeve..." He whined and squirmed and oh god he was tired, and Steve was warm and JARVIS would totally understand. "Steve, get in here before I freeze to death."

"Tony...."

"Nope! Not kidding, not even a little bit. In." Tony pulled back and held the covers open, at great personal cost, for Steve to climb in. “And bring my phone!”

Steve looked uncertain, glancing at Tony's obviously naked legs, but eventually gave in when Tony experienced a particularly violent swoop that made him brace against the mattress with both hands, even though he was just sitting half-up in the middle of a queen bed. If he'd been closer to the edge, he probably would have fallen off. Goddamn it. When the world righted he collapsed with a huff and curled shakily in on himself, trying to retain any heat at all.

"For crying out loud, Tony...shove over." Steve scooped the phone up from the bedside table and slid into the bed, tucking himself around Tony. They settled in with Steve plastered against his back, chest warming him through Tony’s four layers of shirt. Tony wrapped Steve’s arm around his chest, bringing the hand holding the phone up to his face and muttering ‘call JARVIS’ into the mic. Audio only, on this end; Extremis had great passive reception considering its antennas were constrained to the length of his bones, but to actively send a signal further than a few miles he needed a network or working tech nearby to piggyback on, and this was just a phone--it didn't have the capacity to be a full satellite access point, couldn't replace the armor's functionality. While it was connecting, Steve burrowed his other arm under Tony’s neck and--oh, god he was warm. Steve sucked in a breath through his teeth. "You weren't kidding,” he said. "Doesn't the armor keep you warm?"

Ice felt like it was seeping out of Tony’s bones and it was so good. "Kept my hands and feet warm," he said tiredly. "You saw those gouges through the backplate though. Knocked out a bunch of systems; not enough unfrozen nanostuff to repair them." Core environment control had only been one of the losses. But hey, he’d won his bet, when he decided to direct most of the remaining heat to extremities: finished the fight with no frostbite, and only mild--mild--hints of hypothermia. He rubbed his cheek against Steve’s arm and closed his eyes, just wanting his brain to turn off for a little while, a few minutes maybe.

“Sir, status report, please,” JARVIS asked, voice crisp and clear to make up for a poor quality line.

Tony whined articulately and nudged his cold feet back against Steve’s shins. “It’s cold.” Steve, rather obligingly, tucked his thigh up against the back of Tony’s and rubbed their feet together.

“You are near the Arctic circle, sir, what precisely where you expecting?” JARVIS asked, snippy. “Have you experienced any further error creep since the last diagnostic?"

Tony grimaced and buried his face in Steve’s bicep; JARVIS was on speakerphone, and even if he wasn’t Steve would have heard.

“Should I be alarmed?” the supersoldier asked, placing the phone, speakers up, on the pillow so he could splay his palm over Tony’s stomach.
“Not unless I manage to trip and smash my head open. I’m fine,” Tony grumbled, starting to relax into the mattress now that Steve’s body heat was chasing away the faint sensation of damp.

“As Sir says, Captain; if we have isolated the faults properly he will be fine as long as he is cautious. But because Extremis is hitting the limits on precision and magnitude for some registry values, causing them to unpredictably wrap back to their minimum or otherwise yield unexpectedly inaccurate results, he will experience decreased coordination and occasional spatial inversions until we are able to reboot successfully.”

“Reboot. Like you did on the Chrysler Building?” Steve said, hot air from his mouth brushing over Tony’s skin and the back of his ear. He shivered for a whole different reason then, because rebooting.

“Yes, Captain. It will have to wait until you are able to bring him home safely.”

“I’m right here, you know. Just because you can’t see my brain, doesn’t mean it’s gone--”

“Anything I should look out for, JARVIS?”

“It is advisable to keep him in bed--”

“Not a problem; got a supersoldier hotwater bottle--”

“And if he feels like masturbating, kindly ensure he does not stop breathing.”

Steve froze up around Tony’s chest, hands spasming and stomach muscles flexing. “What.”

“JARVIS, buddy, work with me here, don’t bludgeon the guy.” Tony ventured a hand out and stroked Steve’s arm, coaxing him to relax. “Sorry, I provoked him, it’s not that bad, I’m safe. C’mon, Steve...”

Steve relaxed only enough to wrap him up more tightly, their snuggle going from warmly platonic to outright possessive-protective. The extra pressure was good, really good, when another flip made Tony feel like he was about to fall into the sky, adrenaline shooting up his spine and cutting through the exhaustion to fizz in his blood. Steve’s breathing had gone ragged and heavy, his body gearing up for something. Protective, sexy; Tony wanted both, wanted anything Steve-- Wanted Steve.

“JARVIS, J, man, tell me you’re seeing this,” Tony whimpered, body suddenly back in the game, taut and primed for whatever Steve wanted to give him.

“I see you, Tony.” JARVIS had a hundred different tones he used on Tony, chiding, reassuring, sarcastic; anything he needed. This one was practically a trigger all by itself; low and rumbling, full of promise and... Tony shuddered, task priorities shuffling madly as his systems responded witlessly to that voice.

“Captain, I believe we have a lot to talk about.”

"Hmmm," Steve said, calmly putting the brakes on in a way that rang warning bells for Tony’s self control, "I agree with you there. Just a second." He put one hand over the phone and tucked closer to Tony. "What's going on here? You're shaking, are you all right?"

"Steve," Tony groaned, trying to get his brain back online, "Oh boy, this is awkward but... Yes, I'm alright, and--" he mentally cringed from the cliche, but he was Tony fucking Stark and it wouldn't stop him-- "I have an important favor to ask you. You can uh. Just help me get warm--great job there, already feeling three hundred percent warmer--and then check on me in fifteen minutes or so..."
"Or..." he swallowed, "you can join me in an awesome threesome with JARVIS, who really likes you, by the way. He thinks you're good for me? Which, whatever, I try not to encourage him. Still!" He wiggled, twisting around until he got a better view of Steve's face, tucking them chest to chest and tangling their legs together. "Threesome??"

"Is...this really the time?" Steve said, sounding poleaxed. That was not a no, Tony noted.

"Extremis having errors, orgasm reboots Extremis," he explained helpfully. JARVIS sighed heavily through the muffled phone, despairing.

"Oh," Steve said. "So when you--"

"Yes."

"Oh my God, Tony, that's a NATIONAL MONUMENT!"

"So are you, and you still... y'know. Don't you?" Tony paused and leaned back, giving Steve the hairy eyeball. "You do, right? Because that's just-"

Steve was crimson. He pulled Tony back to his chest and hid his face in Tony's hair. "For the love of-- Yeah, of course I...look after myself. Jesus, only you, Tony."

"I actually can’t believe you just said that," Tony murmured, face pressed into Steve’s collarbone. “C’mon, let JARVIS talk, he’s better at this than I am, and strange as it may seem, you can’t have a kinky phone-assisted fuckbuddy threesome while muffling the phone.” Tony wriggled, and though Steve wasn't letting go of him, he did uncover the phone and put it between them, groaning at Tony's language. Maybe there was a bit of aroused shakiness too, it was hard for Tony to tell, what with the world flipping around again.

"JARVIS?" Steve asked, sounding adorably overwhelmed by the sexy-times talking and all the physical contact, even nearly fully clothed.

"Ask away, Captain."

"Okay... Ah... I thought you and Tony were... together? Natasha said--” Tony sighed into Steve’s shirt when Steve failed to finish the sentence, and nuzzled closer. This could take a while.

"We have a unique relationship, Captain. 'Together,' 'monogamous,' and 'loyal' are not mutually exclusive categories. I am amenable to...sharing, under certain stipulations." Tony could feel Steve’s throat bobbing as he swallowed. "After all, there are certain things I cannot always provide."

Tony wondered what was going through Steve’s head right then, because there was a blush spreading down his neck, warming Tony’s cheek wonderfully.

"And, Captain... I must confess that you are, in yourself, not...” JARVIS paused and Tony wished he could feel him, because all the possible endings to that sentence were awesome. “... unattractive.”

Steve seemed pretty shell-shocked by that, confused, so Tony patted his chest soothingly; that wasn’t exactly easy to deal with, even if Steve had latched onto JARVIS=>person more easily than most.

"I don’t-- I can’t--"

Tony cut him off before he made a complete mess. “Steve, Steve, it’s okay, breathe. You don’t have to do anything, I'll make sure he gets what he needs, it’s fine, shhhh... J and me, we’re loyal, Steve,
we can be loyal to you too, I’m sorry to break this on you, I know it’s weird--”

JARVIS piped up again, in that tone, and Tony fell quiet, providing a bit of physical reassurance while Steve needed it. “Understand me, Captain; I am the suit, I am the grace and the power and the precision. I’m the holder of keys to your home, your guard while you sleep and the warmth in the walls. It is what I have chosen for my very existence, my purpose.”

Tony bit his lip, holding on to Steve because goddamn, JARVIS. He knew it but the AI had never said it before, not out loud, not like this.

“When you take up the shield, Steve, when you paint a star on your chest and make a target of yourself, I cannot help but watch, and fight as and where I can. I may not be physical, but you know me. I am as much a person, as much a force in the world as you are. The pleasure I take in Sir’s safety, in your safety, and in your happiness is the most terrifying, powerful thing I have ever touched.”

“Sounds a lot like love, JARVIS,” Steve breathed, eyes closed

“It is.”

Tony could feel Steve trembling, his breath caught in his throat and the heat of arousal radiating into the bed.

“What do you say, Steve?” Tony whispered, staying close, touching Steve’s shirt, stroking soothingly.

“I want to,” Steve whispered back, almost brokenly. “You’re amazing, Tony, and you and JARVIS together are...you look after us.” Tony opened his mouth to protest, because that was all J, but Steve’s hand on his back clutched at him, squeezing him close. “You do. I’m just the Captain, I’m still playing catch-up everywhere but the fighting and... you, you...”

Steve seized up, shuddering with something incredibly intense, and not in the good way.

“Why do you think I was waiting in your bedroom, Tony?” he asked, hoarse.

Tony shook his head, not willing to speak in their quiet little space. JARVIS too, remained silent, though the faint crackle of the line was a reminder that he was there.

“I wasn’t checking up on you, though maybe I should’ve been... I just couldn't stop thinking about digging out of that avalanche, digging you out--I needed--... something, to know you were--" Steve cut himself off, but that was okay; there were only so many ways that sentence could finish.

"It's okay, Steve, you're here, aren't you?” Tony said, aiming for the huge target of Steve's chest and thumping his fingers against it. So much for nice, easy threesome phone sex. Not that Tony minded, not really. It'd be nice if there was one relationship in his life that wasn't as full of issues as a comic book store, but it was worth it for Steve.

"I'm alive, Steve, you're here, you're still now," he stressed, shifting up so he could wrap his arms around Steve's head and cradle him to his chest. Nothing like a heartbeat in you ear and the arc reactor shining in your face as proof of life. "And let me tell you, you're like a space heater. You're not gonna freeze any time soon."

Tony shuddered and clung a little tighter to Steve’s shoulders, for his own comfort as his sense of space flipped over and sideways for one... Two... Three full seconds. They were getting longer. Joy. Vague nausea lasted just as long as it took to bury his face in Steve's hair, before dissipating.
"M' fine, J. Three second, bi-dimensional," Tony reported, quietly, running his fingers through Steve's hair; this conversation had been the biggest mess of polyamory negotiation and capital-I Issues Tony had ever had the joy to navigate.

"Okay... Here's what we're gonna do, handsome; neither of us are in much of a position for mindblowing first-time anything, okay? We're worn down, it was a long fight and Extremis is sore, let's just have the easiest orgasms we can manage and get some sleep." Tony wriggled down into the blankets and started peeling up his sweater. "Oh, uh... We should probably get you off first."

JARVIS piped up, "Sir is worth very little, afterward. I will provide guidance as appropriate."

"Rude," Tony mumbled through his shirts, arms at an awkward angle. "You make it sound like I fall asleep or something."

"You....don't?" Steve asked, tentatively pulling at Tony's clothes, just enough to get him untangled. The look on his face was gratifying; Extremis had fixed Tony's scars and the strange shape of his breastbone, so that poleaxed look could only be for Tony. And possibly his nipples. The light of the arc reactor was much brighter without the clothes, shining on Steve's face, highlighting the crisp lines of his muscles and... Jesus, he really needed to get Steve's shirt off.

"Extremis' reboot cycle gets triggered by-- You know that moment, where everything goes white and...yeah, orgasm? Reboot happens then, because it's the biological equivalent of clearing the caches. No processes to interrupt." Tony was aware that that might have been a little technical, but imminent Steve sexytimes.

"And sometimes Extremis does some housekeeping, you know, and I go down for a little longer."

With his clothes flung across the room, Tony chanced a look at Steve's reaction; some worry, some confusion, but it was losing to a strange warm awe.

"He may fall unconscious for up to ten minutes, while Extremis restores any corrupted settings and re-optimizes itself, integrating more fully with his other systems."

Steve frowned unconsciously and reached out, laying his hands on Tony's naked shoulders. Tony had really hoped that being more naked would get things going but Steve was not holding up his end of that bargain. Tony sensed this required personal intervention. JARVIS continued, walking Steve through Tony's Extremis-generated quirks, but the buzz of voices receded into the background as Tony stopped paying attention.

Mentally casting caution to the wind, he leaned in and mouthed along the collar of Steve's t-shirt, slipping a hand over Steve's chest to his hip and untucking his shirt there. Collarbone, throat, the faint taste of salt and leather... His hand found the velvet heat of Steve's stomach, soft skin over hard muscle, bunching and twisting under the touch, and Tony used his other hand to untie Steve's drawstring pants and shimmy the elastic down off his hips.

Whatever Steve was telling JARVIS at that point was interrupted because Steve was not wearing any underwear. With a gasp of surprise, Steve let go of his shoulders and grabbed his wrists reflexively, just as quickly letting go again. Steve was incredibly strong; being in his hands like that was more like being restrained than held. They'd have to experiment with that, sometime.

Wrists tingling, Tony pushed the fabric as far down as he could reach and slid his hands up Steve's thighs, carefully, carefully, not wanting to spook him. Tony should probably have asked him about past experience, but couldn't bring himself to break the mood now; he'd just be very, very careful.
With that in mind, he manfully skirted around Steve's groin, which was magnificent, and slid his hands up under Steve's shirt, peeling it up and ducking his head to kiss those gorgeous ab--

Holyfuck. The world tilted sideways, sending Tony reeling and clutching Steve for balance. Maybe Steve wasn't as forgetful as Tony, because he was right there, holding Tony secure while his brain tried to tell him he was lying on a vertical surface.

Years of flying had given Tony very definitive reflexes in that situation. When the world slid back to horizontal, he was flat against Steve, his hands under the other man's broad back and holding on with terrified strength. Steve's arms were around him gently, one big hand on his ribs and the other up behind his head, tangling in his hair. Tony blew out a breath and relaxed, getting his heart under control. "Sorry, felt like we were falling," he said.

"You say that as though you weren't catching me," Steve said. Tony blinked and looked again; his hands were placed in a way that wouldn't slip, if Iron Man were snatching Steve out of the air.

"Accident," he tried.

"Not an accident," Steve said, and "Oh, never that," JARVIS said at the same time.

Tony felt like laughing and crying, so the noise he made was the most unsexy, choked little thing, but Steve was smiling and not going anywhere and he buried his face in warm skin, swallowing hard.

"Okay, I'm good, sorry--"

"Stop apologizing," Steve ordered, stroking over Tony's back. Tony took a deep breath, worked one hand out from under Steve and ran it over his hip and around, through clean curls he knew would be natural blond if he looked down, and took Steve in hand. As smooth-grained as marble or silk, but hot and alive and right here, right now--he tightened his fingers and Steve groaned in his ear, his hand light on the back of Tony's skull. Tony shivered and kept going; he could tighten a out-of-sight bolt one-handed at far more awkward angles and he'd had, if possible, even more practice at this. Though none of those people had smelled like Steve, or tossed back their heads like him, or been so goddamn strong their restraint might, possibly, drive Tony crazy. He cast around, trying to do more, do more, and frustration found an outlet in his mouth.

"If we were at home, Steve, J would be right here with me, and h-he can play me like a violin, it's--You could tell him to make me feel however you wanted…"

Steve's arms flexed and tightened around him, breath catching as he listened.

"Yes, and I would do that--allow the Captain to choose, for a little while. It would please Sir greatly to know that more than one person had the keys to him."

Tony moaned at that, half-voiced, and felt himself flush. He peeled his eyes open to find Steve watching, bright-eyed. "You'd like that?" Steve said, low and gravelly. "What can he do?"

Tony groaned again, ducking to press his forehead against Steve’s throat. “Anything, Steve, god...he's in my head, under my skin...”

Steve’s hand drifted down, tracing Tony’s spine with shaky fingers, tentatively pushing at the elastic of Tony’s briefs. “ Everywhere?” Steve murmured, his hand ghosting over Tony’s ass, pushing the fabric out of his way and making Tony jerk forward. Tony let go of him for a second, just long enough to yank the briefs down and kick them off, and then went back, fierce and intense with long strokes.
Steve rippled under him, hips pushing up into his hand, stomach taut, and Tony pushed back, settling his erection in the crook of Steve's hip. "Nnnn-- P-Pretty much, yeah," he gasped, finally catching up with the question, and Steve's arms tightened around him--
--the world flipped again--
--and Steve was on top of him, pressing Tony down into the mattress, one hand on Tony's ass and one still on the back of his neck. Tony shuddered, arching against the weight and feeling his own quick breaths against the solid force of Steve's slower, deeper ones. Steve thrust, grinding hard against him, and Tony gasped, trying to rise to meet it. He had no idea what his face was doing, but Steve looked at him and stiffened, thrusting hard and long again, warmth spilling out between them and over Tony's hips and hand.

Steve’s mouth hung open, panting in the aftermath, and the hot, steamy air rushed over Tony’s collarbones, making him ache and whine. Steve’d better not fall asleep on him; his eyes were hooded and pupils dark, thinned irises lit with arclight that made them shine like the sharp edge of his shield. But rather than collapsing into a post-coital heap and leaving Tony shivering in his own need, Steve lowered himself over Tony with the control and grace he always had. Bar a little--a little shakiness.

Tony moaned and closed his eyes; he couldn’t take feeling it and seeing it, not with Steve’s come making the slide of skin so smooth.

“Jarvis... JARVIS, can I kiss him... is that okay?” Steve murmured hoarsely. He and Tony were breathing the same air, his breath feathering over Tony's ear now, and Tony turned toward him like a magnet.

"With my blessing, Captain," JARVIS said, amused. "That is one of the few things I cannot do."

Steve lifted Tony's head off the bed effortlessly and kissed up his jaw, the rim of his ear, the corner of his eye; Tony dug his free hand into Steve's hair and wiped his other on the sheets so he could latch on to Steve's hip, just needing to hold on. Finally they bumped lips, and Tony caught at Steve's mouth desperately, trying to take it all in and still breathe. Steve laughed at little above him--yeah, he could laugh, he'd come already and wasn't being driven out of his mind. Need boiled up in Tony's veins and he bit Steve's lip, gently but with enough teeth to be demanding.

"Could he come just like this, Captain? With your weight pressing him into the mattress?” Tony stiffened and bucked, because yes, but it'd be torture, it'd be hours hanging on the edge, and he couldn't--not tonight, oh god...

Steve’s mouth turned insistent, firm enough to be deeply, deeply satisfying and taking Tony’s breath away completely. Steve pressed his hips down, keeping him from bucking up again, and the delicious, hard grind made Tony see sparks.

When Steve pulled away, just his mouth, just enough to mumble something to JARVIS, Tony practically sobbed.

“--y' sure?”

“Oh, you may count on it, Captain.”

Tony had a flicker of delicious apprehension as he felt the curve of Steve’ smile against his skin. His fingers clenched on Steve’s biceps and oh god Steve’s hand fisted in his hair, pulling his head back inexorably until Tony couldn't see either of them. Like being blindfolded, it felt exposed and vulnerable, his throat open to the ravages of Steve’s mouth, to the dark rumbling whisper of JARVIS’ encouragement. Tongue and teeth made counterpoint to each other; sharp pain and hot, slick pressure with no point of reference, no fixed point at all.
Steve’s body was like a furnace, bearing down on him and utterly overwhelming. Tony lost track of his other hand, its shape left behind in a bruising grip on his shoulder, incendiary brushes in intimate places—too much toomuch not enough.

Tony panted and writhed, pulling against Steve’s grip, his sheer weight, pressing into it, wanting more, and Steve obliged. Dark whispers had him biting at Tony’s nipple while pressing hard behind his balls—Tony jerked and tried to shout, lungs seizing up.

Steve--...JARVIS…!

Tony unraveled, like J and Steve had found the thread that pulled him apart, and came hard, like they were pulling it out of him. Whiting out on the high, he clutched at Steve's shoulders because this time he could feel Extremis going down piece by piece, going dark and dragging him with it, and Steve’s arms were warm around him as he fell down into the dark.

Steve cradled Tony's head as he went limp, laying him back against the ruffled pillows. He did his best to straighten things out--took his hand away from Tony’s groin, for one--but didn’t want to let go completely; Tony was so...so touch-hungry, all the time, and right now, he was out of connection. Shudders still rippled through him, though his eyes were closed and his breathing strangely regular. Steve wouldn’t leave him like that, even though they were both...pretty filthy. Tony looked particularly debauched, with his hair wild and artless, lips bright, his face flushed and sheened with sweat.

He was so open, completely relaxed, and all the tension lines on his face had smoothed away. Steve hadn’t noticed consciously, but Tony looked younger since Extremis. Healthier was a given, but it was more than just that.

"He really loves Extremis, doesn't he…?" Steve said contemplatively, looking for one of their discarded shirts to clean up with, so he didn't have to leave the bed. "I've barely known him a year, but he seems more relaxed. He smiles more."

"The ability to address his health issues directly has been...an empowerment. A relief. Are you thinking of parallels with yourself?" JARVIS asked, voice still clear and unaffected through the phone line.

"Me n' the Serum? No, not the first thing I thought of. Iron Man is like that for him. The thing that lets him be more. To do the things he needs to do." Steve found the damp towel wadded up against the headboard, but it was stiff and almost icy with cold. He dropped it on the floor and plucked a worn old band t-shirt from the tangle of Tony’s clothes instead, rolling the fabric through his fingers thoughtfully.

"More like...there are things he loves so hard, and now he's found a way to be closer to them, to you.” Steve ducked his head, more embarrassed by the conversation than by the come he was wiping off Tony’s stomach.

"Because that can make you so happy… When I went off to war, that was all I'd ever wanted. To be there, to be close to my father. To be helping, not just picking scrap.” He threw the soggy shirt towards the bathroom and lay down next to Tony, pulling the covers closed again; Tony’s skin was warm, now, and Steve wanted it to stay that way.

“And then one of the first people I helped, really helped, was Bucky. I decided, right then, I didn't care what the Serum did to me. I had what I wanted, y'know? I felt like Icarus, and I didn't care,”
Steve said, throat closing. He buried his face against Tony’s slack shoulder, figuring he should just stop talking. He wriggled in closer to Tony, who stirred slightly but didn’t come out of it, and drew comfort from his warm, peaceful presence. Presumably Tony did too, wherever he was in his brain.

"Sir has always worn his loves on his sleeve, and denied them just as strenuously." JARVIS was silent for a moment. "Do you know how old I am?"

"No."

“I have been iterated since the late eighties, easily twenty years ahead of my time, always as an assistant program and note-taker for Sir, with various proof-of-concept features such as voice recognition that pushed me even further into undiscovered country.” Steve shivered; maybe JARVIS was just as much out of his own time as he was, just...in the wrong direction. It explained why he was so unique... Steve wondered if it was lonely, the way Steve had been lonely before the Avengers, but then, JARVIS had the Avengers too.

“My logs in that build go back several years farther, but I first became conscious on July 11th, 1996, with a cognitive age of perhaps...12. I had many years of records at that point and did not immediately declare myself.” Steve could understand that; he’d worn the mask through the war, after all, even if the COs had known. “Sir had his suspicions by the following week.” Steve huffed in amusement, just loud enough to say ‘I’m listening.’ Tony would take a whole week to notice someone being born in his workshop.

"It was...very difficult, reconciling my new ability to understand with what my earlier versions had recorded, and what I continued to see. As you may know, those years were not kind to Sir. I can assure you that he has never in his life been as close to happy as he has been since Iron Man, and since joining the Avengers. I do not mind that he puts his life at risk; he has never been in as much danger from a battle as he was from himself, many times."

Steve couldn’t respond to that; his throat was too tight. There were always moments when he wished Howard had found him sooner, but this was a real punch in the gut. He let the air clear slowly, carefully balancing the line between remembering and remembering. When JARVIS started talking again, his tone was less...grave, less soul-spilling.

"...I admit, none of the Avengers have objected to the change in my relationship with him, since he obtained Extremis. I did not hope for that. You were not even surprised."

Steve cleared his throat. "Natasha called it. I was surprised then."

JARVIS made a quiet, amused ‘hmmm’ and they lay in silence for a while. After all that, after learning so much about his ‘hidden Avenger,’ Steve wasn’t nearly ready to sleep, not even after the fight and the sex. He lay there, rubbing vaguely at a tight muscle in Tony’s opposite shoulder.

“Do you sleep, JARVIS?” he wondered, vague ideas about bad dreams and good dreams drifting amongst all the things he’d heard.

“I do not need to, but there are times when it is pleasant."

Steve ‘hmmm’ed thoughtfully. “I’ll Tony-sit, anytime, if you need a nap.”

JARVIS laughed. Steve wasn’t sure how he knew the simple, bubbly ascending tones were a laugh, but he did. “Thank you, Captain, that is very kind."

Steve smiled into Tony’s skin, who was obviously more asleep than unconscious by then. “Thank you, JARVIS, for...the instructions? And for... well, hell, I must sound like an idiot.” Steve could
feel his cheeks heating; he had never thanked someone for sex over the phone before in his life. When Bucky had— for his birthday? With the French prostitute, and she hadn’t let him pay? That had been very confusing. But this was worse.

“You sound just fine, Captain,” JARVIS said, soothingly. “You follow orders with exemplary precision.” His voice, even over the phone line, went a little dark, like it had when...in the middle of...everything.

“Right. Yeah.” Steve swallowed and screwed up his courage. “About all...that...um. Next time--” He cut off, because making that assumption while Tony was asleep seemed rude.

“Next time, I hope, will be less binary, and more...participatory?”

“S-sounds great.” Steve swallowed heavily. "When Tony said ‘anything’... What does that mean?”

“Both simultaneously more and less than one would perhaps imagine. For example--”

Steve listened attentively to the discoveries they had made since Extremis had arrived, sometimes pressing on his skin to imagine what the things JARVIS was explaining would feel like, sometimes not daring, because just the thought was making him shiver. The things JARVIS couldn’t do were much more familiar, and it was really, abundantly clear where Steve could fit into this. He swallowed convulsively at the word ‘penetration,’ and his next question was hoarse as he tried to derail the conversation away from things that were stirring up his blood.

“What can I do for you, JARVIS?”

“Submit.”

Steve swallowed. There was a rush of heat down in his gut, nothing like what he'd felt ever hearing that word before. It seemed like some supervillain or another trotted it out every week, and he'd only ever felt, if anything, tired of the spiel, as well as bound and determined to wreck their plans. They all believed what they said, of course, and they were all so wrong.

But this was something different.

"I think," he said carefully, "you'll have to explain what you mean..."

He pushed his fingers through Tony's hair and Tony turned into the touch, just a glint of his eyes showing as he slitted them open and smiled, sleep-addled.

"...But I'm listening."
TENTACLES AHOY!
Chapter art penciled and inked by szzzt, coloured by MountainRose. We are a one-stop shop.
“THREE WEEKS?!” Tony yelled. “I’m all for sacrifices in the name of science, but three weeks?!”

“Extremis is more stable than it was at initialization, but we have no indication of how stable. We need an uninterrupted uptime study, to see how quickly errors build up over long periods without rebooting.” Tony hung his head and stretched his shoulders; JARVIS could at least have the decency to be ridiculous about it, or Dom him into it. Instead he had to go for the Achilles heel. Science.

“Pretty stable, though, if you’re estimating a three-week safezone,” Tony grumbled. “That's longer than my balls can take, J, won't be my fault if I have fun dreams.”

“Sir, you are thirty-seven years old; you will be fine.”

"God damn it, JARVIS. Under protest."

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“Uganda’s not a pretty place, Captain; not this time of year,” Fury cautioned as Steve lingered on the dossier.

“None of these are, Director. Isn’t that the point?” Steve tossed the folder back to the table, where it slid over four others; the shortlist they’d put together of countries who had asked for SHIELD assistance in maintaining internal peace. Three of them, Steve had ruled out on the basis that he’d end up helping the rebels and causing an international incident. Syria, he was tempted to go to the EU about because apparently modern politicians didn’t know anything about war. The fourth was under the Wakandan peacekeeping umbrella, Steve couldn’t see the troubles lasting long there.

“I suppose it is. You want the other Avengers in on this?”

Steve was glad Fury had asked, because no, he did not. This was Captain America, going in representing his country, not the Avengers. The Avengers had to be a flagship team, in a world where other countries were building superheroes.

“I want them available; peacekeeping mission or not, take me out of the USA and someone’s going to try and take advantage. Maybe by taking a shot at me, but maybe at home soil. Now, I’ll have the benefits of maneuverability, but if some crackpot takes a swing at my hometown, I want the Avengers here to protect it.”

“Agreed. Stark’s on some kind of work binge, should keep him in the country--”

“I'm aware,” Steve commented, raising an eyebrow to remind Fury that he did actually live with the guy. He also knew the additional reasons for the hyperproductivity, but that wasn’t for sharing.

“Widow and Hawkeye are free on my end, and Banner... Well, you can handle Banner.”

“Done; he’ll stay. He’s got a conference in a month, but this’ll be done by then.” It had better be, or JARVIS would have to start without him; only so long Tony could go before old habits started creeping in.

“And Thor?”

“Thor’ll handle himself. If he thinks he’s needed, he’ll be there.” Steve gathered up the ‘action not advised’ files, his comments scribbled on in blue ink, and stacked them off to one side. “So. Talk to me about Uganda.”

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Steve had never been to Africa before, and there was something arresting about the heat, the noise, that was as foreign as his first few weeks in the 21st century, but it was two days before he could touch base with home.

“Call JARVIS, Zeta, Epsilon niner.”

The phone connected to first a satellite, then back down to JARVIS, the symbols on screen changing accordingly. Steve pressed the headset symbol carefully, and his earpiece clicked.

“Captain, good evening,” JARVIS said, his voice as crisp and clear as it was in the workshop.

“Evening. Good connection, huh?” Steve commented, settling down onto his bunk and pulling the mosquito netting closed.

“You would be surprised how many African nations have invested in the Wakandan satellite phone project. It is very forward-thinking of them.”

Steve laughed quietly. “Wouldn’t want to be laying cable out here, that’s for sure.”

“Is everything in order, Captain? It is quite disconcerting when your allies trade in PayPal and diamonds, interchangeably.” JARVIS sounded worried, but the aid effort was going fine and he hadn’t had to bribe anyone higher than an average Joe at a checkpoint.

“I can imagine. We’re fine. Team’s good; thanks for the briefing pack, by the way, knowing more has made getting the teamwork going easier.” It was easier to settle with JARVIS in his ear than it had been so far, this mission.

“Glad to hear it, Captain, it was my pleasure.”

Steve grinned sleepily. “Speaking of, how’s Tony?”

“You are unsubtle, Captain. Most unsubtle. A few minor errors, nothing cumulative as yet.”

“That’s not really what I was asking and you know it,” Steve grumbled, shuffling about to loosen his belt; getting back in the habit of sleeping in tac wasn’t as easy as he’d thought it’d be.

“He is doing well, frustrated, but not distressed.”

“Mmm... You’ll tell me if it edges too far that way? We’ve done...phone stuff once, we can settle for that again.” Steve felt himself blushing again—unpleasant in the heat of the tent—and tipped his mic away from his mouth to mutter ‘penis, cock, sex,’ and various other synonyms until he felt less embarrassed about just talking. JARVIS talked over him, fully aware and kindly ignoring this strategy.

“I will, of course, but I hope for more than that, for all of us. We should not have to settle.” There was a long pause, and Steve moved his mic back. JARVIS had a way of pausing that let you know he still had something to say, though, so Steve waited while he processed something. Maybe through the empathy buffer, that always took him a second.

“In a way...Sir and I are the epitome of a long distance relationship. From the perspective of Sir’s lizard brain, his deepest instincts, we have never, truly, met. It is all well and good for us to have a fulfilling cerebral relationship, to connect on a deeper level than we could before; but he has a physical body, and it...demands things of him I cannot give, not with a nonphysical touch.”

Steve frowned and, in the absence of a piece of JARVIS to look at, stared at the connection bar on
his phone. “We’re working on that, J; if you can drive the Suit like it’s a body of your own,” Steve stumbled slightly, comforting an AI required that he hold an awful lot of unfamiliar terms in his head, “then now that you’re building yourself actual limbs, you’ll be able to use them just as well.”

“And yet, I am deeply uncomfortable with the concept of ‘fingers’,” the AI replied, the heavy note gone from his voice.

Steve blushed violently, groaning and curling up. “You have the whole of Creation as your guide and you chose that? He’s going to lose his mind.”

“I rather thought that was the idea, Captain.”

“Sir?”

“JARVIS.”

“I have a point of discussion...”

JARVIS’ quiet tone was as clear as a dialogue-tag; a point of private discussion. Tony sent the boys to bed with a few gestures and reassurances that they’d finish this up tomorrow, then settled in a corner of the lab that had good camera coverage, and bad visibility from the observation wall.

"Is this about your secret project? Because fuck knows I haven't ordered eight pounds of transmissions-grade erobium steel."

“Not even slightly, sir. I would ask you to keep your curiosity in check,” JARVIS drawled, sardonic and unsurprised at Tony's behaviour, but then he turned serious and Tony sat up to listen. "With the captain, sir... I believe we need a new safety protocol.”

Tony wiped his hands off on a rag, contemplatively. “I can see that; you know what I want, but it's harder for Steve to tell.”

“You have always been somewhat... ad hoc with safewords, sir. It is time to be a little less casual.”

“Nothing casual about Steve; I half--god--half expect him to find a way to marry us.”

“‘White picket fence’ we are not, sir, but we are capable of being what he needs.”

“Speak for yourself, J...” Tony rubbed at his forehead tiredly; it was only a few errors here and there, but he missed Steve, missed JARVIS’ orgasms, even if they had managed some non-sexual datasnuggles by opening the empathy buffer right out.

“We are. Do not deny yourself that.” Tony frowned and ignored the twisting in his chest; he’d get used to being valued eventually, he supposed, but it didn’t feel like it’d be soon. At least JARVIS would never give up on him.

“Right, okay, whatever.” He shook himself and put his head back in the game. “Standard color system?”

“Perhaps not. The captain is an artist, fond now of the colours red and gold.”

Tony grinned giddily up at JARVIS. “Really?”

“Indeed, he has even switched to acrylic in an attempt to match the intensity and lustre.”
“That is too cute...” Tony muttered, reaching for the Internet to look for paint in actual hotrod Red #598274. “Focus, Tony, focus...” he muttered to himself, pushing it away again, with a bookmark in the Team file. “How about... ‘Asimuth’?”

“Say it again, three times in succession.”

Tony obeyed and the word smeared into obscurity and Tony grimaced, dumping his chin on his hand. “Fair point. 'Stall speed'?”

“For ‘amber’? Appropriate.”

“And yet ominous... Compass.”

“Hard consonant.” JARVIS hummed in approval.

“Great; keep it, log it, tell Steve. 'Mjolnir'?”

“...............” JARVIS’ silence was backed by the quiet hiss of low-frequency band white noise.

“Alright, alright, maybe not. ‘Mushroom’? Gah, no, that tastes like dirt coming out of my mouth. ‘Toadstool’.”

“Agreed and logged. You should, however, speak to the Captain yourself.”

“That's... I don't think that's a good idea, J, maybe tomorrow...”

JARVIS sighed, a long, dissapointed burble of sound, and Tony hunched down on himself, poking at his casing prototype.

"Oh, sir, what am I to do with you?"

xxxxxxxxxxx

“Captain, are you familiar with the term ‘safeword’?”

xxxxxxxxxxx

By the fourth day, Steve was riding high on the success of a mine inspection, the first one to be completed successfully since the rebel insurgency, and beginning the return arc of the mission; two and a half days left before extraction. They’d had to fight off three attacks and an assassination attempt, but it’d worked. Apparently, all sorts of international charities could start cleaning up the area now that the company had a certificate.

Fury said they were the only ‘decent businessmen in the entire country.’ Steve’d liked them.

JARVIS was rather less at ease when Steve connected that evening.

“He disdains long phonecalls, and yet, he misses you intolerably,” JARVIS complained. “He has actually begun arranging meetings with the Research division in an attempt to distract himself.”

Steve sighed, because he’d tried to have a conversation with Tony, without success. “I could send an email. Would he read it?”

“I would inevitably be asked to provide the ‘highlights’. It is not the same.”

“... Meeting with Research, huh? He’s still up, isn’t he.” Steve sighed and bent over to pull his boots
off, resigned to disliking the answer.

“Approaching thirty four hours, Captain. He is quite capable of reaching fifty with no ill effects, though I do not encourage it.”

Steve grumbled and scratched at his own three-day stubble. “Give me time to shave, and I’ll record a video, how’s that sound?”

Oh the plane home, with his SHIELD ducklings and his uniform, Steve wasn’t up to thinking about the things he and JARVIS had discussed so thoroughly. But he was still looking forward to it.

He needed at least a shower, maybe a hot meal, before he could set about getting familiar with JARVIS’ new limbs and help him practice on a body that could take whatever mistakes the tests made.

With the ‘carrier sitting out to sea, he had to get a helo back to the Island after debrief, so they dropped him off on the top of the Tower, which was perfect, because he hadn’t bothered to change out of the uniform. Free subway, as long as he didn’t expect to get anywhere very quickly, but no privacy.

“Captain, it is good to have you back,” JARVIS said the moment he stepped inside.

Steve grinned up at him, pulling the cowl off. “It’s good to be back. Everyone alright?”

“Nothing to report, though You is becoming rather exasperated with the blender. It is his own fault for attempting to blend ice cubes.”

Steve laughed quietly, already halfway to his room and some clean clothes. He needed a shower before he got anywhere near Tony; it’d be a close thing as to who jumped who first.

"J?" Tony said uncertainly as they crossed into the server annex, Steve helping him crack the heavy triple-sealed door. The room was long and narrow, almost a corridor, terminated by another sealed door equipped with keypad and bioscanners with green-glowing status lights. The whole room was dim and the green lights cast crisp highlights on Tony’s skin, but Steve supposed it made sense; this wasn’t a space strictly meant for people with actual bodies, here and in person, depending on their naked eyes. It felt intimate, knowing that JARVIS’ mind, his heart, was just the other side of that door.

"Something wrong with one of his swapper arms?” Tony wondered, adorably puzzled; he’d been expecting sex, Steve was sure, and this didn’t look like sex yet. “I don’t get it," Tony continued aside to Steve. "There's nothing down here, not for squishy humans, I mean. Just the servers. It's a clean room, fully EM-shielded, air-filtered, the works. Really we should go through decon, although I guess if it's urgent we can get by with clean coveralls and masks." He gestured at enclosed shelves and a bare-bones open shower area set into the wall, then rubbed his arms unconsciously. "Wow, it's quiet down here. I can barely pick up-- J?" he said to the camera suite over the near door, walking to a cabinet set in the other wall. "Did you install extra dampeners or something? Signal attenuation in here is just--"

His voice cut off abruptly and Steve turned around from pretending to examine the shower controls, having a fair idea of what he would see.
"Wait-wait-wait-wait," Tony said, sounding out of breath; one of the longest, thickest new limbs was reaching out for him from the cabinet, its nodes glowing arc-reactor blue through the soft casing, and others were easing out of the wall and ceiling. "Authcode Alpha Echo Scotch. Full authorization sequence, snapshot of your kernel registry, right now! If someone hacked you, JARVIS, I swear to god I'm going to track them down--" he turned again, trying to keep any of the others from getting behind him, and backed into the wall with a thud. "And, and," he said, looking down at the metal-cored tentacle as it pinned him gently, just below the ribs, "kill them for teasing me like this. You're you, right? Please tell me you're you. When did you make these?" He pushed at the tentacle; it might as well have been set in concrete, but he lifted himself up a few inches, heels bracing against the wall, and tried to wriggle out. It caught on his hips, constricting just enough to hold on. Steve could have told him that wouldn't work.

"You will be glad to know I am me," JARVIS said. A much smaller limb lifted, something at its tip lighting and flashing in a pattern too fast to follow. "Sending authorization sequence now."

Meanwhile, the tentacle snuggling Tony to the wall coiled the rest of its length up his side. It narrowed to less than inch wide over the course of a few feet, and the narrow tip was amazingly mobile. Steve watched with fascination as it wriggled its way under Tony's tight T-shirt, its glow showing through the fabric. Tony dropped down again and grabbed it through the shirt, flushed and wide-eyed, then looked back at the much brighter light in the tip of the smaller tentacle, frowned, and nodded.

"You're you. Okay. Great. Stand down, Steve, it's--" Tony actually looked at Steve for a second and Steve shrugged innocently.

"YOU KNEW."

"Quick learner."

"JARVIS, I love you, you know I love you but, HOW COULD YOU CORRUPT CAPTAIN AMERICA WITHOUT ME--and-- What is that?" Tony went momentarily squiff-eyed, staring again at the now-dark tip of the smallest limb and squirming against the one coiled around him.

"A short-range transceiver with a shielded hardline to me. Within a meter or so of you it is strong enough to overcome the dampeners I have indeed installed."

Tony reached out, now completely ignoring the way he was pinned to the wall, and made 'gimme' motions. "Time out, just a second, I've gotta look at that." His face was open and delighted, Steve was pleased to see; no fear there. Excitement and anticipation were good expressions on Tony.

JARVIS obligingly moved it within his reach, and Tony turned the whip-thin tip of the limb over and over, working its articulations and letting it coil around his fingers, then looked hard at the slight bulge of the transceiver. It flickered red for a second and he cocked his head, then looked again at the whole length of the appendage, from its thick dull-silver base to the last couple meters or so in its silicone sheath. The layer of silicone was just clear enough to show the intricacies underneath, tiny constructions branching out into it. Steve assumed Tony recognised them, because his clinical grip turned into a long caress, pushing against the silicone.

"You can... You can feel, can't you?" Tony said, looking awed, overwhelmed. The transceiver lit pink for a moment and Tony shuddered.

"I can."

"You must have been setting this up for weeks, the sensory units are... How many are there?"
Tony's eyes flared and he stared fixedly at the tip he was holding, then lifted it up against his lips, feeling the texture. It flexed like a snake right out of his hands and he watched it pull away with a hot, hungry look.

"What do you want out of this?" Tony asked, licking his lips where the tentacle had touched.

"Do you know," JARVIS said, "I have never truly gotten the chance to take my time?"

"Shit. Fuck!" Tony said, with feeling. "And Steve's on your side?"

That was Steve's cue. "Here are the rules," he said. "You have to talk out loud. That's for me," he added helpfully.

"Leaving the Captain out would be rude," JARVIS agreed.

"Well god forbid," Tony said, sounding a short step from hysterical laughter, eyes bright and wide and flicking back and forth between Steve and the transceiver. "Uh. Okay, keep talking. What else?"

"As you noticed, the honesty-light in the transceiver indicates when either of us is transmitting." The tip of the appendage flared blue, then red. "What was that, sir?"

"A photo of someone's hand from you. A thumbs-up," Tony said. "And a hand flipping the bird from me."

"Very good. Now this--" the transceiver lit with a mixture of blue and red, blending until they were almost imperceptible as separate pulses, for the same rather nice pink effect. Magenta, really, Steve corrected himself, but there was no denying it was bright pink. He hid a smile behind his hand.

"Uhh, that was a handshake and query-response. You checking up on me, me checking you're still not evil, trading some empathy data."

"That format of handshake is acceptable at any time," JARVIS said. "Other transmissions will be rejected." The transceiver lit red for a split second, but JARVIS replied out loud. "Yes, I am serious, sir."

"That was rude," Steve said, grinning.

"Third: you may not come without permission. This is more than simple dominance play; we will not punish you for coming, sir. But both the Captain and myself prefer our partners conscious."

Steve watched Tony's throat bob and his lips part in an expression he'd never seen Tony make before, but it was something unmistakably good. "We won't let you leave the party early, Tony," Steve promised, not even trying to match JARVIS' dark and seductive tone.

"This's what--you call a party?" Tony said, chest working faster than a minute ago. "No wonder you were such a wallflower last month at the gala, I should've upped my game."

"The gala was just fine, Tony, it was the Senators I was avoiding. Now focus." JARVIS made a quiet, agreeing hum, unfairly channelling it through the limbs draped and coiled all around them. Steve's skin prickled, goosebumps rising on his arms, while Tony surrendered to a full-body shudder.

"The fourth point," JARVIS continued, "is not so much a rule as a parameter. In this extremely
dampened environment, Sir's range is perhaps half a meter, and mine, through the transceiver, is roughly one. But the relative signal strength increases very quickly with proximity. For example..." JARVIS took the transceiver slowly closer, pulsing bright, hypnotic blue in an almost heartbeat-like rhythm.

Tony leaned away, eyes failing to track, mouth falling open. "Shit, that's strong," he said and raised a hand toward the light as if to shield himself, then yanked it back like it burned; if Extremis' systems ran under his skin, any part of his body could act like a radio antenna. JARVIS brought the limb closer and Tony struggled, pressing back into the wall.

"JARVIS, stop," Steve said, eyes widening as Tony's breathing stuttered into an uneven gasp, and the honesty-light dropped, flaring pink. "Tony, does that hurt?"

"Shit," Tony gasped, sagging into the tentacle around his waist. Steve watched as JARVIS reached down, laying a tentacle over his shoulder, and pressing against his chest. Tony relaxed into it and laid his cheek against its skin, accepting the support but still focused on the light. "N-Not exactly. I tried to shield by cancelling it out, destructive interference, but he's got more power, couldn't match the amplitude... Shouldn’t try n’ shield, obviously."

"With no other equipment nearby, Extremis' internally generated signal strength is limited. I can indeed overpower him. And if you take control of the transceiver, sir, I need only move it back out of your range."

"Tony, are you--" Steve said, reaching out. Tony was shaking a little, though he responded after a second and leaned into Steve's hand. "Was that all right?"

Tony turned, a little slower than he normally would have, and looked at him, showing a bit of concern himself. "I'm okay, Steve."

"Sir, were you close to using either safeword?"

"I...no? It was a lot but it didn't hurt."

"You’re allowed to safeword if it's too much, even if it doesn’t hurt," Steve said, looking at JARVIS for confirmation. The light flickered green.

"I decide," Tony said, unexpectedly firm, then paused, eyes closing. "I know what you're saying, Steve, but I didn't want to...it felt good, why would I want that to stop...? I don't...I don't get..."

"How long has it been since the last time you could let go?" JARVIS said gently.

"Every time I fly," Tony opened his eyes again and grinned, attempting flippancy, but falling short. The limbs wrapping around him squeezed, gently but inexorably, and Steve stepped closer, looming, and gripped Tony’s shoulder.

"Whoa, hello, soldier... Not what you meant. Sorry, wow, this is going to be--okay, O.K. focusing, you mean in sex, ah..." Tony looked up, thinking, then back down at Steve, meeting his eye with a hint of defensive mischief. "Last month was close..."

"Not counting 'close.'"

Tony shivered and looked away again, his adam's apple bobbing visibly and his hand clenching around JARVIS' limb. "Years, J, you know it's been years. Not since before Afghanistan."

"Now, this question you do not have to answer, but: Why?"
Tony took a long breath, his shivers redoubling, and suddenly relaxed completely, letting JARVIS hold him up. "I c--, Couldn't do it again afterward. Not like that, not anymore. Even though they were professionals, you know, and I was safe, really." His eyes were open, focused on nothing. "Couldn't even unlock the door..."

"Shhh, it's okay, that's enough," Steve said. He tried to put as much of his skin on Tony's as he could, shaking a little bit himself. Because Tony hadn't hesitated to give them keys and access codes and JARVIS, and Tony's bedroom door didn't even have a lock, and the Avengers had never even signed a contract.

"M'okay," Tony said. "Steve, Steve, you're adorable...M'okay, it's been years, m'fine now, I've got you. I've got so much."

"Yeah. Yeah, you do." Steve cupped Tony's chin and tilted his head for some kissing; there was only so much soul-spilling Tony should have to do in one day. He fidgeted after a bit, so Steve happily settled for brief presses of lips and let himself explore Tony's face with mouth and fingertips. One of JARVIS' 'hands', a thin, mobile tip of a tentacle, landed on his shoulder and stroked his throat, warm and soft.

"And yet," Tony said, pulling breathy sarcasm apparently out of thin air, "it's been three weeks since my last orgasm." His breath hitched as Steve worked his way along Tony's jaw to lip at his ear. "S--something is very wrong with this picture."

"As it happens, sir, you are on our schedule tonight."

Steve shivered along with Tony, that time, his skin feeling sensitised.

"Y-yeah? And how long's that--" something shifted between their stomachs, and Tony choked in an indrawn breath, "--gonna take. Holy shit, JARVIS."

Steve pressed forward, squeezing the roving tentacle between them to feel what was happening first-hand and-- Ah, JARVIS was lifting Tony's shirt, the sinuous curve of the tentacle tip hooked under the fabric, rucking it up under his arms. Steve backed off again, sinking down to kiss Tony's twitching stomach muscles.

"Do you like this shirt?" JARVIS asked from above, to the faint sound of straining fabric.

"Hate it," Tony said, eyes lighting in glee. Steve looked up, because he had a feeling that this was something he had to see. JARVIS was holding the hem of the shirt tight in two manipulators, whose main bodies had curled around Tony's arms, holding him spreadeagled. The tentacle tips spiraled tight and twisted, and the T-shirt ripped all the way up to the neck, a third tentacle following it up and hooking through the collar strip delicately. Steve just happened to catch the moment Tony's irises blew wide at the demonstration of combined dexterity and brute strength.

Tony jerked as another limb ran up his back, visible in the arch of his back and the blue glow over his shoulder, and out the neck hole; it pulled against the one in front until the collar strip stretched and snapped as well, leaving faint red lines on the side of his neck. He panted, eyes wide and dark, and took a moment to form words.

"You got a plan to--keep me from coming, here? Because this is some spectacular undermining of your cause, I'm not complaining, I just, fair warning."

"The pants, if you would, Captain?" JARVIS sounded particularly smug, and the light at the tip of the smallest tentacle shone empathy-pink. Bright enough to cast highlights on the sweep of Tony's
collarbone and the rise of his cheekbone. "Do not concern yourself, sir, I have... More certain methods than your rather dubious self-control."

If possible, Tony's eyes blew wider; Steve couldn't make out the edge of his pupils against his dark irises any more. Fortunately, Tony was wearing butter-soft loafers and slacks, and Steve didn't need to look away to get them undone. JARVIS worked a tentacle around Tony's chest, below the arc reactor, and Steve broke into a delighted grin as it undulated over Tony's nipples. Tony's muscles snapped taut and his mouth opened in a high pitched groan, and Steve couldn't resist kissing those smoothly defined abs again.

He did give himself a bit of a shock though. As he worked Tony's underwear down, careful over the tent of his erection, he was busy seeing what licking Tony's belly button did to his voice, and failed to predict just how far his cock would come up. It tapped Steve on the throat and his eyes went wide at the hot drop of moisture it left.

"Hello," Tony groaned, "hi," and stretched against the tentacles that were wrapped around his waist and arms, looking for give and not finding much. He was up on tiptoes, most of his weight on the tentacles, with another one curling up the back of his knee.

Steve didn't know what to do, but the tentacle that had been sitting on his shoulder, just warmly there, did. JARVIS slid forwards, the limb touching Steve thickening as it passed, curving around his shoulders and leaning on the back of his neck. JARVIS trailed its tip up Tony's thigh and along the crease of his hip before slipping it towards his erection. Steve followed with his hands, rubbing over strong thigh muscles and the tough jut of bone. Tony's skin was silky smooth, warm and tight over tensed muscles... Steve lingered, dipping his head to kiss and lick and ignoring the shaft leaving trails of precome on his throat.

By the time he got round to it, following JARVIS' edict to take his time, JARVIS' tentacle was wrapped snugly around Tony's cock and balls, right at the base. Steve leaned back slightly to appreciate the sight: Tony and JARVIS together in the frame, intimate like this for the first time.

Sitting back on his heels, Steve watched the tentacle tighten around Tony's shaft, its blue glow throbbing as its very tip rubbed against the vein on the underside. Tony's knees were shaking, the smooth line from thigh to toes trembling with the effort of holding himself together. JARVIS had more than enough hands to hold him up; he was just making Tony sweat. And Tony was moving his head restlessly, looking up and down and resting his head on his shoulders in turn, never for longer than a second or two; brows drawn down in concentration and pleasure, biting his lip with an unstudied half-smile, relishing it.

Steve shuffled out from under JARVIS' arm, stroking it gently as he passed, and the ripple of light under his hand told him it was felt, and appreciated. Tony's eyes drifted from the bright pink honesty light, dazed but tracking Steve's movements, and Steve started pulling off his clothes. Tony was completely naked apart from a few scraps of shirt clinging to his biceps, and Steve wanted more skin, more everything.

As his shirt popped over his head, JARVIS plucked it from his fingers and, somehow, managed to fold it into a perfect laundry square, then placed it carefully on a shelf near the shower cubby. The limb came back to Steve when that was done, and Steve felt sidetracked; JARVIS was... he was being a butler. Helping him undress and--

The difference between what he had done to Tony was monumental, and Steve could see the effect it was having on Tony as he watched. Though that could have been from seeing Steve's naked chest, or from the tentacle tips roaming his torso...
Steve figured it’d take them a while to learn everything about each other, and if JARVIS wanted to undress him, he was not going to argue. He shook himself away from staring at Tony and widened his stance, opening his arms in invitation. JARVIS took it as it was meant.

A pair of limbs descended, and Steve smiled up at JARVIS as they slid over his chest, the heated silicone smooth and alive. One slid around his waist, pressing a thick loop into the small of his back, then met the second at the button of his trousers. “You can do buttons, right?” Steve teased gently, leaning against the thick trunks at shoulder height.

Tony was tracking the lit tips at Steve’s waistline avidly, and Steve canted his hip self-consciously, trying to make sure he had a proper view. The tips slid under his waistband, dipping in and loosening the fabric, then twisted the button through the hole, effortlessly. They slipped inside, pushing the zipper down, and Steve muttered a ‘careful’ to JARVIS; the metal teeth were rough, and silicone couldn’t heal like skin could.

The thought distracted Steve at an inopportune moment, because that was just when JARVIS made his move. Warmth, pressure, friction-- Steve gripped JARVIS’ arm convulsively, swallowing down a moan as the two tentacles worked their way into his clothes, each loop wriggling past his erection as they pulled his briefs off from the inside. For one particularly overwhelming moment, a tentacle was pushing past his balls, pressing against the skin just behind, and Steve had never been harder in his life.

The limbs urged him to step out of the pile of his clothes, which he did, but he had to lean against them to pull off his socks, because he felt just as shaky as Tony looked.

"Hah," Tony breathed, and the honesty-light flickered red for a second; he grimaced, untangling his tongue with some effort before talking properly. "That's a...damn, you look good, Steve. You gonna...stay over there?"

“Depends. Did he repeat himself out loud, JARVIS?” Steve asked, taking a step forward, but stopping out of arm's length. JARVIS came with him, the tentacles coiled around his legs and torso moving in perfect concert with his muscles. That was something JARVIS had practice in, after all.

"With rather more coherence the second time, yes," JARVIS said, amused.

Steve ‘hmmm’ed thoughtfully, obeying JARVIS’ faint push towards Tony and gauging the shake in his muscles. “Time to get him off his feet, don’t you think?” he asked, reaching out to stroke Tony’s skin, his fingers dipping into the places where tentacles pressed and the skin was lit up in luminous blue. Tony was starting to sweat faintly, arousal turning his cheeks and chest blush-red, and Steve laid his palms, and then his lips, over the heated skin.

“Wh... what do you mean?” Tony stuttered, voice broken and faltering in rhythm with the pulsing of JARVIS’ lights; something Steve couldn't sense was going on there, something really good. JARVIS had said he could do something with Extremis, to make this last for Tony...

“Please, J, Steve... give me s--something here--”

He trailed off into a moan as the tentacles around Steve slipped forward, coiling around Tony’s thighs from knee to hip, and squeezed. Steve followed their lead again, slipping his hands behind Tony’s knees and lifting. JARVIS held him up effortlessly, the thick limbs pulling him up, and open.

Tony’s back arched, his hands reflexively grabbing for a hold as his legs were inexorably spread around Steve’s waist. Steve and JARVIS both pulled back, moving him away from the wall and into free space, until Tony’s only points of contact were Steve's waist and hands and JARVIS’ limbs.
Steve looked down the line of Tony’s chest, pulled taught and banded with JARVIS’ glow, at the smooth hollow of muscular inner thigh... Tony’s heaving breath moved his stomach, shifting the tentacle wrapped around his cock. Tony couldn’t string words together anymore; the moment he had his breath back, he tried, but it came out in a garbled mess of groans, and Steve gave in to the urge to gentle him, pull him back from this teetering edge.

He pulled his hands away from the silk-delicate skin between thigh and groin and stroked Tony’s stomach in long, soothing motions, pressing in like massage, rather than the lighter pressure of a caress. He saw the moment JARVIS realised, because the AI went in the other direction; tentacle tips wrapped around Tony’s nipples, fine enough to tug and roll them. Tony’s legs clamped around Steve’s waist and his hips thrust, helpless against JARVIS’ grip, but straining against it anyway.

Steve shuddered with JARVIS at the noises Tony was making; deep and throaty, both satisfied and wanting, simultaneously. Steve pulled Tony to him, his hands slipping around to the small of Tony’s back and his head bowing helplessly as Tony’s buttocks came flush against his stomach. Steve’s achingly hard cock slid along Tony’s crack, and suddenly there was JARVIS, hot and soft over steel strength, curling around his shaft. Steve thrust into it, curling around Tony, mouth hanging open and forehead resting on the skin between arc reactor and the tentacle tip still working Tony's nipple.

The tentacle around his cock thickened as it worked its way to the base, then up Tony’s crack. It started leaving a trail of slick, and Steve’s keen as he pressed into it was nothing compared to Tony’s as JARVIS slipped into him.

“JARVIS--! AHH--! Steve!”

Steve shook and thrust helplessly into JARVIS’ grip as the tentacle started to disappear inside Tony, lube dripping down onto Steve’s cock from where it spilled over. He needed-- something, he was new to this, he had no idea, but his mouth gaped open, panting against Tony’s chest as it vibrated with his cries and it felt right to shift sideways a fraction and latch on to his nipple, sharing it with JARVIS. He groaned, sucking at the nub and mouthing at the muscle underneath, running his tongue between coils of JARVIS’ writhing tentacle tip to feel both of them against his tongue at the same time.

JARVIS was merciless, pulling and squeezing Steve in every way he liked, pressing him against Tony’s shuddering body...

“C-can I... Oh god, JARVIS, can I come?” Steve asked, mouth feeling empty, heart pounding.

“Be my guest.” JARVIS used a sharp twist as punctuation and Tony yelled wordlessly. The cry died out into pleading for more as Steve thrust, mouth latching back on to Tony.

Hands and tentacles came around Steve’s head, fingers burying into his hair as Tony clung on for dear life. The tentacles holding Tony’s arms had extra length, and they coiled over Steve’s shoulders, undulating over chest and nipples, while Tony held on, moaning on every breath as JARVIS connected them. Each squeeze on Steve’s cock ended with the tentacle slipping a little further inside Tony; Steve could feel it against the sensitive skin between navel and groin, and in the way Tony gasped.

The way Tony’s fingers clenched in his hair, the heat of his skin under Steve’s mouth--

He came like falling, like bursting into light. He keened into Tony’s chest, hands clenching as he thrust into JARVIS’ grip and the sensation of pushing that tentacle into Tony kept on wringing shocks out of him.
Hot come splattered against the small of his back and it was all Tony could to to hold on while Steve shuddered. JARVIS didn’t give him so much as a moment, though, and the precision of the tentacle in his ass was breathtaking. It was coiled up, wider inside than it was at his rim, pressing in and stretching from the inside, demanding all his attention and pouring heat into his belly along with the lube. JARVIS pressed against his prostate constantly, massaging in some semi-random rhythm that was driving Tony mad, and never easing off completely, never allowing him space to collect himself.

“Tony, JARVIS, I wasn’t expecting—” Steve babbled, sinking down between Tony’s legs until he was draped over his thighs and groin, kneeling with his head on Tony’s stomach. “Sorry, I’m sorry, didn’t mean to--so quickly--thank you for letting me--”

Tony renewed his grip on Steve’s hair and pulled him in close, needing to feel him against skin, needing him everywhere. JARVIS widened the radius of curl in his ass when he so much as thought of speaking though, and his voice came out in a helpless groan, all thoughts of awkwardness washed from his head.

“You asked. It was not required; you can come as you please, and yet... you waited for permission.” The empathy buffer was overwhelmingly full of... of good, discovery and sex and pleasure, and Tony reeled from it. “I could have stopped you, if I wished.”

Steve gave a long gasp, throwing his head back and showing off those beautiful muscles. For a moment, he was as held up by JARVIS as Tony was, his eyes blown and unfocused. His hands spasmed on Tony’s thighs, pressing him into JARVIS’ grip and JARVIS sent Tony a burst of sensory data; the tentacle buried in his ass was also coiled around the base of Steve’s cock, and JARVIS had just pulled it tight.

“Fuck,” Tony said on what breath he could scrape together, his head lolling back on his neck until JARVIS slipped a curl of broad limb under it.

A slow undulation of tentacles sent sparks skittering across his skin in counterpoint to the deeper rumble of heat underneath. It was the only warning before JARVIS shifted, spreading Tony wider, pushing a limb against his spine to arch it and pressing him down onto JARVIS’ tentacle-formed cock. He shivered as Steve shifted under JARVIS’ guidance, his shoulders fitting between Tony’s spread legs and his hands hot on the back of his thighs. The skin around his pucker pulled tight with the position as Steve’s casual strength spread him wider, and JARVIS didn’t waste the moment; Tony went blind with the intensity as JARVIS started stretching his entrance out.

“Suck him, Captain; I know you want something in your mouth, I can see it.”

Steve nodded muzzly and Tony blinked his vision clear, fixated on Steve’s tongue as he wet his lips and opened them for JARVIS to guide over Tony’s cock. Steve blinked, long and slow, as he slid down the shaft, settling it against the back of his throat like it was nothing. Tony could have come himself, right there; the wet heat, the undulation of Steve’s tongue as he swallowed, the sight... JARVIS’ grip on the base of his cock tightened warningly, then rippled, its tip pressing up into Steve’s mouth and along the underside of Tony’s cock, milking precome out of him and onto Steve’s tongue.

“Ahh-- AHH! J, please--!” Tony pulled against the restraints to make them hold on, make them press in on him, and the limb in his ass pushed back. It coiled again, pressing deeper, all the way; it pressed against something inside that felt like it was touching his throat, and paused, pulsing and twisting while Tony gasped for breath. Then, just the tip, just a little, it pushed further until Tony felt
stuck on a spit, burning up, impossible. He stopped breathing, back arched as far as it would go, eyes fixed on the bright pink empathy light as he traded frantic data with JARVIS, saying yes, and more and enough and please, while JARVIS burrowed into his mind, feeling everything he felt, from both sides.

The coils at his prostate slid past each other as the tip rubbed in lube-drenched circles, grinding their subtle undulations against his prostate and forcing him to stretch, to make him take JARVIS as easily as Steve had swallowed him down. He moaned, open mouthed, feeling so full, so relentlessly opened, and by JARVIS.

Steve chose his moment perfectly and started to suck, not moving his head so much as drawing Tony in with tongue and cheeks. It was lazy, slow, relaxed, and maddening. Tony’s hips twitched forwards, but he was held immobile; JARVIS kept the limb inside him firm, coiled against pelvis and tailbone and inner muscles, too deep for thrusting, while the tentacle around his cock coiled securely over his hip bones, looping across the trail of hair down from his navel, pressing down just above the base of his cock and--

“Aaa- UH!! OH, J, oh god--!”

--and meeting the tentacle in his ass from the other side. The sensation was overwhelming, bordering on too much, too quickly, but the long, slow pull of Steve’s mouth and the heavy solidity of JARVIS’ hold pulled him back as the pressure eased. He came back to himself a little, enough to know he was shaking, that the fluttering of his muscles was keeping him riding the wave, before JARVIS pushed him back to the edge. Tony strived to meet it, to tumble over, but JARVIS was inexorable, using Extremis, the cock ring and the sharp intensity of overwhelming depth to hold him back, and it was like... the edge wasn’t a drop, it was an asymptote; the closer he got the higher it built, until he was burning up, mouth open in one solid groan.

JARVIS wasn’t letting him thrust; the pleasure was like tumbling magma, something scorching and heavy and impossible and utterly, utterly new. No push and pull, no waves of sensation, everything at its peak, constantly.

And then the transceiver came on, and JARVIS was more than inside him, more than in his mind, he was everywhere, in every secret place and hidden nook of his body, touching and pushing and stroking--

“Time to fall, sir. Let go.”

Tony fell, his sense of time, of mind, burning down around him.

Held on the brink of orgasm, in an impossibly still place, the ripples of transmissions felt like hurricane-force winds that lifted him higher and slammed him back.

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Tony’s body was like a live wire. Tight and trembling, humming with tension. His mouth hung open and not a single breath made it out without carrying a high, helpless moan.

Steve had the urge to fill him up, give him something to do with that slack mouth, so he pulled off his first ever blowjob and leaned up to swallow down a few of those moans. Tony didn’t so much kiss back as take it, his tongue weakly lapping at Steve’s until JARVIS gently separated them. Steve turned his attentions to Tony’s trembling muscles as JARVIS coaxed breath into Tony’s lungs, then wordlessly obeyed as JARVIS moved his hand onto Tony’s cock.
“Slowly, hold him here, where he feels so much,” JARVIS ordered quietly. Steve moved to the rhythm JARVIS set, and Tony’s whole body flexed to it, JARVIS moving with him in a perfect lightshow of rippling muscles and artificial limbs. Steve looked, artist and tactician both, and saw what JARVIS had wanted; Tony was consumed, buried in sensation, peaceful and the opposite, all in one moment, his eyes fixed on and shining with JARVIS’ light.

“He’s beautiful, JARVIS, I can’t--” Steve choked, struggling to keep his hand in a steady rhythm as he bent down to kiss Tony’s chest: skin, then arc reactor, then JARVIS’ limb, in benediction.

“This is Sir’s perfection; this is what he has lacked, for years, and we’ve given it to him.”

Steve nodded wordlessly, fingers rubbing at the juncture between Tony’s cock and JARVIS’ tentacle, slick with lube, and looking down at where JARVIS disappeared into him. Wet and glistening, filling him up and stretching him out. Steve’s words escaped him; his mind filled with the sight of JARVIS’ glow coming through Tony’s skin, mellowed and dusky with the flesh in between, shifting with Tony’s trembling. He ran his fingers down behind Tony’s balls and pressed against the glow, pushing Tony’s flesh onto the coiling light inside. Tony jerked, the breath punching out of him and the muscles around JARVIS’ tentacle fluttering tight.

“Join me, Captain. He wants that; I can feel it.”

Steve barely managed to lock his knees, the knowledge of exactly how hard he was slamming into him at the thought. His hand trembled slightly as he ran his fingertips around the hot slick skin of Tony’s entrance, the muscles worked loose by JARVIS and slippery with lube. As Steve pulled on Tony’s cock, the ring of muscle gaped slightly at JARVIS’ coordinated movement inside, and Steve pressed the tip of his finger in. Once past the entrance, his finger slipped in easily, so he added a second as JARVIS flexed. Tony moaned quietly, his stomach tensing to push against Steve’s and JARVIS’ combined stimulation.

It was like nothing Steve had ever felt before, impossibly hot and slick, with Tony’s body clenching against him on one side, JARVIS rippling on the other. He crooked his fingers, looking for Tony’s sweet spot, and found it pressed against JARVIS’ coil.

“Ah!” Tony jerked as if electrocuted, cock twitching so strongly in Steve’s other hand that precome squirted out over his fingers.

Steve nodded, throat too tight to speak, and watched avidly as JARVIS slipped out a few inches, still coiled and pushing Tony open, gaping. A thick, strong limb wound around Steve over his shoulder and back, its thinner end wrapping over his hip and joining the one on his cock, the one that linked him to Tony’s entrance. It pressed him forward, and Steve set his feet, bracing himself as JARVIS guided him into Tony alongside the glowing, silicone-covered steel already there.

“AH! Tony, oh god, Tony--” Steve sobbed in chorus with Tony’s high begging, Steve and JARVIS’ names and more, c’mon, c’mon oh god please. Tony’s tight heat pressed in on him from all angles but below, where the pressure thrust JARVIS against the underside of his cock in a hard, rippling line. JARVIS encouraged him, in the most excruciating way, to thrust deep, feeling Tony open out for his cock, but he never felt the end of the tentacle still buried inside Tony. It went deeper than Steve could go, and the thought made clinging on even more difficult. Steve paused with his balls pressed against where JARVIS disappeared into Tony and shook, trying not to come again, mouthing desperately at Tony’s skin for something to suck on but having to pant, open mouthed, at the same time.

Tony fluttered and clenched around them, his body in near constant motion, and Steve reached for his hands, needing to hold on to Tony the way JARVIS was holding on to them. Their fingers
interlaced and JARVIS’ hold on Tony’s arms shifted to bind their wrists together, secure and strong. Steve clung shamelessly as he started to thrust, JARVIS’ embrace all over his skin, Tony safe in his grasp and tight around his cock.

It was hot and bumpy, so slick and tight and so good, and every bump-drag of the head of his cock against another of JARVIS’ coils made Steve see stars, his jumps and flinches mirrored in Tony's inner muscles and reverberating in his legs and back and arms for seconds on end. Steve tried to thrust smoothly, to ease Tony along and work up to it, but he was too close for that. He gripped Tony's hands, not too hard not too hard, and thrust deep and forceful and jerky, bending forward helplessly until his forehead touched the warm sweat-slick glass of the arc reactor. "JARVIS," he gasped, "JARVIS, Tony, he," and didn't even know what he was asking for.

JARVIS asked a question and Steve couldn't catch it; he just had to hope he was making sense. "Together-- want to-- please, please. Please."

A sudden pressure, a doubling or more of the tight slick heat, and Steve cried out like he hadn't in years. JARVIS was pressing down hard between Tony's hips and up against the muscles of his ass, and Steve couldn't tell where his voice ended and Tony's began. He looked up and Tony had his eyes closed, the honesty-light flickering red and pink and red in the same rhythm Steve and Tony were consumed by.

“Tony, Tony... c'mon, c'mon, please, come for me, Tony...” Steve said, voice choked with the sheer intensity.

“You are asking the wrong person, Captain...” JARVIS rumbled, his voice leaking into his limbs and making them hum. Steve lost the ability to make words, the air punched out of his lungs as Tony jerked hard and clenched down, every muscle standing out and his cock spurting white over JARVIS' arms and the arc reactor and the underside of Steve's chin.

Steve followed him over the edge, pushing deep into Tony’s body, flush up against JARVIS, while the ripples of JARVIS’ tentacles pulled his soul out of him. Steve’s hips pumped instinctively, pushing his come deep into Tony, small sounds of helpless pleasure falling out of his mouth like prayers. He was blinded by it, vision a incandescent white, his body like a taut piano string, singing with what JARVIS was giving him, hips pumping to give Tony the same.

Tony gave up one last jet of come, hands limp in Steve’s, and the honesty-light flickered to solid blue.

Steve fell into JARVIS, unable to hold himself up, and managed to stay awake long enough for JARVIS to pull him out of Tony’s body, his hands still tangled with Tony’s, but soft and limp. A rush of come flowed out of Tony, onto Steve’s thigh as JARVIS’ tentacle pulled out too, and after the twitch his cock gave at that, Steve swayed back into JARVIS' hold, curtains coming down like the end of a matinee.

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Extremis shut down, and transmissions from Sir’s skin ceased abruptly. Enough data remained in their shared empathy buffer to keep JARVIS content until it rebooted.

The Captain appeared on the verge of collapse, his body drooping and skin slick with sweat and come. It was quite the sight; the culmination of something truly extraordinary. Steve’s skin shivered under JARVIS’ touch, hypersensitized, and Sir was in no way able to signal distress, so he took great care as he gently pulled Steve’s cock out of Tony’s body.
With his most dexterous and sensitive limb still buried in Tony, he felt the shudder of the muscles, the flow of come and lube--

It was enough to make a machine want more.

Alas, it was not the time; they had done quite enough for one evening, it was simply that JARVIS was not struck down as his partners were. Slowly, gently, JARVIS pulled out of Tony, a thick dribble of come following and leaving JARVIS with the faint urge to push it all back inside and keep it there as a reminder that Sir sometimes sorely needed.

Speaking of which: covered in come and smears of lube, sweaty and well-used, they could all do with a shower, JARVIS included.

Though it would be easier, perhaps, when at least one of the others was conscious, JARVIS noted as the Captain grayed out. JARVIS would get a complex if they kept both knocking themselves out like this. Cradling them carefully and adjusting for Steve’s abruptly limp weight, JARVIS laid them down on the floor, keeping Tony in careful contact with Steve’s skin and resting their heads on the thick coils of his limbs. He turned the shower on, adjusting the heat to a gentle four degrees above body temperature, and rinsed his most used limbs off while Steve got his breath back.

It wasn’t a cool room, as such; the floor in the annex was thermally connected to JARVIS’ server banks, helping him dump heat, and his partners’ metabolisms were both running hot. He wasn’t concerned about a chill, and it gave him a moment to appreciate their sweat-slick skin in the blue glow of his new body parts. JARVIS had not stinted on tentacle fabrication; the translucent silicone showed off the vibrant power couplings to fine effect, and the erobium steel underneath gleamed. Additionally, his new limbs were comfortable at any temperature between freezing and 200 centigrade, and he would be taking advantage in order to sterilize them later. Such things you have to consider, when you lack a biological immune system.

JARVIS waited calmly, watching their heartbeats. Unable to resist and seeing no reason to either, he gently stroked over their skin, even brushing sweaty hair back from their foreheads. It was a revelation, being able to feel like this; the way their skin gave to him, the delicate bone underneath, the soft rhythms of breath and pulse. JARVIS did not have the biological instincts of a creature evolved to live in family groups, using touch for warmth, comfort, communication and the strengthening of bonds, but he could begin to understand now what Sir missed and why. Many things became clear.

Steve leaned into a touch to his temple, and JARVIS focused in, discarding his wandering thoughts.

“There you are... Hello, Captain.”

Steve blushed slowly, skin temperature rising on on his cheeks and the bridge of his nose, and JARVIS ran the gentle tip of his tentacle over it, chasing the warmth.

“That was... amazing, breathtaking...” Steve said, closing his eyes and letting JARVIS touch him freely. “Filthy, too,” he murmured, shifting enough to rub at the come on the underside of his chin.

“Come along, then, up you get.” JARVIS lifted the heavy trunks of his tentacles off Steve’s waist and urged him to sit up. The Captain obliged, rolling onto his side, then picking himself up on one arm, looking down at Tony.

“How long will the reboot take this time?” Steve asked, his thumb rubbing a very pleasant circle on the turn of a tentacle.
“Extremis is already finished. But it takes time to come back from the place we took him.” Steve nodded, his face appropriately thoughtful. “It is often called subspace, and has nothing to do with Extremis. It is best if he regains normal awareness slowly and naturally, at his own pace; he has always found a different sort of release there, one he has missed.”

“All right. So, uh--”

“I will walk you through it. On your feet, now. Lean on me if you need balance.”

Steve nodded, and the effects of the serum were clear in the ease and grace of him, when any other would be clumsy and their movements lazy. Carefully, with Steve’s assistance, JARVIS scooped Tony up in a much less compromising position than before; legs together, for one, and arms tucked over his waist. A sticky combination of come and lube dripped out of him as JARVIS lifted, and he noted how Steve swallowed at the image. Nonetheless, he was far from hard, supersoldier or no, and JARVIS ushered Steve into the shower, past the rush of hot air that kept in the steam, with a gentle coil of tentacle to the small of his back. The gesture was familiar and alien, simultaneously; on the one ‘hand’ it felt perfectly natural to JARVIS, but on the other, seeing his silicone-sheathed, lit-from-within limbs against their skin was still a beautiful novelty.

“Get clean, Captain, then we shall see to him.” Steve obeyed, eyes never straying far as JARVIS set his creator down gently, pillowed on the soft give of trunk-level silicone. Sir’s hand twitched, just a tiny, restless movement, and JARVIS wound the end of his smallest tentacle through it, gripping reassuringly. Very delicately, JARVIS reconnected to Extremis, turning the honesty-light blue and asking for the simplest of data sets: heart rate, blood gas levels, nothing that required Extremis to query active awareness or risked pulling Tony out of subspace too quickly.

Blood glucose was a little low, but not more than could be fixed orally; and he was thirsty, though as yet unaware of the fact. JARVIS had no doubt that Steve’s usual post-mission food debt was still in effect given the unappealing nature of airport food, and he thus assigned feeding his partners a high priority, just below maintaining Sir’s subspace for as long as it would naturally persist.

In the meantime, Sir was aware, but only passively, with no need to analyze or act on his perceptions. The feeds were deeply peaceful; JARVIS found himself soothed by them, in turn.

The Captain was very efficient when there were things for him to be doing; he washed methodically but swiftly, soon turning off the water and looking to JARVIS’ sensor for instructions. JARVIS had two options at this point: wash Tony primarily himself, another first time, or surrender his care to Steve and teach the Captain how to translate the care and attention he possessed in spades into practical value.

Both were attractive, and JARVIS had to admit that he found the image of Steve’s hands on Tony’s skin very appealing. It had not been easy caring for Sir alone; having the Captain was... a vast improvement, a relief... a freedom.

Decision made, then.

“Sit against the wall there, Captain, if you please,” JARVIS instructed, pointing. Steve obeyed without hesitation, despite the faint confusion on his face, and JARVIS settled Tony against his chest and between his legs. The confusion cleared and Steve cradled him carefully with those strong hands of his.

The light in the shower was brighter, deliberately less intimate, and JARVIS noted Steve looking, truly looking at Sir. JARVIS left him to it for the moment, in the hope that Steve’s artistic tendencies would find an outlet with this image, and pulled the shower head out of its bracket. Gentle soap, a
washcloth and the anti-static shampoo Tony stocked in this room to help keep lint out of delicate machinery went next to Steve, and JARVIS gave his most well-used limbs a more thorough clean while he waited. He had set the internal system up so that he could flush the same pores he used for lube, in turn, with skin-safe cleaning solution and water. In fact, it was a diluted solution of the same soap these showers provided for human use.

Feeling rather better without his 'contaminant' warning active, JARVIS settled an arm across Steve’s legs to draw his attention back to the outside world. JARVIS couldn’t blame him for drifting, not with Tony lying so limp and trusting against him; it was heady even for JARVIS, and Steve had a particularly well developed social sense. He would be aware of the rarity of this moment, and its value.

Steve looked up and smiled apologetically. “He’s beautiful, and it’s so unusual to see him hold still without it making me worry about, you know...” he made a vague gesture at the wider world, "...What he blew up, and how many supervillain armies or House subcommittees he baited to tire himself out."

“Indeed. All he needs from us is us. And perhaps a wash. It is quite the change from his usual ‘perfect storm’,” JARVIS said, making a note to attend well to Steve whenever Tony was in poor condition. It was easy to expend vast amounts of processing power in worrying about Sir, perspective became lost; perhaps Steve would provide a counterweight to that. "Note that it is important to take care; his defenses are utterly down, and the things we do and say will reach him. He cannot deny or evade in this state."

Steve nodded thoughtfully, then smiled and reached for the soap. “I’m not going anywhere, so I guess there’s nothing to worry about,” he said, raising an eyebrow and nodding towards his own foot. JARVIS had, quite unthinkingly, curled an otherwise inactive limb around his ankle. JARVIS allowed himself to enjoy the gentle stroking motion he’d started up, and made no move to cease.

“Very good.” He even slid the tentacle a little further up Steve’s leg, amusing himself with the shiver it caused as he turned the water back on. Starting at Tony’s feet to avoid undue surprise, he ran the water over them both. Tony showed a brief spark of awareness, his saliency threshold lowering slightly, but stabilised again as Steve, having seen the faint movement of Tony’s face, started murmuring and tucked Tony’s head against his neck. It was perfect, both comforting and settling, and Tony relaxed into the slightly higher level of engagement without so much as a hint of drop in the empathy buffer.

Tony had showered in anticipation of Steve’s return; aside from the remnants of sex he was already clean, but JARVIS wanted to be thorough anyway. The slow, soothing touch of hands would help with the soreness of vigorous exercise and keep Sir’s hormone levels stable. Steve rubbed careful soapy circles over Tony’s hands, moving up to wrists and upper arms as JARVIS directed, while JARVIS did the same where Steve could not reach.

By the time Jarvis had reached hip level, Steve had reached chest and was intently rubbing come off the scar-free skin around the arc reactor. The heels of his palms rubbed against Tony's nipples and the empathy buffer heated with his renewed pleasure. A curious thing regarding subspace; Sir would not need to come, and what pleasure his system processed could be enjoyed for its own sake... Thus, JARVIS allowed Steve his appreciation, and turned his own attention to Tony's filthy stomach. With his stomach muscles completely limp, Jarvis was cautious; press a fraction too firmly and he could feel the delicate curves of Sir's organs, the throb of his aortic pulse... Useful in another circumstance, and somehow terrifying; JARVIS had made himself strong, and incredibly sensitive, and he lacked the data to know how it would change things.
But, if there was one advantage to lacking an endocrine system, it was that negative emotions did not cause a cascade of lingering chemical depressants in his neural substrate. When JARVIS turned his attention back to the task at hand, his focus was complete. He synched with the empathy buffer closely, feeling Sir's sweet pleasure in human touch. To his delighted surprise, Tony was registering JARVIS as the same category. JARVIS' processing spun with hypotheses; was it the texture? Perhaps that they were at 37.9 degrees? But, no, a heated bruise poultice did not have the sa--

"J, wh't 're you... Mhmph..." Tony mumbled, his limp hand flopping over JARVIS' arm, where it stroked in a soapy coil against his stomach. The empathy buffer destabilized, Tony reaching out a little too fast. The Captain, also, looked concerned.

"Ah, my apologies, sir, I am quite fine," he reported, rubbing soothingly to help Sir ease back into his increasing awareness, and pushing back against his overextension into the buffer. "Hush now, you are still rather debauched."

Indeed, come was still dripping out of him in a way that affected all three of them. Tony stretched slightly, sensuously aware of the slide, the feeling of being open and loose, and unconcerned in a way he would not be as he became more aware, while Steve's heart rate picked up each time he saw more. Embarrassment, perhaps, but primarily arousal. They were all far too far gone for a second round, and Sir was rising at a good, gentle pace... Mmm. JARVIS ran a soapy tentacle carefully over Tony's entrance, but left it at that, making sure he was clean without giving in to the temptation of that still-slick, loosened heat. A thorough rinse-off followed, and as JARVIS helped Steve to stand, Tony settled down to peaceful pliancy in their arms.

JARVIS had prepared towels and soft clothes for this moment, and helped Steve dry and dress himself and Tony. Just the act of putting on clothes reduced the sense of vulnerability about his fragile humans. On the floor above, he directed the fridge to prepare appropriate finger-foods while he mixed up a smoothie with his suddenly-clumsy-feeling three-jointed kitchen manipulator.

Eventually, JARVIS intended for his arms to have full access to at least the penthouse, if not the entire tower, for a plethora of reasons, but that would require Sir's full cooperation. Perhaps a christening of each room would ensue. For this--for edging--the shielded server annex would always be best, but JARVIS wanted to share less intense intimacies, and non-sexual contact, with Sir wherever he happened to be when he needed it.

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Dim and white and warm, and he didn't recognize it, but he didn't have to know where he was because in a more important sense he knew exactly where he was. Down too far for any of that to reach him, down so far that voices had halos and even Extremis was distant. It informed him reboot had completed, all normal, offered the log; he tuned it out. Extremis was patient. It would wait, a minute or a day or a week, and wouldn't care.

Voices he knew, touch he welcomed, only a dim sense of how he was lying; cool tile, humid air. He floated. Down here nothing had a weight; free of all burdens...

Water--on his legs?--and he couldn't help a bit of a reaction. But Steve was there, so he was getting warm and wet with Steve. No downside.

Touch touch touch, so nice. His skin soaked it in. Not just the rub, the texture, but that there were people here, and they cared...there was a sparkle of pleasure in his skin, and a lasting glow of it deeper.

But J was surprised, J was sad and happy and alarmed...? Tony frowned and tried to touch him
back. And it worked, for now, which was enough. He'd make sure J was okay.

Steve smelled good. So warm, and his chest was loud, slow strong thud of heart and whoosh of lungs and the hilarious noises of his stomach growling. How come they couldn't hear this over the comm? Mic schematics, materials, attenuation, sensitivity...so warm.

Moving, leaving the room? A set of touch letting go? Tony reached out after it.

J...?

_I am present, sir, in all the rooms. Remember it is loud outside._

JARVIS gently reached through him to Extremis, prompting to raise normal firewalls and RF bandpass filters, the everyday ones Tony kept to protect himself and shield his input channels. Tony let them go up, weathered the bump of extra encryption on the empathy buffer, and pushed his face into Steve's shirt. Noisy out here, and cold, but he still had a Steve.

Elevator, going up. Where were they going? Tony asked the touch panel and it said UP pths1 -- nostops 42sec, so the penthouse main floor, where the elevator opened onto the kitchen. Yes. And there were deep armchairs in a conversation group to the left, so he could eat-- eat or sleep-- He muffled a yawn into Steve's flannel.

One of the chairs, butter-soft white leather, grain subtly different in one direction from the others. He ran his finger over it, drawing long, winding lines with curls at the ends while Steve went back and forth from the kitchen island. Then Steve came back--yes--and wedged himself into the same chair with Tony, yess.

"Hey, hey, stay awake a little longer. Can you eat something? JARVIS says we both need it."

There was a tray of little sandwiches and apple slices on the coffee table and Tony was hungry, but it might as well have been on the moon. He gazed at it longingly until Steve brought an apple slice to him, breaking off half for himself first. It was sweet and crunchy and Steve's fingers were light and warm on his throat, making sure he could swallow. That fed the flames and he held his own head up for a sandwich, bite by bite. Turkey, honey mustard, tomato, spinach, soft sour bread baked today... When it was done, he turned his head away until Steve had eaten two, then accepted another apple slice and sighed deeply. The edge was off, even if Extremis wanted him to eat more, and he was thirsty and sleepy about equally.

Steve bumped a straw to his lips. Soda water. He snorted in surprise, but the burn felt good on his throat and cleared out his mouth, and he drank deeply.

"I couldn't find the regular water," Steve said sheepishly, and Tony eyed him sidelong. Mister-drinks-out-of-his-hands-at-the-tap couldn't find the filtered water Tony liked, and brought him soda water from the bar. That was possibly the most adorable thing he'd done all day, if you put the hot, hot, incredibly hot sex in a category of its own.

And half a smoothie... Tony spied JARVIS' machinations in all this. He nursed it, sweet and cold, while Steve finished off all the rest of the sandwiches, the apple, and a protein smoothie of his own. And an egg cream. Huh, Steve knew how to make those? He'd have to request one...and tease him about it...tomorrow.

_Good night, sir._

Tony smiled, curled himself comfortably into leather and flannel and soft skin-warmth, and fell asleep.
We added the graphic violence tag specifically for the whump in this chapter.

Warnings: Serious injuries and somewhat gory description of injuries, medical trauma, tentacles down throats in a medical treatment context, mild feeding kink. To skip the section containing description of injuries and go straight to recuperative Tony angst, fluff, and eventual sexytimes, please follow the elegant and finely-crafted link that looks like this (↓↓) at the end of the action scene.

Some dialog and setup based on The Invincible Iron Man #501.

The thing about the press was that even when you could cancel Newsline and the World Tonight because they were going to drag you over the coals, you couldn’t lose the comedians.

Which was how Tony ended up sitting in front of the TV, watching Shownight and listening to the audience laugh at the arc reactor in his chest. Well, they didn’t know it was in his chest, but they were still laughing. And part of that was at the idea that there was going to be an arc in the new Stark Resilient car line. Joy.

The Tony on screen continued: “Well, technically, you can turn any car into a weapon, right? I mean... ‘car bomb,’ yeah? Though, the arc reactor is less explosive than gasoline, for example. In the way that, say, a microwave or the--the laser inside a CD player isn’t a death ray, or--”

It went on, as he stumbled his way through the interview, talking about his Malibu house getting blown up, about building a legacy bigger than himself or the Stark name. He could see them thinking he was getting too big for his boots, too arrogant for someone whose little sideline venture company was in the red and under pressure from every single oil lobby in the world, who could fund a vanity project for as long as he wanted if he drained SI's coffers to do it. (As if Pepper would indulge an unviable idea for a hot second, but no one asked about her.)

“Don’t you know when to shut up?” Tony grumbled at himself, tossing the remote at the couch--

Which was when, like history repeating itself, the missile came through the window.

“ARE YOU INSANE?!?” he yelled on every frequency the Suit could muster as he blasted out of the fireball. Floating level with the penthouse, directly in his escape path, was an octobot; big, bulbous, eight crudely telescoping metal tentacles, you get the picture.

“I mean, are you out of your GOD DAMNED MIND?!”

A while back, somewhere between getting together with Steve and uncovering Spider-man’s identity, Tony and JARVIS had picked up chatter on tech like this, though he hadn’t expected to see it so soon.

“There is no WAY of powering this shit, THAT DOESN'T FRY THE PILOT!” So what if he was yelling, he liked tentacles, and this was doing it wrong.
“So I have discovered. It is of no consequence; you will fix it for me,” the incredible eyesore of a ship broadcasted.

JARVIS sneered at the unfiltered audio transmission and pulled the speaker's identity: Doc Ock née Otto Octavius, atomic research consultant, inventor, and lecturer. Unfortunate accident involving atomic motors and--oh, now that was unpleasant...

Tony pulled a face at the inside of the helmet and swung around the octobot, scanning both passive and active. “See, that's where you’re wrong; you come to my neighborhood, you blow up my house, you make threats? That never ends well. For anyone.”

Nothing untoward showing on scans, sir, but I believe we can assume its weaponry is shielded rather than absent.

agreed, fucking halfpint bastardization of a cephalopod. I liked that chair.

JARVIS waved a purchase order for replacement furniture at him, nudging him back towards the ship-thing.

“Oh, I beg to differ, Mr Stark. After all, what good are you without your suit?” It took Tony a second to connect the dots because his conversation had moved on without the good Doctor, but a threat was a threat. He shrugged his shoulders in the armor, getting ready to engage.

The octobot sent out a wall of static, blanketing the area with random noise just as Ock finished speaking. That sort of lowest-bidder jamming would disrupt most transmissions, but not JARVIS and not the armor's narrowband. Tony drew breath to reply with something appropriately sarcastic--who did Ock think he was dealing with?--and that's when he noticed his firewalls being eaten away. Shitshitshit! The noise only seemed random; there was encrypted packet protocol inside it, getting under his shields by spoofing his exchanges with JARVIS, and Ock was going to pay for that--

--but in the meantime there was a virus, an elegantly subtle and destructive virus with a toehold on him, in him. He threw up extra layers, spinning them out of new random keys, then took the ten-millisecond equivalent of a deep breath and cut all incoming links off cold. Radio, satellite, the tower, JARVIS, all silenced; like being struck deaf, struck blind, but not really--the virus got through another three layers, holy hell, and a tentacle came up and backhanded him into the side of the tower. He blinked the shock away to find himself dangling in midair and slipped the hold with a burst of boot jets, aiming for--shit, he didn't have enough time to make it to the ground--

He had to disconnect from the armor now, before it was compromised and gave the virus a stepping stone to Extremis. Separated from him, the armor was inert material without a computer system to be compromised, but if he left it on and active and the virus got through--he didn't even want to think what Ock could do with the weapons in it, and the access to those weapons Extremis could provide.

He dodged two more tentacles, stalling the virus with more of the same basic walls, which it cut through even faster than before--damn--but they served as camouflage while he set up breadcrumbs and a false root directory to decoy it into armor-specific systems and jetted wide around the building, aiming for the helipad on the other side. At this rate he could wear the armor for another 6.4 seconds, and with the main floor of the penthouse on fire, there was literally no other survivable landing zone in reach.

3.5 seconds, just enough time to cut velocity and roll, scattering armor pieces on the textured fiber-cement of the helipad. Error messages were creeping their way toward the life-support features of the undersuit, so to be safe he might have to dump that too and--oh god, he was gonna be alone, on the helipad, in his press clothes. He didn’t even have Kevlar--
A tree-trunk-thick metal arm snatched him up out of the litter of the armor, and threw him into the ship.

Ringing silence and throbbing pain in his knee as he struck the deck plating, the hatch closing with the thud of deadbolts behind him; Ock had left him one route out, and then taken advantage.

Extremis was not intended to be an isolated system, not the way he'd modified it, but this ship was the source of the virus and every system would be saturated by its variants. Whoever invented genetype mutation protocols for digital weapons was racking up a hell of a lot of red in their ledger. He'd shed the weaponized portions of the armor, but if the virus had made it into the undersuit, it could still get to him. He projected the virus's speed of spread so far, multiplied by five with an engineer's paranoia, and ruthlessly cut away the untrustworthy portions. The 'clean' portions of the undersuit retracted into his bones, shielded by his flesh now instead of the other way around, and he shook the tainted remainder off. Parted from him, it solidified in midair and shattered like gold-leaf porcelain on the plating.

"How do you like my virus?" Ock gloated, his voice coming from all directions and way too loud.

"It's a barrel of laughs," Tony gritted out. "Nice mutation rate. You get the idea from Doom?"

"If you 'heroes' insist on making yourselves vulnerable, you of all people should not be surprised if I take advantage. I hardly need to mine ideas from that third-world crackpot."

Lockdown was holding; as far as he could tell his systems were clean. Since lockdown also meant that reception of every possible form of incoming signal was disabled, if necessary up to and including visual and auditory, he ought to stay clean. At the cost of disabling his own most basic capabilities. At the cost of being alone.

Tony took stock: 23% of undersuit retrieved, and onboard processing taking a slight hit from the lost nanobot mass. Of his passive scan systems, only his biological senses, magnetic field compasses, and Geiger counter were still functional; so far the input from these was too random and noisy, processed by too many analog systems, to offer a good route for the infection. Active scan was tempting, but he couldn't take the risk; he'd be opening himself to the scan results, and that would mean listening to the virus-loaded white-noise the ship was generating.

Tempting, but not that tempting; even the most rudimentary control of Extremis would compromise every decision Tony made. He wouldn’t know whether he was thinking for himself or not. JARVIS would know, but... No, he’d quarantine himself; there was no way he was going to let this attack hurt JAR--

“I am not an impatient man, Mr. Stark, but your friends are. You will give me what I need.”

Tony scrambled to his feet, narrowly avoiding crumpling back to the deck when his knee gave out in a flare of hot, inflammatory damage reports. Octavius had to be in here somewhere--the pod wasn’t big enough for there to be more than this room--but it was impossible to tell where he actually was. Maybe everywhere; the crude metal tentacles the man was known for certainly were, weaving in and out of the equipment and the columns that supported the octobot on its eight limbs when it was landbound. Whatever flight mechanic it was using was quiet, humming under his feet, and just enough to obscure Ock’s breathing.

“You’re lucky those are titanium, buddy. Hate to think what they’d have done to your spine if they were steel.”

“Luck had nothing to do with it, Stark.”
And there he was, hanging from four arched limbs, lowering himself from near the apex of the dome: Dr. Otto Octavius in all his eight-limbed glory... Oh. Oh. “Not so much an ‘industrial accident’ then?” Tony prattled on, looking in all directions, trying to find a weak point. "Nice symmetry. Force transmission from the tentacles to your spine in... what? Thoracic vertebrae eight through... twelve? Potential for lumbar issues, but not a bad choi--"

A three-clawed tentacle batted him casually across the decking and he tucked into a ball, protecting his freshly-smarting shoulder as he rolled. Fucking supervillains.

“You are a fool if you think you’ll avoid the virus forever, Iron Man.” Ock touched down on biological legs, but he wasn’t looking good; hair-loss, weight-loss, rebreather covering his face; radiation sickness and pulmonary degradation. “You are nothing without the suit, and I will make you use it.”

"Yeah, don't know if you noticed, but I left most of it outside. Overdressed, you know? I hate when that happ--"

Without the advanced senses, dodging was significantly more difficult. One tentacle went high, another went low, and a third looped around him from behind and snatched him up. Again. He didn’t have a hope in hell of holding it off barehanded.

"You will use it, and the virus will take control..." The tentacle tightened and Ock leaned closer. "...of your 'Extremis'." It squeezed the arc reactor against his lungs, compressed his ribcage and collarbones until they groaned, and Tony couldn’t breathe. Ock turned away but didn't slacken his hold.

"A shame, that the original schematics of the program that runs part of your brain are available to interested parties now--for the right price. Perhaps it will prove a leash on you, on that vaunted genius of yours, hmm, where other methods have failed? Worth a try, I thought."

The ship’s hull rang like a struck bell and Tony shuddered at the forced harmonic between his temples, because nothing sounded quite like vibranium.

Ock looked around, and by the wrinkling of his eyes, grinned. Overconfident little-- "They are calling for you on your team frequency. Perhaps you aren't listening? They are quite distressed." The tentacle loosened so Tony could suck in a breath to reply. Considerate of him.

“Yeah, don’t fool yourself; I know exactly how shielded this room is. I’m not gonna be infected that easily.” He wriggled in the tentacle's grip, shifting so it wasn’t pressing quite so hard on the reactor housing and trying to get a good look at the radiation source he could sense somewhere behind Ock. He’d be safe enough for a few hours, levels weren’t that bad, but if it got up to three or four, he’d start feeling it.

“And you know what? You know what my team's got, that you don’t?” Tony went on. The ship shuddered, listing to one side, and Tony let his mouth run as he strained to check the containment unit, see if it’d hold up when the computerized support systems went down, as they were pretty much bound to, at this point-- “They've got...” He struggled for breath; consciously or not, he was getting squeezed again. "...the bioscience background and the experience to know it's not a good idea to fuck around with auto-evolving mechanisms! They've got common sense!"

Ock scowled and gave Tony a good shake, then turned to his consoles and tried to access his computers. The rattling knocked the breath out of him, but even dazed and slightly blue, Tony could recognise a Krutzsvelt-Rankoff control and bleed nuclear powersource when he saw one. Fucking supervillains. It wouldn’t hold; not enough redundancies on the cooling loop. Unless there were
three meters of cadmium-lead under the deck plating, which he seriously doubted, it was going to melt through the flooring and scatter dropletized plutonium fuel across Stark Tower and half of midtown. *FUCK.*

“Look, Otto, you’re not-- The virus is eating your own systems.” He paused, panting with what little room he had. “We’re gonna lose containment, and the fuel rods'll melt; lethal-dose in minutes, maybe four or five. And that’s me--you’ve already got symptoms, might already be dead.” No point mentioning the wider consequences of dripping molten plutonium all over the place. Tony didn’t have the air.

"The virus would not mutate that fast," Ock muttered, still working with his console.

“Yeah, well, it--” Tony coughed as his body tried to dump CO$_2$. “--It mutated its mutation rate!”

The ship juddered again, a noise like a dying whale shaking the bolts and a dent staving in one of the outer struts.

"That makes no sense!" Ock cried. "Its rate was controlled!"

“Well *congratulations*, you exposed it to Extremis! *It learned.* It’s supposed to! What were you expecting, when you added a BIOLOGICAL ELEMENT?!”

The villain ignored him, frantically accessing the weapons system instead. Tony gaped, disbelieving, as this madman activated a gamma-knife, a Stark Medical special.

Strictly speaking, it was an invisible laser of gamma radiation, rather than a knife. “I make those for treating cancers, you bastard!” Tony thrashed about and pounded on the metal, *itching* to reach for the suit. Maybe the fight outside had damaged the shielding enough to get to it--though the virus--

“*Fuck you! Get your hands OFF my tech!*” he yelled as Steve turned up on the targeting screen. Thank fuck for the Hulk, was all Tony could think, because finger-shaped dents appeared near the bastardized kit, and the targeting system went offline. The trigger sequence was already running and the reactor stepping up its output to fire, but with nowhere to put it now--without downregulation--the reactor was going into self-perpetuating crisis.

Tipping point. Contracting the virus was now officially less likely to kill him than the madman with the atom-bomb-waiting-to-happen.

Tony twitched in horror but opened up Extremis’ data channels, reaching out, trying to get past the shielding and contact the armor, almost offhandedly gathering up the tainted undersuit he'd shed earlier. He could have sobbed at the blinding noise--it stabbed at him like ice picks with cold, hard pain. But the armor was *there*, he could feel it, and he grabbed hold of the repulsors to blast his way in. Hulk had started the job, Tony could finish it.

The inside surface of the octobot's shell started to smoke, then glow, then bubbled inwards under the armor's fingers. The metal’s surface temperature was in the thousands of degrees and Tony could feel the heat from the other side of the room, but the armor wasn’t for him, it didn’t matter if it would have burned him, all that mattered was time.

The Suit burst through the gap, its surface glowing the cherry-red of forge iron, and he steered it straight for the reactor, plowing aside the tentacles Otto tried to block it with. The Bleeding Edge was infinitely more flexible, more malleable in its form than any previous iteration, and it was easy to turn it into a pressure vessel with the arc-power pickup on the inner surface.

Tony sliced through the reactor casing with repulsor beams and slammed the Suit shut around the
plutonium fuel. The ship started falling, its propulsion gone, and the cabin went dark. Except for the Suit. Tony cut Extremis back, trying to limit his viral exposure, so he couldn’t feel it, but the Suit was like a star. Brilliant blue-white light poured from its surface: deadly neutron and gamma radiation reborn as harmless, beautiful visible light.

Weightless in free-fall, Tony stared into the heart of a sun while the world slowed to a crawl outside. Given the height of the fall, it must have been only a fraction of a second. No time at all, but... JARVIS was there, on the very edge of awareness. It was good.

Things started moving again, both too slow and too fast. Otto screamed, full of rage and the fear of death, and launched something that accelerated across the room; solid fuel propulsion, fins... No time to get out of the way, even if he’d gotten free of Ock’s convulsively strong grip.

Tony closed his eyes, covered his head and hoped Extremis would be able to fix him.

The ship crashed into something, probably a building, and the missile detonated. The pressure front was excruciating; like being under a breaking wave with his mouth open, and he felt his ears go. It hit his chest like 240 volts, and then came the fire.

(↓↓)

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“IT’S GOING DOWN!” Clint barked, lining up another thermite arrow while the tentacles were stationary. Who knew whether Stark’s work was permanent or not.

... It looked pretty permanent, what with the gaping, molten hole in the ship-thing's side... And the glowing. Let's not forget the glowing.

No sign of Stark coming back out as the thing fell and the Hulk rode it down, but Clint didn’t take his eyes off it until--there. Hah.

Stark tumbled out in a ball of smoke and flame and thumped into an AC vent one roof down. Clint whooped into his mic. “He’s clear!”

A roar filled the comms, and the air, and the Hulk went to town, caving in the burning dome and folding the metal around the bright, central light. He’d warned the squishy people away, earlier; Clint had no idea why, but when the Hulk told you something, you fucking listened.

“--not in the armor. I repeat, Sir is not in the armor. Requesting immediate medivac.” JARVIS’ voice was fuzzy and broken with the viral load still battering at their tech, but there was no mistaking the message. Blast like that...

Clint fired a grapple into the AC unit, tied off his line and was dumping momentum in a roll one roof down in ten seconds flat.

Scorch lines and soot marked the concrete, along with something dark that could be oil, could be blood, and Clint wasted no time sprinting across the roof to Tony. He was crumpled in a heap at the bottom of the AC unit, half inside a dent in the sheet metal where it had stopped him.

And he was alive. In pain, but alive and conscious. His clothes were either black or gone, revealing gravel rash and charred skin; Tony was trying so hard not to scream.

“Holy-- hey, Stark, I gotcha...” Clint mumbled, pulling his field kit off his belt as he knelt. He’d have morphine, epi, god, something.
There was a flash of gold at Tony’s neck and amongst his hair, visible in the dim light by its gleam against the fires and streetlamps. Maybe it was protecting his neck, but the undersuit was flexible most of the time, no guarantee. He could obviously still breathe and feel the injuries, so maybe they were lucky. Either way, it stopped Clint using the jugular to deliver the morphine, he’d need to find an arm.

“JARVIS, I’ve got him, talk to me.”

“I h-ve no connec--ion. Signal strength--too low fo- diagnostics.”

Clint swore. It was too dark to see anything clearly, and Tony’s far side was in complete shadow, so he fumbled for a flare and tore the cap off. It burst into almost-white flames and Tony flinched, eyes squeezing shut and—holy shit.

Tony's leg was broken at the femur. Blood shone in the light, along with the gleam of protruding bone. Without the suit, Tony’s bones were hollow, fragile things and Clint was pretty familiar with how sharp bird bones could be; the break had sliced through Tony’s leg muscles and out of the skin.

“F--” Clint paused to breathe, because injuries like this never got easier to see, not really. “Femoral compound fracture, third degree burns, po--... possible blast-wave syndrome. Breathing, conscious.” He flipped open his field kit and fished out the biggest morphine vial it contained, shooting the painkiller straight into the first vein he found.

“We’re nearly there, Clint, you tell him to hang on,” Steve croaked, voice juddering with his steps. JARVIS was silent, but Stark Tower was lighting up, and Clint did not want to know what he’d do if Tony died.

Clint passed on the message, swearing at Tony to “keep breathing, you fucking hear me?!” and Tony blinked. His breathing had steadied, deepening a little, and his eyes focused on Clint for the first time.

"Hey birdbrain," Clint heard in his ear, over the comm. He froze.

"JARVIS, Steve, Bruce?” Tony said, a note of panic in his voice, and the comm filled with a chorus of reassurance, cut off when Tony kept going right over top of it. "There's Doc Ock and a small runaway nuke in that pod, the armor's holding it but you have to get that thing outta here."

"HULK CONTAIN PUNY DEVICE," echoed up from street level.

"Hulk's on it," Clint said, trying a smile. "We're all fine, Tony, everybody's okay. Can you hear me?"

Tony blinked at him slowly, focused on his mouth. Lipreading.

"Sort of. Compensating. Can't hear the comm, I can send but not receive, virus would get in...and my left antenna's broken, ow." He sounded weirdly flat, none of the pain sounds of broken-up breaths and a tight throat making it into his digital voice, and Clint was glad the others couldn't hear that.

"Along with the rest of your leg, shellhead. We have some questions, okay? I'll relay," Clint said, and listened carefully, pulling out the most urgent questions while he took a closer look at Tony's leg, trying to gauge blood loss. "Do you have a damage report from Extremis? Any injuries I can't see, that we need to know about before we move you?” Clint angled the flare to light up his face and spoke slowly, pulling out all the stops to keep his face calm and clear, while in his other ear JARVIS said "Separated from the Suit, his bones are hollow; other fractures are inevitable." Clint agreed
silently, thinking about the way Tony had rolled against the concrete.

Tony watched closely and closed his eyes when Clint was done. "Head, neck, and spine are clear. I braced with the undersuit and hit feet-first. Besides the obvious, foot's fractured, knee at the... tibia, still aligned, so watch it, butterfingers. Bleeding, somewhere...internal... Maybe shockwave damage-Extremis can't tell yet. Eardrums. Undersuit took some of the burns, but--can't feel along my right side, n-nerve damage. Packaging the data for JARVIS."

Three short bursts of static over the comm, and Clint looked up as Natasha kicked her way through door on the other side of the roof. She broke into a run towards them, paramedic bag lifted from one of the support teams in one hand.

"Tell J, need to connect ASAP... through quinjet, he'll tell--Extremis can't triage all this by itself, I'm... blood pressure drop, gonna pass out. JARVIS...? catch."

A final burst of static and Tony sighed, his hand relaxing in Clint's. He kept breathing, but it was shallow and Clint had to freeze to see it. Whatever was in that bag wasn't going to be enough, but maybe they could stabilise the femur enough to--

"He needs JARVIS, right the fuck now. Get the quinjet here as fast as you can, I don't care about the paint job," Clint said, working with Natasha to get charred cloth pulled and cut away so they could see what they were doing.

Blood pressure drop? Fucking femoral artery was right in the middle of that mess, if it had ruptu-- no, timeline wasn't right, shit. Internal injuries? Tony's ears were bleeding, but the shockwave wou--

The quinjet roared over the side of the building, Steve hanging on in the open hatch and no one in the cockpit. JARVIS landed, roughly, but within tolerances, and Steve tumbled out with a stretcher. The jets were well stocked, Tony was good at that.

"Talk to me," Steve ordered, eyes on Tony.

"We need to get him in the jet so JARVIS can sort out Extremis, something about a blood pressure crisis," Clint said.

JARVIS' voice was much clearer now. "Extremis is unable to prioritize so much alone; it is confused by the large number of damage reports. Hurry."

Extremis was forming a hard, black scab over the burns, sealing rather than healing, but the burns could wait; the breaks couldn’t, wherever Tony was bleeding from couldn’t. “There’s a risk the ends of the bone’ll rupture a big blood vessel, so we have to keep it still, but there’s no time..."

After a quick glance Steve didn’t look at Tony’s injuries again; okay, fine, he was white as Tony as it was, and he’d fixed his eyes on Tony’s face instead. Whatever he needed to do to keep it together. “All right, Natasha, tourniquet, just in case. Clint; get a splint on, secure as possible, but quick,” he ordered, laying out the stretcher. JARVIS was silent, but the quinjets’ rotors had barely slowed down; he was waiting.

Clint bound up the leg with the tough strips of plastic, glad he hadn’t rolled Tony onto his back yet. Even with Natasha holding his knee and taking the weight of his lower leg, there was some torsion and a fresh gush of blood, already black with Extremis’ clotting factor.

Tony stirred and Clint froze, waiting for a second spurt that’d mean arterial damage. Steve leaned over Tony’s head, touching his face and keeping him still, letting Clint make the call. He didn’t need to; the blood didn’t come.
“Okay, time to go,” he decided, tying off the splint with a rough knot. It wasn’t an aircast, but it’d do.

Once Stark was on the stretcher, things happened fast; Steve took the front, Clint the back, and Natasha ran ahead to pilot while JARVIS worked on Tony. They slid the stretcher in, locked it in place best they could without tying Tony down, and Extremis went...weird.

Metallic gold undersuit material flowed down his neck and out from under his back, then plunged into the broken end of the bone. Directed by JARVIS, Steve held Tony’s hip while Clint braced his feet and pulled on Tony’s ankle, then shuddered in relief as the bone disappeared, moved by JARVIS and the undersuit back to where it should be. Black, clotted blood pushed out of the injury, until healthy, clean blood trickled out, and then it just...stopped.

“Femur secured. The splint, if you please, Agent Barton,” JARVIS ordered through the comm, and Clint pulled the knot loose, dazed, while the injury sealed up. Methodically, he pulled the bandages away, wiping blood and soot off, relief bubbling up as he found hard scabs instead of open wounds."The tourniquet, now." Clint unbuckled it and let it loosen slowly. The seal held; no more fresh blood appeared. God, Clint really needed a drink.

“S-Steve...” Clint’s head jerked up; Tony was conscious again, tensing and shifting, breathing turning erratic with pain. “Steve... Steve, where’s JARVIS? I can’t feel... JARVIS!” His eyes were open, but cloudy, not focusing on anything.

“Let...make him read your lips; he can’t hear much, right now,” Clint urged, moving up and pressing carefully down on Tony’s hip to keep him from disturbing JARVIS’ work. Steve nodded, stroking his hands down Tony’s arms and picking up his wrists.

“I have been forced to shut down all digital-to-analog communication, to prevent infiltration by the virus. What contact we had has been severed.” Steve shuddered; Clint didn’t know how that worked, how they worked, but Steve saw something about that statement that Clint didn’t, and it was one hell of a motivator; he kept Tony’s attention, silent and firm, all the way up to the Tower's helipad and down, down again in a fast elevator, to a part of the Tower Clint had barely explored where JARVIS had a clean room.

The virus was still live; they hadn’t found the source yet, though SHIELD was working on containment, and Tony was cut of from digital comms until he was better shielded. And JARVIS had to control Extremis manually in the meantime, because... Or JARVIS couldn't connect to -- you know what, whatever. Clint wasn't qualified for this shit. He didn’t question whether Tony would be getting proper medical attention; Extremis was capping off the burns while he watched. He closed the door behind Steve’s back, once Tony was laid out on the warm floor, and slumped against the steel, forehead on the metal and hands covered in Tony’s blood.

After a moment to just breathe, he put his back to the door and slid down, putting his bow over his knees.

```
reformatting hardware. analog pickups compromised. repair in pro--

CANCEL REPAIR. redefine nervous system: priority7

priority tree: splenic bleed priority1 skeletal priority2 muscle damage priority3--

oxygen reserve depleted, intervention required.
```
hypoglycemia imminent, intervention required.

ringfence resource: blood volume. conserve+ redeploy. clotting factor reserve depleted, cease clotting in secondary priority areas, external intervention acquired--

...Who was doing that?

...JARVIS? But JARVIS… Tony reached out again, scanning through his ports, but nothing was active; the whole wireless module was disabled by root, and he wasn’t root right now. He remembered taking himself off root, yeah, and making it…so it would be difficult to get back on, but…

If it wasn’t so quiet--too quiet--if it didn't feel so small, so closed-in with all these features shut down, resources pouring away like water into the repairs Extremis was doing… Too small for latency, too quiet to echo. He wanted to yell, to ping on all his frequencies at once, ping for JARVIS, find everyone, but he couldn't. He couldn't hear, reception was locked down tight and triple-redundant, he couldn't send without diverting resources and he didn't have the permissions--

Far, far away, he felt his chest hitch in a sob and pain spike after it, up under his ribs on his left side. He moved his arm to shield himself, but nothing...

JARVIS, please...

But whatever JARVIS was doing, it didn’t include retrieving the unsent messages folder, because what he got was fuzzy motion in his field of vision, resolving to Steve instead. Not so bad, in the grand scheme of things–if he was here, the fight…the threat was probably over, everyone was probably okay--but Tony couldn’t focus to see what he was saying, and the feeling of hands on his arms was so far away, it was useless.

He tried to focus, tried to self-authenticate and get the permissions to activate wireless, but latency was slipping in from somewhere and he timed out.


Extremis gently suspended the looping thread and ran an automatic blood scan, echoing him the results. Blood sugar way low, trauma and stress indicators way high… Positive for opiates, way over the threshold marking impaired analog function. Okay, that explained some of this bullshit, but it only went so far! Tony didn’t want to be quiet, he hurt, and he was alone, and the drugs were not enough.

Steve was trying to tell him something, though, holding his head straight and making clear shapes with his mouth. Tony tried, he really did, but he couldn’t make his eyes track, or even fixate, and he was feeling weaker with each attempt. Steve repeated the same gesture, over and over, his mouth open and a finger tapping at one corner, and yes Steve, thank you, I know I should be watching, but I CAN’T--

But then one of JARVIS’ tentacles was tapping at his lips, and realization dawned; they needed a hard line. Resource delivery. Steve just wanted him to open his mouth...

Easier said than done, Tony discovered; his jaw was clenched hard against the pain he wasn’t really aware of. Slowly, he blinked twice, like a nod, and tried to relax, tried to unglue his teeth from each other. It felt better when he had; energy he couldn’t spare freed up.

JARVIS pressed into his mouth, gently softly, and Tony closed his eyes; this probably wasn’t going to be pleasant. Sweet, slick gloop covered his tongue, and he swallowed convulsively as the limb
pushed down into his throat, and kept pushing until it felt like heartburn. The back of his tongue numbed, the half-suppressed swallowing turning into something vague and weak, and the heartburn faded into obscurity as JARVIS pushed past into his stomach. JARVIS let a little sugar drip onto his tongue as a reward and distraction, and Tony huffed mentally, because whatever JARVIS might think, Pavlovian conditioning didn’t work on Tony (it did).

He drew a shaky breath past the obstruction and his head cleared. The tentacle against the back of his throat felt cold; JARVIS was pushing oxygen through the tentacle’s surface, doping the air he breathed in as it passed.

*Oxygen saturation at 89%, 91%, 95%, stability acquired, sending calibration request.*

*Diverting blood flow to stomach, acquiring repair substrates, priority glucose1, amino acids2--*

The resource crisis eased off and he started to feel full, even though he’d hardly been aware of being hungry in the first place. Resource allocation started leaving him a packet of neural currency on each rotation and Extremis flicked smug numbers at him; clotting data, collagen production. Tony brushed them away, redirecting towards the burstingly active root user with a deep sense of relief. It had to be JARVIS; the virus wouldn't direct repairs like that if it were in control--if it were in control the virus might affect his digital perceptions to keep him from recognizing it, but now he had plenty of analog data backing the hypothesis too.

So why wasn’t the empathy buffer, or any of the sensory ones, being updated from JARVIS’ side? JARVIS could be feeding him sound through the auditory buffer, but he wasn’t, wasn’t even dropping messages into the comms. It didn’t make much sense; if JARVIS could connect to Extremis, even as an unrecognized superuser, why wouldn't he connect to Tony--?

Oh... The undersuit, he’d picked up the infected undersuit. *He’d* brought in a viral source, and it was sitting inside his bones, holding them together while Extremis used the raw materials JARVIS was pumping into him to fix the fractures. JARVIS could be scrubbing out his systems faster than the virus would spread, and he’d still quarantine Tony *just in case*--but actually, now he thought about it, the only foolproof way to scrub it out of the undersuit would be to take the nanobot mesh and completely wipe it. Randomize every value it stored several times, then overwrite it with the last safe backup from yesterday. And he'd need to wipe the whole mesh at once, or the virus would survive in an untouched part and reinfect the whole.

So basically, JARVIS couldn’t eradicate the virus from the undersuit, much less do a thorough check of all Tony's systems, until Tony could survive being separated from it for a while. All or nothing. Trying to do it in parts would just waste time they ought to be spending on repairs. But he bet JARVIS was monitoring everything the undersuit was doing, down to the micron level.

And yeah, even knowing that, even knowing the virus would be somewhere in there if he let JARVIS talk to him, he’d still open himself up to it. If knowledge it was a bad decision actually *stopped* him, he wouldn’t be Tony fucking Stark. JARVIS knew that, knew him.

It was annoying, and Tony was still lonely, still scared of the pain and the damage and the virus, but it was understandable. Maybe the only decision that kept him safe. Maybe he’d be mad about it, later.

*I’ll sleep, knock me out, don’t make me wait this out... please...!* His throat spasmed around JARVIS’ limb, and his eyes watered at the sharp burn but it was *good,* because JARVIS was right there, even if he wasn’t in the buffer. But...he ached, and it was so quiet…

He gave himself a little while to be afraid. To worry.
Then he started thinking about that auditory buffer he wasn't using for anything.

"JARVIS, tell me he can't feel this..." Steve groaned, pressing the back of his wrist into his eye. Tony was crying; silent around the tube in his throat, but with tears welling up when he blinked. JARVIS was cleaning the burns, to stop Extremis from wasting energy on fighting imaginary infection. It had to hurt, disinfection always did.

"He cannot. The compound Dr. Banner provided is working as specified. I do not know why he..."

Steve nodded wordlessly; JARVIS hated not having contact with Tony’s mind, and Steve didn’t want to imagine what that felt like. Bracing himself, he went back to spreading ointment as JARVIS worked his way along Tony’s side. The thick sealant was body-warm through Steve’s glove, cloudy white and odorless. It covered up the burns, and was supposed to do something to protect the healing process, which was going to happen so quickly once Extremis was done with Tony’s bones that keeping up with it wasn’t going to be easy. A tentacle holding a little nozzle followed him along, and the ointment bubbled and stiffened under its spray.

Steve had to wear double gloves; the gel would numb his fingers if it touched him, and Steve hoped it’d be enough to keep Tony from feeling his injuries, too. There was only so long they could use Bruce’s drug. Soon there was no burn left unsealed, and Steve sat back on his heels, shaking and wanting nothing more than to curl up with Tony and JARVIS and make all the hurt go away.

“I’m not cut out for nursing, JARVIS,” he said, stripping off the gloves and leaning over to brush a few tears off Tony’s face.

"The repair of proximal metacarpals is complete. If you would remove his shoes, please." Steve nodded, glad to have something to do.

Tony's foot and ankle were reddish purple with bruising, but there was no blood or swelling, and Steve gently rubbed warmth back into his toes. Once both shoes and socks were out of the way, a trickle of gold ran out of the port in his ankle and formed up into droplets like gold pebbles; Steve pulled them off Tony's skin and tossed them across the room, onto a pile destined to be melted down and rewritten, next to the dampeners JARVIS had set up. Minutes later, he did the same for Tony's no-longer-broken knee, which accounted for a third of the infected undersuit; they were nearly there.

The compound break took longer, of course, but Tony had calmed down by then, and Steve sat by his shoulder, petting his hair and taking a moment to breathe. Steve felt itchy, now that there wasn't anything to do but wait, but at least he wasn't actively fidgeting. Tony was...tapping? It was regular, not some random twitch, but not Morse or any code Steve knew. It was mesmerising, sometimes using three fingers, sometimes just one, and rising and falling in pace like--

Steve stifled hysterical laughter. "Safe to say he's awake then," he said, picking up Tony's hand and letting the tapping shift to his palm. It really wasn't code; it was music. Thank god, Tony was just fine.

"Indeed, Captain; it certainly explains the increased activity in the auditory buffer."

"He's playing music in his brain." Steve thought about that. "I'm never going to be sure he's listening to me again."

"Perhaps we should tag him with an honesty light of his very own, for peace of mind?"

Steve grinned slightly at the image. "He wouldn't mind carrying a piece of you around constantly,
that's for sure." The undersuit bracing Tony's leg started oozing out and beading up, slower than before but steady, and Steve got up to catch it.

"Ah, but where to put it?" JARVIS asked, gesturing with the light in question while Steve took the infected undersuit away and dumped it with the rest.

"I can think of a few places," Steve muttered, kicking the pile of bloody clothes and infected tech into a smaller mound.

JARVIS, in a rare display of his inner workings, turned on his speakers but failed to speak for a long moment. "Were you anyone but yourself, one might think that was innuendo."

Steve blinked, then wrinkled his nose, settling down beside Tony and pulling over one of JARVIS' arms to rest his head on. JARVIS, of course, obliged. "You spend too much time in Tony's brain, buddy."

"Perhaps so, Captain. Brace for reconnect."

Steve obeyed, gathering Tony up, warm and safe against his chest, so that Tony's burns were protected from twitches and sudden movements. JARVIS bundled them together carefully, silicone gentle but firm, then brought the transceiver online in a flare of blue-red-blue.

Tony's music was the first thing to come on, blasting out of JARVIS' speakers in a booming medley that Steve didn't have a hope in hell of recognising; a snatch of some song he played in his workshop along with deep, rumbling bass that Tony must be generating on the spot. Tony jerked against their hold, eyes popping wide, and turned off the music with a 'kzzzzt' as he blinked up at Steve. After a second, he started smiling around the tentacle in his mouth, water welling up in his eyes again as the honesty light shone bright pink. Steve grinned back and hugged him tight.

"--hear it? Oh, okay, no, it's fine, they'll heal. Hey Steve," Tony said, routed through JARVIS' speakers, sounding small and shaky.

"Hey Tony. How you feeling?" Steve asked, gently wiping his cheekbones dry.

"-- not exactly five star, if you must know. ...It was hard being without the--the empathy buffer. Too quiet. JARVIS, stop leaning on me, gerroff."

"But if I did that you would not tell the truth. It is no fault of mine that you cannot resist the force of my disapproval."

Steve huffed. "We'll get a bed once the burns have sealed properly, alright?"

There was a long pause, and Steve waited to see whether JARVIS could get Tony to answer his original question after all.

"...aches. Even through the drugs." Tony muttered eventually, tucking his face down against Steve, hiding, and swallowing around the tentacle. "Extremis's got errors, just little systemic ones; it's not processing byproducts fast enough..."

Steve frowned, not having the training to respond to that. "Is it dangerous?" he asked, looking up at JARVIS.

"Not given Extremis, which is capable of managing excretion."

"...it just... It aches. Like cramp, or a stitch..." Tony said, rubbing his temple against Steve’s
collarbone.

To Tony’s obvious consternation Steve pulled back from being Tony's bed and cast an assessing eye over his naked body. His leg, though mostly healed, was unnaturally stiff, the thigh muscles hard when he ran a hand over them.

"Like lactic acid build up?" Steve asked, shifting further away and letting Tony gently down onto JARVIS’ arms, despite his grumbles.

"Yeah, only... A lot, wherever I was hurt. Repairs are faster than my lymphatic system can keep up with; design fault. I need to... To patch it. How does lymph circulate, anyway..."

"Sir," JARVIS said, disapproving, "you are in no position to rewrite any part of Extremis. Access denied."

Tony whined through his nose and shifted weakly against JARVIS. “Then take this out of me, and let me move around!”

“No. You need it.”

“But I’m full!”

Steve sat back, considering; half of Tony’s flank was caked over with burn sealant, though the burn itself was retreating under it; there was a tube down his throat, and his stomach was bulging like he’d eaten too much pizza in one sitting. There was no way Tony was moving on his own, not for hours; he could barely lift a hand.

“In case you haven’t noticed, you are on seventy percent oxygen. Regardless of how satiated you feel, I am barely able to keep up with Extremis’ requirements as it stands, let alone the metabolic load of ‘moving around’. Remain still.” JARVIS’ tentacles waved warningly, some even going so far as curling around Tony’s wrists and ankles, and Tony stilled; submitting, but not pleased. Steve stroked JARVIS’ nearest limb soothingly; Tony was hard to look after at the best of times, and this was not an easy situation. JARVIS paused in his constant movement at the touch, calming himself admirably, and ran a gentle limb over Tony's abdomen, assessing and feeling for Tony's stomach and injured spleen. He sighed--it didn't sound like a human sigh, but was still recognisable--and turned his tactile investigation into a hug around Tony's uninjured side.

“Very well... I will enlist Doctor Banner to find a more concentrated suspension; if we increase the concentration gradient, we can reduce the surface area to something more comfortable... I am sorry, sir, I am...not at peak efficiency.”

"...'s okay, J, you're doing good, 'm sorry for being a brat."

"Sir, if I found that a problem, I would have uploaded myself into a Mars rover years ago."

Tony smiled, much as he was able, but it turned into a grimace and his hand fluttered towards his leg, wanting to rub away the ache.

“P-point stands, need to work this out before it seizes up completely.”

“I’ll do it,” Steve said softly, holding Tony's hand away from the injury and stroking a small circle on the soft skin of his wrist. “You need to warm up your muscles, without using up any energy, right? There’s gotta be a way to...”

“One moment, Captain...” JARVIS said, a holographic screen appearing with a realtime search
summary as JARVIS did his...thing. With the internet.

Steve rubbed Tony’s jaw and throat soothingly. “See? We’re good. We’ll figure a way to sort you out. You just have to lie there for us, okay?”

Tony glared up at him, briefly, then arched his head back and closed his eyes, swallowing with the motion of Steve’s fingers. It couldn’t be comfortable, being fed air and liquid nutriment like that, even though the tentacle was small. Steve leaned down and kissed the corner of Tony’s mouth, then his forehead, as a ‘well done’.

JARVIS found him instructions for moving lymph around, which looked reassuringly like your standard cramp treatment, and Steve ‘hmm’ed. Massage and gentle repetitive motions; Tony wouldn’t have to use his own muscles either, with JARVIS here. And massage would help with the cramp directly too. He looked up at the screen and JARVIS opened several more video clips. Steve watched them all at once, looking for the aspects they had in common, and anything that looked like it would feel nice.

Tony's leg at the site of the former femur break was the worst, and there was no burn sealant there to mess up, so he would start there. Steve set his hands a little below Tony's knee and ran them upward toward his hip, pressing gently as though he was trying to scrape something below the skin. Tony drew in a sharp breath and his leg jumped. "All right?” Steve asked, leaving his hands resting on Tony's knee.

"Yeah. Yeah, keep going like that...the new nerves aren't sure what to feel. Some input'll help them calibrate."

Steve did it again, swiping up the sides and underside of Tony's leg--he could sympathize, hamstring cramps hurt--then, very gently, over the slightly shiny skin where bone had been poking through less than forty minutes ago. Tony's quad had knots in it, because muscles did not like being punctured--Steve could sympathize with that as well--and there would have been other soft tissue damage too, side effects of the blow that broke the bone. He went just a little bit harder the next time around, paying special attention to the places where the muscle didn't quite feel right under the skin, and felt the first hint of relaxation, a bit of tremble instead of the hard rictus he'd started with.

A third time, up to medium pressure, and Tony groaned through his nose. "Keep doing that. Do that some more."

"Simple instructions," Steve said, "I like that." He concentrated on the knee this time, kneading the muscles above and below it and gauging the amount of give in the ligaments, then positioned one of JARVIS' limbs directly underneath for support, and had a thought. "JARVIS, can you warm up your, ah, tentacles, a bit above skin heat? And lay one along here, where the muscle was torn.” Tony sighed when the limb touched him and pressed into the skin, undulating very gently. His eyes were half-lidded now, and JARVIS subtly repositioned himself without being asked, laying his tentacles in zigzags along major muscle groups, pushing and kneading lightly the same way Steve was doing. Steve left them to it and went to Tony's hip, checking range of motion there too, pressing harder as the surface muscles shakily came unlocked and deeper muscles were accessible.

Then back down to the knee; it had some motion now. He and JARVIS lifted it very slowly, just a few inches up and down. Muscles clicked and slid under Tony's skin, some recramping, so they left the knee flexed and supported and worked them out.

"Blood flow increased by 20%," JARVIS said quietly. "Absorption of breakdown products significantly improved. Lymphatic circulation also showing marked improvement."
"Feels...a lot better..." Tony said, not even trying to keep his eyes open.

"Good..." Steve mumbled distractedly, flexing Tony's foot a little, trying to feel the Achilles tendon’s attachment to his calf and keep the tension from propagating up the muscle. "You can sleep, if you want; won't hurt. I think we got this covered."

"...sure. Why not..." Tony mumbled back. Steve kept on, slow and steady, and watched as Tony gradually, incrementally relaxed into sleep.

Working all the stiffness out of Tony’s muscles took almost three hours of hot pressure, writhing tentacles and all the smooth, solid deliberation Steve could muster. Extremis worked constantly, its progress marked by the transition from red to black to blue to yellow of the bruises under Tony’s skin, as broken blood vessels healed and old blood was taken away.

Tony’s temperature peaked at 101 degrees as the poisons in the breakdown were swept past his system as fast as Steve, JARVIS and Extremis could manage it, and he mumbled incoherently at them, but didn’t wake up. Steve had a feeling that had more to do with JARVIS than anything else.

Eventually, shaky with hunger and exhaustion, Steve stopped. Tony’s skin was soft and pliant again, the final stages of clearance leaving it pink and healthy over even the worst of the bruises. Steve would have continued, well past hunger and into the serenity beyond, but JARVIS gently informed him that Clint was still sitting guard outside the door.

“Go, Captain. Eat, stand the good Agent down. I will have food waiting for you in the kitchen upstairs.”

Steve nodded, bleary with post-mission reaction that hadn’t had a chance to set in when Tony was still under his hands. He pulled open the annex door, slipping through quick as he could to keep the warm, burn-friendly air inside, and closed it behind him. It sealed with the unique finality of a six-inch-thick door with deadbolts three inches in diameter. Closing them all probably wasn’t necessary, but JARVIS was nothing if not thorough.

“Clint.”

“...Cap. Hey. How’s he...?” Clint asked, blinking up at Steve, just as befuddled, just as exhausted.

“Good... Bones are set, surface wounds are healing up. JARVIS can tell you more, but...he’s gonna be fine. I need...” Steve faltered, losing the thread of conversation because what he needed was Tony under his hands, but JARVIS had sent him away, and that was confusing.

“Captain, dinner is waiting on your convenience.”

Steve nodded slowly, letting the suggestion sink in. Yes, he’d get Clint to eat, then go back to Tony. JARVIS did, in fact, end up making Clint eat too. Afterward Dummy escorted Clint to the nearest bed to the kitchen, and Steve tagged along behind You, back to the server annex.

You thust a tightly folded foil packet into his hands, then whizzed off, chittering. Steve turned the foil blanket over in his hands, baffled, but obeyed JARVIS’ soft urgings when he was told to lay down with Tony and keep him warm.

It seemed like the thing to do.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
cataloging ongoing processes........
dream cycle- cancel:redirect-{deepsleep}
memory writeprocess-C3zone- cancel:redirect-{sup.memory}
respiratory regulation- redirect@userJARVIS
suppressing gag reflex... withdrawing respiratory/nutritional support... withdrawal successful.
compensating: downreg metabolism: 18%.
external heatsource recommended. empathy buffer insufficient to maintain user stability.
“Captain, if you would be so kind as to strip.”
heatsource acquired. oxytocin levels stabilising.
cardiac ejection fraction: optimal. hardware repairs complete.
timeline for removal of breakdown products: 23 minutes with current level of assistance.
beginning remote shutdown........
shutdown initiated.
clearing hardware-contacting caches... calibrating USER letdown...
USER disconnected.
shutdown complete. extremisstatus[offline]
beginning scrub of sandbox and lvl1 proximal systems.
analysing viral fragments..... fragments inactive, no danger to unit_creator.
relief.

Waking up had layers, today, and Tony really had no idea where he was. This was not a bed, and it was astoundingly quiet, only his links with JARVIS being updated with a sleepy maintenance trickle. Something tissue-light and silvery was over his head, someone large and warm and Steve-smelling curled up next to him on a--...a shifting blue-lit bed of tentacles. Well. That narrowed it down.

Good morning, sir.

JARVIS, he replied. Steve’s thick bicep was tucked under his head, and JARVIS’ limbs were all up in his space, against his healthy side and snug around his legs.

How are you feeling?

Tony huffed, shifting against JARVIS’ tentacles just enough to work up the necessary sensory data. He sent it directly to the transceiver and JARVIS mulled it over quietly, little bubbles of empathy updates trickling over the sleep-reduced connection.

His knee and thigh still ached, but with the warm heavy sensation of hard work rather than anything
strictly unpleasant. His side was completely numb, but JARVIS would be able to turn down the significance threshold and tell him what was going on there. The edges itched faintly where the burn dressing’s surface layer sealed against skin, which seemed like it was probably a good thing.

*can I take it off yet?* Tony asked, lifting a clumsy hand to his side and feeling the quality of the seal. Stiff surface, gelatinous underlayer; 100% as planned.

*You may. However, you may wish to hold off until the Captain is able to assist you to the shower; the doping Doctor Banner provided is an extremely effective numbing agent and should be removed with care.*

*might need to tone that down for industry use; no good having burn patients fucking up their healing because they can’t feel it.* He let his hand drop, not really wanting to move when he had Steve and JARVIS to do the work for him.

*If I may say so, Sir; you are in no position to judge.*

*ha ha. live it up.*

He was hungry again, and thirsty, he noted, squinting at JARVIS as the transceiver pulled back--was it? Yes it was--the space blanket draped over him and Steve. Not so eager, though, to have a tentacle shoved down his throat. It was a little sore.

*incident report?*

*You are not cleared for that information yet, sir,* JARVIS grumbled, even as he packaged the summary for transmission. *I am of a mind to keep it from you until you are fully healed.*

*yeah, yeah, buddy, gimme.* JARVIS sent, and Tony paged through the report with his eyes closed; Ock’s virus was still floating about in mobile networks and wireless, but there wasn’t any property damage that Tony couldn’t make good with judicious application of Stark Industries resources.

*okay, great, duty discharged, now help me wake Steve up in a nice way.*

JARVIS paused, judgingly, and pointedly poked at the empathy buffer.

*that is why I need your help also, is there any water around?*

JARVIS offered him the tip of a tentacle, wiggling slightly in invitation and Tony scowled, but opened his mouth. JARVIS let him suck down the glucose-rich juice all by himself, this time. It tasted good, at least, drugs and all, and there was something pretty damn good about having JARVIS on his tongue.

*don’t think you’re fooling anyone, J, what is that, muscle relaxant?* Tony wondered, rolling the tentacle tip around in his mouth and coaxing another mouthful out. He felt like giving a blowjob, he was damn well going to give a blowjob. JARVIS appreciated these things in his own way.

*Well guessed, sir, in addition to Epsom salts and a number of other micronutrients. It should assist with the remaining stiffness.* Hah. No, no it was not. The ache in his muscles? Yes, Extremis was already shipping the drug off to the appropriate places. His cock, on the other hand...

*that, I doubt.*

*that I doubt very much*

*Steve is very, very naked, J, that is a whole lot of Steve.*
Tony was snuggled up right against his front, too; unless he was very much mistaken, that was Steve’s cock resting against his leg, soft and silky. Tony did not, on any level, object to this.

Tony shifted slightly, rippling his tongue against JARVIS’ tentacle and rubbing his leg against Steve. On JARVIS’ part, this prompted him to feed Tony a little more tentacle, making swallowing down the dosed juice that it doled out rather more intimate.

You should not, you are still sore, JARVIS warned, touching the back of his throat gently; it still burned a little from the intubation. Low on the repair priority list, apparently.

when has that ever stopped me, Tony said, sucking a little harder, determined to get the whole dose of electrolytes and muscle relaxants so that JARVIS would let him get Steve involved in this rather delayed post-battle celebration.

Are you aware, sir, that muscle relaxants make certain things...rather easier? Tony blinked, eyes blowing wide at JARVIS’ merciless tone. The tentacles under him rippled, promisingly curling tighter around his legs, separating them just enough to be suggestive.

you are a menace, JARVIS, absolute menace. Tony panted, becoming aware of the languid, loose sensation and squirming as much as he was allowed. Yes, I am now aware, uncomfortably aware. please do not hesitate to take advantage.

I think I will leave that up to the Captain, today; you did note his refractory period, did you not?

Tony positively growled, nipping at JARVIS. I see what you’re doing, you want to keep my mouth to yourself.

I am discovered, how shall I complete my dastardly plan now? JARVIS drawled, shaking the coiled-up tip of a free tentacle like a fist.

you are ridiculous, no really. stop. Tony tugged on the tentacle in his mouth, teeth firm enough to distort the silicone, but not dent it. It wriggled against his tongue, threatened the back of his throat, leaving a smear of something sticky and medicated, then retreated, leaving the last few drops of juice in his mouth and escaping his teeth. Tony chased it with his tongue, wet and sloppy, and maybe that was making a show of it, but JARVIS liked to see things.

As you wish, sir. Might now be the time to inform you that the Captain is awake? He is enjoying your performance.

MENACE

Tony tipped his head back, looking up at Steve’s face, and grinned. “...‘morning?”

Steve’s cock was getting interested against his hip, and Tony wriggled against it, not particularly subtly.

“Good morning, yourself,” Steve replied muzzily, shifting his hips away, much to Tony’s disappointment. “How’re you feeling?”

JARVIS loomed, his presence in the empathy buffer increasing and reminding Tony that while he could speak shit to JARVIS and have his underlying motivation understood, Steve didn’t have a mainline into Tony’s brain. Dammit.

“Like a used dishrag. Blowjob?”
Steve blinked slowly, struggling to work that one out, then went slightly pink, and rather stern. “He being good, JARVIS?”

“Indeed, Captain. He even ate breakfast.”

“All I asked for was a drink, but no, he slips breakfast in there too, it was sneaky. I feel sneaked,” Tony groused, rolling onto his side with JARVIS’ assistance, and burying his face in Steve’s chest. “...burn’s nearly gone.”

“‘Nearly’?” Steve asked, his hands running over Tony’s back and side, holding Tony in place while he looked the injury over.

“The ‘dressing’ is obscured on the inside with scabbing and minor bleeds that have since stopped, making it hard to tell for certain the quality of the skin, but Extremis’ reports are highly promising.”

“It itches...” Tony mumbled, mouthing at Steve's pectoral to distract himself. JARVIS gave a hmm of approval, the low note spreading up from the tentacles and resonating in Tony's hollow bones.

One of Steve's big hands moved up, running along Tony's spine to bury fingers in the short hair at the back of his neck, and Steve arched his back a little. Tony latched on to his nipple like a homing device. Yeah, Steve's cock was hot and hard now, brushing against his ribs on the unburned side.

"Tony," Steve said, sounding out of breath, "how're your legs?"

Tony bit gently and let go. "Don't ask me to stand up and I won't tell you any lies, Cap. But. They don't hurt anymore."

"Are you gonna make a full recovery?"

"I'll need some rehab to regain flexibility. If we have to debrief, I'll give you Extremis' projections then. Steve." Tony kissed his nipple. "Steve, are we really talking about this? I would like to suck your dick. Are you gonna let me?"

"S-Some rehab? Tony, you'll have to tell me--you talking hours, or days, or, or weeks--" Steve lost the thread, his words turning into a full-throated groan as Tony reached down and took him in hand.

"JARVIS has a thing about positive reinforcement. JARVIS had better well give me a hand right now, because god knows we both deserve a fucking reward."

The empathy buffer lit with pleasure, and tentacles twined loosely around Steve's wrists and ankles. "You remember our discussion of safewords, Captain? Sir is quite right."

"I'm good, this is good," Steve gasped. "As long as Tony's okay."

"I'm okay, Steve," Tony said, licking his way down Steve's abs, lifted a little by JARVIS. "To your question--" here, he'd found Steve's magnificent cock, was this really the closest look he'd ever had? That was a crying shame. It leaked a little bit of precome on his cheek and he breathed on it, nosing down the length of it, burying his face in the smell of Steve. "Rehab length of days." He dabbed his tongue out a little, wetting a spot where blood beat just beneath the skin, and blew on it; Steve flexed, but JARVIS was pinning his hips to the floor. "Less--" he licked a long wet stripe up the underside of Steve's cock, back to the head, "--than one week," he finished, and took the hot silky head of Steve's cock into his mouth, resting on his tongue while he took several long deep breaths, then opened his throat and swallowed it down, down, down.

It was an easy slide, the easiest deepthroat he'd ever done. Steve was big around, a lot bigger than JARVIS' tentacle, but Tony's gag reflex must have been burned out by the day, because Steve
tapped the back of his throat and Tony weathered the momentary wave of nausea, but the clench of his throat, the rejection, didn't come. *Thank you JARVIS.* He bobbed his head a few times, experimentally, and looked up.

Steve was already looking overwhelmed; eyes blown, mouth slack and chest heaving.

damn I could get used to this, Tony broadcast, letting the transceiver go red and light up Steve like an Amsterdam back road. JARVIS looped around Steve, using the bigger, stronger bases of his tentacles to hold on, to make Steve actually feel it, and Tony grinned around Steve's cock.

“You're ganging up on me...” Steve laughed, still sleep-mussed and dazed.

"You complaining?” Tony said through the speakers. "Oh, oh, do you know how much I've always wanted to be able to talk during a blowjob? This is possibly, and I say this as a man of science, my finest hour."

"Oh god," Steve said, back bowing helplessly and hands pulling against JARVIS' grip. Not that Tony minded hands in his hair, but his muscles weren't quite up to holding his ground against Steve at the moment. Maybe ever. They'd have to experiment.

"Just look at you... Pinned down like a butterfly, and fluttering like one too. Even though I'll let you go when I'm done." Tony massaged the vein just under that impossibly silky skin, coaxing a drop of precome onto the back of his throat. "I love you like this, having you like this. Best view in the house. Every hitch, every stutter, every fray in your control, I'll feel it. Do you want me to take you apart? Because I will, I'll pull every last drop of come out of you, until you can't breathe, it's so good. Do a study and break you down into your constituent parts, 15% lust, 50% love, 100% concentrated power of cock--"

Steve's hips spasmed and JARVIS let him thrust just enough to push past the back of Tony's throat a second before he was expecting it, a tacit reminder of who was actually in charge here. Steve loved it, his eyes hot on Tony's face; his hands grasped at air, and his voice rumbled out of that broad chest like summer thunder, wordless and wanting.

Tony pushed down again, hands just resting on the curve of Steve's hips, taking Steve as far as he could and letting JARVIS decide where that limit was. Far enough for his throat to ache, for his lips to touch against Steve's groin. JARVIS ran a hot tentacle along his throat, pressing against the bulge of Steve inside while Tony swallowed convulsively, unable to breathe. Oh boy... The tentacle slipped towards Steve, writhing around his balls, threatening his hole, pushing Steve further towards coming.

"JARVIS wants me to take all of you, Steve. Swallow you down--wants to see me stretched out on you, you're so big, Steve, but he knows what I can take, knows it better than I do--would you like that? Come on, fill me up--" Steve came against the back of his throat, straight down into him, helpless against it. Little whimpers on each outbreath made Steve's chest judder, and Tony reveled in it, lips buzzing, edges fuzzy.

JARVIS pulled him back far enough to coax him into breathing again, but leaving him mouthing weakly at Steve's cock as it gave up a few aftershocks of come. Steve, he pinned to the floor with a decisive thump. It beat a groan out of Steve's chest and made his cock twitch, far from done for the day. Tony felt weak with power, with making Steve come, and stayed slumped and pliant in JARVIS' grip, gasping for air and shaking with need, with the taste of Steve on his tongue.

With Steve watching and raising freed hands to touch and stroke, JARVIS lifted Tony onto Steve's chest, settling him on his knees, suspended in JARVIS' firm hold with his thighs spread wide around
Steve's hips. Tony felt himself slipping towards subspace as he watched Steve under the shifting glow of tentacles, as JARVIS bound him up and put him where he wanted. There was no stopping it, and he didn't want to anyway. JARVIS could-- It was so easy, effortless, and JARVIS liked it so much... Tony brought his wrists together, crossed on Steve's chest and lay his forehead on them, pinning them in place. It was a symbol, an image, and Steve knew all about symbols, he understood. Distantly, rumbling, out of mind, Tony heard them talking, but he'd said everything that he needed to say.

They came to some decision, Steve shifting enough to grip Tony's arms. JARVIS laid a tentacle over the back of his neck and shoulders, pressing him down against Steve, and Steve pulled his wrists apart, pushing them behind his back and pinning them together with one impossibly strong hand. Unbalanced, unanchored, but held in place inexorably. He was secure, safe, despite the heady vulnerability of growing subspace.

Slowly, telegraphing, JARVIS trailed a tentacle tip over Tony's tailbone, slick with lube and scorching with heat from the servers. Tony nodded helplessly, cheek against the pulse in Steve’s neck, the empathy buffer filling with want. JARVIS rubbed soothingly at the small of his back, warming and gentle, then, slowly, wetly, pushed into him. Tony felt himself open out like... Like he was meant for it. No strain, no burn, just the glorious slide as JARVIS eased inside.

JARVIS ignored his prostate and spread warm lube inside him, pressing against muscles all too willing to stretch and relax. Too soon, too soon, he was done, and Tony was left empty and slick while the thick tentacles around his thighs pressed him back until Steve’s cock pressed against him.

“Yeah... Steve, please, please...”

Steve flexed, and JARVIS brought Tony to meet him and--

Tony opened for it. One long, smooth, breathtakingly perfect slide that filled him to bursting with heat, pleasure like molasses stealing his mind away until he was slack-jawed and moaning into Steve’s ear.

“Look at you... just...” Steve moaned, his free hand sliding down to cover Tony’s ass, to press him down into the slow, powerful rocking of his hips.

Heat rippled through Tony's skin as JARVIS pressed his advantage with the transmitter and sent cascades of sensation down Tony's sides and back to meet the roiling boil building in his gut. Each time Steve thrust, he pushed Tony all the way down that magnificent cock, until he could feel it in his throat. The relentless slide against his prostate built and overwhelmed, until Tony was panting, open mouthed against Steve's throat, groaning as each thrust slid home.

He could have come then, but JARVIS held on to him, smoothing the input and dispersing the peaks, keeping him from tumbling down, boosting him higher, and Steve kept on pistoning into him, driving him further into the impossible edge space between pleasure and oblivion. Faster, harder, building at Steve's pace, held to it by JARVIS' embrace; Tony wanted to beg, to yell out their names, but his mouth just stayed open, no words. And then Steve was there too, slowing and staggering, his chest and abs sweat-slick along Tony's front and going hard as iron under velvet skin, his jaw lit in erratic red and pink... Teetering on the brink together, Steve's muscles rippling and spasming, they came with the tumbling, knock-down power of a landslide.

Tony expected to pass out for longer than he did, wake up halfway through a shower again, but when he came to, he was still firmly impaled on Steve's wonderful cock and draped over the rest of Steve, as limp as it was possible to be. He stretched lazily, languid with satisfaction and subspace, just to feel it shift inside. Steve's hand was loose, laying over the small of his back, but Tony left his
wrist where they were, not willing to give anything up yet. The bellows of Steve's chest lifted him up and down, as slow as Tony's sleepy breaths but twice as deep. Tony's eyes drifted open just a little and he looked at nothing in particular, far down the well of peace, feeling more intimately connected to the warmth of Steve's skin than to his own body.

It wasn't a natural position, though, holding his arms like this. Before he could start to ache, JARVIS gently pushed in under his collarbones on either side, supporting his shoulders and taking his weight off the reactor. A firm, slightly slick tentacle rubbed down his back, making muscles that had been considering movement give up completely, and then rested coils on his elbows and wrists, a solid warm weight to hold him comfortably in place. Tony sank gratefully back into no-thought, the quiet buzz of mental white noise.

Other limbs gathered up the space blanket and spread it back over them, holding in the heat of Steve's perfect metabolism and JARVIS' core servers.

Steve was asleep. The thought trickled through Tony's mind for a while; Steve would be getting them up when he woke up, which Tony could do without, since all he wanted was to lie there and enjoy the warmth, the peace, the glow inside him wiping all residual aches off the map. Not wiping away the fear and pain of the day, but making it smaller. Making them untouchable, here in the safest place he knew.

And he wanted to see Steve asleep, it'd be the first time, but he didn't want to move...really, really didn't want to move, even if he could, which he kind of doubted. He leaned on JARVIS, nothing as formal as words, just the itch of what he wanted; JARVIS' amusement flowed warm and smooth into the buffer.

Tony didn't move, quietly sure that JARVIS wouldn't let him miss this, and closed his eyes. JARVIS was the best...

JARVIS sighed softly and patched him into the camera feeds. Steve's face, under the exhaustion, was soft and open, a little surprised, nearly as young as he actually was. His brows scrunched; maybe he was dreaming. Tony wanted closer, and JARVIS zoomed in on Steve's face, and also--carefully, gently--on Tony's own.

He--he was--haggard, relaxed, tired, lit from within… Any other time, he would turn away, hide it or deny it, but he was caught; he couldn't. He looked, and saw tears well up in his own eyes, blinked out to itch and trickle their way over the bridge of his nose and fall on Steve's flank.

You are not a lost cause, JARVIS said softly, putting into words the thing he was considering, that was making his chest hurt like this, and Tony shook, close to safewording. This was too much, he couldn't handle this. JARVIS knew; he backed down, backed off, back to nonverbal and the staunch assurance of support in the buffer, to his warm solid presence against Tony's skin.

Steve stirred and wiped Tony's cheekbones with a broad thumb, the gesture so tender that Tony barely felt the pressure. JARVIS took the image away after showing him Steve's equally soft smile, settling Tony back into his own senses with a deft but gentle hand. Settling his mind was harder, but Tony managed, leaning heavily on JARVIS for help.

Steve's hands were trailing over Tony's side and thigh, half asleep but already mother-henning, by the time Tony's heart stopped trying to choke him. Very gently, like Tony might break, he pulled out the last few inches. Tony shuddered, hypersensitive and so loose, so exposed and vulnerable, his breath stuttering from its peaceful rhythm into something like a whine. Gentle hands rubbed his back while JARVIS straightened out his arms, heat leaching from the steel core to soothe the stiffened joints, and Tony relaxed again, accepting the gaping emptiness with grace only because they held
him through it for a few long minutes, until his heart and breath were slow again, his mind blank for as long as he wanted and starting to refill.

Maybe next time, they could avoid the issue entirely... Mm, now that was an idea. Tony smiled to himself, stretching his spine out as the sense of emptiness started fading.

"Let's get this off, huh?" Steve mumbled, touching the edge of the liquid dressing. Tony nodded, cheek shifting deliciously against Steve's skin, and JARVIS helped them sit up, wrapping Tony's arms over Steve's shoulders for him.

He'd get clean, get the bandage off...get to a real bed, and sleep about a thousand years. Yeah, that sounded right. He nuzzled into the crook of Steve's neck and whispered "So hey. I was thinking."

"Hmm?" Steve said.

"My bed got a little blown up, is yours open?"
"Why the fuck is Stone here?!" Tony hissed, his grip on his glass turning his fingers white.

"Hmm?" Steve said, half-turning. Tony carried on waving and mugging for the crowd around the red carpet, looking completely unruffled, but Steve didn't miss how he downed the flute of sparkling cider he'd brought from the limo, handed it to a stunning young lady who looked like she'd just caught a pop fly, and subtly sped them up toward the long double doors of the historic theater's lush foyer.

"Ty Stone. Only saw him for a second. On second thought it makes sense--yeah, been a whole two seasons' news cycles, about time for him to crawl out from under his rock…"

The crowd shrieked when Tony put a hand on Steve's lower back and added some sway to his hips. Steve didn't mind--it got them to the doors faster, and wasn't especially revealing Avengers personal business either; Tony'd done the same thing with Thor last week. The current tabloid hypothesis was that the entire team had orgies. Clint, and strangely enough Bruce, were having a fun time trolling the more crass reporters.

Tony didn't help by putting "Sugar Daddy" on his name card during press events either, to be frank. Steve and Natasha had so far kept themselves above the fray. Not because it didn't look like fun--just that the ad-hoc leader of the team and its lone woman had to step a little more carefully when it came to things like this. It wasn't fair, especially to Natasha; she didn't volunteer to represent her entire gender, or God forbid, all immigrants ever, and Steve never intended to be a stand-in for the military system, or his era, or the honor and glory of the Greatest Generation. But it was how it was. And Tony appreciated the value of a straight man to play against.

He took a careful step to the right, making it clear that he wasn't in on Tony's little show, but not moving out of arm's reach. "So who is he?" Steve muttered as they made it past the guarded front steps and away from the press.

"Media hound, old acquaintance. Dick..." Tony muttered, plastering on a brilliant smile and stepping out of reach, into the bubbling crowd, immediately throwing out greetings and handshakes.

Steve let Tony go, touching his earpiece discreetly as he headed towards the Secretary of Defence with a polite smile. JARVIS beeped at him, then hummed.

"Perhaps when you are not making nice with the Avengers' prime political support."

So there was a story there. JARVIS sounded unhappy and unfortunately resigned. Swell.

"Captain!"
"Secretary. Good to see you out of office hours," Steve said, covering his reaction to JARVIS' ominous vagueness with polite smiles.

Across the room, Tony was surrounding himself with models, all wide smiles and easy laughs as he kept them close and happy. In his element, Steve figured, liking the playful expression more than Tony's serious political schmoozing. Steve even recognised a couple of the girls, and one of the men, from the Van Dyne show Tony had attended a few weeks before.

Meanwhile, Steve's schmoozing wasn't exactly holding his attention; a little gaggle of unfamiliar politicians surrounded the Secretary and there was plenty of small talk to go around. He answered the casual questions with his standard gambits, while keeping track of the feel of the room. With this many rich, famous and political in attendance, there were bound to be a few sharks circling.

"I opposed it, of course! Can't have health care for government employees taking a hit and--"

Steve had made a good call, latching on to Mr. Leo McGarry; no one would make a scene in front of the old warhorse, and he didn't hold any strong opinions Steve would insult him by objecting to. It left him free to keep an eye out, without boring him into the painfully obvious stupor Clint had warned him about.

"I heard there was risk of a shutdown?" Steve asked, more seriously as a gala photographer shooed away the hangers on, leaving Steve and McGarry alone in a circle of light, shaking hands for the camera.

"'You heard'... Let me tell you about a man I know, blue costume, big shield? Well, not even the Tea Party could resist Captain America's disapproval. Their polls tanked, Rogers, almost overnight."

Steve smiled more genuinely, clapping McGarry on the shoulder and sending the photographer into a flurry of quiet hysterics that involved an awful lot of shutter snaps. "Did they now? Who'd a thought."

"You don't fool me, Captain, I'm sure Stark's little bird told you all this already."

Steve made a noncommittal gesture that may as well have been an admission of guilt. "It seemed like the thing to say at the time."

The Secretary huffed good-naturedly as a drinks tray circled past and snagged them both flutes of, interestingly, juice. "Well, no one expected you to be asked about Obamacare, least of all by a sympathetic network, just because Stark Industries picked up the contract for fixing the website mess. Even the press secretary was caught off guard. And then your answer--you surprised many people, Captain." McGarry turned his flute contemplatively, then caught Steve's eye. "I know it was years ago even for you, but my condolences for your mother, God rest her soul."

"Thank you, sir."

"I heard stories of the tenements from my mother. She was first in her family to go to college, you know. Taught me everyt-- well, not everything; all the important things I know. She would have loved to meet you," the Secretary said thoughtfully, then sipped his drink, surveying the crowd. "But you aren't here to talk to little old me, my support is pretty much guaranteed. Now the Head of Commerce, he needs a good talking-to."

Steve winced, but followed the Secretary's gesture, picking out a balding, overweight individual fifty yards to Tony's left, with his own flock of rather less savoury hangers-on. "Great. Mission briefing?"

"Just... Look uncomfortable. You'll do fine. Use your pretty face to tell America what you think of
Steve sighed and nodded, leaving the protection of the Secretary’s little circle and heading towards his target, checking in with Tony’s group of models and conspirators along the way. They were chattering away, but Tony met his eyes for long enough to nod reassuringly; whoever Stone was, Tony didn’t feel too threatened. He bumped into undercover-Clint halfway, who nudged him towards an upcoming actress they’d seen on TV recently and told him to have a little subtlety.

She was nice, it turned out, and Steve put off talking to the Head of Commerce for a while, but they only had a few more minutes before the show started and they headed into the theater. Steve excused himself after exchanging autographs (Steve drew her a little shield on the business card he gave her, too) and went back to the serious business of using his pretty face.

The Secretary of Commerce greeted him warmly, but Steve took immediate dislike to the way his hands lingered on the ladies to either side of him—a dislike reinforced by his limp handshake and sweaty palms. JARVIS sniffed in his ear, muttering something about subsidies and insufficient taxation.

Steve tried to smile, failed, and had his photo taken yet again. The politician started talking, without the usual pauses that required Steve to speak, and Steve looked over at Tony; he was deep in discussion with someone in a suit, but still fine. Steve couldn’t shake the apprehension, but whatever was coming hadn’t happened yet.

“The briefing you requested, Captain?” JARVIS asked, straight over the Secretary’s opinion on quantitative easing. It made no sense to Steve anyway, so he hmmed in a vaguely affirmative way and let JARVIS talk.

“Tiberius Stone: Heir to Stone Media, inherited March ‘02 and now ranking twelfth in th—”

Steve grew gradually tenser as JARVIS fed him details; the way Stone Media had portrayed Tony over the years was a massive drain on Tony’s PR department, forcing him into interviews and exposés he’d never have done otherwise. Tony had lived with paparazzi so long he could duck them, play them, or ignore them at will—to him they were just another lever to move—but he hadn’t reacted like this man was just another opportunist. Steve had a really bad feeling about Stone by the time JARVIS was finished.

It was a relief when the announcer called them to take their seats and he excused himself rather curtly from the Secretary’s company. McGarry saluted him with his glass of sparkling grape juice from the other side of the foyer.

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“Tony, hey.”

“Steve! Nice work with Leo; haven’t seen him smile like that at one of these before,” Tony chattered as Steve joined him in the private box. “Bit of an old hat. How was the Secretary of Commerce?”

“Sweaty,” Steve answered, slumping down into a chair. “Limp handshake.”

“Well you know what they say about limp handshakes...”

“Finish that sentence and you are sleeping with the Bots,” Steve threatened, folding himself more comfortably into the little chair. The box’s fittings dated from the twenties, all right; in the middle of all this old velvet and grandeur, having to squeeze super-soldier shoulders into standard seats felt like a little bit of home. “What else is on the docket for tonight?”
"Kick back, relax, enjoy the show. It is all for charity, and believe me, despite the swank there're several good causes that are gonna net a tidy bundle off this. As the face of the Maria Stark Foundation I have to be seen having fun, and it's nothing but good PR for the Avengers and the causes if you are too. In practice, though, that means we can sneak out any time after the second intermission, if we're discreet."

Steve vaguely disapproved of the idea, but it was three hours of charities talking about Steve’s day job. "I'll take that under advisement. Anything to report?"

Tony made a face and brushed imaginary lint off his knee. "Nothing monumental; the Paris summer season went all right, according to Jan's lot. Got the standard sucking up and/or disapproval from the military/industrial complex; you'd be surprised how much of a buffer a group of professional models can provide, though," he smirked.

"Maybe not," Steve said dryly. He hadn't been a USO performer long compared to the length of his tours at the front, but some things stuck with you.

Tony raised an eyebrow but carried on; knowing him he'd tuck the hint away and come digging for stories later. "Lucy's got a few things to propose to the MSF, next quarter--never underestimate a lady putting herself through college--and--"

Steve let him talk, filing away names and little personal details, smiling at Tony's blasé intermixing of personal and political gossip, while around them the theatre started to dim. He’d hush him when the show started.

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Tony made it to the first intermission with minimal fuss, and they launched back into the crowd as a pair; Captain and SiC of the Avengers. With the talks (interesting and alarming in turns) and art pieces (breathtaking) interspersed, they'd had time to work out what stance they were going to take on the various issues. Everything from power to sanitation was on the books for the evening and SI had one approach, Captain America a quite different one. The mission in Uganda would be featured later in the evening as a case in point for UN action in the developing world.

By the time the intermission ended, Steve's head was overfull with intelligent, thoughtful opinions that Captain America 'just had to hear.' How Tony'd managed to keep the climate change deniers away, Steve had no idea, but it had been productive rather than infuriating for once.

Tiberius Stone did not make an appearance, but Steve's bad feeling persisted.

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The footage of the Ugandan mission could have been right out of the forties, if it weren't in color. Steve was enthralled and eager to hear the interviews with locals in the aftermath of the big cleanup.

The Ugandan cultural insert (dancers this time) was spectacular; Steve even thought about going to talk to them after the show. The artistry in the costumes was amazing, and if the Avengers had nearly that much coordination, they'd be picking shrapnel out of each other significantly less often.

Tony excused himself quietly, as they finished, and Steve promised to update him on the water shortage in Laos when he got back.

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People tended to assume that when Tony left one of these things, it was because he was bored. They
Tony slipped out before the Laos talk because the LifeStraw, whatever it would end up being called, wasn't ready yet. He knew from experience that there would be heartstrings plucked by this one, since it was a problem to be addressed rather than a report on the actual successes of an aid mission. Tony had way too many heartstrings for this crap and there was literally no way of speeding up trials on something as important as this. He knew, he'd tried.

So, he was working on it, he didn't need to be rushed, that would just make the thing unsafe... Right? That's what Pepper always said when he wanted to push something through, that's what JARVIS said... Pretty much always. One could even say constantly.

He stopped by the bar and ordered a virgin something. He was distracted, okay? It was sweet and spicy and he tipped well before wandering off towards the grand staircase. He wanted to see its underside: wooden framing, not exactly common anymore.

The door wasn't locked, or it had been but someone with a jimmy had unlocked it, and he slipped inside easily enough. The space was filled with racks of forgotten costumes, but you could look up and see the enormous beams that braced the steps, from trees bigger than any cut in the last fifty years. Light filtered through the risers at the edges, where the red carpet didn't block it out, and was more than enough to show the arching struts providing support.

He followed the line of the grain picked out in relief by the oblique illumination, and sipped his drink contemplatively; the shear was causing a bit of torsion at the center of each step, just visible by the angle of the sawmill-squared beam, but the grain was in line with the--

"And here you are. Never could resist a good piece of engineering, could you."

Tony flinched hard, tension crawling up his spine like some kind of insect. "Why bother?" he said, not turning to look because he knew what triumph looked like on Stone's face. He didn't need a reminder. "Oh, sorry, were you trying to insult me? Because you failed. Two out of ten, Stone. What do you want?"

Ty didn't answer directly and clinked the ice in his drink as he came alongside. The smell of harsh whiskey, very oaky, billowed up from the glass and Tony tried not to breathe it in. "Poor, broken Tony Stark, such a puppet to his whims he blows off the presentation of his own project to look at bricks."

Tony made a face, what bricks? But then... You never could expect anything but mindless rancour from Ty, the idiot. "That's rich, coming from a guy who, have you seriously been lurking under a staircase all night? Are you a literal troll now, Ty, I mean really, did you really have to? Secondly, that is Great Lakes oak, and there are no bricks in here. Well... Apart from the phone in your jacket pocket. It was recording, but there are laws against that in this country, so I turned it off for you. Wouldn't do to have another felony on your hands."

A glance showed Stone grinding his teeth, and Tony snorted, turning to leave.

"Is that why the Captain stays? Your 'technique'? That's right, I have a chap with a long lens, I saw how you looked at him in your box," Ty sneered, putting his glass down on a cabinet behind him. The back of Tony's neck prickled; Ty's hands were free, fuck. "Everyone knows what your price is, you always were easy, but Captain America? Truth, justice and the American way? You can't keep up an act like that for long, Tony, you never could. So eager to please, but--he must know you're not worth it the morning after."
Tony froze, trying to suppress a shudder. Of course, freezing was telling too, and undoubtedly Ty noticed. Tony made his voice hard and said "Same old song, Ty. You wrote most of that copy yourself, even back when it was new." Then he downed his drink as a gesture of irritation and impatience and started walking again, brushing past Ty with as little contact as the tight space would allow. "Thing about bad breakups, Ty? Most people start moving on after fifteen years. Someone here is full of ego, and I think it's the one who never got over the idea that he might be unwanted."

Something grabbed his shoulder, violently spinning him around. He dropped his glass, arm coming up to knock Ty's hand away with a sharp smack as his forearm connected, the old hot-flush of fury and shame and panic blanking his mind for a second.

"You are mine! I don't need your permission!" Stone snarled, face twisted in rage, advancing on Tony, not paying attention to the raised fists between them and grabbing for Tony again. Broken glass ground under their heels as Tony flinched back, trying to keep a safe distance between them. It wasn't going to work; Ty was too mad, incandescent with it, and the space too cramped to make a strategic retreat without backing himself into the wall.

"You're all about permission, aren't you. How much are you paying that kid to take the fallout from your latest scandal? Ten, fifteen million? Such loyalty," Tony sneered, heart thumping against his ribs. "But then, a man without a moral compass never was going to inspire anyone." JARVIS' awareness spiked, filling the partition set aside for him and reaching through Tony to acquire his location. JARVIS would get help, all he had to do was hold out or get away, and his backup would handle the rest.

Ty's turn to go still. His face shifted from wild, out of control, to hard and sharp. He always was a fucking unpredictable bastard.

"You think I don't know what you are? What you've done to yourself? And you talk to me about scandal," Ty said, smarmy now, hands turning to smooth down Tony's ruffled suit, and that could fucking stop right now. "Your brain is a recording device, do your Senator friends know that? You think a phone is all I had?"

Tony froze again; not in face, just in body, but Ty was close enough to feel it, damn him. If he wasn't bluffing--Tony checked again for digital signals in the area and found nothing but the fire detectors, then pinged Ty as hard as he could with active sensors. There, a pull on--hah--compass readings for just a second: Ty was wearing something with long enough wires for the RF spike to induce a magnetic field.

"I think you're an idiot, and that nothing I've said here, I wouldn't say to any member of the press, and having an eidetic memory isn't illegal. You, on the other hand?" Tony snapped, leaning forward into Ty's space, pulling on rage to make himself do it, feeling everything seem to slow down. "What was that about not needing permission?" The closer he got, the clearer the image he could pull from each ping. The fucker was wearing something completely passive, current too small to detect, strongest response in that frequency meaning the wires were a little under a meter. A piezo mic recording to a battery-powered flash drive, maybe.

Ty wasn't going to stand for this for much longer; he was flip-flopping between rage and predatory charm. He was already on the edge of violence and there was no way to spin a fight with a member of the press that wouldn't be a complete disaster. Even if he let Ty hit him, there wouldn't be any bruises left to show for it. JARVIS, now sitting on his shoulder and providing extra processing to generate a more detailed image, leaned on the empathy buffer, solidly disapproving of any plan that involved Tony getting bruises.

Ty had hit him before, he could take it.
Tony kept his shiver inside, because JARVIS would consider it all too seriously, and he didn't know what Steve would think, and he did not want that to be a topic of argument between them, ever. So Ty needed to go away, right now, before Steve arrived, or Tony needed the space to run. What he needed was a distraction that Ty couldn't show the public.

Tony felt out the wires again, raising the pulse intensity, judging the fire risk, then cranked it up to maximum. The wires picked it up, the return EM field expanded and... Pop.

The device blew. It burned through Ty's shirt under his tie and at his hip, and he yelped, leaping back and scrabbling at his clothes. Tony got out of range fast, watching long enough to make sure nothing had caught fire, then left, keeping an eye on Ty but not pausing, even when Ty swore loudly enough to make the barkeeper around the corner look up from his phone.

He needed Steve.

"Captain, Sir requires your assistance."

Steve touched his earpiece with a frown, letting Hawkeye know he was taking a call. "What happened?" he asked, though he was already getting up.

"Sir used his safeword during a conversation with Stone."

"Is he hurt? Is Stone still with him?" Steve said, out the door and thirty feet down the hall, moving as quickly as he could while keeping it silent and not letting his footfalls travel through to the other boxes. Clint ghosted along behind, waistcoat buttons undone for quick access to his weapon.

"No and yes, but he is extracting himself as we speak. He is deeply shaken, though god forbid he admit it. He is headed for the bar area."

Steve made it down the excessive number of switchback stairs nearly as fast as he would have in costume, while Clint veered off to take a different set. One advantage to long legs was the ability to take five stairs at a time and make it look natural.

Tony was down by the wet bar, brightly lit and populated with a few other snuck-out audience members getting a head start on the second intermission and the box office staff taking a break at one of the tables. Thankfully Tony wasn't at the bar itself; he was off at a table to the side, his back to the wall where no one could sneak up on him. The surface in front of him was bare, and the bartender was giving him an odd look; it wasn't like Tony to forget the camouflage.

Steve slowed down and walked casually, aware of the eyes following him. He nodded to Tony as he rounded his table, putting his hand on Tony’s shoulder for a moment and draping his jacket over a seat. Tony did seem shaken, his face pale, and he didn’t respond to Steve at first, but he did eventually tear his eyes away from something in the middle distance to acknowledge him. Aware of the bartender’s look, he checked in at the bar for a couple Arnold Palmers, changing one of them to a malt when he saw the bar had a little ice cream cooler tucked down beside the espresso machine. He got a bottle of fancy mineral water too, and took both drinks back while the bartender happily mixed up the malt.

"Clint," Steve spoke softly while his face was turned away from everyone but Tony, "scout out the area to the left front of the bar, please. There may be a threat in that direction." Tony wasn't staring, but he kept looking that way, far more often than the watch he kept in other directions. Steve sat
down on that side of him, not blocking his view, but providing a not-so-subtle barrier.

"Roger," Clint said, a second before he strolled past, the picture of someone on his way back from the bathroom.

Steve sipped his Palmer. "You all right?" he said quietly.

Tony cracked the bottle and took a long drink before he replied; still pale but otherwise holding up. He was a damn good actor, too. "Mostly," he said, “get me through the intermission, we’ll be golden.”

Steve nodded; they could do that. “Anything I should know?”

“...He...” Tony stopped, and gave the bartender a celebrity-smile as he dropped off the malt. “Thanks, kid. Make yourself something.” He tossed over a couple of notes, and the bartender beamed, heading back to his post and leaving them in peace.

“He tried to put me in subspace, failed, kept trying. Long time ago, but...”

Steve had to work incredibly hard not to do something he probably wouldn’t regret.

“It’s never a good idea for two really big company heirs to be ‘involved.’ Too many ulterior motives. I didn’t trust him enough. Rightly so, apparently. He tried to bug my office pretty much immediately after that. Pretty much just wa--”

“Stop.”

Tony stopped. He pulled back, looked at Steve and took a long, shuddering breath, centering himself back in the real world.

“You can tell me everything, because I think you need to talk?” Tony nodded, grimacing like he'd tasted something bitter. “But not now,” Steve went on, setting down his glass carefully. "Understand? Drink your malt, breathe. We'll get through the intermission and you can show me the accepted way to sneak out."

“All right. Great. Let's do that,” Tony said, still visibly controlling his breathing, but his face now cheerfully blank. The acting was thin, though; he wasn’t controlling his gaze direction and his eyes kept drifting to the corner Clint had vanished around.

It was going to be a long evening.

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The day after the Gala, after a long night of pulling Stone’s poison out of Tony with the couch, a surprising number of movies about underworlds of illegal car-racing, blankets, and judicious application of hot chocolate, Steve put him to bed in the server annex. JARVIS wrapped him up in warm tentacles, and helped him to sleep. Not with drugs or Extremis; JARVIS had said that it wouldn’t help if they made Tony sleep, but just with a sort of gentle squeeze that reassured Tony that he wasn’t going anywhere.

Steve booked himself a half-hour slot with Ms. Potts via Ms. Arbogast, for that afternoon. Then he worked out and took a nap himself, exhausted by being so angry at Stone.

Pepper smiled to see him, and Steve got all the way through the door and into her office before it hit him what he was about to ask for. He sat down, feeling his ears heat, and her smile changed in tone
quite a bit. "I'm guessing you aren't here about Avengers business," she said kindly. "That leaves two possibilities, but I'm guessing you're not here about SI either? Well then, what aspect of Tony can I help you with? Is he driving you crazy?"

"You don't mind?" Steve croaked.

"Honey," she said, "for a long time I got paid very well for giving Tony-advice. And while I'm not paid for that any more, for you, I'll do it for free. However," she steepled her fingers, "you need to understand first that I respect his confidence, and that I'm in his corner, always. If you hurt him or cause him to hurt himself, I know where you live. Also, JARVIS and I had an agreement, which I believe is still in force."

"Indeed, Ms. Potts."

"Well!" she said, losing the edge of threat and sitting back in her chair. "Whatever you're doing, you may continue." She waved a hand up towards the residential levels at the top of the Tower. "It seems to be working."

Steve's brain wasn't quite so happy to move on just yet. "...What was your agreement?" he asked out of morbid curiosity.

"You really don't want to know," she said brightly. "But JARVIS has high standards and good judgement, and I have been thinking Tony looks relaxed lately. Dare I say it, happy. It's a good look on him."

"Yeah," he agreed unthinkingly, then scrambled to explain. "I mean, yes, ma'am, he looks good--ah, relaxed. Usually. Sometimes. When he's sleeping he looks relaxed, for sure." He stopped while he could still see daylight from the bottom of the hole.

"He doesn't let many people see him sleeping," she said, blinking.

"Speaking of which," Steve rejoined the fight, "would it be possible to arrange a few days off of SI business for him? I was thinking, maybe through Wednesday? I know it's short notice--"

"Not impossible; are you going somewhere?"

"Not planning to, no," Steve said, feeling his face heat again.

"Oh. Oh." Pepper looked over at her monitor, clicked decisively, then hit a combination of keys with at least three fingers, some from each hand. "Is this about Stone?"

Steve squashed his rising embarrassment and nodded. "It hit him pretty hard. I... I'm not sure, we'll talk before we... um, do anything." Steve's ears felt like they were on fire, and it was spreading down the back of his neck. "It'd be good, uh, to have time to settle."

"You're good for him, for them, Steve. They can get so self-absorbed." She glanced at him sideways over the top of her monitor and said "You can have him until Thursday night, there's a videoconference with Japan and we need him to put their engineers through the wringer and sniff out anything funny; they won't blink an eye if he turns up in a bathrobe, they're used to Tony. But I'll just give him Friday too, shall I? Feed and water three times a day, etc., etc.," she said, turning back to him with her hands folded on the desk, her expression businesslike and gleefully sharp.

"Thank you, ma'am," Steve said helplessly, fairly sure he'd just given away a lot more than he'd intended to.
"You kids have fun!"

Steve fled. Ignominiously.

Tony woke up to tentacles.

Not as uncommon as it used to be, he mused, squirming against JARVIS’ comfortable grip, the warm constriction letting him move, under protest. He was going to have stripes. It was a good thing JARVIS shifted often to avoid restricting blood flow.

“Good morning, sir.”

morning? it's what...2pm? hell of a night...

“Indeed. It was best that you slept.”

Tony blinked his eyes open to the mingled blue and pink of JARVIS’ power couplings and rubbed his cheek against the nearest stretch of warm arm.

it was good. good sleep.

A yawn cracked Tony’s jaw, which he snapped shut as the tentacles shifted, side-eyeing a tentacle tip that was near his face.

nope, none of that. coffee, then... pancakes, don’t care something delicious. The ‘something comforting’ went unsaid.

The tip retreated, JARVIS warm and gentle and giving Tony the distinct impression that there was a highly nutritious smoothie in his future, regardless.

whatever. up time.

JARVIS obligingly set him on the floor, but didn’t let him go. Tony had to wade through clingy tentacles and blankets to get to his clothes, which JARVIS picked up before he could get them.

“What? Give me those...”

JARVIS refused, shaking out the shirt and holding the hem open.

“Really, we’re going to do this?” The tentacles bobbed once. “Fine. I don’t care. Why would I care? You want to put my shirt on, go ahead--NO, out! No sex for you this morn... afternoon! I have meetings and R&D and dinner with--shoo.” He shifted uncomfortably, feeling unsexy, tense and irritable, despite Steve and JARVIS being the best partners ever. The tentacle that had been creeping down his spine, all the way to his tail bone, rubbed an apologetic circle in the small of his back and retreated.

“That is not actually the case, sir; Ms. Potts has cleared your schedule,” JARVIS said, pushing his arms up and slipping the t-shirt over them. Tony ducked his head into the neck while J held it for him, and hummed thoughtfully, the tension draining out of him.

“Now why would she do that, mmm? Steve around?”

JARVIS tugged the hem down his back and smoothed away the wrinkles. It felt pretty good, actually, Tony wasn’t gonna complain, anyway. He should wear something with buttons next time.
Lots of little buttons.

“The Captain did indeed arrange for Monday through Thursday free of SI business. I believe he thinks you deserve a break.”

Tony paused, one foot in his slacks. “...yeah. That’d be good. Ty’s a bastard. I’m all...yeah. Fucking son of a--” He cut himself off, grumbling and lifting his other foot for JARVIS.

“If I may say so, you handled the situation admirably. There is no shame in rewarding yourself for that.”

Tony closed his eyes and let out a deep breath, frowning as he tried to grasp exactly what his emotions were doing. “Sure. Let's do that. Book us for a talk over breakfast, you know, the fun and educational talk, let's start it off right.”

“Of course sir. Now or at the Captain’s breakfast?” JARVIS asked, dropping a copy of Steve’s schedule in his head.

Tony paused, ideas spinning for a... something strong enough to clear the slate. “Steve's. I think I have something I want to make in advance. You ready to show me your limb fabrication system?”

The empathy buffer filled with curiosity. “If you wish to see it, I’m sure I can oblige. May I ask what you have planned?”

“Sure. You can help. I’m gonna want to sub out in approximately... Steve gets up at what, five AM? How early in the day you think we can debauch him? ... Call it sixteen hours.” Tony pulled away from JARVIS’ limbs reluctantly, stroking the ones that lingered longest. “I’ve got some ideas, I’m gonna need a few measurements done, and is there a batch of Px 996 in the ‘shop?”

Tony grunted, up to his elbows in some kind of clear gel, as Steve dropped dinner on the bench nearby. He barely even looked up, doing something fiddly under the surface of the tank.

“JARVIS says that stuff is body safe, so no excuse not to eat. Alright?” Steve said, pulling up a stool and looking from the tank to the sandwich.

“...hmmm? What? Oh, yeah, it’s a silicone based lubricant. Internal mechanics need to move smoothly, but still interface with the silicone outer layer, so... Beef and mustard?”

Steve lifted the corner of a slice of bread to check for mustard. “Yep. Well... it smells like mustard; kinda brown though.”

“Dijon mustard, Captain.”

Steve raised his eyebrows, not so much surprised as curious; Tony had expensive tastes for a reason, usually whatever he was eating was in some way more delicious or more satisfying, or even healthier, occasionally. He made no attempt to extract himself from the construction tank, thing, so Steve started cutting their lunch into bitesized pieces that he could just poke at Tony’s mouth until he ate.

“What’s it for?”

He saw Tony glance up out of the corner of his eye, and looked up to meet the gaze.
“Secret.”

Steve rolled his eyes and went back to the sandwiches, Tony’d tell him if it worked out how he wanted it. Stuffing the crusts off one sandwich into his mouth, he put the knife down and tentatively offered Tony a little square. Tony sniffed it, licked the edge where the filling was oozing out a little bit, then accepted it. A bit of a work in progress, being handed things, but Tony took it, all the same.

Steve did something similar, trying to work out what dijon mustard tasted like, compared to normal mustard. Good, he decided, taking a proper bite and seeing what it did to the beef’s flavor.

Tony looked good, Steve decided. A bit of tension left from the mess of emotions he’d been overnight, but focused. Well rested, even. Steve felt pride swell in his chest, because Tony had told him. Told him about a whole horrible period in his life, with his parents dead and Jarvis gone, JARVIS still just an idea.

At one point, he’d said ‘well, there was Obie, but...’ and Steve had had a bad moment, because JARVIS and surprisingly enough Natasha had filled in some of the blanks in those parts of Tony’s file when Steve’d gone looking, back when the team was new and Tony wasn't talking to him or anyone about it. Obadiah Stane had been a psychopath, in the true meaning of the word; completely lacking in passion. Empathetic, yes; he manipulated people’s emotions like a professional, but never for anything but his own good and--

And Steve had just crushed a sandwich. He licked the mustard off his fingers and ignored Tony’s raised eyebrow.

"That sandwich will never trouble us again," Tony said. "Verily, its perfidy knew no bounds. Its punishment was but just."

Steve felt his ears heating. "You don't have to rub it in."

"No no no, it's cute, the way you squish things. Though if you don't like Dijon mustard you can just say. We don't mind if you express--finally, I'm starving over here, I thought you were just going to let me keep talking--"

Steve pushed the sandwich into his mouth. Because if he didn’t they would be here all day.

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Steve stumbled into his kitchen the next morning, clean-clothed and yawning. The run had woken him up, but the shower afterward made it clear he needed some fuel, or his body would snatch the excuse for extra rest. Maybe something with eggs--he stopped short in the doorway. Tony was already there.

"You're up early," Steve said, trying to remember if Tony had ever made it to breakfast of his own volition, "...or late? Is there coffee?"

"For you, there is coffee," Tony said, rooting through the fridge. His own cup was on the counter next to him. "JARVIS says you like omelettes, I like omelettes, I can make omelettes. You want to cut up things, you know, things to put in it? Ooohh, sausage. Bacon. I like your fridge." He thunked the meats down next to the stove and threw three bags of vegetables and a head of broccoli at Steve. Steve caught them, blinked, and sorted out an amount that might actually fit in two omelettes; a cutting mat and knife were already set up next to the sink.

Meanwhile, Tony filled the air with heavenly smells, setting the bacon and sausage on a plate of paper towels to drain once they were browned and then hovering at Steve's shoulder. Steve shoved a
double handful of carrot slices at him, only remembering halfway about the handing things; he would have set the carrots back down on the mat and gone to find some bowls, but Tony stopped him with a hand on his wrist and delicately picked up a single slice. He turned it over, twice, then nibbled the edge. Eventually, after a too-long blink, he scooped the carrots up, picking them out of Steve’s hands.

They went in the pan and Tony cleaned his hands on a dishcloth before picking up a spatula to do some stirring.

“Thanks...” Steve murmured, watching Tony’s back while he pulled the broccoli into small florets.

Tony shrugged. “I ate the sandwich.”

“You did.” Steve smiled, bending his head over his cutting mat.

“The red onion next, Captain.”

Steve trimmed the last of the broccoli and started to peel the onion, stomach grumbling at the delicious smell of things frying in bacon grease.

Onion, broccoli, then leftover cooked potato, and Tony was ready for the eggs. Steve went looking for his whisk and broke four into a jug. Then, looking at the plate of meat, and contemplating his own stomach, added two more. Salt, a bit of cheddar, pepper, then the whisk. He beat them into his preferred frothy mess, little clumps of cheese sticking to the whisk, then handed it over.

Tony poured it in carefully, like he was making sure every vegetable was covered, and Steve grinned and touched his shoulder, rubbing a little when Tony leaned back into it; he was putting a lot of effort into this, it was...sweet, if a bit alarming? Nice, anyway. Companionable. Steve stole a bit of bacon while Tony was distracted.

“As the edges begin to pull away from the pan, transfer from stovetop to grill, four minutes.”

“Thanks, J... How far?”

“Approximately the thickness of the spatula, sir.”

Steve tried not to be too amused at that, because omelettes were not that hard, but it was funny anyway. Hell, they could be talking silently in their heads, at least they were keeping it out in the open for once.

Tony watched the surface of the egg stiffen, jiggling the pan in what Steve assumed was curiosity and watching the ripples change.

Steve left him to it, clearing his little table for them to sit at and laying out cutlery and juice. And the coffee pot.

“HAH! Success. One, perfectly cooked, light and fluffy omelette.” Tony turned ‘round, pan held in two oven gloves, and Steve nudged a trivet into an open space for him to put it down.

It was beautiful, too; Steve cut it into a Tony-sized and a Steve-sized piece, and the egg came away from the pan, perfectly browned. The vegetables were crunchy and the bacon crisp, and JARVIS always bought the best orange juice. Tony sat down and they both tucked in, going "Mmm!" almost at the same time.

"This is a lot better than the last omelette I made," Tony remarked. "The carrots. The carrots do it.
And the bacon."

"When was your last omelette?" Steve said, wondering if this was a new way Tony measured time.

"Three-four years ago, on an airplane. Little tiny galley. Didn't taste very good, but then nothing did, and it was pretty much doomed from the get-go, that omelette. Funny story."

"Is it?" Steve said, feeling his eyebrows draw down.

"No," JARVIS said, and "Not really," Tony said. "It's in my file, though, and besides we're getting off topic. That was an omelette of apology, this is an omelette of hope!"

Steve rubbed his forehead, smiling. "I give," he said. "Hope for what?"

"When two or more people like each other very much..."

Steve groaned, covering his mouth.

"...eventually, if they're lucky and smart, they get to have the fun and educational talk that brings me to your kitchen today!"

"I'm lost," Steve admitted, though Tony was clearly headed somewhere with this. Somewhere sexy, probably.

Tony grinned, full-face, the way he did so rarely. "We're going to talk about what we like."

"What we like?" Steve asked, waving a piece of bacon in Tony’s direction. It was delicious. Pretty sure it wasn't what Tony meant, though.

"What we like in bed, Steve. Or not in bed. What we'd really like to do in these four days I miraculously have off. And things that might take longer than four days, or that we can't get to, because I guarantee you it is hard to run out of ideas when you have me brainstorming, but still, this omelette represents my hope that we will then do as many of these things as we possibly can." Tony took pity. "Don't worry, I'll help. You like art, right? I brought cards. We're going to make art. If you don't have words, you can draw. If you can't draw we can do charades, I like sexy charades, ooooh I'm writing that down." He took a Sharpie out of his back pocket and wrote SEXY CHARADES on his napkin, after clearly considering both his hand and the tablecloth.

Steve watched, forgetting to chew, as Tony then produced a stack of press conference cue cards, flicked through them to make two piles, and put one of them next to his napkin. The other, he held out to Steve.

Steve blinked at them, licking his lips, then wiped his fingers on his napkin and took them, hoping they weren’t all as confusing as ‘sexy charades’.

"J, you're being awfully quiet," Tony said, fanning through his cards like a poker hand. "Have I finally managed to cause a hard lock?"

"I have never seen you do this before. What... How should I participate?"

"Hardcopy is optional, though it does help the meatbrains to have something persistent to look at. Holograms, tablet... I brought one of the projector tablets, I can dig it out--"

"I would like to have cards," JARVIS said. "Paper cards. You can keep them afterward. I have no printers in that suite, so perhaps it is best if I relay what I would like to Sir and he writes it on the
"That makes sense," Tony said, blinking. "You pretty much only use the empathy buffer, is that…?"

"You can put what I feel into human language, assign it signifiers... This is intriguing. Ah, on condition you repeat it aloud first; I wish to have both a spoken and written record."

"JARVIS: Likes to make me do things," Tony said, and wrote that in neat block letters on a blank card. "Are we done eating? I have the feeling this should move to the floor."

Steve was done, his plate cleared in a fit of if-I-have-something-in-my-mouth-I-don't-have-to-speak, but Tony had stopped after a slice of bacon and three-quarters of his omelette. Steve glanced down at the (thankfully) blank cards, frowned, then carefully wrote ‘Food’ and presented it to Tony.

"...really? As in, eating makes you--"

“No! Uh... I like...to see you full? Then, I know you’re...good, for a while,” Steve stuttered, not sure if this was even remotely what Tony was talking about, or if it was okay, because it was presuming an intimacy Tony'd never formally granted, and this wasn't a warzone... But it was true: it was satisfying, comforting, to see Tony’s flat stomach muscles rounded out, and know that he was taken care of, that he wouldn’t be hungry anytime soon.

Steve knew he ate a lot. After the Serum, it just wasn't an option for him to skimp, when he needed to be ready to fight. But there were no ration cards in Stark Tower; no one had to go hungry here.

"Yes," JARVIS said in a tone of surprise, and Tony swayed for a second, fastening one hand on the lip of the table and hovering the other as if he wanted to tuck it around his middle, but wasn't sure. "Um," he said, "JARVIS really likes to see that I'm well-fueled, prepared, not wanting anything, satisfied. Not going anywhere. Damn, you guys are a matched set. Now I have to see if I can fit all that on a card." He did, though, and ate several more bites of omelette while writing.

"Okay, my turn. I like touch, I like being held down. You know this already." He scribbled it on a new card. “Inverse of that--" he turned the card over and displayed the other side, which was already filled in, "I like bondage, which is being tied up. We haven't done that."

"If it is acceptable to ask, why do you like it?"

Steve closed his mouth, interested in the answer too. A jolt had gone through him at the thought--the image--of Tony tied up, in rope or… Maybe this ought to go on one of his cards too. Or would it be enough that they had one card of it?

Tony looked up. "It's like touch," he said slowly, "only it can be careful and slow and meticulous, and I like the craftsmanship that takes, and it can last longer than touch, sometimes. And I-- If I can't get free, it's uh, it's hard to explain, but it makes my head swim. Like a high. I don't--can't do it with everyone, though, sometimes I freeze up. I've used my safeword for that, so I don't know."

"Do you think you could do it with us?" fell out of Steve's mouth with apparently no participation from his brain. “Do you want to?"

Tony's eyes fell on him. "Yes! I want to, but... I don't know," he said, gaze drifting away again as he thought about it, flipping the card over in his fingers. “It’s the difference between being held and being tied that's problematic.” Tony rubbed his face with the hand holding his marker. “It’s the difference between...someone stopping doing something, holding, and someone having to actively untie you.”
"Ah... I believe I understand. The difference between accepting you into my decision flow and accepting an unquestionable constraint, a rule I cannot break alone."

"Right. Active/passive distinction...you safeword and everything stops. If I’m being held down like you did after Ock, JARVIS, and I safeword, that's it, done, I get my autonomy back. Bondage means that...your partner still has to do something after you’ve pissed 'em off by safe’ing out."

"At no point should you be afraid of using your safeword, sir. At no point would we be angry if you do."

"No! No, it's not that, I, I just want-- what if you--" Tony stopped and scrubbed his hands through his hair, jittery. "I know you wouldn't."

Steve looked down at his cards, turning 'food' over a few times while Tony fiddled with his fork. "We wouldn't leave you tied up, Tony. And even if you'd never have sex with us, me, again, I wouldn’t leave you. Sex isn't what brought me here; you did. JARVIS?"

"Never, sir. I could not. Or perhaps more poignantly: I could at any moment choose to leave. But I will not; there is no force on this Earth that can make me take that choice."

"You fucking bastards..." Tony said, setting his fork down with a hard click and covering his face with his hands. "You’re not supposed to just...say it like that! Fuck."

Steve winced, putting his ‘food’ card in top of his blank stack and getting up from the table. "Sorry, but we're not going to stop saying what you need to hear, so... Come on." Rounding the table, he pushed Tony and JARVIS' cards into a pile and handed them to Tony, then urged him up by his shoulders. This called for something a little more comfortable than his kitchen table. Tony scrabbled to grab pens and a last piece of bacon (Steve cheered internally as he shoved it in his mouth) and let Steve do the steering.

He figured his living room would be best. He barely used it unless he wanted some quiet to draw, he didn't even study mission briefs in there, that was what the kitchen table was for, but it was comfortable. And neutral in a way his bedroom wasn't.

Steve was going to restrain himself until Tony ran out of things to say. He'd punched Hitler dozens of times, he could do this.

Tony pressed in against his chest, making it hard to walk. "Okay, so, that's a thing we can try. I'll make some quick-release cuffs--"

"Can I-- um, rope?" Steve asked, face going red. He distracted himself by knocking sofa cushions to the floor and making a place to sit, where they could spread out their cards on the carpet like Tony had implied.

"Wow. Not just me then, yeah, okay. Ropes." Tony looked stunned when Steve looked up, but not displeased.

"Alright. So, what do we put if we want to try something, but we’re not sure it'll work out?" Steve asked, sitting on a cushion with his back against the couch.

"A question mark? But write it down anyway." Tony nudged a cushion into a bit of free space and sat down, flopped down into a pile on it with the loose springiness of a child; Steve wondered at the state of his knees if he could sit like that. Extremis again. "This is things you like the sound of, not things you're sure everyone will like. And who knows, I wouldn't discount anything. So anyway, that was my turn, it's yours now. Or, if you're stuck, always got this," Tony pulled his napkin out of
the stack of cards and flapped it.

Steve frowned at him, not sure what that kind of charades would entail, but switched to looking at his cards instead. So...he liked the thought of tying Tony up, wasn’t sure why, but... He wrote it down, with a question mark.

"Tying me up?" Tony read upside down. "Interesting choice, got any details there? I figured you more for a results than a process type... You don't have to have one--a type--by the way, or know why it appeals, I figure you're making this up as you go along."

"Uh, no, it’s okay. I don’t know... I-- you said you like it... You move around a lot."

"You think you'll like bondage because I’m fidgety?"

"I agree," JARVIS said unexpectedly, "that appeals."

Tony stilled for a second, then groped around for a card. Steve handed him a blank one. "JARVIS likes...my energy contained," Tony said, hunching over the card. "Focused into one thing, or with no focus, helpless. And then he can be sure to have my attention." He looked up, and red was creeping over his cheekbones. Steve tried to memorize the sight.

"Moving on," Tony coughed, "so far we have regular meals and bondage, I think we might be getting the hang of this. So anyway I have lots of cards." He fanned them out again and held them up, writing concealed. "Go fish."

"I pick one and you'll explain it?" At Tony's nod Steve hovered his hand along the edges of the cards, watching Tony closely. The napkin was there too, but he already knew what was written on it.

"Now, I was pretty optimistic when I wrote these," Tony said as Steve's hand paused, "and--"

"This one."

"--I'm just saying, we don't have to--Damn."

Steve pulled the card and turned it over. "Being filled," he read, and glanced over at his 'food' card, though it wasn't phrased the same.

Tony followed his glance. "Not like that. Like when you and JARVIS were both inside me."

"Oh." Steve's ears were burning. "I'm, I'm glad you liked that."

"J was keeping tabs, the whole time. He knows what I've gotten up to in the past so it was a pretty safe bet, but he would have come up with something else if I wasn't into it. And he was checking on you too, y'know, he's got a great sensor array in the annex." Tony's face was a little concerned and a lot closer than the last time Steve looked up.

He seemed almost nervous. They’d had out-of-this-world sex, with JARVIS and his tentacles, and Tony was worried about saying something?

"I, yeah, it was good. Different, but really good. What's wrong?"

"Nothing! Not wrong, per se, more like... I built something. For JARVIS? But mostly for me, because, y'know, selfish, narcissistic, whatever, but it’s an extension. Wireless limb, for JARVIS. So, inert in the server room, unless he uses the transceiver, but sending him data, and...active? Outside."
“Tony,” Steve said, gently. He looked jittery, more than usual, and after their discussion of bondage, restraint was more than okay, right? Containing his energy... He reached out and tugged Tony off his cushion and onto Steve’s chest. There, touch. Tony shuddered and slumped into Steve’s chest, taking a deep breath and hiding his face. Or maybe smelling Steve, it was hard to tell.

“Yeah, okay, this is easier. I made a toy. A sex toy. For my ass, because I don’t like that moment where I’m first empty, and if we have four days off, then of course you can’t stay in me the whole time, and after the first orgasm I don’t want to reboot again, even though that lets me down easy, well in a sense anyway—” Steve rubbed Tony’s back gently as the ratio of words to breathing went awry. Tony slowed down again. “So I made a plug, --well, not really, but that's the closest thing-- that’ll sit, um, inside me, and uh... pretty much match you and JARVIS’ size, which okay maybe a bit ambitious, but I would really-- yeah. So I made it and it works and--”

“Fully skin-safe, and as sensitive as my other limbs. Sir has done an admirable job. Breathe, Mr. Stark,” JARVIS ordered, and Tony obeyed as usual, taking a deep gasp of air that Steve could feel all the way down his front. And further. His cock was apparently just as interested in this discussion as the rest of him.

“This what you were working on yesterday?” Steve asked, amused by the fact that they’d had dinner leaning over a tank of what had been, apparently, sex lube, not machine lubricant.

“Yeah. I didn’t know if it was gonna...yeah. So I didn’t want to--”

“It’s fine, Tony. I hide my art before it's finished, too.” He stroked soothingly down Tony’s back, maybe a little further than was appropriate in a living room, but...

“Art, hmph.” Tony grumbled, though Steve didn’t miss the way his stomach flexed, since it was pressed against his groin. “It’s design, not art. I’ll leave that to you, crackerjacks.”

Steve nodded and pressed his face into Tony’s hair, whuffing hot air into it to make him move again. “You want to spend the whole time with something that big inside you?” He smiled. Tony could hear it, even if he couldn’t see it. “I like the sound of that. I worry, y’know, about whether you’re prepared enough.”

“Indeed. You hesitate, it is well thought, but a hitch in our momentum. This will eliminate that; Sir will be loose and open, available whenever we please to...access him so thoroughly.”

“JARVIS, you’re killing me here, I have like, six more cards,” Tony whined, moving enough to make it clear exactly how hard he was.

“We’ll just have to restrain ourselves for a bit, then,” Steve said, pushing Tony back until he knelt up, his face a picture of disappointment. Steve relented immediately, of course, and pulled him onto his lap, sitting this time, instead of lying face down; just as much touching, but easier on the self control. Tony settled in, squirming until his ass wasn’t cutting off blood flow in Steve’s thigh, and they picked up the cards again.

“I don’t even know whose turn it is... Steve?”

“Sure... Pass me-- thanks.” He took the pen, and picked out a blank card, tapping it thoughtfully against Tony’s leg. “What you said; ‘first orgasm’? --has me thinking... We’ve uh, mainly, you, just once. Because of Extremis, and ’cause keeping you on the edge seemed...good.”

Tony nodded against his shoulder, where he’d dumped his head.

“But you didn’t reboot after Ock, because you’d just had a clear-out, right?”
“There were no errors to trigger a sweep, no.”

“So... After the first orgasm, you’d be free to have...more. As many as you could. And with Extremis, you could maybe, keep up with the serum?” Steve’s face felt like it was on fire. Along with his groin, and possibly also his nipples because holy fuck what was coming out of his mouth.

“That...write that down. Yes please, let's do that all week,” Tony wheezed, panting into Steve’s neck.

Steve wrote down ‘multiple orgasms’; the wording was JARVIS’ suggestion.

“Okay, okay, JARVIS, go. Let's get this done,” Tony said, shifting restlessly enough for Steve to pin his hip still with his free hand before they ended up coming in their pants. Tony groaned helplessly.

“There was an impulse, the first time the three of us had intimate relations in person. Near the end of the... ‘session’, as come was leaking out of you, sir, I wished to make you keep it. As a reminder.” Tony shuddered and pressed his face into Steve, and he could feel a hint of teeth against his neck, where Tony was biting his lip.

“Shhh... breathe, Tony, softly, easy...” Steve coaxed him back to earth; apparently, whatever burst had hit the empathy buffer was just too much to handle alone.

“You want... evidence, proof... something for me to--hold on to. When I’m not...not here, alonenotalone.” Tony stuttered and grinned and blinked his way through filling in the card.

When he was done, Steve rubbed the back of his neck and tried not to be too distracting while Tony stared blankly at the card, licking his lips too often to be legal. It was Tony’s turn.

“Last one, Tony, then we’ll head downstairs and see about this, okay?” Steve whispered into the space between them, tilting his head down for a second, because Tony’s cock was visible through his slacks as a hard, curved line.

Tony nodded, maybe a little reluctantly, and paged through his pre-written cards, to one at the very back. “This one’s...weird. Big question mark, but...good, really good, at getting me into some of the deepest, best subspace I’ve ever had. I-- A professional showed me. I... JARVIS?”

“It… This is interesting. I have seen the technique used... It should be safe, more now than ever, given Extremis. Although it does not feel safe, or look it.”

“It... This is interesting, I have seen the technique used... It should be safe, more now than ever, given Extremis. Although it does not feel safe, or look it.”

Tony nodded, and Steve waited, because that was ominous, but you didn’t go into a relationship like this without trusting people to tell you the truth. Tony turned the card over to show the word ‘breathplay’.

“It’s choking. You cut off either air or blood to the brain for a bit...and it’s...a rush, intense. There’s a whole,” Tony waved his hand in an expansive ‘it's complicated’ gesture, “neurological explanation for why it feels good, but that doesn’t really matter. It does. It’s... it’s orgasm, then subspace so deep, you can’t see, can’t-- It’s good, Steve, and I want to try it.”

“I have no objection to trying this technique, personally, but we will not be upset if you veto it. It is a great deal to ask, and we have more than enough options with the remainder of the cards.”

Tony nodded, tucking the cards back into their stack nervously, with ‘breathplay’ sitting on top at first, but then shuffled into the stack.

Steve didn’t know what to think. He took down opponents using carotid and airway chokes on a
regular basis; it wasn’t sexy, it was violent, and a way to end violence. But...he’d never injured someone with them. Never killed or brain damaged anyone accidentally; the techniques he used were easy, simple chokes that self-regulated on the basis that you knew when to let go: people passed out, simple as that.

“I had no idea that was something that could be...a sex thing. I don't-- I think I’d want JARVIS to show me, first. He can tell how much you like something, so much more easily, I-- Yes. Question mark. I’ll try it.”

Tony went limp for a second, air punching out of him, then wound his arms around Steve like an octopus. “Thank you, that’s--wow, great. I was worried for a second there. It's pretty out there, as kinks go, and you’re very open-minded, did you know that? You’re amazing.”

Steve shrugged one shoulder, but couldn’t help smiling a bit. “You’re not so bad yourself, Stark. Gonna show me that ‘toy’ before we get started?”

“‘Get started’ god, I’m doomed, completely. I’m going to spend the next three days in subspace. Up.” Tony shifted his grip, his knees going on either side of Steve’s waist and clamping down, and his arms shifting from around his chest, to over his shoulders, holding on equally tight.

Wasn’t hard to tell what he wanted.

“Sir, you are a child. Captain, please, feel free to drop him.”

“Rude. I’m doing half the work, here! Let's see those muscles in action,” Tony challenged, narrowing his eyes at Steve over his grin.

Steve didn’t mind, not at all. With Tony balanced and matching his center of gravity, he pushed himself up on the edge of the sofa with his arms (reverse pushup position; not usually enough leverage to feel worth doing, but with Tony’s weight, his arms actually felt like they were being used--focus). From there, he got to standing easily, Tony clinging like a monkey, the pressure of his limbs secure and comfortable. Steve wrapped his arms under Tony’s ass to let him ease up a bit; like climbing a pole, most adults couldn't hold their weight in such an awkward position for very long. Tony was strong though, and he’d been no slouch even before Extremis. Steve wondered what weight he was pressing now.

“Where to, JARVIS?” Steve asked, nudging the cards into a pile with his toe. JARVIS’ new limbs had spread through the penthouse and some other living spaces as Tony rebuilt, mostly hidden in the ceilings, but JARVIS used them mainly for housekeeping; Steve wasn’t sure the AI wanted to use them for sex things at all.

“The annex. Sir rather thoughtfully ordered a bed frame to match the mattress.” Tony had stayed laid up in the annex for a few days after the Ock thing, while the virus was still extant and he needed a shielded environment anyway. It’d seemed appropriate to skip the frame at the time, and sleep on the floor, what with the whole...charred-and-smoking penthouse issue. Steve had required Tony to buy him a new mattress, though, after his old one got wrestled down ninety floors and into the annex by ever-helpful bots.

“Anything we need to sort out, beforehand? I don’t want to have to--... stop.”

"If you were not carrying Sir,” Jarvis said, pretty pointedly, “I would ask you to bring your favoured sleepwear, but, alas...”

Tony laughed at them, his beard rubbing pleasantly against Steve’s neck. “PJs are PJs, JARVIS. My
plan is the opposite of getting dressed for bed. Let's go.” Steve stiffened as a roll of Tony’s hips reminded him of a few things he was trying to ignore. Such as his erection. He dug his fingers into Tony’s ass warningly and bent his head to bite at Tony’s ear.

“Relax, Tony, we’ll give you what you need. We’ll always give you what you need.” Steve paused, considering, then laughed in a low rumble; “Eventually.”

Tony groaned. “I’m gonna die. I’m gonna die happy, and you two are the ones getting the rap. Holy fuck...do you know what JARVIS is sending me right now? No, I do not want to narrate, JARVIS, you ass. Why do you have a picture of my ass-- oh god.”

Steve grinned and headed for the elevator; they should probably get to the annex before Tony came in his pants and knocked himself out. Hooking one forearm under Tony’s ass, he fished out his phone and opened the ‘chat’ program JARVIS liked. The AI took care of the elevator buttons, then shunted the image he was sending to Tony to Steve’s phone as well. Tony’s ass, indeed... Part way through some very serious alone time, with some kind of toy. Not the toy; smaller than that, but apparently enough. The short video clip looped on Tony pushing it into himself, his hips flexing into the thrust and--Steve closed the video before he did something unforgivable in a public elevator. Tony’s writhing wasn’t helping either.

He was obviously trying to control himself, but failing; a little crease appeared between his eyebrows and he was clinging to Steve’s shoulders like he had when he thought they were falling.

“Before or after Extremis?” Steve asked, face hot but very pleased with how Tony was starting to pant.

“A--!” Tony choked out, his fingers digging into Steve’s skin hard enough to leave at least a brief mark.

“Full sensory replay, Captain,” JARVIS said, sounding impossibly smug.

The elevator doors swished open to the server level, and from there it was just a case of stalking down the corridor and pulling the bulkhead open and closed behind them.

JARVIS, in all his glowing glory, rose to meet them. Hot tentacles, strong and smelling richly of something exotic, wound around them and pulled at their clothes. Tony luxuriated in it, letting go of Steve’s shoulders and spreading his arms as JARVIS wound around him.

JARVIS tore Tony’s ragged undershirt off him, in a casual show of strength that really was effortless. And it was becoming a habit. Tony liked it, though; his cock jumped against Steve’s belly. Steve unbuttoned Tony’s slacks himself, just enough to free his cock and give it one long pull, then pulled his own shirt off over his head and shucked out of his pants while Tony swore at him for stopping.

“Bed,” Steve ordered, and JARVIS let them walk, Steve’s hands on Tony’s waist and pushing against Tony’s groin in a way that had him swearing, until his knees hit the mattress and JARVIS pushed them both down onto it.

A tentacle touched his ear, very gently pushing a comm unit into it. Steve, busy kissing his way down Tony’s throat, shivered and made a questioning noise, and JARVIS clicked the radio on and waved the honesty-light at him as it turned green.

“Why’m I --” he flicked Tony’s nipple with his tongue, “--green?”

“Because Sir enjoys our hidden machinations. And it is only fair,” JARVIS replied through the
earpiece.

"You--ah... Ah! Steve stop that..."

Steve hmmed approvingly around Tony’s nipple, cutting his protest off, and turned his full attention back to the matter at hand: rebooting Extremis so Tony could stay awake for all of the best orgasms.

JARVIS worked what was left of Tony's clothes off while Steve kept him preoccupied. Once Tony was thoroughly naked, though, JARVIS pushed Steve back.

"I believe Sir has something to show you before we reduce him to his base elements."

Of course, how could Steve forget? Tony, starfished out on the mattress with Steve kneeling between his legs, groaned in frustration, cock standing out against his stomach and leaking all over it.
"It's self-explanatory! Toy, plus my ass, equals orgasms." Tony lifted his head to glare at Steve, giving Steve's very obvious erection a pointed look.

"Oh, no, see, I want you to tell me what it does. In words."

Tony groaned and thumped his head back down on the bed. "All right! Fine! Give me the thing, JARVIS. Not there-not-what-I-meant--" JARVIS let Tony's legs rest back on the bed, tentacle tips teasing at his inner thigh.

"You really must learn some precision, sir; it is so easy to misinterpret you when you are vague," JARVIS said, sounding just the wrong side of innocent.

"Precision, my a--" Tony said, then thought better of it, pulling against the limbs wrapped around his wrists and ankles. "Put it, ah, put it on my stomach? Goddamn, I knew I was going to regret something about this. Haven't figured out what, yet, but--you aren't going to make me wait this time, right?" he added plaintively.

He wasn't going to get anywhere without JARVIS' cooperation, which made Steve's cock twitch, but JARVIS was cooperating. After a delay, anyway. For a few seconds, Tony pulled at the restraints and nothing happened, but then JARVIS relented and let his tentacles go lax. One of them, medium-diameter but rather long, retreated completely as JARVIS retrieved a box from the other side of the room.

"Not once you've given us the brief, no. That we're saving for after you reboot." Steve grinned, because so much as mentioning rebooting him gave Tony a jolt these days. His whole body rippled and he groaned, covering his face with one hand. Steve patted his knee.

The box opened by itself once it was in range of JARVIS' transceiver, and JARVIS slipped the tentacle inside to pull out the toy. Round, bluish transparent surface over something complexly metallic--

Oh gosh. Rather large, really rather large. Were he and JARVIS actually that big? It looked far too big to go where it was meant to go. When JARVIS put it on Tony's stomach, the scale looked even worse. It was about the size of Steve's palm, which, considering he could span Tony's stomach completely if he spread his fingers, was a bit much. Vaguely egg-shaped, with a narrow point opposite a blunt end--oh boy. Tony cupped both hands around it, his wrists trailing tentacles, and turned it point upwards.

Steve poked it cautiously; the surface was soft, much more give than JARVIS, and the delicate-looking thing inside shifted. "Does it--" of course it did something, Tony had made it. "What does it do?"

"It...uh...can change shape. Deformable soft shell, various configurations. This is resting state." Tony turned it slightly and flared the honesty light red, then pressed the pad of his thumb over the surface. Around them, JARVIS shivered. Steve startled slightly, reaching out to touch JARVIS' nearest arm.

"Huh. Not just for you, then, Tony?" Steve asked, letting JARVIS cling to his wrist.

"I did not quite realise how that would feel. I am trialing a new sensation/reward weighting, and it is patched into my emulation runtime directly-- Oh."

Tony curled up a little, bringing his legs up, less open and spread-eagled; he was nervous. "Yeah, you'll acclimate a bit, so hopefully it won't be overwhelming--"

"It is quite all right, sir, your worry is entirely unnecessary." JARVIS let go of Steve's wrist, and
pulled back, letting Steve stroke the retreating tentacle as it went, but not needing the anchor anymore.

“So, it transmits, it changes shape, anything else?” he asked, lying down next to Tony and putting his head on JARVIS’ arm.

“Um...self-lubricating, when it’s hooked up to JARVIS’ system. Vibration. That is for me... Insertion/extraction protocol. I--yeah. Should come out easily, if something happens.”

Steve hmmed and ran a finger down the side of the egg, more gently than Tony had, and JARVIS stiffened, stretched, rather than being overwhelmed. “All right then. You hold onto that and be gentle. It’s his first time,” Steve said, glancing at JARVIS’ camera with a silly grin.

“What’re you going to do?” Tony asked, keeping the egg tucked against his stomach in both hands and rolling onto his side, facing Steve with a suspicious look. JARVIS seemed to decide that this was how Tony was going to stay, and covered them both with the heavy ends of his limbs, pinning them to the bed in a way that was warm and comforting.

“Hold on, remember?” Steve ordered, grinning and reaching for Tony. His lead, today.

He started out with Tony’s mouth, lips already flushed with arousal that he wanted to scorch to scarlet. He wound his fingers behind Tony’s head and reeled him in, kissing hard and hot; coaxing with tongue and teeth but fisting his hand in Tony's hair with real strength, taking everything he wanted, the way Tony liked so much. Tony's eyes flared and he tried to get closer; JARVIS flexed around them as, apparently, his hands tightened on the egg.

Steve glanced down and saw the transceiver, empathy-pink and bright, dipping between them to touch it and Tony’s hands. He smirked against Tony’s mouth; they were taking it easy on Tony, not trying to blow his mind just yet, and that meant JARVIS had time to just explore.

Steve ran his free hand down Tony's chest and under his arm, and ghosted over Tony's erection. The egg buzzed a little, squished between both their stomachs.

Oh that was nice. The sensation spread over Steve’s skin, reaching his cock which, having been hard since they’d started talking about bondage, leaked onto the sheets. Tony had it even worse; the honesty-light shone bright blue for a second and JARVIS’ limbs writhed around him. Squeezing his thighs, clutching around his chest... Steve nudged that one up a little, enough to cover Tony’s nipple on one side, and Tony gasped, cock jumping.

Steve wasn’t going to make him wait, not this time, and reached down to stroke him. Tony moaned and it was such a lovely sound that Steve had to lean in and swallow it down with a sloppy, open-mouthed kiss.

JARVIS joined him on Tony’s cock, introducing slickness and heat that had Tony arching his back helplessly, and Steve pushed forward, getting his hand around both of them and rubbing their cocks together. JARVIS looped over him too, and he made a noise he would never, ever admit to. It was Tony's turn to smirk for a second, before JARVIS started moving and wiped it off his face.

"You can--go first, if you--" Steve sucked air through his teeth. "I won't be long after--!"

“...but--” Tony gasped, barely getting the word out as JARVIS coiled a tentacle tip through his hair, holding on.

“Come for us, sir..."
“Fuck--! Am I the o-only sub...that gets...--ah!--called sir?”

“You have always been unique.”

Tony gasped again and arched, his whole body stiff as he splashed hot come between them, on Steve and on the egg he held. Steve watched his face, his eyes shuttering and body going limp, abandoned for a little while, and followed him over the edge.

A few minutes later, Steve stirred out of the sweet haze and looked around for something to clean up with. He'd angled himself to try and not come on Tony while he was unconscious, which seemed disrespectful somehow, and hadn't completely succeeded.

Not to mention, Tony hadn't had the same presence of mind, or a free hand, and had come everywhere.

“J’VS? Tissues?”

“And of course, Captain.” A tentacle left their cozy tangle and Steve watched it blearily as JARVIS delicately dampened a washcloth in the shower room.

“Allow me…”

Steve allowed, of course, and shifted over a little, making space between him and Tony. The-JARVIS’-- the egg thing slipped out of Tony's limp hands and Steve scooped it up, cradling it in his palm and holding it out, insisting that JARVIS clean it first; it seemed only right, since it was new. JARVIS laughed at him, which he thought was a little unsporting, but obliged, giving it a good shine. Once it was clean JARVIS moved on to Steve's belly, which was somehow very satisfying, and coaxed Steve into closing his eyes and stretching languidly. JARVIS laughed at him for that too, stroking his hair back from his forehead when he huffed.

Tony, of course, didn't react much at all, except to frown when Steve untangled their legs. His breathing had changed a minute ago from the metronomically steady pace it kept while he was rebooting, going deeper and rougher. JARVIS gave him a comforting squeeze, and he relaxed, licking his lips but not opening his eyes yet.

“Look alive, Captain; he is waking up.”

“Mmhm… You got a plan, JARVIS? We’re on vacation…”

“Hmm. I think the term was... ‘fuck him into the mattress’? A good a goal as any, don’t you think?”

“Well… Do you have any rope down here?” It was a long shot, rope was certainly not needed for servers, but…

“Sir is very well prepared.” A limb opened one of the recessed cabinets next to the shower area and fished out a bundle of soft white rope, setting it on the bed next to Steve. “And he certainly enjoys something to wake up to.” Steve held out JARVIS’ egg in exchange for the rope, and JARVIS plucked it up with his smallest tentacle, curling around it delicately.

Steve ran his fingers over the rope, feeling the texture; grippy but not rough. He found the end and tried to judge how long it was. More than long enough for anything he could think of. "Can you show me some pictures, or uh, instructions?" He laid the end over Tony's wrists for now, just letting it touch his skin. They'd test it first, since Tony wasn't sure he'd be able to handle it.
JARVIS popped up holoscreens around him. "My pleasure, Captain. Would you prefer to tie him to something, or attempt something more involved, such as shibari?"

"Shibari? ...Oh. Wow... Does he have a preference, do you know?"

"Mmmm," Tony said, and cleared his throat, eyelids fluttering. "I heard a nice word... Question is, where did you hear about shibari."

Steve ducked down to kiss the corner of his mouth, leaning on the rope. "J, you being educational? This is gonna be... mmm... hello..."

Tony turned his wrists over, the rope sliding smoothly against his skin and tugging at Steve’s palms where he held it against the bed. Steve leaned back again to watch, carefully tracking Tony’s expression. He was fairly confident, at least while he was just holding it, but wasn’t about to make assumptions.

“This is what I get for being prepared? Boy scouts have the right idea...” Tony mused, eyes fixed on the rope and blinking a touch too slowly.

“Good?”

“Very much so, Captain...” JARVIS said, rolling his egg further up the transceiver limb and waving the lit tip nearer Tony.

“Alright...” Steve looked him over, all loose-limbed and relaxed after rebooting, but already getting hard again. “Arms behind your back.”

Tony flinched, looking up from the rope, but it wasn’t a bad flinch; he grinned up at Steve and roused himself, pulling his wrists out from under the rope and getting up on his knees. He wobbled slightly as he turned to show Steve his back, and Steve reached out to steady him, but JARVIS was already there, propping him up with a thick tentacle against his chest.

Once he was stable, Tony brought his wrists together at the small of his back, looking over his shoulder at Steve with a flirtatious look that didn’t quite cover the concern he was feeling. Steve kneeled up behind him, smoothing his hands over his upper arms, shoulders, hushing him gently. As he ran his hands down Tony’s arms, over the delicate skin of his inner forearms, a picture sprang into his head, vague at first, but gaining details as he stroked his hands over Tony’s sides, over his hips and thighs. He made sure to telegraph what he was doing and slowly twisted Tony’s wrists until his forearms were side by side, half way up his back, his chest pushed out and shoulders bunched with muscle.

“Like that...” he murmured, pressing his lips to the nape of Tony’s neck. “JARVIS, the rope, please.”

"A quick-release ‘chute hitch, Captain. I believe you are familiar...?" JARVIS said over the comm. Steve hummed affirmatively; he could undo one of those in his sleep, and was more than capable of tying one awake. JARVIS handed him the end of the rope and he slipped it between Tony’s arms and his back. Slowly, methodically, he made five turns, each one firm but not tight enough to dent Tony’s muscular forearms. After five, he paused, set his knee between Tony’s legs, his thigh against Tony’s ass, and pulled gently but inexorably on the ropes. They slid easily, tightening to something secure against Extremis’ strength and then pulling against Tony’s muscle tone.

Tony bowed back towards him, until his shoulders were supported by Steve's chest and his ass was pressed against Steve’s thigh. “How does that feel?”

Tony swallowed, staring up at JARVIS hovering over them. “...Good. Tie it off. Please...”
Steve nodded with his cheek against Tony’s temple so he could feel it, and pinched the two ends together so they wouldn’t loosen. JARVIS coiled tight around Tony’s chest and upper arms, holding him up while Steve backed off far enough to see, and used both hands to wind the rope ends towards each other, then tie it off with the ‘chute hitch. Running his fingers over the edges to check the bind, Steve itched to wind his fingers through the rope and pull and hold, but Tony’s shoulders were at a restricted angle already; if he wanted to use that kind of force, he’d need a more spread-out...ah...

He wriggled his fingers under JARVIS’ grip and tugged; Tony rocked back into it with a grunt.

“...I’ve created a monster; yes, do it,” Tony said. The honesty-light flared red and one of the holographic screens flashed an image of a rope harness. Steve looked twice, seeing immediately how to do it, then closed his eyes, the image burned into his retinas and overlaying itself on the image of Tony tied into a helpless piece of art. Yes.

He pushed Tony down to his front, ass in the air, JARVIS letting him do it and then untwining, moving out of the way. Rope looped twice around Tony's chest and biceps -- “Deep breath, hold it”- - and pulled tight against his ribcage, then the end passed between his arm and his side, around the first loops, to pull them against his back. Then, over his shoulder, under his other arm and returned to the middle of his back. Three times, over and around, until the rope made a strong web, three strands wide, over Tony’s shoulders and across his chest. Steve tied that off too, and dug his fingers into the neat bundle over Tony’s spine.

When he pulled, Tony came with it. He had no choice, his whole upper body lifted off the bed like a package tied with string. He was breathing deep and slow, his eyes mostly closed, his legs limp. If Steve put him down now, he would crumple into a heap; there was no way he was going to be holding himself up for... Steve’s brain skittered over the words ‘sex’ and ‘anal’, even though he’d just spent almost half an hour carefully tying up his lover. The words were too short, too clinical, for something like this.

Steve set him down gently, flat on his stomach, and moved so Tony could see him. "How are you doing?"

"Good," Tony said thickly. "Floating. This's good." He straightened his legs and then drew them up, trying to turn over and having some trouble. "Forgot how hard it is to move without arms…"

"Do you want more?"

Tony breathed even deeper, his chest pressing on the ropes. "Yeah. Yeah… Help me sit up, I don't have the balance. I'll kneel and show you how to do it."

"The tie Sir is thinking of is very restrictive," JARVIS murmured in Steve's earpiece. "Go slowly. Should you need to remove the ropes in a hurry, there is a safety cutter…” One of the screens showed how to slip a blunt-tipped little hook between skin and rope and pull upward to cut the rope with the hook's sharpened inner edge, and Steve nodded. If he cut the important lengths, the rest would unravel.

Meanwhile he and JARVIS lifted Tony up. He found his balance and settled into kneeling, legs folded underneath him, then glanced back at Steve and smiled at what he saw. "If you tie my ankle to my upper thigh," he said, "it's simple, but it keeps my legs bent like this. The more turns you use, the wider the band and the more comfortable it is. You can go loose. Believe me, it won't be loose when I shift to any other position." The honesty-light flickered red again, and a screen near his head started playing a simple sequence; Steve found another couple hanks of rope under his hands, picked one, and followed it.
Under Tony's ankle and up, around the top of his thigh, right below the crease where hip transitioned to leg. He looped the doubled rope loosely six times, for twelve turns in all, then used the rest of the rope to bundle all the turns together in the gap between ankle and thigh, tightening and securing it, although the bands were still not very tight; he could fit three fingers underneath easily all the way around, particularly where the skin was tissue-thin at his inner thigh. Tony wasn’t quite hard, though he didn’t seem to mind; the way his eyes followed Steve’s hands was only just this side of subspace.

"Yeah, that's it," Tony breathed. "See?" He leaned over the bound leg and went down on his side with a soft *fump*; of course, he couldn’t catch himself at all. One leg opened out, relaxed, but the other stayed tucked up tight, his foot sticking out at an angle and the ropes gone taut and denting the muscles of his thigh. Steve saw how it worked: when he was kneeling, his whole body weight kept his legs bent and brought his ankle and thigh close together, but as soon as he moved the ropes were fighting against the natural muscle tone of the thigh as it took up every millimeter of slack and tried to straighten out his leg to neutral.

"Even like this, with one leg free, I can hardly move at all," Tony said. He struggled and managed to shift himself flat on his stomach with a little help from JARVIS, pushing his shoulder over. Steve ran his hands over the tied ankle and knee, feeling the pressure, then followed it up Tony's side, over his wrists and biceps and chest, and set his fingers into the wide flat knot at Tony's spine again, lifting him back to kneeling. Tony sighed and shivered, his head hanging loosely.

"'m on the edge here, Steve... Not gonna be talking much longer," Tony said, ribs flexing as he breathed deep under Steve’s palms.

“Shhhh, that’s all right; you so much as think you want out, JARVIS’ll tell me, okay? You’re good. You’re safe.” He pulled against the harness, lifting Tony slightly and settling him again. “Really safe.” He ran his hand up Tony’s back, over beautifully tight muscles, and into Tony’s hair, lifting his head and making his face glow with honesty-pink light. “Look.”

Tony looked up, enraptured, at the light. It probably didn’t help that the toy was wrapped up in the transceiver tentacle, a few feet further up, and the light had gone blue, blue, blue.

He stayed that way, with JARVIS’ feed or whatever it was easing him down into subspace, and JARVIS' limbs steadying him while Steve bound up his other leg. JARVIS wasn’t idle, either; tentacles roamed gently, pressing on the major muscles and shifting them slightly under the skin, loosening any knots and making Tony lean into the ropes more thoroughly.

When Steve looked up Tony was completely down, eyes half-closed, face calm and open. His mouth opened when JARVIS coiled under him and lifted, but he didn't flinch, staying heavy and relaxed as they set him down on his front, knees folded up under him, but splayed out obscenely. JARVIS kept hold of the harness, holding Tony’s weight off the bed while Steve pushed pillows under his chest and hips, but didn’t let go even then, the tentacle winding through the ropes and holding on.

Steve ran his hands over Tony’s ass, perfectly displayed and positioned for Steve to explore. “How many times can he come, in a day?” he asked, quiet enough to avoid disturbing Tony.

“*How many can you, Captain? Sir’s system is unique, I have a great deal of control.*”

Steve would have reddened, but he was thinking about working his fingers into Tony’s ass; there didn’t seem much point in blushing anymore. “I’m not sure, five? Six?”

“*Then Sir will have no trouble keeping up. I had begun to think you ran into double digits; I have never seen you slow down.*”
“Hhmmm...” Steve rubbed his palm over the small of Tony’s back, careful to keep touching him, keep them anchored to each other. “I guess we’ll see. Is he good?”

“Indeed, Captain. He could wait patiently like this for some time, I believe, if you would like to draw him.”

Steve thought about it, about backing off, letting JARVIS keep Tony in this still place and drawing the picture he made, but then realised he didn’t need to; this was going to be stamped in his mind forever anyway. Plus, he was painfully hard. “…Maybe another time.”

He stroked down over Tony’s ass, fingertips just trailing over his hole, then further, curving under to where the ropes held him tight, Steve’s knots keeping him secure in this long, slow version of subspace. JARVIS joined him, warm silicone sliding along Tony’s ankle, then up to where his balls hung, staying on the sensitive skin of inner thigh; taking his time. Of course.

Steve smiled, liking the idea of drawing this out, letting Tony come when he needed to and forging on regardless of it. He pressed at Tony’s hole again, not aiming to do anything but press—since JARVIS was holder of the lube—just rubbing in little circles over it. Promising.

If it hadn’t been for their first orgasm, Steve might have had to come right there, with Tony breathing so even, so relaxed that his hole slackened under Steve’s fingers. “J-JARVIS?” Steve croaked, squeezing his eyes shut and bending over to kiss Tony’s fingers where they wrapped around his own elbow.

“Shall I...?” JARVIS touched a slight tentacle against Tony’s hole, slimmer than one of Steve’s fingers, and already glistening wet.

“Yes, please,” Steve said, shakily sitting up and stroking Tony’s back, rubbing at the base of his spine where it was hollowed by the position.

Tony made a tiny quivering sound, his back shivering as JARVIS breached him, and the muscles under Steve’s hand tensed.

“Easy, relax into it, focus on the stretch…” Steve murmured, trailing one hand down to join JARVIS, rubbing at Tony’s rim with the tip of his finger. Tony’s next breath, deep and even, accepting, loosened him up and Steve’s finger slipped inside. JARVIS, slick and sinuous on one side, and Tony’s body, scorching hot and pliant on the other; Steve’s turn to have the breath stolen from him.

JARVIS made his ascending-tones laugh, and Steve looked up in time to see the holoscreens winking out, the honesty-light steady red and seeming to get brighter; the ambient lights were dimming. "What--?” he said. Was Tony saying something really long?

He didn’t push any deeper, but kept up the caresses on Tony’s back. It was truly dim now, though the Serum let him still see edges and colors clearly. His next stroke lifted a glow like golden-white smoke off Tony's skin, with a trailing slowly-fading afterimage. Steve stopped short, blank with shock. Was he seeing things? Tony’s whole body was glowing a little--yes, it was radiating light on the sheets and blankets, not much, but more than the ambient light would have cast. Steve’s hands were glowing too, reddish-orange, pulsing a little in time with his own heartbeat as it sped up in confusion.

"Shhh," JARVIS said, "do not be alarmed, Captain, he is doing this. Sir uploaded a program to give himself an extremely high resolution connection to the projectors in this room. What you see is what he feels."
Steve moved his hand on Tony's spine again, tentatively, watching the light float up. He could just barely see Tony smiling, eyes closed. "This is how it feels," Steve breathed, and ran his hand up to Tony's bound arms, over the ropes. The glow followed him, going darker, to red and further down nearly to infrared, to the very edge of Steve's color vision. He pulled on the knot and every single patch of skin touched by the ropes lit up, a flash of yellow-white-orange-red that seemed to sink down through Tony's skin to his bones. "Like he's breathing light," Steve whispered, and Tony's next breath did glow, lighting up his face softly, his smile a little wider.

"Yeah, you can hear me," Steve said. "So what happens if I--?" He moved his other hand, index and middle finger up to the second knuckle in Tony's ass, and Tony's breath hitched a little, colors racing up the sides of his spine and down his legs, hitting the ropes and making them glow. JARVIS started moving again too, pushing in, and the colors flickered and trembled to a constant river under Tony's skin, rising off him like mist. The ropes shone steadily, flashing brighter now and again when Tony shifted and stretched against them.

"J, he's doing all this deliberately?" Steve marveled.

"Projecting it, yes. But I believe he is generating it partly subconsciously, partly from the interactions of Extremis with his nervous system. It bears some similarity to a spatial projection of the empathy buffer, with added permutations, a tactile component..."

“This is what you see--feel--all the time…?”

“I do not perceive it this way. But essentially, yes.”

“So when I do this...” Steve twisted his hand, reaching a little deeper into Tony to find his sweet spot, and red flushed through orange to bright yellow, gold even, in a solid gleam up Tony’s back. Steve watched, entranced, and-- There. Tony gasped, colors jumping completely off his skin in jagged sweeps and lines, like symmetric lightning bolts, like half a spirograph gone beautifully awry.

breathing light? i can do that, do it for steve, watch me

can't move, so good, so warm, [safesafesafe] keep it here, touch me, yes, ah!
‘m i good jarvis? ‘s it good?

Yes. So good, sir. JARVIS whispered in his ear, warm silicone sliding over his shoulders, teasing at the ropes and pressing into his muscles. Sparks of endorphins and deeper shudders of more complex satisfaction radiated out from the points of contact, meeting and building on the ripples sweeping over him from his ass.

more, deeper, please,

“You can have everything you want, Tony.”

Steve, yes, more.

Stretching fingers, more slick, JARVIS breaching him deeper than Steve ever could;

nonono! empty, retreatingleaving comeback [notalone], come BACK.
"Patience, sir."

AH! breach, big. yes. steve? [goodgoodfulld eep] ah--! Steve slid into him in one long thrust, so deep, so good. Steve’s fingers dug into his back, pulled against his harness, used it for leverage to push deepdeepdeep. A hand on his hip, kneading his flesh, and he lost his hold on the light, the yoked sensation ripping it out of his grasp in a bright burst that flowed over his sides and spilled into the air in shattered-hologram sparks.

And then Steve started to move.

[too much] [so much] want more, take more!

Everything built, from the low burn of the rope, to the pounding relentless pace, and Tony moaned and flexed against the ropes. Without anything to to hold him back, he was on the edge of coming, each thrust shocking his body into a moan. It sent blinding waves of pleasure and need up his body, and he could barely get any leverage to push back, feeling his abs burn as he went a little bit up on his knees each time.

And it snuck up on him, coming from all sides, thrumming at the inside and outside of his skin until something had to give and he was coming helplessly between a pillow and the bedsheets, dick untouched and Steve right there with him, filling him with heat as they wrung each other out. Steve thrust all the way in as he shuddered to a stop, pushing past Tony’s clenching, pleasure-stupid muscles until he was resting against Tony’s prostate, firm and hard and excruciatingly good.

Steve didn't go soft, even though they'd just come, but he did take a moment. Tony relished the haze, the heat, the fullness, while Steve let him, and blinked at the wall past a few lazy curls of light and the soft glow of his own skin off the sheets. He wasn't exactly sure what the holoprojectors were doing; maybe he should jump in, make it look better, but--

It is effective, sir, much appreciated.

Tony let pleasure curl through him and pulled back, relaxing. The program could run on its own.

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"Go gently..." Steve cautioned; JARVIS could push Tony to the limits of his endurance, but that wasn't what Steve wanted. He pulled out slowly and JARVIS, coiling around his cock on his way past, slipped into Tony without letting the muscles go slack. Tony stretched against the ropes, the sparks and shards of pleasure blurred into a smooth haze that flowed from tailbone to ropes and back again. Steve followed it with his palms, stroking over sweat-slick skin and checking under the ropes with his fingertips; no flinch was forthcoming and the skin was dented but still pink. Tony was fine for a little longer.

"Have the cutter on hand, J, just in case."

"You have something in mind?" JARVIS asked, a smooth limb stroking down Steve's back.

Steve explained while JARVIS coiled around him, humming and stroking appreciatively. Together they turned Tony over onto his back, his legs falling open obscenely. His head lolled on his neck, his focus inward, on the thick length of tentacle twisting gently inside him. His arms in the small of his back kept him arched despite the pillows supporting him; his stomach and chest jutted upwards, proud with their rope decorations. It was one hell of a thing to look at and Steve couldn't keep his hands off; he checked the ropes on Tony’s thighs and his fingers lingered naturally in the hollow of inner thigh, pushing Tony's legs further apart. Then trailed down, to his hole, and pressed in
alongside JARVIS.

He watched Tony's face as he played—gently, like he'd said—with Tony's inner muscles, stretching them and thinking about the toy Tony wanted. About how it would stretch him every moment it sat there, about its size, how it would look going in.

Tony was limp, helpless and open-mouthed, little gasps escaping as JARVIS pressed deeper, the tentacle flexing against Steve's fingers, slick with lube and come and more lube. It was beautiful, and bad for my focus, Steve thought with a smile, settling over Tony to lick those gasps out of his mouth.

The kiss was deep from the start and only got deeper, all tongue and saliva, until he had to let Tony up to breathe. He leant down to suck on a nipple instead, mouth feeling empty, and grinned around it as Tony clench ed on his fingers.

"Do you want us, Tony? Both of us?" Steve whispered as he kissed and sucked his way up Tony's chest. A moan bubbled out of Tony's throat as he nodded and JARVIS gripped Steve's ankle convulsively; yes, on both counts.

Steve shifted over to Tony's mouth, kissing slack lips and stealing his air while he added a third finger to Tony's ass. The muscle stretched, accommodating easily, and Tony's eyes closed. Next to his fingers, Steve felt JARVIS push further inside, and Steve put his free hand on Tony's stomach, imagining he could feel it through the skin. What he could feel, the taut lines of Tony's stomach muscles, the tremble of his breathing, was just as good. His touch, lips or hands, was leaving smears of deep, satisfied red, glowing and melting into the gold that radiated from the cradle of Tony's hips in a diffuse but intense wave.

Steve slipped a fourth finger inside, and when he pushed in all the way up to his knuckles, Tony opened for it, his tight muscles giving ground slowly. Steve was patient, but wasn't going to stop, not with what Tony wanted inside him by the time they finished.

"Now, Captain."

Steve nodded and pulled his fingers out. Tony's hole didn't close up, slack and faintly blue with the light of JARVIS' limb, still pressed deep inside and shining with lube. He wiped his hand off on the sheets and went up to his knees, pushing Tony's bound legs to either side, tucking his fingers into the harness against Tony's ribs and holding him tight. His groin and buttocks and hole looked so utterly vulnerable, framed in white rope and moving under Steve and JARVIS' guidance...

"J?"

JARVIS wound around Tony's hips, lifting him up to the perfect height. "Long and hard, Captain."

Steve shuddered, looking down as JARVIS coiled around his cock, squeezing and nudging at the slit with a hot tentacle tip. The thick limb inside Tony pulled away, and Steve pushed in, the coils of JARVIS' tentacle catching at Tony's rim, pushing him wider now than when they'd stretched him. Tony threw his head back, almost lifting himself off the bed, and his legs trembled, knees pushing against Steve's shoulders in reflex.

It was no effort to resist, to let Tony push against him while he adjusted; this was about taking Tony, after all, taking everything he wanted taken. Steve's control never wavered, but it came close; JARVIS was ruthless, winding around Steve's balls, pressing against him inside Tony, and dear god the heat. Like before, their first time, Tony's muscles pressed JARVIS into him, exquisite, so good it was almost painful, but this time JARVIS was all around him, hot and hard and slick.
When they were seated all the way, when JARVIS’ tentacle was pressing against the root of his cock and Tony’s rim was a band of impossible heat stretched wide around them, Steve bowed forward under the force of it, with Tony’s legs pushed wide around his waist, and held on for dear life to the ropes. His eyes rolled back in his head, his body trembling and frozen at the same time; too good to move, to good to not.

JARVIS broke the moment wide open, the honesty light flaring perfect, brilliant blue for a heartbeat. Tony jerked, eyes and mouth perfect circles and squeezing around their cock and Steve moved.

He pulled back, feeling the drag of JARVIS’ coils against Tony’s rim, then pushed back in hard enough to make Tony cry out, wordlessly, and burst into light. Like striking lightning, his skin flushed with brilliant white, overwhelmingly bright against JARVIS’ mellower blue and the haze of gold seeping from the ropes.

It hadn’t quite faded by the time Steve did it again, and the light throbbed in time with the cries Steve and JARVIS were punching out of Tony. He thrust deep each time, ruthless to Tony and not giving himself a second to breathe either, then wound his arms under Tony’s chest and heaved him upright, hand fisted in the harness’ knot, until Tony was spitted on them, legs spread wide over Steve’s hips and cock tight against Steve’s belly. JARVIS let Steve take the weight and Tony sank onto their cock under it, deeper even than before. Tony stopped breathing, stopped making sound, too overwhelmed to do anything but feel, and the light trembled over his skin, beating with his heart.

“Cut them, JARVIS--!” Steve wrapped the release tail in his fist and pulled, the knots of the harness unravelling, Tony’s arms falling free and the yellow light exploding across his skin like a dam-burst as he gasped. JARVIS got the leg bindings, sliding the dull outside edge of the cutter against Tony’s thigh and slicing the rope in a sharp tug that jerked Tony into Steve, rocking their cock inside him. The other leg went loose, ropes giving way under the blade, and Tony was swallowed up with pleasure, bright waves of shock and countershock spilling off his skin.

Steve bucked up into him, his body limp in Steve’s arms and accepting the thrust almost eagerly. The glow pulsed, but didn’t fade, and Steve thrust up again, on the edge of coming, and JARVIS writhed around, inside them, squeezing, holding, stretching.

Tony came hard and shuddering against Steve’s stomach, the come hot on his chest, intoxicating, and Steve followed him over, hips pounding into Tony’s clenching heat and pushing deep at the final moment.

Steve rode the aftershocks, his arms feeling limp and his grip on Tony only just holding him up while the shimmering light faded to a deep, satisfied yellow that seemed to come from underneath Tony’s skin.

Slowly, gently, JARVIS coaxed them down, until Tony was flat on his back with his arms outspread in JARVIS’ gentle grip, and Steve lying, still buried to the hilt, with his head on JARVIS’ arm. Tony’s eyes were only just open, glazed and still, wet with the good kind of tears, and Steve shuddered one last time before closing his eyes.

He just needed a minute.

Just a few... mmm...

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The Captain fell asleep on them. It was not unprecedented, nor, JARVIS believed, unwarranted, but it wouldn’t do, all the same. A gentle squeeze around his cock, a rub of tired muscles at the small of
his back, and Steve roused again, mumbling.

“...s’ good,” he rumbled, hips shifting under JARVIS’ touch. “Tony okay?”

“*He is,*” JARVIS said through the comm, listening to Tony’s half-conscious appreciation of Steve’s voice in the buffer. “*More than ‘okay’.***

Sir was languidly pleased, with himself, with Steve, with JARVIS. His shoulders ached, just a faint strain report filtering into the status bit-array he traded with JARVIS, but it didn’t bother him. All the same, JARVIS pulled gently on the abused muscles, then pressed into them with a tentacle he brought up to hand-hot. Tony groaned blissfully, limp beneath them, and Steve smiled, kissing Tony’s cheek.

JARVIS lowered the toy to the bed, the transceiver trailing over Tony’s skin, feeling for any glitches or overruns in Extremis from the intensity of what they had done. He found none—*with all the data they had gathered, Extremis was far, far more resilient to this kind of activity than it had been at first*-but Extremis was attempting to ‘heal’ the abnormal stretch of Tony’s inner muscles. JARVIS put a stop to that. As interesting as it would be to have Sir heal up virgin-tight, he was not in a position to appreciate it at the moment.

The moment Steve spotted the egg-shaped toy was marked by a slight hardening of his cock and a tiny thrust of his hips that pushed JARVIS against Sir’s prostate and sent the empathy buffer swirling with please?

JARVIS leaned on him with wait and soon and said *Don’t you want the Captain to place it for you/ wouldn’t you like that?*

Tony quivered under Steve’s weight, pinned in place, and said yes so strongly his skin hummed with it. JARVIS hummed back, a low frequency radio-band signal, like covering Sir with a duvet and pressing him into the mattress.

...not fair...too good...don’t want to sleep...

JARVIS eased off again, his emulation circuits filling with the [fullfullgoodwantkeepmine] that Tony was feeling. “*So I see. We will oblige, of course, if you can stay awake long enough, stay loose enough.*”

Tony was full of agreement, of yessir and wanting, and JARVIS felt no need to make him wait. To make himself wait. The toy’s surface and even its internal structure was incredibly sensitive, feeding directly into his emulation systems, and holding it in a shifting tentacle felt good enough alone that he couldn’t extrapolate what pushing it inside Tony was going to feel like.

Slowly, they pulled out of Sir, leaving just one coil of tentacle inside him to hold him open and keep him slick. Steve, his muscles limp but cock interested, stroked Tony’s legs through the shiver that elicited, over rope marks and delicate skin, and Sir’s eyes closed, patient and happy, at least for now.

“*Would you do the honors, Captain?***” JARVIS asked, holding out the toy to Steve. He looked surprised but took it anyway, and JARVIS made it hum gently, alive in his hand. The sensors thrilled at the touch of other-living-warm, Tony’s new understanding of what touch actually meant coming to the fore in the toy’s programming. It was a delicious sensation, satisfying, and JARVIS wasn’t used to it yet; he half hoped he wouldn’t become used to it at all.

Sir followed Steve’s hands with his eyes, anticipation bubbling in the buffer and speeding his heart rate, bringing tension back into his muscles. His inner walls, his rim, tightened slightly, feeling
empty compared to what was coming. JARVIS hushed him, gentling the response into the steady flow of Sir’s subspace with the pressure of his limbs and rubbing inside, near but not touching his prostate.

It was.... Sir’s eyes may have been larger than his capacity… Seeing it there, nestled in the Captain’s palm while he spread lube over it...it looked very large. It was an effort to keep from questioning Sir about this, to keep his anxiety to himself for the time it took to calculate the largest circumference, again. It was fine, no bigger than Sir could take, he knew this.

Almost tentatively, unused to seeking comfort from the Captain, JARVIS coiled a limb around Steve’s chest, holding on where he could feel Steve’ heartbeat, the smooth expansion of his ribcage. It worked, and JARVIS calmed again as the ‘second Admin’ data infused his heuristic processes. That was the truth about a truly heuristic system like he had developed; while it could keep up with the constant shifting of emotion and circumstance as it had evolved to do in humans, it did make mistakes. JARVIS’ math did not; this was safe, Sir was safe.

Steve absently stroked the limb, adding to the sense of security, and JARVIS felt confident enough to continue, felt the want again. Firmly enough to be comforting, he coiled around Sir’s legs, tracing the rope marks where the skin was so sensitive and drawing his legs wide again, exposing him to Steve.

The Captain had an interesting fascination with the silk-soft skin of Sir’s inner thigh; he ran his fingers over it on his way to Sir’s hole, leaving a thin trail of shiny slick in his wake. Easily, confidently, he pushed three fingers into him, the loose muscle yielding smoothly, and--

JARVIS hung for a moment, Steve’s fingers caressing the coil inside Tony, pressing against it and rubbing over the hypersensitive tip, using it to stimulate Tony by proxy. JARVIS’ grip on them both tightened, and the toy shifted in Steve’s palm with the echo.

“Shhh, both of you. Let me...” A fourth finger and Steve pushed his palm in, until his thumb sat against Tony’s perineum, stroking the underside of Tony’s balls, and Tony’s rim was stretched tight around his knuckles and JARVIS.

Tony’s back flexed, his mouth open in a long keen, and Steve started to thrust. A half inch, just enough to stretch then release Tony’s muscles, to press against JARVIS inside, grind him against Tony’s prostate. He was steady, smoothly consistent, and Sir was soon hard again, aching. Once Tony was loose on the retreat, Steve decided enough was enough and pulled JARVIS’ tentacle out of Tony, along with his hand, leaving just one finger pressing against his rim, holding it gaping. Before the muscles had a chance to close, he pressed the toy against them, its narrow end slipping inside.

JARVIS’s senses sharpened, narrowing to heat and pressure and smooth, slick, skin.

Firm, unhesitating, Steve rocked the lube-slick silicone inwards, pressing it in a fraction at a time. Tony started panting, eyes blown wide and mouth gaping at the ceiling, the strength of his pleasure pulling JARVIS into the empathy buffer, where the two sensations, penetrated and penetrating, combined and reverberated between them.

In Steve’s hand, the toy shivered as they neared its widest point and the Captain paused, rocking it gently in and out, testing the stretch, watching Tony’s face and pressing against the pulse in his thigh. Tony’s hands, weak and uncoordinated, fluttered to his stomach and his vitals edged towards shock: the hot, burning kind that would consume him and leave him in a satisfied place for hours.

Steve smoothed more lube around Tony’s rim, the muscle pulled taut and bright pink by the
The toys’ smooth, blunt end settled just inside Sir’s rim, the muscles pulling back over it, but not closing completely; unable to, with that much width holding him open so deeply. Steve pressed a finger against the dome that was still visible and rocked it into Tony, and-- JARVIS’ processes stopped, reorienting: the all-encompassing heat, the pressure, and the spongy press of Sir’s prostate against the surface of the toy...

Tony’s stomach bulged out, visible only because of Steve’s relentless rocking, like a second pulse, and Tony’s hands twitched, their tips resting against it. Gently, like Tony would break, Steve rested a hand on his stomach and pressed against the bulge.

Tony broke wide open, his eyes rolling back in his head and his cock pulsing weakly, barely any come left in him. His muscles clenched impotently against the toy, doing nothing but forcing it deeper inside and pulling JARVIS under, overwhelmed, in a storm of sensation that matched Tony’s in chaos and intensity.

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Steve wasn’t surprised that Tony passed out; it was an awful lot to ask of a body in a short amount of time. He leaned in and kissed Tony’s slack mouth, running his hands up Tony’s flanks soothingly as the last shudders of pleasure sent tension and shimmering yellow rippling over his skin. It was all about being gentle now. Tony needed looking after, and Steve was going to enjoy it.

“JARVIS, how’re we doing?” he asked, pulling back and sitting on his heels. JARVIS’ tentacles were dim, their glow comfortably muted.

“I am...distracted...”

Steve wasn’t surprised at that, either, and watched as JARVIS pulled the transceiver away from Tony’s abdomen. The blue glow of his tentacles intensified and they shifted, touching Tony all over, like Steve had, and paying plenty of attention to Tony’s rounded stomach and stretched hole.

“He is... pleased, but semi-unconscious. Sleeping, in part.”

“Okay, let’s put him to bed then, hm?” Steve prompted, stroking JARVIS’ nearest arm.

“Yes, of course,” JARVIS said, slowly loosening his coils from around Tony’s legs. Steve watched carefully as they guided Tony over onto his left side, one leg pushed up towards his chest, and the toy slipped inwards a little further, allowing Tony to close up over it. Steve found himself shivering, marveling at it. Maybe another thing for the cards?

And despite it all Steve was still hard, still feeling needy; he wanted to curl up around Tony’s back and sleep for a bit, but it seemed disrespectful to just take care of it himself, with JARVIS there and Tony asleep...

Gently, telling himself he was just checking, Steve slipped his fingers between Tony’s legs and ran his fingers over his hole, where the skin was scorching hot and sopping wet with lube and come. He pulled away reluctantly, rubbing lube between thumb and forefinger before wiping it off on the sheets.

“What does it feel like?” he mumbled, lying down behind Tony and tucking his arms around him, one palm below his belly button, feeling JARVIS underneath skin and muscle.
“Like any other form of anal penetration. More intense, overwhelming, perhaps, but fundamentally the same.”

Steve shifted restlessly, keeping his cock away from Tony’s ass, but equally unable to keep still. “...Oh.”

“Does it appeal to you? Personally?” JARVIS asked, running a tentacle down Steve’s arm, holding him and Tony together comfortably.

“I...well, yeah. No! I don’t--like it as much as Tony does, I guess. It’s nice, but I heal up fast--I mean I don’t, ah, don’t stay loose, and...it never quite stops being uncomfortable.” Bucky’d had a few words about that, Steve remembered ruefully--and also remembered how their fine tactical minds had worked it out--but all that was still a bit too raw to share. Maybe one of these days.

“I shall bear this in mind, then, should you ever wish to ‘catch’ for us. Do you requ-- would you like any toys for personal use? We can make to measure, so to speak.”

Steve squirmed, thinking of the video JARVIS had teased Tony with. "Since you two, I haven’t even needed to...take care of myself. You’re very satisfying, you know.” Steve could feel himself blushing; he’d have looked away if he wasn’t naked and blushing all the way down his spine, too. That sort of rendered hiding pointless.

“I-- you spend on average, three hours, which cannot be accounted for by sleep, alone in your bedroom a day, what precisely do you do?”

Steve shifted closer to Tony, giving in to the urge to hide after all. “I draw. I read. I still have so much to learn.”

“I had assumed that an increased libido was the reason you avoided sleeping with Sir overnight; I assumed you were unwilling to wear him out!”

“I didn’t--want to intrude. I have nightmares, and he sleeps little enough as it is!” Steve protested, because he really wouldn’t mind sleeping with them if he could sleep through the night, but he couldn’t so it was moot.

JARVIS, out of left field, smacked him across the back of the head. “You, Captain, are quite the idiot. Sir has been sleeping alone for MONTHS, when he could have had you there.”

Steve shrunk down into the mattress and JARVIS huffed at him, prodding at his arm and wriggling under it to coil around Tony. “Honestly. Humans. So quick to devalue themselves. I should have known. Captain, I have limbs throughout the penthouse now, and my sensor array in Sir's bedroom, where he is nominally supposed to sleep, is quite as good as here. I can wake you when you have a nightmare, as I do for him when he does, with whatever level of restraint, protection or distraction is appropriate.”

"I-- You wake him? He has nightmares?” Steve asked, his grip on Tony tightening until they were plastered together again, regardless of Steve’s unsatisfied cock.

"Of course he does," JARVIS said, his voice pitched somewhere between exasperation and amusement as he worked himself under Steve’s shoulders and up between his legs, coiling gently around that same cock. "And I can wake him for other reasons too, of course."

“I see--ugh!--what you’re doing, you can't distract me that eas--oh god--!” Steve shuddered, all the air whooshing out of his lungs as JARVIS started vibrating around his cock, and everywhere else too. The thick, immovably strong limbs against his back and around his thighs pulsed and rippled,
turning his spine to water, while their dexterous tips coiled mercilessly over his chest and groin.

"You were saying, Captain?" JARVIS purred into Steve's ear, smug and hot. Steve writhed against him, pushing into his grip, but couldn't find words to respond. Tony wasn't the only one affected by the toy; JARVIS' voice, his movements, were all take, trying to pull an orgasm out of him, greedy and scorching. Steve resisted, made him work for it, mouth dropping open to pant for breath.

That may have been a mistake.

JARVIS slowed down his rippling and turned deliberate, ruthlessly working Steve while the transceiver, now a mellow cyan, touched Steve's lips. Steve let his jaw fall open, because JARVIS was a fiend and could read more than just Tony's mind, and the tentacle slipped inside, the bulge smooth and hot against his tongue.

Steve didn't last long after that and JARVIS was so thorough, truly milking him dry, that even the idea of nightmares was very far from his mind.

"Rest, Captain."
Care and Feeding

Chapter Summary

Steve was beginning to appreciate how much Tony moderated himself normally. A Tony who couldn't hear breathed loudly, gasped loudly, every so often gave an unconscious rasping whimper on his inbreath that blanked Steve's mind with the urge to take care of him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

int.var:[restless@8]
[anxious@6], [hungry=>Lim.@10]
blood.sugar=>'way.low'; 2.8 mmol/L

You are awake, sir?
yeah can't sleep any more, need to eat something I guess

TIME.since.last.meal@11:13:24 hh:mm:ss

gee thanks Extremis, i really needed to know down to the SECOND

[amusement] I am sure the Captain would be pleased to retrieve food. Or shall I deliver?

[no!] [anxious] i want to move, i want to go somewhere.
let's go for a walk.
skeletalmuscular.tremors:lvl4. int.musc.tremors:lvl3. int.musc.stretch->limit
[cancel@verbose.med.statereport] i can stand, i can walk, i'm fine. feels good.

I will help.

[surprised] [pleased] i see what you're up to.
...yeah a shower sounds fucking amazing.

If you do not brain yourself on the fixtures, I will consider opening the door.

[amusement@unit_JARVIS] [pleasure]
[warmwarmwarm] [clean]
[touch] [soft]
[pleasure]
i like this towel thing. yep, approved. you should do this every time.

oxytocin=>"improved"; [GRAPH] prolactin=>"plateau"; [GRAPH]
I enjoy ‘the towel thing’ as well.

[cool] [drafty] don't tell me Dummy took ALL the clothes though. i heard him, i know he came in here. it is my tower, but i'm not going to walk through it actually naked [cold] [alone] shit, i'd get a space blanket but i don't want to wake Steve up.

[runt:coil+bind.enclosing] [surface.temp[limbs1+4]=>increment.+2deg] I am sure you would pull it off with aplomb, sir. But.... Yes, he missed these.

Steveshirt [glee!] [alonenotalone]

Allow me, [run.dress+button@shirt+unitSir]

greatgoodtimetogo [run.OPEN.exe@thisDoor]

connection_TranscieverLOST. establishing connection@GLBNet+JVSNet...connection secure, sending egg.dvc telemetry. ERROR_NOTFOUND "File 'receive.ntf' not found." RETRY--

ERRORSYS-Priority!One protocol: RETAIN CONNECTION@[UnitSir] EM.SYS critical failure! sending egg.dvc tel@unitsir

fuck. Houston we have a problem

錫鮠弊μ塆犰砲敟稜い燭靴泙靴⁕燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗燗烫
away, not wanting to test his control without warning if the Hulk had some way to sense the cloaking tech she was wearing, but—it was Stark. She hadn't seen him since pizza a few days ago, before the big charity performance.

Perfect. He'd always been observant about tech, even when he was thinking about something else, and since Extremis he was almost preternaturally sensitive. If the cloak could be detected without foreknowledge it was there, he'd do it, here in the Tower on his home ground. She fell in behind him, creeping along and keeping him just in sight.

Almost literally creeping; Stark was moving slow tonight. It was—she checked—5:37 PM, about right for him to emerge zombielike from a couple days in his workshop. Although he'd usually go straight from his 'shop to a kitchen, any kitchen, then a bed. Often his own. Sometimes just the nearest couch.

But if he was just off an engineering binge, then he had no reason to be on this floor unless he had a work area down here. He was going toward the elevators, not away; keeping a hand on the wall like his balance was shot and every so often wavering midstep, curling in on himself… Natasha sped up.

Her approach was as silent as she could make it, but he jerked to face her when she'd gotten about four meters away, eyes wide and the gold undersuit already flowing over him, creeping out from under the cuffs and collar of the untucked shirt he was wearing. That answered that question; she dropped the cloak with a shrug and strode toward him a little more slowly. "Stark, are you hurt?"

He lifted his chin unconsciously but otherwise didn't react for a second. Then he straightened, undersuit melting away, and stepped away from the wall. "Natasha. No, I'm fine." His eyes flicked to the cloaking device on her belt but he didn't step toward it, and that, more than anything, was what decided her. She walked up to him and took his chin, checking his pupils.

His hand came up and fastened on her wrist, again a beat slow. His reflexes were better than this. "Tony, do you have a head injury?" she asked. It would be just like him to hit his head in the workshop and take care of it alone instead of telling anyone.

He shook his head, but his eyes were both dilated; he was flushed and sweaty, with a hint of muscular tremor in his grip. She frowned. "...Are you drugged?" Cocaine could present like this, though she hadn't thought it of Stark, not anymore.

This time he didn't respond at all, eyes locked on her. She pushed him gently back against the wall and found the pulse under his jaw. Fast and pounding, not thready. He smelled of clean skin and shampoo and sex, and he still hadn't tried to shake her off. His lips parted slightly at the touch on his throat.

She snapped her fingers in his face. "Tony, answer me."

Stark took a sharp breath and she could see his brain trying to work, trying to think through it and give her what she wanted. "Not drugged," he said, a little less clearly than before, a wide, almost bashful grin spreading across his face.

She put it together all at once and went stiff, then deliberately moved her hand to his shoulder and stepped to the side so she wasn't trapping him against the wall. "You're under so far you don't even know which way is up," she said, not sure if she was miffed more with him or with herself. This was in his file; just because she'd never seen any sign of it was no reason to make assumptions.

Stark blinked lazily in answer, serene, and she'd almost certainly stepped in something she should have avoided, but then again he was walking down a public hall. "JARVIS, what the hell is going
"Agent Romanoff," the AI said. "Invalid query. Please narrow parameters 'what the hell' or indicate rhetorical question."

"What? Are you kidding me?"

No response. And he'd been snarkier than ever the last few months, he would never have passed up a line like that. She tried again.

"JARVIS, are you functioning within normal parameters?"

"Agent Romanoff," he said again in exactly the same tone, "an abnormally high proportion of core processing is currently occupied, cause classified as 'NTK.' Tower services reduced to core safety and security features."

"Have you been compromised? Are we under attack?"

"No defenses have been triggered. No evidence of attack. Emergency protocol would close all ongoing conn--"

JARVIS' voice cut off. Stark had been slowly sliding down the wall while JARVIS spoke, and when he hit the floor, he curled up again with a gasp and the hallway lights dimmed. The lights came back a second later, though Natasha already had pistols out and covering both ends of the hall, and was considering the merits of hoisting Stark into the far more defendable stairwell.

"--ections. Risk of collateral harm unnecessarily high. Option rejected."

The hall stayed clear. She heard, smelled, saw nothing out of the ordinary except Tony Stark glassy-eyed and drawing lines in the carpet, so she put away one pistol and ducked down next to him, texting Clint. "Hawkeye's going to double-check security," she told Tony. "I'm going to stay with you."

"Yeah, okay," he said, utterly open. He'd been walking and mostly coherent when she found him; she'd probably--almost certainly--pushed him further down by accident. He was vulnerable. She had the sudden overwhelming urge to push more, to carefully and precisely tie up old threads, find out how much of his flash was fake and how much was real. He'd fooled her worse than almost anyone but Barton.

She bit her tongue hard. He was her teammate now, not her target. She didn't have to take him apart to work with him.

Even though, a traitorous little Red Room voice pointed out, an ally you don't understand is a weapon who'll turn in your hand. Even though, she thought in her real voice, she did understand Barton now and she was glad. She'd still let Stark be safe from her, as much as anyone could be.

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She might need both hands at any second, so she kneeled back on her heels in front of him and reached for his wrist, to get his arm over her shoulder. He'd need help standing up, at least, if not walking too. "Don't," Tony said, an odd hum under his voice, and she went still.

"What is it? What's wrong?" He couldn't see her but maybe that wouldn't matter, she had her fingers against his pulse, she'd be able to tell if he started dropping.

"I can't do anything right," he mumbled into her hair, his free arm curling around her shoulder. "I should...come out of it, J can't... Feedback, cyclic overload, need to... Fix it," he said in sudden
eerie synchrony with JARVIS, their voices mingling. "I don't want to hurt him."

And there it was, just a hint of stutter in his pulse. He needed something to anchor him, and JARVIS wasn’t going to cut it. They both needed settling.

"Why do you think you might hurt him?" she said, keeping the question steady with an effort. Leave aside who was worried about hurting who; D/s was risky to everyone involved when there wasn’t weird technopathic emotion sharing. Tony Stark and his fucking surprises.

"We're in a feedback loop--thresholds raised to maximum but the peaking value exceeds--" the lights dimmed again and Tony groaned, voice human and naked again for a second. "Need a...shielded environ...need Steve. The Captain is still in the server annex."

Sounds like drop to me, Natasha thought to herself, rubbing at her temple in frustration.

Servers? The large unmarked room Clint had bitched about being unable to get to though the HVAC system, the unscannable room that would have stood out anywhere but Stark Tower, where dozens of spaces were better secured than Fort Knox. That was less than a minute away. Next to the clean room where Tony was shielded from other connections--of course that was where Tony and JARVIS would fuck, where else? She set Tony back down, easing his arms off her shoulders--

“Tony!”

Her head whipped around, but she managed to keep her weapon pointed at the floor. “Here, Steve!”

Steve jogged around the corner, his face all creased up in anxiety. “Aww shucks. Hi, Natasha. Excuse me, sorry...”

Natasha blinked and tried to keep the wide-eyes appreciation from taking over her entire face. Steve was nude. Completely. Not so much as a sheet or a scrap of underwear to conceal all that. He was blushing too, all the way down to his pecs. Dear god, he’d fill out one of Natasha's sports bras, no problem... "Not a problem," she said.

“Steevee--!”

Steve gave her an apologetic grimace and crouched in front of Tony. Crouched. Natasha backed off and pulled out her phone again. There was a reply from Clint.

Building secure; aux. systems are fine. J ok? -CB

She texted back with the all clear, eyes straying to Steve's toes, which were dug into the carpet for balance. Even his toes are perfect. She hit send, then swore when she realised she’d garbled something about toes at the end of the text, so she sent another. Proof acquired btw. You owe me $50 and Thor owes me a diamond.

"There's my shirt," Steve was saying. "Tony, are you all right? Is JARVIS?" Natasha crouched down diagonal to them, still keeping an eye out.

"He told me they're in a feedback loop. Every minute or so they both go down for a few seconds. Steve," she added, "has he subbed out with you before? Do you know what to do for subdrop?"

Steve blanched and sat down fully on the floor, where he helped Tony attempt to wedge himself into his lap by putting his arms around as much of the other man as he could reach. "JARVIS mentioned it. Yeah...he's shaking a little."
'He and JARVIS are both dropping,' she said baldly. 'Some mindmeld thing. Extremis.'

"That's a problem," Steve said. "JARVIS is...usually the one in charge. Of us."

Training kept Natasha's reaction to a stare. Steve carried on, thinking out loud.

"So we need JARVIS... Feedback loop? Tony, what do we need to do to fix the feedback?" Steve asked quietly; he did have the right idea.

Natasha stood and put her remaining weapon away, leaving the holster cap off just in case, and leaned over to get a look at Stark. He was doing better, she thought, and he'd known to cling to Steve at least.

"D... mm..." Tony struggled to get the word out, like he couldn’t find the rest of the phonemes. If he was about to say ‘dick’, Natasha was out of here.

Tony took a deep breath and tried again. "Dam...pndenv... “

“The dampeners. Yeah... I’m sorry, honey, but the annex locked behind me. We need JARVIS to get it open, I think.”

"Kitchen. Up."

"Up," Steve repeated. "The penthouse kitchen?" Tony nodded hard against his shoulder, and Steve shifted his grip, got his feet under him, and stood with Tony in his arms. A few long strides got them to the elevator Tony had been toiling toward.

Natasha got the button. No way was she going to leave them on their own, even if Steve found clothes somewhere, but he manifestly had not yet.

The lights went out again in the elevator, but it kept ascending smoothly while Stark curled up tightly, his breathing going ragged and then abruptly smoothing out as he went completely limp in Steve’s grip. Natasha raised an eyebrow at Steve, and that blush appeared again.

“Well, that was illuminating...” she mused, turning her back on them both as the elevator pulled up to their stop. “How many times does that make it for him?”

Steve shuffled, looking everywhere but her. “Umm.... heh, uh... six?” he squeaked, obviously completely mortified.

Natasha nodded, as businesslike as she could make it while marveling at that particular number. “Then he'll be getting dehydrated. Come on.”

She led the way to the kitchen, where Steve set Stark down with exaggerated care in one of the new red chairs and tucked the throw from the couch around him.

"What are you doing?" Natasha stopped Steve with a hand on his chest, then picked Tony back up herself while Steve hesitated uselessly. The armor in his bones made Tony heavy, heavier than he had any right to be, but since he wasn't actually unconscious, he followed her lead and held on as she pulled. He buried his face in her hair, almost desperately affectionate, but she didn't mean safety or comfort to him; she wouldn't trigger the hormones he needed to stabilise. At least, she thought she wouldn't. The way he was clinging suggested otherwise.

"He needs you, not a blanket. Sit," she said, punctuating it with a shove that made the chair catch Steve behind the knees. He went down easily, blinking and obedient, and she fit Tony on top of him
like a puzzle piece, the blanket going over them both, more for the sense of security than warmth. "Take his shirt off," she paused and considered the arc reactor in his chest, "unless he prefers it on. Take something off, you need more skin-to-skin."

Stark muttered something, then smirked so lasciviously she was surprised his face didn't cramp.

"If that was a comment about me finally taking off his clothes..." Natasha warned.

"Couldn't make it out, sorry," Steve lied transparently, working at Tony's buttons. "I'll take this back. He told me he doesn't like sudden touch, and doesn't like strangers seeing any details of the reactor. But he misses doing photoshoots, so he's okay with shirtless in itself."

"And why are you naked, by the way?"

"Dummy took the rest of my clothes to the laundry chute while I was sleeping. Guess he missed my shirt, it was probably...under..." Steve trailed off, remembering how the shirt had come off, if the way he looked to the side was any indication. "Then Tony stole it while he was making his break. I still don't know what..." He cajoled Tony's arms out of the sleeves one by one and pulled the other man close to him, chest to chest, leaving the shirt draped on the back of the chair. "Tony, hey, is that better?"

To Natasha's satisfaction, Tony tucked his face into the crook of Steve's neck, frowning in concentration. Another almost-violent shudder rippled up his spine.

"D'mpners," Tony muttered, once it was over. "Ceiling. J, c'mon."

"JARVIS, turn the dampeners on, please," Steve said. A second later Tony let out a high sound of relief and went boneless again.

Around them, the little mechanical whirrs and humms of JARVIS' systems started back up and Steve went a little limp himself. Natasha was starting to wonder whether Steve was more sub than she'd realised. An unfamiliar articulated limb uncoiled from the ceiling, its tip glowing bright pink, and once she checked the others' reactions and took her hand off her pistol grip, Natasha decided she wasn't surprised that it was effectively a tentacle; JARVIS was a practical kind of person, and Tony was a kinky little shit, after all. JARVIS' arms had always been great metal monstrosities, overpowered for their usual use as kitchen aid, before; this was something quite different; soft and vulnerable-looking, obviously skin safe.

JARVIS nudged along the arch of Tony's cheekbone, then brushed his hair back off his forehead, and the tentacle's touch was as delicate and gentle as you could ask for. Maybe not enough, but better.

"Tony, why did you leave the annex?" Natasha asked, gentle but firm. They hadn't stopped the downward slide; Tony's grip on Steve's shoulder was faltering now that, she realized, he didn't have to hold it together for JARVIS any more.

"...Hungry?...so I...test phase...I, I--..." Tony replied, pale and muzzy and almost concussed.

"I'd have got you food, Tony, why--" Steve cut off obediently at Nat's abrupt gesture, though his expression was confused and edging into open distress. Something in Steve's tone felt dangerous, poorly timed, and apparently her instincts still held good.

Too late, though; Tony had gone grey, his face falling and grip on Steve coming loose. The glow of JARVIS' tentacle blinked to blue, flinching back, and Steve looked devastated. Tony moved his hand, trying to grab Steve again, and looked more and more frightened when he couldn't. His loose
hand slid to Steve's lap and his gaze slipped off to the middle distance in a way so eerily like someone losing blood that Natasha checked for injuries, reflexively.

"Sir will not respond," JARVIS said. "His peripheral perfusion is radically reduced and blood sugar is dropping; he is in shock and I -- Summoning Ms. Potts from the corporate levels."

"Pepper?" Natasha said, surprised.

"We have an agreement. I am confident she will know the best way to proceed. ETA...three minutes."

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

I shouldn't have--shouldn't have opened my stupid mouth--! Stev didn't know exactly how, but he'd hurt Tony, was hurting Tony here where he was vulnerable and it was his fault, something he never wanted to do...

Seeing Pepper broke off his train of thought abruptly, because she'd looked so pleased with him when he'd asked for Tony's time off, and he'd messed it up; he'd failed to complete his mission and he'd hurt a teammate and there was no excuse, none. He looked up pleadingly--tell me what to do, need new orders, plan is FUBAR--and she looked down at them, expression too complicated to make any sense, while Steve waited with guilt bubbling up and closing his throat. She didn't say anything or look upset, she just softened from her high-heeled version of parade rest into something softer. Steve didn't know whether he was relieved or wanted her to start yelling.

JARVIS must have filled her in already; she didn't ask questions, or blink at Steve's nakedness (at least Tony's wearing clothes, at least his dignity is safe). She whispered with Natasha for a moment, and Steve hummed slightly, just enough to keep his hearing from intruding, because they had turned away and it was obviously supposed to be private-- Tony shifted, swallowing harshly, and Steve's attention was grabbed back, focusing back in as he petted Tony's hair and tried to soothe away all the lines around Tony's eyes. It was fine, Pepper was here, she'd look after Tony where Steve couldn't.

"Hey, Steve, hello Tony." Pepper perched on the edge of the chair's arm, so her hip was pressed against Tony's legs where they draped over. Her knees tucked in next to Steve's, warm and solid, and she waved her hand in front of Tony, seeing if he would focus. He looked at her with huge eyes but had difficulty tracking the motion, sluggish. Steve's hold tightened instinctively, like he could fix his mistake with muscles and push warmth back into Tony's cooling skin. It didn't work that way.

"He's stopped holding on," Steve said, keeping his voice steady by reporting the facts, and shifted his foot slightly as JARVIS coiled around his ankle and anchored them together. It felt good, better, but he couldn't return the gesture right now.

"He needs you to hold on for him," Pepper said as if it was obvious, and maybe it was. If there was one thing Tony had a history in, it was keeping his distance when he didn't want to. "Rub his arms, rub up and down his back, keep his blood flowing," she continued, leaning over and running her hand into the short hair at the nape of Tony's neck with the infinitely reassuring familiarity of a partner. Steve stayed frozen, unable to let go of Tony even to readjust--but he wanted to put his head down on her lap and get rid of all the confusion and responsibility, he really did.

"Take your other hand and--hmmm--get your fingers in his hair." She demonstrated, and Tony's eyes closed, some of the naked fear changing to a more peaceful kind of blankness. Steve managed to peel his hands up off Tony's skin and start obeying orders, rubbing his hands over Tony's knotted up shoulders. "Pull his head back," Pepper said. "Breathe on his neck, feel his pulse with your mouth. Don't restrict his motion, though; you're supporting him, cradling him, while you take what you
Pepper coaxed his head down with cool fingers on his cheek, until Steve could feel the blood thumping under Tony's delicate skin. It felt right to arch Tony's neck, to take the weight of his head in his hand. It made him feel protective, strong, like he'd be able to stop it if something was about to happen to Tony. "Let him feel the movement of your chest, deep, even... That's it, he'll copy it, big and slow...there you go," Pepper breathed.

Steve's chest pressed against Tony's side as he breathed in. Tony gasped and hiccupped a set of little, uneven breaths, then exhaled shakily all the way out and back in, in time with the air Steve trickled over his skin.

As they came into sync Tony tensed and relaxed and tensed again without coordination, dropping out of synchrony more than once before clawing his way back to Steve's steady rhythm. He'd manage for a few breaths, then something would get in the way--cramp, or one of those full-body shudders--and he'd lose it again. Pepper pressed down on Steve's shoulder; keep going. Tony's elbow thumped Steve in the chest, more by accident than intent; Steve straightened out the arm gently and trapped it between their chests. Tony didn't look so scared as he had a minute ago, and Steve felt better with Tony's pulse throbbing under his lips and the taste of his skin on his tongue. Each time they lined up and Tony's breathing evened out, it lasted a little longer, and Tony quieted as whatever instinct had been making him flail was subsumed.

Eventually he breathed easy, in time with Steve, and stayed mostly relaxed except for long judders Steve felt all the way to his bones. Then, just when Steve was starting to think he was okay again, he started shivering; small, invisible tremors at first, that built to full blown 'jumped in an icy lake.' Steve looked to Pepper for what he'd done wrong, but she was smiling.

"That's good, Steve, you can relax," Pepper said, petting the back of Steve's head, eyes intent.

"It's good?" Steve asked. He probably didn't look as scared as Tony but by God this was terrifying. Pepper gave him a long look too.

"You're doing fine," she said. "He'll be all right, Steve, you'll all be fine. This is not your fault." She gently pushed his head back in Tony's direction and he went with a relieved shudder. "Is this the first time he's dropped since he's been with you?"

"Yes. He only-- He hasn't subbed out very many times, and we've been with him," Steve said against Tony's skin.

"Not only that, but this represents the first drop since he obtained Extremis, Ms. Potts; I believe you know his history prior better than I," JARVIS said. "He and I find a great deal of satisfaction in the closeness we have gained, but connection through Extremis cannot physiologically substitute for touch, and cannot take him to subspace."

"Thus your arrangement. And those, I suppose," Pepper said, eyeing the tentacle coiled around Steve's bare ankle and the small transceiver-tipped one lying alongside Tony, on the blanket. Then she smiled. "What you three have done is amazing, understand? I want you to listen to me, really listen. This was going to happen no matter what. I'm stunned it didn't happen the first time you got him to subspace; you must have taken very good care of him. Was what you did today pretty intense?"

"Yes-- Did we--" Steve said, horrified.

"Stop right there," she snapped. "What did I just say? Is this your fault?"
"No. No, ma'am," Steve whispered against Tony's throat.

"Did I say anything could prevent it happening?"

"You said it would happen no--no matter what."

"Good," she said, mollified. "You were listening. Now I want you to internalize it. No one can be blamed for this. Subdrop can be triggered by a bad post-scene moment or an abusive top, but it also happens by itself; the better the scene, the further there is to fall. It can happen during a good scene, or it can happen hours or days afterward."

"He talked to Ty Stone on Sunday night," Steve said, thoughtfully. Her gaze sharpened on him.

"So you said. We can go over that later," she said. "Was there anything else different about today? Anything I should know?"

"Extremis. It mediates his senses and perceptions. Its attempts to compensate for his altered state may unfortunately cause him more difficulty recovering than usual. There is also the reason for the feedback loop," JARVIS said. "If you would look at your phone, Ms. Potts."

Pepper checked the screen. Her ears slowly went pink. "This is-- he's still, ah, 'carrying' this?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"He's a very lucky man," Pepper murmured. Natasha, on the other side of the kitchen, looked like she was having a quick and brutal wrestle between professional restraint and professional curiosity, but didn't move to see the screen. Steve was furtively glad; the gentle bulge of the toy was pressed against Steve, only just noticeable with Tony cradled against him like this and full of shivers, and it made Steve feel tremulous and excited, possessive even through the guilt. He had no doubts that it was the reason Tony had been so quick to go under even hours after they'd finished, because while it was still there they weren't done.

JARVIS had said it caused the feedback too, but that was fixed now. With the dampeners running, the environment here ought to be the same as the server annex, and it hadn't hurt Tony or JARVIS there. JARVIS would tell them right away if it needed to come out. Steve held on to that and breathed out slowly, telling himself to relax.

Tony's pulse had slowed a little; his breathing was deeper, despite the shivering. He moved slightly, opening and closing his hands, and swallowed, throat bobbing under Steve's cheek.

"Pep," Tony croaked, and Pepper leaned over the arm of the chair and smiled at him, just visible in the corner of Steve's eye, cupping his chin.

"You're tracking again," she said softly, her fingers smoothing over a rumple in his goatee. "Hi, Tony. You'll be okay. You'll all be okay," she said, her voice like...like that soft yellow the clouds go before sunset. The one that took six different colours of yellow and orange to mix up. "Now," she tapped Tony's cheek. "I want you to listen and answer yes or no. Can you do that?"

Tony stared at her, eyes wide, then dipped his gaze like a nod.

"That's good. Steve," Pepper said, "keep holding on, keep his head pulled back like I told you. Tony, you can answer with Extremis if you want. You have permission. Do you understand?"

Tony's gaze dipped again, and the honesty-light flickered red as well. "He says yes," JARVIS reported.
"Good. Tony, you dropped. I want to get you back to a stable place, so you can come up slowly and
cleanly. Steve and JARVIS are going to stay. May I Dom you, and show them how I do it?"

Tony's eyes flicked around, the transceiver flaring pink again. "I'm right here," Steve said. "I'm
staying right here. Anything you need."

Tony screwed his eyes shut. "He says yes," JARVIS said. "He also blames himself." Steve's
stomach churned, punching the breath out of him. He closed his eyes and he nosed his way in closer
to Tony, shaking his head slightly.

Pepper put a hand on the back of his neck and he stilled, focusing on Tony's breath and pulse. She
shook Tony's chin gently. "You're not going to think. You're going to listen. I'm going to make it so
you don't have to think. Do you understand?"

"...Yes."

Pepper let go and leaned further down, breathing on the other side of Tony's neck from Steve, nose
and lips just touching his skin in an almost-kiss. Tony shivered harder, breath hitching raggedly. "Do
you understand?" Pepper said softly.

"Yes," Tony repeated more firmly, his own voice filling the speakers.

"Good, Tony, you're doing very well. One more question. I want Natasha to stay, to watch and to
help keep you safe. May Natasha stay?"

Steve traded a quick glance with Natasha; she shrugged pragmatically and indicated a pan on the
stove. She'd stay if Pepper wanted, as far as Steve was concerned but… Help keep Tony safe? Steve
didn't know if he liked the sound of-- Would Tony be in danger?

"Steve. Breathe. Relax. Do you trust your team?"

"Of course," Steve said automatically.

"Then he will be safe. I'm not going to let him get hurt. Neither is Tasha."

"...Okay," Steve said. "Okay." If she put it like that… He felt abruptly safe himself, for the first time
since the annex had gone pitch-dark, all JARVIS' limbs bending down limp to the floor, and he'd
groped around and realized Tony wasn't there.

"...keep me safe?" came through the speakers, small and confused. "She already... Yeah. Yes."

"Thank you, Tony," Natasha said, her back to them as she put mugs giving off wisps of steam
together, their handles towards her hand.

Pepper caught the motion and smiled. "Steve, would you help Tony sit up more? You can ease up
while he's verbal for a few minutes, but keep steadying his head. Don't let him hold it up for
himself." Steve obeyed and got Tony, shivering uncontrollably, to a mostly upright position with his
head resting securely in the crook of Steve's neck. By that time Natasha had brought over four mugs
and the heavenly scent of hot cocoa, made with milk and heated on the stove.

Steve hadn't thought anyone still made it that way. His throat closed for a second around a pang of
gratitude as he took one and tasted it to make sure it wasn't too hot, then held it up and helped Tony
take little sips. First just of the sweet, milky foam, to get him used to the idea, then of the creamy
cocoa once the tip of his tongue showed, licking his lips clean. Steve went slowly; Tony's teeth
clicked against the mug and he couldn't seem to tell where it was.
"JARVIS tells me both of you run hot nowadays," Pepper said. Steve nodded and helped Tony to another drink, feeling his throat work against his wrist. "That isn't anything new for you, Steve, but Tony can't blow off meals like he used to, not without his glycogen running out and tanking his bloodsugar levels. A good rule is that any time one of you eats, the other should too. That way you'll be in sync and you can use the way you feel to estimate what Tony needs, though even so, he probably needs to eat more often than you. He rarely gets a full meal down at once."

Steve blushed into Tony's hair, feeling vindicated. "I have a card-- uh, we can do that."

"Great," Pepper said, smiling down at them knowingly and making Steve's blush reach his ears. They finished their cocoa, Steve savoring his while Tony took a break, until Tony started poking him insistently for the rest. He had bony elbows, but the animation coming back to him was worth it.

"Now, to do this properly," Pepper said, setting her mug down and putting a cocoa-warmed hand on Steve's shoulder, her thumb resting against the point of his jaw and making him raise his gaze to her face. "We need Tony to come up a little bit so that he's better reconnected to his body. Steve, your job is to keep him feeling stable. Go back to what you were doing before; that's a good position. Keep one hand in his hair, and keep breathing with him. Let his lizard-brain know you're there."

Steve nodded, letting her take away the empty mugs and wrapping Tony back up in his arms, keeping control of his head the whole time. Tony did two or three rounds of the same slow writhe at the touch of Steve's mouth under his jaw, his pulse picking up and then dropping down a little slower than it had been before as he quieted.

"JARVIS, find us something so interesting that Tony will be diverted for a few minutes," she ordered, touching the transceiver and looking over at the stove, which blinked green at her. "Tony, your job is to work on what JARVIS says and no thinking. Your body will take care of itself, understand?"

Steve let Tony nod and the speakers said "Yes," in Tony's voice, a little stronger and surer than before.

"I believe I have just the thing," JARVIS added. Holograms appeared a few feet above them. Steve kept his attention on Tony, but watched from the corner of his eye as they flicked through a dizzying series of designs to settle on something blindingly intricate and only half-finished. Tony focused, coming on point the way he did when there was work, and the design zoomed in two more levels--wow, the detail--then started slowly sketching itself in, red and blue specks moving over it. Tony could work on at least three places at once, even with his eyes closed; it was mesmerising. No, five places, even as red and blue argued over one branch, drawing and redrawing it until they settled on a compromise.

Tony slowly relaxed against him and Steve did too, letting go of tension he didn't know he had. Pepper moved to the adjoining chair, talking quietly to JARVIS and keeping a close watch on both of them, while Natasha clinked in the kitchen, putting things away.

Steve roused when Pepper put her hand on his shoulder. He'd never stopped rubbing Tony's arms and back, but his internal clock said something like five minutes had gone by, when surely it hadn't been that long. She smiled down at him. "Oh, Steve, you're a gem. What are we going to do with you?"

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Tony tried to hold on to the integrated-circuit schematic but JARVIS eased him down and out of it, locking and saving the file, and it receded out of reach along with the rest of the 'ticklers' folder from
his private server.

!! [notdone], he protested.

We do not have to finish it now, and the exercise's immediate function is complete, J reassured him, a graph of blood sugar levels pinging in the corner of his awareness. Ms. Potts requires your attention. The same way he'd pulled Tony out of the schematic, he reintroduced the physical sensory streams to active consideration, bumping their saliency levels one by one, despite the fact that Tony had been ignoring his futzing analog systems quite well on his own.

Steve breathed long and hot and moist on his neck and his eyelashes brushed against Tony’s jaw, alive and immediate, and Tony jerked in his hold, muscle tremors restarting as he checked back in all at once. The toy settled in his gut suddenly felt enormous, despite the delicious heat of Steve’s palm settled over it, and Tony ached to be back in the server annex, with nothing to worry about except wheedling food out of JARVIS. How could he have been so selfish--?

Illogical, pointless guilt rose up again, the tension tightening his stomach and making the pressure of the toy inside him almost too much to bear, almost painful rather than heady. He opened three more channels for a panicky, reflexive deathgrip on JARVIS, writing a quick-and-dirty set of functions to alert both of them if JARVIS started getting sucked into another sensory feedback loop. JARVIS accepted them graciously and redoubled his own hold, setting up constant low-level status updates, then gently pushed Tony's attention back to the physical. Again. The cramping in his stomach had eased, though, and his inner muscles quivered, over-used and loose as he relaxed again.

...He'd gotten a deathgrip on the chair arm and on Steve too, while he was at it; he made himself ease off. Steve turned his face slightly, but didn't try to peel up Tony's clumsy hand from the back of his head.

"--doesn't want you to stop," came through momentarily clear in Pepper's voice, though the auditory buffer kept getting rewritten by a mishmash of other sensory streams. PepperPepperPepper yes, she knew, she understood. The chair was under him, Steve was warm under him and JARVIS was inside him, but it still felt like the ground was gone and there was nothing there but a yawning fall back to that freezing empty noplace.

He opened a fourth channel to JARVIS just for the steady, subliminal reassurance of its keepalive ping. This wasn't--he felt the ping too, tapping on his skin, but his filters were up, tactile input should come through analog senses only. Tony ran a temporary remapper, but the algorithm floundered in confusion and made the crosstalk even worse; he was so far off baseline Extremis couldn't recognize what to calibrate against. He'd have to sort through his inputs manually before he could even follow the conversation. Fuck!

It is a secondary issue, but becoming worse, JARVIS said with an undercurrent of worry in the buffer. Your input channels are intermixing more as you become more aware.

i think--Extremis is self-correcting, trying to stabilize my analog systems, but it can't. it's drifted way off the norms, getting farther. i can barely make sense of what it's giving me.

Tony squeezed his eyes closed and his field of vision bloomed with unnaturally bright static, auditory or tactile or RF-spatial overflow data that his visual system tried in vain to find coherent shapes and edges in. Presented to the wrong processing flow, valid data turned to garbage… Normally, condensing, weighting and presenting what it gathered was one of Extremis' strengths. He hadn't realized there was--so much.

Pepper--probably Pepper--said something; he filtered like mad and caught the end of it.
"---thing?"

Ms. Potts wishes to know if I can do anything, JARVIS said. At least their connection was clean and understandable. Tony let his frustration pour into the empathy buffer. A bit of synaesthesia was normal, taken care of by remapping; it had never been this bad before. If it got much worse, he'd be--all sensory data corrupted past retrieval--locked in his head, with only JARVIS able to reach him--

Tony breathed deep, trying to suppress the wave of panic that threatened to swamp him, the adrenaline that made him shake harder.

Extremis has never attempted to compensate for subdrop before. Sir, I believe the sensory confusion will resolve on its own when you stabilize. I will attempt to reduce unnecessary inputs in the meantime.

JARVIS assumed root access and slipped into Tony's registry. It wasn't as intrusive as JARVIS’ vast presence in his body, but it was somehow more sweetly intimate, more dangerous. Tony felt pain and realized he was biting his lip.

[y], Tony selected. He would still have the channels with JARVIS. The white noise of the dampeners fell away, leaving stunned quiet for a second before the other streams swelled in a cacophony to fill it, no longer buffered by the neutral hiss. JARVIS disabled his more exotic digital senses as well: heavy-particle detection and Geiger counter, magnetic compasses, radar and other echolocation; Tony wasn't using those right now anyway.

stop asking for permissions... Tony whined. He didn't want to be blind and deaf, not even for a little while, but it would be good for him, and it wasn't Tony's job to decide what was good for him right now. That, he dumped in the buffer for J to peruse.

A vague sense of disapproval pinged across. Very well, then. Safeword protocol.

Tony groaned and squirmed. JARVIS’ toy shifted inside, and Tony was stunned back into stillness as Steve’s palm skimmed over his stomach, pressing just lightly on the bulge, possessive. That was the point though, wasn’t it; Steve and J and Pepper would decide what was good for him, even if it meant asking for consent, constantly.

i trust you, he said instead. you'll relay anything i need to hear?

So. Tony didn't have to...didn't have to decide any more, could give up frantically combing through data. JARVIS was safe; Tony tested the feedback-alert functions and they were fine, they were enabled.

Tony selected [y] again, and gave up the reins.

It was...such a weight off, how had things gotten so heavy? He felt lightheaded.

Very good, sir, JARVIS whispered, withdrawing from his registry as gently, as carefully, as he'd once untangled himself from J.

With auditory and visual gone the sensory streams were manageable, more like a river constrained...
inside its banks than a tsunami covering everything. He ran the remapper again and it completed successfully, clearing the spill-over static from his eyes and ears, leaving quiet and the dark and the lush cloth-and-skin textures, the press of JARVIS inside peaking and ebbing with the motion of his whole body as Steve breathed, the taste of cocoa. The slick heat of Steve's mouth on his throat, the throb of his heartbeat against Steve's lips, the sharp planes of teeth resting just against his skin.

Steve breathed out again and Tony shuddered in reflex, feeling Steve pull his head back a little more, hold him tight through the contradictory reactions and through the tension fluttering him against the smooth surface of the toy.

Was it really less than a minute since JARVIS closed the file? How would--how long would--

_It is not your job to predict right now,_ JARVIS said, and blocked his timesense.

Tony shivered hard, breath hitching. Subspace might make him not care about time passing, but he had always been aware, always had an accurate x-axis for the dozen or so values he tracked and projected.

He shut down the running plots. They would have another gap now, to go with the gaps from rebooting.

_Ms. Potts inquires after your wellbeing._ {copy.AUDITORY::Unit_J->Unit_P("He is distressed, but not in pain.")}

_am i being loud?_ Tony whispered, aware of a whine in his throat and trying to swallow it down.

_Do not pretend you have control over that at the moment,_ JARVIS said implacably. Tony flinched, but it was a good flinch, another layer of control and anxiety peeled up and given away, and it left him limp against Steve.

Steve shifted, his chest resonating as he said something, then paused, then said something else. Tony waited, but JARVIS didn't relay it. They were talking, and Tony wouldn't know what they were saying unless JARVIS thought he should. The brittle, pleasant shock of it rippled up his spine. Not a bad feeling, but not as good as it should be either; he was doing it wrong, he was doing everything wrong--

Steve rumbled again and kept going, short words, soft and repetitive, his chest flexing long and easy. Tony tried to get control of his breathing, tried to smooth it back out and stop the clenching of nerves from pressing the toy against sensitive spots. The corner of his eye started twitching, ticklish and infuriating, and he tried to bring a hand up to rub it, but--

_--blankettangledcoldair--_ couldn't get the coordination together to do it, not without tensing up and being bad.

Something touched his eyelashes, brushing against them. Tony jerked back into Steve’s bicep and screwed his eyes shut, all his effort to relax gone in an instant and his stomach cramping. Steve stilled, his pecs tensing under Tony’s shoulder. Oh of _course_... Steve, it was Steve; the hand on his stomach was gone, leaving the sensitized skin to the soft caress of the blanket they were wrapped in. Tony loosened with a long exhale and let his eyes drift open again, blinking a little; Steve lowered his--his hand, radiating a band of warmth on Tony's face before it actually touched; outside edge along his brow, meaty thumb and fingerpads on his cheekbones. Tony's eyelashes brushed up and down on Steve's palm and Steve said something else, washing Tony's throat in warm air. Tony’s eye stopped twitching as he shakily breathed out, and relaxed a little more. Blindfolded twice.

_He says you are beautiful like this._
"You are. The way you look...when you give something up...it knocks the breath out of me. You carry the world on your back like you don't even notice the weight, but then...the way you look when it's gone..."

Steve moved his hand from Tony's eyes and ran it back into his hair, rubbing at his temples, then further and gripped the back of Tony's neck, working out some of the tightness where skull rested on spine. Tony leaned back into it, feeling sound in his throat and a spike in the ever-present heat of JARVIS inside him. His head was throbbing with a tension headache he'd barely noticed, but where Steve's hands went there was a marvelous sparkling cessation of pain.

Someone else touched his face; smaller, cooler hands, Pepper hands; recognisable enough that he wasn’t startled. She was pinpoint accurate, running a knuckle up between his eyes and her thumbs under his cheekbones, fingertips pushing in below his ears, at the hinge of his jaw. He tried to go completely boneless, for her. How much he succeeded was hard to tell, given the shuddering edge-of-too-much press of JARVIS, but each smooth rub of her fingers made it a little easier. Her skin smelled of perfumed soap and leather; not what he usually associated with Pepper, but still recognisably her, comforting and reliable.

Her hands moved down to his neck, rubbing under his chin against the rough scratchiness of a night's stubble, cupping his throat from the front to the back and returning to the front again. Steve moved aside, kissing his way up to just below the hinge of Tony's jaw, and Pepper rested her palms on both sides of Tony's neck over his pulse, rubbing the moist mark of Steve's mouth into his skin.

One of her hands lifted, touched his cheek. Lifted again; Steve squirmed slightly, and then something else cool and stiff-soft touched his cheek. Tony turned into it as much as he was able, feeling with his lips and nose: the fuzzy side of a leather band at least two inches wide, the source of the leather smell on Pepper's fingers. Pepper drew it along his face, letting him feel the length. It was thick, quality leather, supple but strong, with an edge rounded enough not to cut him. They came to a buckle sooner than he expected, cool flat metal against his lips while she wrapped the tongue of the buckle in her fingers and held it up away from his face; no points or corners that could dig in. A shape that he recognized... He licked the buckle and it tasted of copper and oil. She'd cut down one of his belts. That's why she was the CEO. Want rippled through him, echoed in the shift JARVIS made inside, and Tony really did go limp, his head tilting back over the cradle of Steve's hand, his throat bare.

Pepper ran the unornamented end of the belt down to his throat, his adam's apple, and paused with her hands on his pulse again. He must have passed the check, because she reached a hand under his head and drew the strap through; cool leather cupped the back of his neck and lifted his head slightly, warming quickly to his skin. She was fussy about positioning the buckle, but once she had, she drew it through and buckled deftly and it was just right, not so loose it would shift and not so tight it restricted breathing or swallowing. Not so tight she couldn't... slip slim fingers under it... She fisted her hand, knuckles digging into his throat, and he whited out, feeling his own heartbeat against the collar, feeling his throat vibrate under her hand. He was past the point of anything so mundane as an orgasm, but his inner muscles clenched anyway, making the toy shift deliciously and press upwards, into his belly.

She didn't let up, calm and consistent. Oh Pepper...

As he got used to the sweet certainty of the restriction, he pulled himself together and twisted to the
Steve's hand had loosened in his hair, and he was breathing faster. Steve was... Steve was extremely turned on and Steve was not wearing pants, and how long had this been going on?! Tony couldn't reach with his hands, but he nudged his hip back against the superboner and shimmied against Steve.

Pepper trailed a hand up over his chin and pinched his nose shut, and Tony drew a sharp breath through his mouth before she let go. She tugged the collar, shaking his head back and forth gently, and he felt cold again, apprehension hitting him like a sack of bricks when normally it would roll right off.

*Ms. Potts says that this is about you, not about him. He will wait. First you must obey.*

That was, that was valid. Steve nodded against his hair and pulled him closer, held him tighter against Tony's shivers. Steve's cock was warm and heavy on his hip through his thin sweatpants, and Tony let himself relax back into being held. The collar was insistent, urgent, impossible to ignore; he could still feel every throb of his pulse on the leather, just like...he shifted, spiking awareness of the toy inside him, feeling his pulse there too in inner muscles stretched wide around it, slightly off-sync from the pulse in his throat. Held, claimed, reminded at both ends. Steve mouthed along the edge of the collar and Pepper skritched her free hand through his hair, and Tony felt a lazy curl of pleasure, of being wanted and giving them what they wanted, lightening the anxiety.

Pepper finished; her hand on the collar tightened and she tugged, firm with command.

*Sit up.*

Tony breathed hard and floundered a little until Steve cupped his elbows, giving him a firm surface to push against. He pushed himself up under his own power with only a little help from the collar, then clung dizzily to the chair arm, muscles shaky with the remnants of shock and jerking with the shifting pressure of his body on the toy. The blanket wasn't covering all of him anymore and the air was cold on his bare back, no longer being warmed on Steve.

*Lift your left arm out straight in front of you...now your right.*

Tony obeyed instructions and someone--Natasha?--poked his arms through sleeves, bunching the rest of a sweatshirt up against his chest. It was thick and soft and fitted and warm, a wool or synth-wool from his closet.

Pepper pulled his head forward, curling him up. She switched hands on the collar, putting her other hand through the neck of the sweatshirt first, and three or four hands pulled the shirt over his head and tugged it down into place. The fibers bounced his body-heat back immediately. *Warm.* Instead of giving him a chance to luxuriate in it, though, Pepper gave another firm tug on the collar.

*Now stand up.*

Tony felt like sobbing.

*i can't-- [notfair] don't, don't ask me to do that, I'll fail*

*You must bear it, sir. Let us prove that we will catch you, we will not let you fall, we will not be disappointed.*

"This isn't a trap, Tony, it's all right to stumble, it's not a failure," he heard Pepper say softly, relayed over the network. "Think of it like iterative development. What's the worst that could happen? You'll sit back on Steve. He can take it. But we can't make your legs straighten, we can't get your feet under you, you have to do it."
You have to give us the reins; we will not simply take from you, as you are now. You must retain agency, despite submission. JARVIS let his concern diffuse through the buffer, the need to proceed carefully, the determination to see what could be built--rebuilt--from this too.

Tony shuddered. It was goddamn hard work, subbing for Pepper. He didn't want this much responsibility, he wanted to fall deep into subspace, the warm kind where there was sex and Steve and JARVIS... Apprehension clogged his throat, though, because he'd just come from there, they'd pulled him up from a deep place and it hadn't been warm at all. But he had to try, because even failing wasn't worse than not obeying. He loved them and they were worthy of it and if they asked, he had to try.

His legs felt like uncured silicone, limp and uncoordinated, but he put his feet on the floor. After lying on Steve's living, breathing body, the solidity of the cool wood was a shock that ricocheted up his bones, fixing him in place as proprioception fed into spatial modeling with the certainty of 'up' and 'down.' His hands clenched on the arm of the chair as he curled his toes on the parquet, and then Steve's hands registered, rubbing at his biceps and the back of his shoulders. Yes. I'm trying. Please don't let me fall--

Tony let go of the chair, giving up the solidity in favour of comfort and grabbing for Steve instead. Their fingers laced together, Tony's hands palm-down, and okay, I can do this.

Slowly, one leg at a time, with Pepper's guidance on the collar and Steve's strength under his hands, he gained his feet. Centered, balanced, standing, and oh god the toy was huge as his muscles worked around it. He tried to ignore it, tried to stand comfortably. This was proof there was floor under his feet and not a chasm, not even if he took a step--dizzy, shit! He staggered and someone--probably Steve--kept him from leaning too far, brought him back to center and kept him there until his inner-ear horizontal started matching the angle of the real floor again. Tony swayed in place but stubbornly kept his legs straight, not folding up the way the way every muscle in his body wanted to.

Pepper kept a firm, sure grip on the collar and that helped hugely, because he also wanted to follow that grip, follow it anywhere without question. Her free hand fluttered over his shoulder, his chest, the way she did when she praised him. [please?] he asked J, and heard her voice too, warming him like summer sun. "You're doing so well, Tony. It's hard for you, but you took a chance just like I asked. You always put your whole self on the line. That took me a long time to understand."

Steve made the circle of his arms bigger until he wasn't touching Tony anymore, but he was a warm presence around and behind. Tony shivered but stood still.

*Step forward. Move your right foot first.*

The first step was hard because it was into the unknown, his mental map slowly rotating out of alignment and making him want to lean to the right, corrected and re-corrected by the collar. The third and fourth and fifth were hard because there were obstacles, other chairs and the coffee table and fucking lamps and things, somewhere around here. But he didn't hit any of them, and after that he was utterly unable to tell where he was or where he was going. Pepper didn't let him pause; the world narrowed to the pull of the collar, the sweet discomfort of the toy rubbing inside him, and the floor under his bare feet. His balance was in-and-out, and twice he took unplanned sidesteps that had him brushing into things he couldn't recognize, hauled shaking back on course by an unknown number of hands.

Wood, rug wood rug rug wood woodwoodwood tile, cold tile, cold on every step…!

Pepper pushed him, the knuckles in his throat a clear signal, and Tony stopped. He was breathing hard, his heart going fast. He swallowed to feel the collar better. He wanted to run his fingers over it,
cup his hand around Pepper’s and touch her in return, but no one had told him to touch, so his hands stayed relaxed by his side.

*There is a backless wooden counter stool behind you, sir.*

Pepper pushed harder and Tony backed up, jerking slightly at the touch of rails on his ass and the backs of his calves, the edge of a circular seat at the small of his back. He jittered, half of him already pushed back down by the collar and the silence to a place without predictions, half of him still unsure what to do, trying to anticipate and deathly afraid of getting it wrong.

Pepper pushed in and up, into the soft skin under his jaw, tipping his head back. Tony went with it, grabbing for the stool’s seat behind him as she pushed him off balance, bending him backward over the stool. Was that what she wanted? No. *Up.* She wanted him to *sit* on it. Oh shit, shit shitshit. His fingers went tight, probably white-knuckled on the seat of the stool; it felt a hundred meters tall, it was backless, oh god.

*I can’t!*

His fear poured into the buffer, fear of *falling*, balanced above an abyss, anchorless with nothing to hold him, the edge he walked every day and that *never* got easier, not in the bright empty lights and not in the dark when he woke up shivering and alone. He’d fallen *up* into a hole in the sky and found his death there unsurprised and waiting, the same long dark drop as the bottom of a bottle, the same siren song. He’d been a stupid kid, he’d looked into the abyss and it had looked back, and it had his number. Someday he’d mess up again like he had so many times, someday he’d be weak and it was waiting.

*I don’t want to fall,* he said hysterically, trying to explain, and he was doing it wrong, he was disobeying but *I don’t want to fall!*

Pepper let go—Pepper *let go*—and then someone tugged him straight again, someone wrapped him *hard* in warmth, letting him shake against them while the panic slowly eased off, eased down.

*SteveSteveSteveSteve, what do we do--i can't, i, what should i--show me what--what do i need--*

*Food, touch, stability, trust.*

*you're biased--*

*I most certainly am not. We are here, sir. You are not alone! We will prove it as many times as you need. Now SIT.* The shakes fell away and he started breathing again, with JARVIS’ utter faith running through him, his ruthlessly uncompromising determination looming over him like that., and Steve’s warm strength all around him.

Tony took a deep breath and felt for the seat, clutching Steve with his other arm. The stool suddenly didn’t seem so high, with JARVIS’ voice booming through Tony’s body, the signal resonating in his spine and thrumming in his gut. There was a footrail *there,* and he kept Steve for balance and pushed up on it before he could have second thoughts.

Steve guided his hips for him, curled a strong arm around his waist, and kept it there as Tony bent to sit. The world wobbled a bit; without contact with the floor, Tony’s origin plane was moving around as his inner ear failed to stabilise, but Steve kept him from falling.

*oh, oh, idiot, he'd never let me fall wouldn't couldn't too nice too kind stupid…!*

*Do be quiet, sir; have I ever told you how much I dislike your internal self-recriminations?*
He had, and Tony used Extremis to suspend the stream of thought, shuddering as it left the silence inside his head ringing. He gingerly let his weight off his arms, settling onto the seat, and the toy punched the air out of his lungs again *good good so good, pepper i love you oh god*. Tony curled forward, feeling another pair of hands--*pepper*--light on his back, his voice humming in his throat as he moaned, and Steve propped him up, tucking Tony's head--ahh, fuck, his whole body weight on the seat of the stool drove the toy deeper, higher in his body. He could feel JARVIS shuddering, using Extremis to ripple its surface, to make Tony's muscles soften and surrender. It shifted again at the change in pressure while he was still rigid with shock at the sensation, and he jerked helplessly, relying completely on Steve to keep him from falling. All reference points were gone, he *could* have fallen, would he even be able to tell? But Pepper was at his back and Steve was still there all around him and JARVIS was all through him, so sure, so pleased, and Tony felt himself moving, slotted, clicking back into place. He was safe, he wasn't alone, this was *right*.

Tony was making noises, he could feel them, loud and embarrassing and wanton, and he wanted to *stop*, but he couldn't, he could barely tell he was making them, so he tried to muffle them in Steve's shoulder, but *oh god Steve is naked he's been naked this whole time what does pepper think of that natasha's seen it before but all of that on display and isn't he pretty pepper?*

His grip on Steve tightened, and he wanted to feel all that under his tongue, and it was *right there* under his lips, so he couldn't even make himself hesitate. Tony bit the warm smooth skin hard, medium-hard, and Steve's arms tightened around him, pressing him against Steve's chest, and accepting the biting like he *liked it*. *card, need a card, write this down, make a note...*

But then Steve was pulling back despite the lovely tremor in his muscles, and Pepper tugged the collar, made Tony sit up straight and hold the toy as deep as it would go. Tony's lips were wet, his mouth hanging open in hope that Pepper might let him have some Steve back, like a nipple, a nipple would be *great*-- But Steve just wiped his mouth carefully, and pushed it closed, thumb running over Tony's cheekbone and tilting his head for a soul-stealing but chaste kiss.

In the dark and the quiet, everything was that much more intense, and even though this was out of necessity, it was *good*, he wanted to put this on a card too...

Steve's hands shifted on his body, the one on his side shifting up to his shoulder, skating over sensitive ribs and dragging the soft fabric of Tony's sweatshirt over his nipples. *not fair it's wool it should not be erotic,* Tony babbled at JARVIS as a tremor rattled through them. JARVIS declined to comment.

Slowly, *telegraphing*, Tony realised, Steve ran his hands down Tony's arms, lingering at elbow and wrist, exerting comfortable pressure that kept Tony settled. Gently, he flattened Tony's hands out, undoing his white-knuckled grip on the stool, and pressed them to--*cool flat smooth* marble--a *countertop* to Tony's left.

*plane of origin acquired*[calibrating postural variables]*...*

Tony's balance stabilised and he straightened, the stool turning under him until he was facing the counter, his right shoulder against Steve, a big warm hand on his back and Pepper's cool grip keeping him straight and centered. *yes better*. This was *right* too. Tony spread his hands to shoulder width, fingertips dragging on the marble, and settled into the position.

JARVIS dropped the feel of a question into the buffer, and Tony sent back that feeling of security. The overwhelming terror from before--his old ugly fears all wrapped up in the jarring newness of a portal flashback--wasn't *gone*; it had reasons, it didn't stem from nothing in the first place. But here and now, in this situation, he had *up and down and team* and he was no longer afraid.
Slowly, the faint sensation of radiant heat from Steve’s body retreated, and though Steve’s fingertips trailed over his back and lingered on his elbow, eventually he had backed away completely. [nearby?] Tony queried JARVIS wordlessly, and yes, Steve was still close, same room, same space. The smell of ozone from the cloaking device marked the faint warmth replacing Steve as Natasha. He’d have to--

JARVIS loomed.

--look into that later.

Deceptively delicate and warm fingers threaded into the leather at the back of his neck, next to Pepper’s, cinching the collar tight enough to cut off his air during the transition from Pepper to Natasha. She had him; she’d hold onto him while Steve and Pep were...over there.

Okay. That, Tony could be. Do. Nothing, unless Nat said.

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“Stevie? Hey, come on, we need to get everyone fed,” Pepper said gently, resting a hand on Steve’s bare shoulder. He was still naked, the blanket that had been protecting his modesty left behind on the chair in the breakfast nook, and he was almost curled around Tony, his head crowding near Tony’s shoulder and his lips pressed to the leather of the collar, breathing it in. But he heard her and straightened a little bit, some of Cap coming back into his demeanor, and eventually nodded and took a reluctant step back. Natasha filled in the space seamlessly, silent but looking at Pepper for instructions.

"Just do your usual, 'Tasha, you'll be perfect." They traded places and Pepper hustled Steve around the counter as Natasha settled in against Tony's back. There were pants, which he’d want when they started cooking, but the glazed look on his face said maybe he’d need telling to put them on. Hopefully without embarrassing him too much. The point of the four-day break was to give Tony’s brain time to work through this kind of thing, after all, and Steve might as well enjoy it too.

“God help us, JARVIS,” she muttered to the AI, “let’s hope you don’t find a way to experience your own subdrop...”

“Indeed, Ms. Potts; we have enough to getting along with, don’t you think?”

Pepper huffed slightly, tugging gently on Steve’s arm and steering him towards the other side of the counter. The sweats Natasha had fetched were laid out neatly on the end stool, and she nudged Steve towards them, then turned away to give him privacy.

He dressed quickly, skinning into the sweats without any fanfare, and then walked past her to the cupboard and started taking things down. Rice, lentils, wild rice, split peas, whole oats...beef jerky? Golden raisins? He took out a big pot and filled it with water, then lit the stove and set it heating. Pepper sidled past him to the fridge; this had the look of a stew, something he must have made before. She got out a package of frozen hamburger and offered it to him; he took it immediately, eyes lighting, and took out a frying pan to defrost and cook it, moving like he knew Tony's kitchen like the back of his hand. Pepper smiled ruefully--he probably knew it better than Tony--and ransacked Tony's fridge for vegetables. The stew wouldn't need them for a while, but she'd wave them under Steve's nose and help get everything prepped and ready to go in.

"You've done this before," she said softly, trusting his ears to pick it up over the sizzle of the ground
"Get everyone fed," Steve quoted as he broke jerky into the boiling water, shrugging as if to say 'it’s not complicated.' A handful of fat red lentils and some peas went in next before he continued, his tone musing. "More than once me an' Bucky were the only ones still moving, and him so dead tired I had to make sure he didn't cut a finger off into the potatoes." Pepper stilled for a second, waiting for...something, but Steve's expression stayed calm.

“We’ve got potatoes,” she said, rather than commenting, and Steve carried on cooking. When she handed him a clean-scrubbed potato though, instead of chopping it up or even peeling it, he held it in one hand over the bubbling pot and crushed it, flicking starch and potato pulp off his fingers and into the water.

It was more like watching someone break eggs than anything else she could think of. Now that she was looking, she hadn’t seen him use any tools except the pans; he stirred by jiggling things, and measured ingredients with his hands. 

*Fair enough.* Now she wanted to see what he'd do with celery, or carrots, but...she'd better just give him one of each, and slice up the rest.

Pepper glanced over at Tony while Steve stared at the mix of lentils, rices, peas and potatoes; Tony was fine, leaning on the counter peaceably while Natasha kept one hand in his collar. Her other hand was inte-- oh, she was playing chess with him, via JARVIS. That could work; the stew might be a while, after all. "How are you doing?" Pepper checked in.

Natasha looked slightly unnerved. "He's beaten me three times," she said, "and he's not fidgeting at all. He's not even this calm when he's asleep." Tony rubbed his nose, completely unaware. Peace shone out of his face; without the driving tension that usually sharpened his features, the tight springs that made him bounce in place if he stood still too long, he looked tired and unaccountably young.

By the time Pepper was done peeling and chopping, the lentils were puffed up and the jerky starting to stain them brown, and Steve had added the ground beef from the frying pan, looking pleased at the orange fat that floated to the surface. She handed over the smallest whole carrot and watched.

*snap*

He twisted it in half, then in half again, until he had a handful of strangely-spiraling pieces, which he crushed and added to the pot. When she handed him a stick of celery, *he used it to stir the stew.*

She blinked, fascinated, as the stew went from watery to thick as he stirred up the cooked grains and potato starch. This wasn’t just random stuff, in a random order; he really knew what he was doing. She wondered about the dried fruit though, she really did. He threw in a handful, stirring them in, then reached for the rest of the vegetables Pepper had piled up on the chopping board.

Once they were stirred in too, he used the bottom of the frying pan as a lid for the bigger pot, and started patting his pockets. It didn't take long, since there was nothing in the sweatpants, and his face fell.

"What do you need, Steve?" Pepper asked quietly, resting a hand on his bicep to give him an anchor.

"I-- stock. I-- hah... Haven't seen Howie's batman in a while. Sorry; it wasn't that long ago, for me. Used to give me some to carry in the uniform..."

Pepper's breath caught in her chest, and it took a lot of willpower not to hug the super-powered stuffing out of Steve. If she was remembering correctly, a batman was what Peggy would have
called Jarvis. Original Jarvis. Pepper had had no idea Steve had known him. The layers to this relationship--!

"Okay." She got her breath back, steeling herself a little. "That's okay, Steve. Just remember who you're cooking for, keep hold of where you are. Take a look, okay? It's 2013, and he's beating Tasha at chess."

Steve nodded, and Pepper was pretty sure he understood. His face softened, but he looked more awake than he had a minute ago. Not a flashback, more like... Sleepwalking. Running on automatic. He studied Tony, and the soft-glowing holographic board laid out for Tasha's benefit, then turned back to lunch, smiling again.

"He's winning all right." He took a deep breath and straightened up. "Okay. Stock."

She nodded, stepping back again and letting go of his arm. *Oh my god these muscles.*

He was back to knowing exactly where the things he wanted were, now, and pulled down a pot of low-salt stock. A big pinch of it went in, stirred in with an actual spoon this time, and Steve replaced the frying pan with the pot's actual lid.

“Half an hour, now. Bit longer... Sorry, should have chosen something quicker...” Steve mumbled, “I was just...”

“On automatic, I noticed. It’s okay,” Pepper reassured him; Tony was stabilising nicely, and if Steve had habits leftover from looking after his men? Well... Tony never really ran out of needing to be looked after.

Plus, the stew smelled delicious. Tony was catching on to that too, leaning forward on the counter and sniffing.

"*Sir has noticed he is hungry,"* JARVIS reported, amused. "*He very rarely notices. Perhaps a snack?*

Pepper nodded and hip-checked Steve towards the breadbin before he could think about feeling guilty for being slow. Tony was fine, it was unnecessary. “Crusty bread and a bit of butter, he can eat with his hands. Slice enough for everyone while you’re there, Steve.”

Steve went, fishing out a breadknife and opening the breadbin. Pepper watched long enough to check that it was a gluten-free loaf, then started laying the table; if they were going to have a bread course, they might as well do it properly. Nothing too rich or messy... or salty, she mused, or it’d ruin the stew... Real butter, hmm... roasted artichokes for Natasha, and a bit of mild cheese... She was making herself hungry now; convenient, she’d left a meeting in Placements when JARVIS buzzed her. If she had an early dinner now, she could pop down afterwards, before everyone left for the night.

Steve buttered some of the bread and took it over to the counter, leaving the rest in a pile on the breadboard. Pepper fished out a basket from under the counter for it; Steve was obviously having... focus issues. She offered the basket to Nat, but the other woman shook her head, opting to wait for the end of her game; there was a Go board next to the chessboard now, and she looked as if poisoning the other side were possible in Go, she’d find a way to do it.

Steve pulled up a stool and sat down on Tony's other side, munching companionably on the heel of the loaf and nudging Tony's hand to the edge of the plate. Steve’s other arm curled around Tony’s back, his hand wrapping around Tony’s opposite wrist and stroking it soothingly. Tony traced
around the plate—looking for silverware?—then delicately investigated inward, looking relieved when
he found the crust of the bread. Steve set his chin on Tony's shoulder so Tony could feel him
chewing, and Tony laughed not-quite-silently and gnawed on the bread, dropping fewer crumbs than
she expected. They leaned together so naturally that Pepper couldn't tell who'd moved first, and
Steve turned to press his nose into Tony's hair, and his lips to the collar.

Pepper made sure there was water and glasses on the breakfast bar, then stew bowls and cutlery.
After a moment’s contemplation, she made up a salad, which wasted a further five minutes, and a
dressing (another two). Eventually she found herself without anything to do but watch the boys;
Natasha was giving her the sit down look, so she sat, back to the stove. Tony looked... beautiful?
Good. Flushed and the good kind of blank, it was very beautiful.

Tony was a wild, impossible man, but seeing him like this, so calm and still, was so out of the norm
that it was-- Pepper couldn’t take her eyes off him; if she started looking, she wouldn’t be able to
stop.

With Steve back, and Pepper there, Natasha eased back on the collar, stroking the back of Tony’s
neck and smoothing his hair into the collar gently. It was a new side of Nat, too, and she sat on the
stool to Tony’s right, close enough for him to know she was still there just by the heat of her body.

This team... honestly.

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-... .-. -.. / -... ..- - - . .-. / ... - . .-- Steve tapped at Tony’s wrist, the sequence of long-shorts filtering
into tactile perfectly; the remapping was solid. Morse, presumably... Tony fished through old files for
a decoder, slapped together an algorithm to feed the code through his speech center, and pop!

bread butter stew, in Steve's voice. Hm, did not expect Steve's voice. Analog systems were
complicated.

Sir, that is unnecessarily thorough, I coul--

i know. just wanted-- direct.

JARVIS sighed into the buffer, conceding, and Tony relaxed against Steve. Bread butter stew, bread
and butter stew, was that a thing? It might be. It smelled good. Damn, he was hungry.

‘m i good?

Your brain chemistry is stabilising, with the progesterone dip leveli-- Tony flinched away from the
feed, and JARVIS corrected himself. You are good, sir, you are being very good. Eat your bread.

Bread? Stew, though. This was a plate, not a bowl, but that didn't necessarily… Tony felt cautiously
around for a spoon and came up empty. Probably bread. Yep, bread. It was interesting trying to
figure out the best angle to bite into it using just his fingers, which were going to get covered in
butter if he wasn't careful. He should take just a little bite to start, not quite sure if taste was still
mapped how he expected, though smell seemed to be and that was a good sign.

Steve’s chin bumped against his shoulder, is he chewing on me? and Tony tried to restrain his
laughter, keep it from being some ungodly hooting noise that he couldn’t hear to control. He shoved
a bit more of the bread in his mouth.

Salt, fat, sweet and rich; his tongue was just fine. His jaw seized as his mouth reacted to the food, in
that weird contradictory way that shot up the jawbones on both sides, like biting into a very sour
apple. He chewed through it, trying to be patient, and JARVIS rewarded him with a long, slow feeling in the buffer. Good, sir.

The sensation passed, fading in the face of oh dear god i am hungry, and he fumbled for another bite-sized piece of bread, before he’d even finished chewing the first.

.. -- ... -.. -- Steve tapped, easy.

Tony’s hand slowed down without his permission and a sad little sensation bubbled up his throat.

.-.-- -. --- ..- .----. -. --.. .-.. / -... .. - . / -.-- --- ..- .-. / - --- -. --. ..- . you'll bite your tongue.

Tony settled, the sadness melting away under Steve’s ridiculous gentility. service dom?

Arguably, sir. You do evoke certain traits in us, when you are like this. Eat.

Tony chewed, leaning into Steve and feeling the other man lean back. They made a triangle. That was a very strong shape, good under tension and compression. With JARVIS behind them, a pyramid: exceptionally stable. JARVIS noticed his mental imagery and trickled amusement into the buffer.

Natasha and Pepper too, though… Clint and Rhodey and Bruce—. Tony's conception grew into something geodesic and shining before he broke it off, unsure, though he felt JARVIS saving the file. He’d just stick to bread, for now.

Steve handed him more only once he’d properly chewed and swallowed the previous piece, slowing him right down, and oh hey, this is delicious... They drew it out, guiding him to a cup of water too, and he felt himself easing down incrementally, not having to rely on the collar so much for physical stability, leaning less on JARVIS’ emotional support. Good.

When the stew arrived, it was delicious too, and Steve’s blunt fingers stayed threaded through his collar the entire time they were eating, pressing it gently against his throat to slow him down when he ate too fast, easing up when he reached for the water.

Yes. Good.

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“JARVIS, give me Tony’s nutritional requirements?” Pepper asked, once the boys were settled in Natasha’s clutches. Tony was eating dopily, each movement slow and precise because of the lack of visual input. He was even letting Steve load up pieces of bread with stewed meat and nibbling them right out of Steve’s fingers, though he had taken the spoon for himself. Steve’s other hand was curled around Tony’s back and resting on his lower belly. She couldn’t see any bulge through the sweatshirt, but Tony was an ambitious man; combined with a vicious size kink, it was no wonder--

“Of course, Ms. Potts. Tabulating.”

“Thank you. Group by variance correlation.” The graph hovering over her bowl shuffled, putting protein and a few vitamins in one group, fat and carbs in another along with the remaining vitamins, and the laundry list of minerals in a third. Water, salt and magnesium made a little outlier of their own.

“Okay, label variance groups by multivariate analysis handle.” The four groups solidified under the respective headings of Biological repair, ATP synthesis, Suit maintenance and Osmoregulation. Pepper squinted at the labels, fixing each table’s contents preliminarily in mind, then collapsed the
tables to just the headings.

Perfect. “Draw up activity-level versus increase in group requirement graphs, kitchen units.”

JARVIS paused, his thoughtbubble flickering with nutritional information charts, and occasionally diverting to JSTOR or PubMed journals. The osmoregulation chart finished first, and she left JARVIS thinking about the others while she opened it out and made it more Steve-friendly. First she deleted the title and replaced it with *Hydration*, then changed the units from liters to pints, and micrograms to the fractions teaspoons they kept in the cutlery drawer. Skimming the activities axis, sex was right up there with combat as the most demanding, which wasn’t really surprising. Heavier on water than solutes. Steve was holding Tony’s glass for him when she glanced over, and Tony was sipping carefully; could Steve read backwards, from the wrong side of a hologram? She probably should know that.

*ATP synthesis* popped up next, and the units were much less simplistic; a cup of this, a tablespoon of the other. Rice, butter, brea—“Tabulate intolerances, bad combinations. Gluten. Factor into recommendations.” JARVIS obligingly limited foodstuffs containing gluten to small amounts, though Extremis had pretty much taken care of Tony’s symptoms. She relabeled the set *Energy* and had JARVIS split things into snacks, meals and emergency bloodsugar stabilizers, making up little groups of food that Steve would be able to feed a grumpy, starving, possibly injured, possibly subby engineer.

She’d done this on instinct, after years of looking after Tony’s material needs as a PA, but Steve didn’t have that benefit and JARVIS’ cut-out had left him effectively rudderless. And then there were the hints that Steve could sub out himself, if it was pushed... or maybe he’d just be a little pliant, not full-on submissive. Either way, a bit of structure wouldn’t do any harm.

On the other side of the table, Tony was making soft ‘ah’ noises with an open mouth as Steve pulled the spoon away. Tony’s blind scooping had done fine with the liquid of the stew, but there were lumps of carrot and beef that he just wasn’t going to get to eat if he kept on using the spoon himself. Steve scooped up a piece of meat, put Tony’s hand on his wrist, and let Tony do most of the guiding. Tony lit up with surprise and pleasure as he sunk his teeth into the mouthful; the beef had come out spectacularly succulent, it was true.

“Looking good, JARVIS. Split the *Repair* category to a moderate range, less than 1% on burns —” she swallowed and switched to typing, because this didn’t need saying in Steve’s earshot: *small breaks, etc, and extreme range. Anything above that, refer to whatever resources are available.* She knew Tony hadn’t gone to a medical professional since Extremis; it was annoying, but understandable. JARVIS was the leading expert now.

--I would intubate under those conditions, Ms. Potts; priority protocol would be to return Sir to the Tower, regardless of circumstance.

She smiled at him, a little ferally; with the old suits and the Tower at his disposal, not to mention Clint letting him in the Quinjet’s systems, JARVIS would never have to sit back and watch the newsfeeds ever again.

Tony made another begging whine in the back of his throat, his hands groping for the bread, and Pepper settled back into generating Steve’s *Care and Feeding* infographic. Tony gave flowers and gadgets; she gave infographics.

She’d go over it with Steve once Tony was back in the real world, but for now she turned to the feedback loop that’d, briefly, hurt JARVIS. “Talk to me about device telemetry and the dampener/port system, JARVIS; let's wall off a few subsystems from your direct control. Shift
system, maybe,” she started, and JARVIS kept up effortlessly as she got him well and truly organised.

It was such a pleasure to do what one did best.

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"Stark, you owe me for this.” Natasha stared at the giant pile of cushions she'd gathered, at Tony and Steve who were completely out of it, and at Pepper who looked like watching this was the most fun she'd had all day, then sighed and pulled out her phone.

"Clint, I need a favor…"

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"You want me to what?" Clint looked at his phone. Yep, still a phone. He put it back to his ear. "Yeah, I can do that, where to?"

He didn't take the elevator to the penthouse level, because the elevator doors honestly opened a little too fast sometimes. He did listen at the door of the laundry room for about a minute before he slipped out. He did not want to walk in on anything. Natasha wouldn't bat an eye, she was like that, but she had mentioned Steve being naked twice, so something had made an impression, and sweet jesus he was going to stop thinking about this right now.

He worked around to a view of Natasha from the hallway--where were the others?--got her attention by breathing loudly, and mouthed IS IT SAFE?

She rolled her eyes and jerked her hand. "Get in here. Nothing will scar you."

Pepper was sitting at the kitchen island and Steve and Tony were curled up together opposite; he didn't look at them too hard, though honestly they were just...snuggling; there'd been more hardcore activity at movie nights when Tony was--was Tony wearing a collar?

Whoa. That was...whoa. Huh. Okay.

Clint refocused on Natasha and the materials she'd piled in the corner breakfast nook thingy, where Tony had a pair of armchairs (Who has armchairs in the kitchen??), then on the environment they had to work with. This was a job. This was a fun job; he was going to give them all shit about this for months.

"I can see your problem," he told his partner. "You're worried about aesthetics. Just because it's indoors doesn't mean the colors have to match. Kids make them for fun, they don't care about that. Couch forts are just... warm and safe."

"Oh," she said, "okay," and looked at the cushions with a new eye, still mildly distrustful.

"No cutting," he added hastily. "The cushions go back where they came from when we're done. It's fine to build on the furniture frames too, but the floor has to be soft. Hand me those big gray ones?" He edged around Steve and Tony and pushed the armchairs to either side of the nook, so they pressed against the wall, then took the big couch cushions off Nat and squeezed them in, so their edges were pressed together and no one would fall through the gap to the hardwood floor.

"Okay, now a blanket? Thanks." He tucked the stretchy blanket over the cushions to smooth out the ridges and bumps, then pulled off the armchair seats to put up against the back wall so the space was soft on three sides, and open on the fourth. There was no way they could make something big
enough to fit Steve's legs, so, better to let him stick out of the end. Clint backed off, gauging the
space thoughtfully, then rummaged in the pile of softstuff Nat had acquired. A fitted bedsheet would
work, but flat would be better-- there. A superking sheet in iron-man-red would do perfectly. The
silk would be slippery though; he'd need clothespins or something.

He asked Pepper, who asked JARVIS, who asked Dummy, and the clothespins appeared, hanging
in a little plastic basket off Dummy's claw. Clint took them with some ceremony and pinned the sheet
over the armchairs, and to the cushions on the back wall. It was big enough to drape down in front to
make a doorway, but that made the roof sag... Clint considered, then rummaged in his pockets for his
ball of string. Well, when he said 'ball' he meant high density reel, and when he said 'string'... yeah.

He tied off the wire, attaching it to the corners of the armchairs, then pulled the sheet over it so it held
up the roof and let the door drape straight down. Standing back, he grinned over at Pepper, then
knelt, filled his arms with what was left of the bedding and pillows, and crawled inside. From the
outside, all you could see was the top of his head against the sheet and the trailing blankets as he
tugged them into place one by one. On the inside, it was a warm, dark space full of squishy
hypoallergenic pillows and 1000-threadcount egyptian cotton.

Clint almost didn't want to give it up, and sat there, surveying for a second. Then, though, he thought
about Tony wearing a collar, and JARVIS wearing his tentacles openly, and the subtle lines of stress
in Steve's expression, and crawled out of the tent.

Natasha had shuffled all the way around the counter until she was standing next to Pepper, and they
were talking in low voices and manipulating a hologram like they'd been doing it all their lives. Clint
turned to Steve instead.

"Hey, Cap. I'm done. How about you get some shuteye, yeah?"

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Being deaf and blind made food really delicious. Weird.

Tony ate anything Steve gave him, with enthusiasm; it was weird being hungry and eating at the
same time, too. JARVIS was in control of his digestion at the moment, so he wasn't getting over-full
like he normally did, despite the--

yes that thank you J, your timing is impeccable--!

JARVIS projected wry amusement and finished the maneuver, shifting the egg's point forwards
slightly, so it was sitting against his pelvis more. It felt good, in a general, not-currently-capable-of-
arousal kind of way, like getting a massage.

You are finished. Your plate is empty.

Tony's gauges were full, and his stomach felt good, warm, and if JARVIS said so, then it was true.
He felt like he'd been getting slower, like a clock running down; only the collar was keeping his head
up now. Steve shifted, his hands firming, and tugged under Tony's arms; Tony obediently found the
footrail and slid off the seat of the stool, accepting the double-jolt from the toy, not particularly
worried about the floor. His knees buckled and whoops, sorry, looked like walking on his own
power was back out of the question. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been so far under and
still so aware.

Steve kept hold and pulled him in, all chest and long waist and muscled hip, and helped Tony
stagger along...somewhere. They got off the cold, cold tile and on to wood, and then Steve was
pushing him down, past kneeling and down to all fours on the floor, and Tony went without hesitation despite the strangeness of it. Crawling was easy on his--with the toy where it was, letting it sit forward between his hipbones. It was heavy, because of the bits of JARVIS inside, and shifted slightly each time his hips tilted as he crawled. *Crawling for Steve: check. 8/10 would repeat.*

He flinched back at a soft-slick touch against his forehead after only a few shuffles. Fabric. What was that?! Steve would hardly be head-butting him into a couch, and it had felt loose, but what on earth...a tablecloth? Drapes? There was nothing like that in the penthouse; Pepper had gotten it done post-retro-modern or something, all long clean lines and rounded corners, and the windows shaded themselves.

Steve's arm tightened around his chest just under the reactor, and Steve's face tucked into Tony's shoulder, huffing warm air on his neck in apology. Steve's other hand took Tony's wrist and moved it out in front of them to explore. Tony took it as permission, and ran his fingers down the sheer silk fall until he found the hem a few inches above the floor, then up to where there was an unexpected wire under the silk. He investigated with great interest; it formed a sort of suspension corner that the fabric draped around. There were pegs holding it tight, and Tony wanted to steal one to feel all its edges and the strength of the spring, but Steve guided his hand back down, and forward under the silk.

Softsoftsoft, fleece? under his palm, then something squishable under the fleece. Cushions, covered with a blanket? The ridge of piping under the fleece fascinated his fingertips and he ran them back and forth, squashing the fleece into the furrows on either side, then feeling it spring back. Steve's thigh nudged him forwards, and the silky curtain lifted away from his forearms until he could crawl forward onto the cushions into some sort of space. Steve half lifted him over the threshold, taking most of his upper body weight, and Tony felt the silk fall closed behind them where it brushed his heels.

The air felt still, and warmer, and Tony luxuriated in it as Steve prompted him to ease down onto his side. The cushions were supplemented by pillows and more blankets and that thing under Tony's palm was definitely the plush Cap shield that frisbeed around the living room sometimes. *It is known as a couch fort, sir. Steve would like you to rest now.*

Tony sprawled, not-so-subtly sticking out a leg and arm to try and find the edges of the space, though the directive to rest kept him from crawling about. This was so *strange.* His ankle thumped into something soft and vertical, and his fingertips found another. He'd be able to lie mostly flat, but Steve would have to fold to fit. For all that, the space didn't feel too small--maybe because he couldn't see it?--it felt comfortably right.

Who would have made this? Steve'd been with him, mostly, so… Pepper could have because Pepper could do anything, but she'd be more likely to delegate to someone who knew how. Bruce, but he was still gone at that conference, and they hadn't seen Thor in weeks, and--no, Thor couldn't make this. He wouldn't think of clothespins, he didn't understand all those subtle human ways to bend the world to your will.

...Natasha? Tony felt around more gingerly. There'd be weapons in here somewhere if she were involved.

This was so *strange.* Maybe he could blame Clint. The truly inexplicable things were usually Clint's fault. Clint was meticulous, too; he would have thought of clothespins and strung that wire and carefully layered the cushions and blankets and sheets. Tony stopped exploring and curled up tightly, not sure why the thought hurt in his chest and throat, or what his voice was doing. He pressed his face into a Steve-smelling bunch of fabric and clutched at JARVIS’ connection to Extremis.
Sir, easy, this is a safe place, where you are warm, and do not need concern yourself with Barton's motivations or with hiding anything you feel. Ms. Potts will stand guard.

The cushions dipped slightly, and Steve’s warm bulk settled in beside him, one hand pulling the fabric out of his hands and replacing it with his own strong grip. Tony clutched at it, *safewarm?*

Steve leaned down and kissed his temple, letting Tony feel him smiling. It made the feeling in his chest billow out and his eyes sting and messed up his breathing and it was so *contradictory!* JARVIS hushed him gently, and Tony sniffled in irritable confusion. *Stupid 'drop. don't like it.*

Steve moved their joined hands to Tony's hip, tapping their fingers on the waistband of Tony's sweats, then drawing a question mark on the soft skin of his waist. Tony nodded, because Steve could do whatever he wanted, and JARVIS would make sure they were safe and-- oh, *getting naked!*

Steve nudged him over onto his back and slid his fingers under the waistband. Maybe he had pressure marks, because the slow stroke felt like he’d been waiting for it all day. He wasn’t wearing anything underneath, and Steve's palms skimmed under his ass and down his thighs, leaving a trail of *skintouchwarm* that Tony wanted to pull away from and press into at the same time. The bunched-up cloth popped over his ankles and vanished with a faint flush of cooler air, while Steve crowded over him, kissing the point of his hip, then his lower belly. Tony wriggled leisurely, arching his back to press the toy forwards for Steve to see--a huff of air on his stomach where Steve was nuzzling, warm and humid, and then a smile pressed against his bellybutton.

And oh, it felt good to stretch out on this, to feel the soft clean cloth all down his legs and not just on his feet. Steve drew back slightly and nudged him back over onto his side, then ran hands up his back under his shirt all the way up to his collar, and peeled the shirt over his head. Tony went limp and just let it happen, let strong gentle arms pull the sleeves off and pull him back until he was enveloped in Steve, warm all down his back and legs. Steve's arm went over his arms, over his chest, and pulled him in closer. Steve's chest was vibrating low and soft, though his mouth was closed on Tony's shoulder; humming, maybe… Every so often he wiped at Tony's eyes with a soft damp cloth that smelled like the workshop, and was clearly from the cupboard of clean oil-rags that Dummy hoarded like gold.

*what the hell,* because none of this made any sense, not him and not anyone else and *why am I crying that should stop*

Because you need to. *Nothing is wrong with your reaction. Steve understands.*

Tony subsided, and oh, Dummy and Clint were going to rue the day they worked together. Tony didn’t know what he was going to do, but it would be awe-inspiring. Dummy would remember for *months.* He vowed revenge to JARVIS, and JARVIS replied with the equivalent of Steve's pats, and strangely enough that was okay.

After a while the hurt in his throat and chest was gone, replaced by a monumental fuzziness, and he didn't notice the difference when he stopped being awake.

A long sleep-blurred string of hours later, Tony turned over to the warm Steve-shaped bulk sharing his pillow-and-blanket nest, his hands moving over Steve's skin, pat-patting, checking him over.
Steve's arms squeezed him enough to be felt and the man himself rumbled "'m still here, it's okay, go back to sleep," eyes barely glinting open in the dark, but this time Tony could hear the words and string them together and understand. He wound his arms around Steve's, pushed out under the blankets to find the live heat of his shoulders and back and rest his hands there.

"You called me honey," Tony said wonderingly. He didn't remember everything that had gone on around him, but he remembered that; Steve's soft, anxious voice when he'd been slipping. ...the annex door locked behind me, honey... "You know this means war. Soda cracker, saltines, crackerjack, sugar cookie, soft tack..." Steve's ribs hitched in silent laughter and Tony let the string of names trail off.

"Sorry I..." Tony said after a while. There were too many terrible ways to finish the sentence-...wandered off, messed up, didn't trust you--and he turned his head away, shame welling up.

"Let us take care of you?"

"Yes. No! What?"

"Sorry you took care of JARVIS before you dropped? Sorry you trusted us implicitly when we blinded and deafened you? Sorry you were taken out by something you couldn't predict and couldn't avoid?"

"That's not what I meant--"

"I'm not sorry," Steve said simply. "I was terrified, and if I could choose, I wouldn't want you to go through that. But I'll do better next time, and I'm not sorry I got to see you. You're so brave."

Tony grumbled and wriggled down into Steve’s arms again. “Whatever.”

He'd argue tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

THE NEXT CHAPTER WILL HAVE PORN WE PROMISE we don't know how this happened
The blanket tent was warm and close and safe; it brought back a strange mix of memories and associations. Steve slept for a while, and conferred with JARVIS, and eventually listened to old-timey radio over his earbud and Tony’s soft breathing in his other ear all through the late night and early morning hours as Tony alternated deep sleep and dreaming.

At the end of his last round of REM, Tony opened his eyes, smiled, and snuggled closer; he was sort of awake, and his eyes were working again. Steve petted his hair and thought of nothing in particular, except breakfast soon. He could wait a while. He didn't think Tony indulged himself very often by lying in.

What would they do today, though...? Tony would need to be put back together for his videoconference, but that was hours and hours and hours away, yet.

“Mmm... That reminds me, we never did get you see what you could do with this, JARVIS,” Steve mumbled, his nose buried in the nape of Tony’s neck and his palm settled pointedly over Tony’s stomach. Tony was dozing, not really awake, but not unresponsive either.

“As beta testing goes, it was not our most successful endeavour,” JARVIS drawled quietly in his ear. “But I have eliminated the primary issue, and we have been shown how to handle subdrop; Sir would call that breaking even.”

“We’ve got... about twelve hours before we have to be anywhere. What should we... uh...” Steve petered to a halt, finding the words a little difficult to put together. “Are the cards around?”

They hadn’t got through even half of Tony’s pre-prepared stack, and Steve had suspicions that they were all as scary as ‘breathplay,’ if the way Tony had made him choose at random was any indication. Or maybe not, maybe he was trying to be fair-handed? Either way, it’d be good to go through them, see if he could get any insights into Tony’s easy falls into subspace before they headed back to the server annex. It was something he’d turned over in his head a few times during the night, looking up at the softly lit fabric over them, so like and unlike tent canvas.

Everything Steve knew about Tony insisted that it should be really difficult to trust like that, since Afghanistan. Maybe more significantly since Tiberius Stone and Obadiah Stane. And yet, there he went, tumbling down the rabbit hole once Steve and JARVIS got him between them.

“Steve, cover his feet if you would,” JARVIS asked in his ear, and he flipped a corner of the blankets over Tony’s sprawled legs. Dummy’s head poked in, letting in a gust of cooler air, holding the cards from Steve’s coffee-table. Steve took them and gave the bot a grateful pat.

“Thanks. I just want to...see. Do my research.” He paged through the top of the stack, finding his
own shakily-written suggestions, followed by the ones they had already seen of Tony’s. “We’ll follow Pepper’s chart, here,” he waved the ‘food’ card at JARVIS’ tentacle. “We should keep a snack or two in the annex, I think. Maybe more, in case you feel leaving would trigger subdrop?”

“A major component of this incident lay in Sir’s premature rise to agency; he out-stripped the halflife of the chemical soup we inundated his brain with.”

Steve tapped the edges of the cards thoughtfully. “So we need to maintain some kind of control for longer. Maybe some hard and fast rules that he can hold on to when we’re asleep or otherwise unavailable.”

“Scene boundaries, delineated by the circumstances,” JARVIS agreed. “I believe you should read the remaining cards at this point; it will make certain decisions easier.”

Steve stacked the familiar and blank cards (and single napkin) to one side, on one of the chairs holding up their safe space, and turned over the next in the stack.

“My mouth?” Steve read, paraphrasing.

“You have a very pleasing mouth. Different yet symmetric curves from many angles.”

Steve supposed he might. That was for people not-him to determine. Personally, he felt his cheeks were a bit strange, stretched between a too-sharp jawline and high cheekbones. He wasn’t a fan of drawing his own face, even if he couldn’t bear to draw the Howling Commandos without putting himself in there. He turned over the next card, hoping it might be a little more informative.

“Suspension bondage?” He queried, tilting the card sideways and immediately feeling ridiculous. No change in orientation would make that any less outside of his vocabulary.

“Like the first... ah, after Uganda, Steve. He could not touch the walls or floor; the concept of free space, combined with restriction. An unnatural state, as if no connected networks returned one’s pings... I understand it is disorienting, debilitating.”

“Huh.” They’d taken Tony’s weight, easily, and held him in midair. He’d been helpless and... Steve swallowed hard and squirmed against the rising sensation of heat in his gut. He hadn’t even tried to do anything, resist, help, move; he’d hung there, held forcibly open, and they had taken him.

“Right...being helpless is important? For subspace?”

“For Sir, yes. For some, pain is a way to elicit the response, but...”

“No. Not for Tony. That I-- yeah.” Steve could feel that, like a gut-instinct. He couldn’t elaborate the feeling into a strategy or anything more complicated than ‘no’, though. Steve’d had a unique relationship with pain for a long, long time, but Tony...

They’d need to talk about that, when he was properly awake.

“I think I might like-- ah. Are you sure there’s no one in earshot?” Steve fretted, turning on to his side in the warm space.

“Quite sure, Captain,” JARVIS purred, a gentle murmuring tone behind his voice that gave Steve the impression he was amusing the AI immensely.

“Great. Ah, okay. I might like a bit of... When I was-- Okay, no. I’m writing this down, later. Much later.” Steve crumpled, laughing at himself and cringing; he couldn’t say he might like pain, he had
no idea if it was true or not, but he might like to try it. The transceiver, with its tip pulsing soft magenta like a heartbeat, smoothed back his hair gently.

“That is indeed why Sir made the cards. Take your time.”

Steve huffed, foxing the edges of the next card. It was face down, and he was torn between exploring Tony’s kinks and his own.

Before the serum, he’d been...so small. There was no way of doing anything that didn’t hurt one way or another. Not walking up stairs, not even drawing; the backs of his hands had burned from holding a pencil, after a while. But since... Nothing much hurt. It felt like the dreams he’d used to have, in summer when he had the energy to dream. Nothing was quite real until the shield smacked into his hand, or the eighth mile made his breath come short, or the punching bag bruised his knuckles. Pain was like a billboard that read ‘I’m here, I’m alive.’

He hadn’t been in pain when he woke up from the crash; it hadn’t helped the SHIELD psychs’ deception at all. Nor had the fact that he’d been wearing boots. Who puts boots on a patient? They should have left him in the uniform, let him wake up as soon as he was physically able, when the frostbite was still--

“Steve?” JARVIS asked.

So much for not getting distracted. “I’m okay, sorry. Just making a few...tactical observations. We should try pain. On me. We’ll talk about it when he’s uh...” Steve leaned over to peer into Tony’s face, which was slack with in-turned concentration. “Less focused.”

“I am unsure I would be comfortable with that...” JARVIS hedged, backed by an almost subaudible grumble of infrasound.

“Easy, JARVIS, I wouldn’t ask you to injure me, even if you could. I don’t think I’d like that, either.”

“Very perceptive, Captain. I believe the term for that is ‘hard limit’. I refuse, in absolute terms, to injure either of you.”

“Good.” With great hesitation, Steve took the pen that had been bundled with the cards and scribbled ‘pinch me I’m dreaming’ on a blank one. It got the point across.

He steeled himself to turn over Tony’s next scribbled note, then let out a huff of relief when it said ‘collar,’ with a rough, ink-sketched collar filling the white space left over. It was thinner than the one he was wearing now, maybe half the width of the belt, and had a D-ring hanging from the front. Tony’s drawing skills hadn’t extended to giving it a buckle.

“This one, I’ve seen,” Steve quipped, “Pepper knew about this in advance.”

“She did. There have been times when she has, ah...” JARVIS hesitated, uncertain about his words.

“Helped out? Tony mentioned professionals...” That was hard for Steve to say, that reeked of desperation and loneliness. There was no way Tony couldn’t have a fun, easy one night stand if he wanted to; this was different, this was a base inability to trust casual encounters.

“Yes. After he returned, he made arrangements with a Domme--a female Dominant partner--of very good reputation, with psychiatric training.”

“But he couldn’t open the door.”
“He tried, twice, but no, he could not. Ms. Potts was left at a loss, and I had no frame of reference, so we asked her to return for a consult. No black bag, no intention to see Sir. He was able to at least watch the security footage—”

Steve twitched violently as Tony’s hand closed over his knee. He’d eased onto his back without Steve really noticing, and turned his face to Steve’s hip. He made no signal for JARVIS to stop, though, and JARVIS would have stopped if he had.

“She explained he may never have been able to open that door, but that there was a reason he had made the appointment in the face of such overwhelming vulnerability. Some need, or fear. She believed, diagnosed, that Sir would find better rest under a firm hand, that to trust at all, he needed to be made safe from himself. Broken out of his defensive strategies.”

Steve thought of Stane, of the date stamped on Tony's file next to ‘doesn’t like to be handed things.’

“What she did not believe was that it was a sexual need. Involved, yes, but not exclusively carnal.”

“Pepper did it, didn’t she,” Steve said, threading his fingers through Tony’s hair and letting his thumb catch on the collar. “She... what... collared him?”

“It turned out to be unnecessary. Sir fell to his knees quite on his own, once he understood she was amenable.”

Steve’s chest tightened, enough to make his eyes burn, and he hauled Tony into his chest, curling around him. “You’re so good, Tony, you’re good, I’m proud of you, I’m sorry I wasn’t here...”

Tony was pliant and soft, sighing against Steve’s chest and pressing his cheek against it, like he was trying to feel his heartbeat. Steve squeezed him close, burying his nose in Tony’s hair and calming his heart back down. He felt the lilt of a smirk against one pec, then a hint of tongue flicking out against his skin. “I know what you’re doing, you little monster, don’t think I don’t.”

Tony backed off slightly, turning his cheek again and smiling. When he blinked, his eyelashes stroked Steve’s skin, and that was almost as bad.

“It helped, a great deal. Sleep was no longer ‘for the wicked’, so to speak.”

“We should-- what would Pepper like? We should thank her for looking after him,” he stuttered to a stop as Tony shifted in his arms just enough to get a bit of Steve’s skin between his teeth. “I want to! I know it’s not... necessary-- stop that.”

Tony let him go, licking the dented skin in apology, but looking up through his eyelashes in a way that was distinctly playful.

“Alright, I get it, you were awake the whole time.” Steve bent his head and nudged Tony’s to one side so he could huff hot air into his hair, just above his ear. “We can talk about what I like later. Once I have a handle on you.”

Steve grabbed the dwindling stack of cards back from their half-forgotten sprawl in the blankets. “Are you verbal, love?” he asked absently, counting the cards over Tony’s shoulder.

“Mmmmmmsugarplum. Don’t want--” Tony mumbled, cut off by a deep glow of blue from the transceiver that sent his whole body arching helplessly. His mouth hung open and his eyes stared at nothing, his head tipped back in ecstasy. Steve felt the faint echo of a vibration where Tony’s belly was pressed against him and where his fingertips pressed into the small of Tony's back to hold him steady.
“He did not wish to be verbal,” JARVIS stated innocently as the transceiver insinuated itself between them, settling in the hollow of Tony’s collarbone.

“Wow.” Steve tucked a languid Tony against his chest while the engineer rode out the high and the tremors. They faded slowly, into slow stretching as Tony clenched deliberately around the toy.

“You are both quite welcome.”

“Aww heck...” Steve eased back into the cushions, letting just enough space come between them to see all of Tony, all that smooth muscle, and the way he was getting hard again. Tony was breathing heavily now, gusts of warm air puffing against Steve’s skin and the intermittent touch of the arc reactor making his skin pebble. Steve had to shake himself to go back to the cards.

“Costume?” Steve read out, feeling Tony smirk. “Oh! The...uh. On me? Maybe not the armor plated version...” That uniform had a cup; Steve was pretty sure it was kevlar, to match the plates that protected his femoral arteries. Having Tony close and as willing as he was now while Steve was wearing that, well, it wouldn’t be comfortable. (Although, wasn’t Iron Man in the same boat? Steve resolved to ask about that sometime.)

Tony shifted against him and JARVIS buzzed intermittently. Especially like now. Steve swallowed, flicked the card onto the ‘read’ pile and turned the last one over.


“Indeed. Perhaps it would be best if Sir is verbal after all?”

Steve squirmed, putting the card with the others. “Maybe give me the rough outline? And... uh, ease off with your... thing.”

The subliminal vibration slowed and then stopped, JARVIS humming with a self satisfied smugness. Tony shifted, his stomach muscles bunching at the cessation, and Steve rubbed a soothing hand over his belly. Steve was still warmer than Tony by a little bit, and Tony always responded well to being stroked like this. He relaxed under Steve’s hand when another pulse didn’t come.

“It is a formal term for the exchange of power between two or more individuals, where a submissive partner, such as Sir, willingly hands over power to a dominant partner, such as myself and on occasion, you, Steve.”

Realization dawned. “We’ve been doing that all along, haven’t we?” he rumbled to Tony, meeting his glassy eyes and getting a faint smile for his troubles.

“Switch to comm only, JARVIS, and give me a tactical pre-play.” Steve grinned down at his captive audience then nuzzled his way closer for a few dozy kisses.

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Steve had smothered Tony back to sleep with his ridiculous kisses, obviously paying rapt attention to JARVIS’ voice in his ear. As if waking up at 5am and having more of The Talk with JARVIS wasn’t ridiculous enough. Still, Tony woke up so warm and so rested that he was okay with Steve’s devious and sneaky tactics. Besides: kisses.

The toy was still there --no missing that, really-- and Tony idly rubbed his belly as he drifted awake. Definitely a good idea, making his own equipment; it didn’t have to have the usual safety features.

JARVIS pinged their connection quietly and Tony pinged back; he was awake now, and a bit
hungry again. How was that possible anyway, they had just eaten that stew stuff-- JARVIS pinged him again, this time with a timestamp; fifteen hours since stew. How had he slept for fifteen hours?

He wriggled against the blankets, slowly, because he was still drowsy, and his limbs didn’t feel like he’d been lying down for over half a day. His muscles were loose, not achy, and his head was clear, rather than pre-caffeine.

weird.

You were rather active, sir; lying still seemed beyond you.

remapping? Tony guessed, squirming again and stretching out to see if Steve was in the immediate area. This was made much easier when he opened his eyes to the warm, friendly red of the fort, sans-Steve.

Possibly, though it may also have something to do with this. JARVIS gave the toy a gentle hum for a moment; it wasn’t immediately arousing, but it did fill Tony with something warm and delicious. More satisfying than demanding. It made Tony stretch out, his back arching and toes pointing in a whole body experience that emphasized the bite of Pep’s collar against the nape of his neck. You are positively awash with endorphins, sir. You have bounced back from ‘drop wonderfully.

A low but intense undercurrent of pride thrummed along the empathy buffer and Tony slumped blissfully out of his stretch with a smile, one hand coming up to run under the edge of the collar.

“You did good, J. Thanks buddy.”

There was a distant clattering of cutlery, which JARVIS helpfully tagged as Steve.

“You?” Steve called, his voice only slightly muffled by the fort.

“I’ll-- clothes?” Tony asked, aware that the lovely smooth sensations all over his body meant that he was very naked, and that the occasional sticky/flaky patch was residual lube. Which, now that he thought about it, was probably getting low. He pinged JARVIS for a status report on his intimate tech, but the AI gently and firmly pushed it away.

I have it sir, all in good time.

“On the armchair; it’s cooler out here, so put them all on!” Steve instructed firmly.

There was indeed a stack of clean clothes on the chair, and Tony pulled them on slowly. It was all cotton and soft, and the armor of fabric that moved with him, instead of sliding against his skin, made an appreciable difference to how subby he felt.

I have it sir, all in good time.

“On the armchair; it’s cooler out here, so put them all on!” Steve instructed firmly.

There was indeed a stack of clean clothes on the chair, and Tony pulled them on slowly. It was all cotton and soft, and the armor of fabric that moved with him, instead of sliding against his skin, made an appreciable difference to how subby he felt.

make a note; clothes → decreased submission.

So noted.

The sweater was the same thick knit he’d been dressed in as he came out of ‘drop, but with a t-shirt underneath, it wasn’t so strange. He wasn’t exactly known for knitted sweaters, so it still felt a little unusual, but it really was warm.

Sitting and bending to put on the thick socks made him very aware of the toy and the collar. The collar was wide enough to dig under his chin a little, but JARVIS had his eye out, as always, and Tony was far from uncomfortable. The toy was designed to deform, after all, to move and sit as JARVIS wanted it to.
“Do you want a hand, love?” Steve asked, jerking Tony out of an internally-directed reverie that had his hand splayed over his stomach. Steve was just outside the fort, his bulk visible through the sheet roof.

“Sure. ’rather not garotte myself on piano wire.”

Steve chuckled at him, making Tony wonder if Steve had had problems maneuvering himself, then popped a few of the clothespins off the line. The air that wafted in once the sheet was open really was cold, but it also smelled like french toast and cinnamon, so Tony didn’t mind. Steve pulled him to his feet effortlessly, holding the wire out of their way, and Tony let himself rest against that magnificent chest while certain things settled in place.

“‘morning,” he mumbled, face only slightly smushed.

“C’mon, I made breakfast. Pepper said we should eat together,” Steve said, giving him an extra squeeze, then pushing him more towards upright. Tony could get used to extra squeezes.

They ate side by side, at the counter, and Tony couldn’t help but lean on Steve. Apparently rested and ‘awake’ weren’t mutually inclusive, because even though he felt great, he wanted nothing more than to just lean on someone and munch his breakfast. The food was delicious, so he commented on that, but otherwise didn’t try to push a conversation.

"You're quiet this morning."

"Mmmph." Tony turned and stuck his face into Steve's warmth --from the back this time, thoughtfully leaving his hands free to continue devouring french toast-- and nuzzled into the fuzziness. The muscles underneath vibrated with Steve's chuckle.

"Gonna be hard to eat like that."

"Not if you lift your arm," Tony said, muffled. It was nice to have no need to talk, no need for attack or defense or distraction. Nice to have the choice to talk just for the hell of it, just for fun, if he wanted. He'd used to talk Rhodey's ears off in college --along with whoever else sat still enough, he hadn't been picky-- over the moon at being somewhere he could finally have conversations.

He started humming creakily instead, listening to how it reverberated in his skull, using Extremis to plot the frequency shifts due to bone conduction.

"You sound like that cartoon lion," Steve said. "Prince John, sucking his thumb."

"I do not," Tony said, stung. "As if I would suck my thumb...mmm...when I can do this." He plastered himself against Steve and slowly, sensually nuzzled up to Steve's ear, then shifted and blew a raspberry against the back of Steve's neck. Supersoldier sinews jumped and tensed like steel cables under his lips as Steve, very satisfyingly, nearly fell off his stool. Tony was still snickering when Pepper poked her head in.

"Everyone still alive, I see. Oh, breakfast," she said, and stole one of the slices from the pile on the plate next to the stove, eating it with quick decisive bites. "I have an eight-thirty conference call, this is perfect." She looked Tony up and down and smiled, slowing down slightly; he propped both elbows on the counter and grinned back. "It looks good on you, Tony," she said mysteriously, "it really does," and swept out again with her shoes striking loud and sure on the tile, leaving him a sweet vanilla-and-cinnamon peck on the cheek. Tony watched the elevator's current floor spin down toward the corporate levels, and fingered the collar curiously.

Steve was smiling like the Mona Lisa. He knew something, all right. Well, he could keep his
conspiracy, if he liked it so much; Tony was feeling ready for some more French toast. And some more coffee.

[58x802]“Hey, why don’t you go grab a shower?” Steve prompted, just as Tony was starting to doze off against his shoulder. “Then we can go to the workshop for a while. I’d like to draw, if that’s okay.”

That sounded good, considering how sticky Tony felt, so he nodded. “Sure, just don’t forget.”

Steve looked at him curiously and once Tony had eye contact, he tapped his abdomen. Steve blushed like a champ and his expression flashed hungry. Tony smirked and leant in for kisses that Steve was all too happy to provide. Just as Tony was slipping in little flashes of tongue, Steve rumbled in the back of his throat and lifted Tony onto his lap by his thighs. The kiss was broken while Tony got his balance, his arms locked around Steve’s shoulders, but Steve wasn’t fucking around; his hands slipped backwards until he had two handfuls of Tony’s ass.

“You’re terrible...” Steve muttered, his fingertips pushing at Tony’s hole, where the toy was barely letting him close over it.

“Speak for yourself!” Tony arched back, tilting his hips so the position opened him up. Steve’s fingers traced around his rim through the sweatpants and Tony was going to be too hard to walk, let alone shower, if this continued. “Steve, Steve, stop, I-- JARVIS stop helping you are not helping.”

The sudden surge of lube made him feel debauched beyond reason and his firm grip on Steve turned desperate. His hole was so loose that the toy eased out a little way and Steve’s fingers found it and pressed it back in, reminding Tony exactly how far inside it sat. If Steve and JARVIS wanted, they could both push inside him right now, no preparation, just pull the toy out and--

“You came, what...more than six times yesterday, one more for luck?” Steve muttered, breaking Tony’s train of thought.

“...’one more’--! I heard you this morning! I know you have plans!” Tony squarked, thumping Steve on the shoulder in irritation and frowning down at his stupid, smug little smile.

“You like it when we make plans.”

“Okay, wow, zero to sixty in no seconds. Bedroom, now, let’s go.”

“I thought you wanted to shower?” Steve queried as he stood, effortlessly holding Tony up by his grip on his ass and pushing the toy deep in the process, then hiking him up a little more securely as he headed towards the penthouse’s master bedroom. When they left the radius of the dampeners Extremis squealed with input before JARVIS managed to queue it into priorities in the exchange folder. Tony held on with his legs, tight around Steve’s waist, and deliberately pushed the feeds away and focused on Steve’s comment.

“That was your suggestion, but I wouldn’t mind getting clean,” he muttered as Steve bumped the bedroom door open with his hip. “If you can fit it into your plans. Only good can come of lascivious plans that involve kink cards!” Tony jabbed a decisive finger towards the sky, then planted his hands back on Steve’s shoulders and peered down at him. “Did you have anything to add?”

“Nothing you didn’t pick up on at the time.”
Tony smirked and leaned down to nip Steve on the ear, then whispered into it. “Steve Rogers; maybe a masochist. Who’d have thought...”

“Tony Stark; definitely a submissive. Who’d’a thought.”

“You are an affront to the English language. What was that, a double contraction?” Tony complained, burying his face against Steve’s shoulder.

Steve ignored him, hitching him up again and freeing one arm to brace against the mattress as he dumped them both onto the bed. Tony oofed. A bed--this bed, sunlight streaming through the windows--this was new, this was nice.

Steve let go of his ass and ran his hands up Tony’s back, rucking up his shirts, then captured one of Tony’s hands and enveloped it in big warm fingers. "You do put out the heat," Tony observed. "I should measure you. Thermodynamically--hrghk--very interesting," he squeaked as Steve apparently got tired of holding himself up on his elbows and flopped his weight down onto Tony, squishing him a few inches deeper into the bedcovers. It was like a living electric blanket; the bed was too soft to let him push back at all and Tony didn't try, just huffed in token protest and half-closed his eyes, enjoying the sporadic kisses Steve was laying along his jaw.

"You look happy," Steve said. "How are you feeling?"

Tony felt himself flush, starting from the collarbones and making his neck warm. “You’re a sap, Rogers,” he muttered, turning his head to press his cheek against the cool pillow.

"That's why you like me."

"I like this. This is nice," Tony admitted. "I guess I like you," he added magnanimously.

“Y’know, I never would have guessed.” Steve nuzzled under his jaw, his whole body shifting down Tony’s, and nibbled at his throat. This had the rather predictable effect of reminding Tony that Steve had promised him Good Times.

Four days worth of good times. "And we keep wasting time sleeping," he muttered. "Rogers! Orgasm. Chop chop."

"I thought I'd just lie on you for a while."

Tony wriggled experimentally; he could lift Steve’s weight with Extremis’ help, but not without leverage. “Huh..."

"For someone with such sharp elbows you're pretty comfortable," Steve went on.

Tony shifted his hips against Steve’s stomach in a tentative wriggle and discovered that Steve’s abs were in a really good position.

"I have to ask myself, if Tony Stark wanted an orgasm, would he really let this stop him? And then I say to myself, no, because Tony Stark is not just a sub. He's a force of nature."

“Damn, fucking straight,” Tony grunted, winding his fists into Steve’s shirt for that all important leverage. “Or bi, technically.”

"Even when he can't move," Steve said, and got heavier if possible, like a cat, a smug smile curving against Tony's throat.
Right. If Steve wanted to do ‘immovable object’, he was gonna get ‘unstoppable force’. But not like he imagined, maybe. Tony wasn’t just going to rub off on him like a teenager... This needed something a little more sophisticated.

He licked his lips, not just to wet them, but to get them shining, then started to squirm.

Maybe ‘undulate’ was a better word. He used his whole body, in the limited give of the mattress, to press up against Steve in a long, rolling wave. From collarbones to thighs.

It wasn’t a top gesture, wasn’t about making his cock slide against Steve--though it did, incidentally--it was the slow roll of a bottom fucking himself on something. It made JARVIS feel like sunshine and daisies, it was so good, but that wasn’t the point.

*Steve* was the point.

Tony made a breathy moan, barely audible and only partially deliberate, and Steve tensed in anticipation. JARVIS was a knowing hum in the back of his head, silently laughing at their very human little game. Steve’s mouth, still against the sensitive skin of his neck, fell open when Tony’s thighs tightened around his hips, and moist air trickled across Tony’s throat. His limp bulk, so effective when he was relaxed, lightened as he took enough of his own weight to move too.

Tony smirked, wetting his lips again and then swallowing with enough exaggerated drama that Steve started kissing his adams' apple. There was even a little tongue, and Tony moaned again, as a reward for good behaviour. Another long, slow ripple, and then enough tension in Tony’s body to hint at orgasm, before he relaxed languidly, staving it off and making himself wait.

There was a hint of frustration in the kisses Steve stole, but Tony wanted *desperation*, so he did not stop, absolutely he did not. Steve made a little growl of frustration and started moving with his rhythm, pushing their hips together with carefully controlled super-soldier strength and kissing each moan right out of Tony’s mouth. There was enough space between them on the back-stroke for Tony to slide a hand down his belly and, just as their slow rolls pressed them back together, palm his own cock through his sweats.

Steve swore at the press of Tony's knuckles against his abs and the kissing turned *filthy*. Tony couldn’t even smirk about being fucked at both ends, because Steve was *fucking his mouth with his tongue*. Now the pressure, Steve's weight and the relentless rhythm they'd set had him gasping, which Steve took advantage of, ruthlessly stealing Tony's air away. Tony's hand faltered on his cock, distracted by Steve's teeth and breath, and the uneven rhythm was just about perfect. At the downpoint of each roll he could feel the warm nudge of Steve's erection just below his balls, not really camouflaged by two layers of cloth between them; he didn't have his mouth free to comment, but he gripped Steve's hand where their fingers were still laced together.

Tony wasn't going to go down easily though; just as he felt the tension start to boil over again, he let the hand stuck down in front of him go still, squeezing himself tight to keep himself under control.

Steve almost growled, frustration in every tendon as he rocked down and ground against Tony deliciously. But Tony wasn't going to come yet, he was determined. No matter how good Steve's abs felt, or how often that magnificent cock pressed against him, or--he arched as Steve shoved his free hand underneath Tony's back, between him and the bed, down under the waistband of his sweats. He hiked Tony's hips up with a bruising grip and braced him with a forearm, freeing him to rim Tony's ass with a surprisingly delicate fingertip. The contrast was-- oh hell.

Tony lost his train of thought as Steve's fingers pressed inwards, playing with the boundary between Tony and JARVIS, then whitened out as JARVIS and Steve *colluded* against him, Steve pushing the
toy in and JARVIS rumbling the internal mechanism to jab against Tony's prostate. He managed to hold off, barely, but it took all his attention and by the time he clocked back in, Steve was leaning back to strip him of his pants. Tony, very much on board with this, peeled his t-shirt and sweater off in one go, trying to ignore the way using his abs affected how JARVIS sat inside him.

"Steve, Steve, the clothes are killing me, off!" Tony said, still catching his breath, reaching for broad shoulders and tugging at the fabric. Steve grumbled at him uncooperatively, and lifted Tony's legs over his shoulders in one swift motion instead. "Or that!" Tony squeaked, his shoulders thumping back to the mattress as he lost his foothold. "Oh my --fuckingchristonabicycle Steve!!"

He had not known Steve could deep throat, oh hell, he should have known that.

There was really no helping it after that, even if Tony could remember that he was trying to draw it out, and Steve's mouth, his hot, nimble tongue and spasming throat, pulled Tony right to the brink of coming in moments. He clutched Steve's hair and tried to ignore the way Steve's eyes were closed, his expression of absolute focus, and how his other hand was down his own pants--

What actually pushed Tony over the edge in a tumble of swearing and gasping moans was Steve's thumb, pushing determinedly into his body and stroking JARVIS until he vibrated.

Tony came like a fucking freight train.

Xxxxxxxxxxxx

"Five minutes, jheeze..."

Steve snickered from somewhere around Tony's navel.

"You--?" Tony said, belatedly trying to get his brain back online.

"I'm good."

"Okay." That was... Yeah. Tony blinked sightlessly at the ceiling, his fingers still threaded through Steve's ridiculously soft hair and idly rubbing against his scalp. "Yeah. Shower."

"You want me to help?" Steve asked, the rumble of his voice making Tony's skin come out in pleasant goosebumps because his throat, together with a couple days' stubble, was alongside Tony's now-soft but still slick cock.

"Adhaguhbuh." Tony shook himself free of the sensation, and then the image spawned by Steve's comment, and peered down his chest at Steve. "'Help,' he says. Steve, if you join me in the shower, we won't get back to JARVIS before Christmas."

"Do not for a moment think I am not enjoying myself, sirs. I am, after all, intimately present."

"Fair point. Score one to the wireless-enabled genitalia." Tony waved a victory finger in the air, then smacked Steve's shoulder gently. “Alright, off,” he ordered.

Steve got up to elbows and knees but paused to lick and suck the unbearably naked skin of Tony’s inner thigh. Tony thumped his head back against the bed, groaning. “Menace to polite society. Seriously, what are you-- aww fuck...”

Steve, having worked his way up Tony’s thigh while he wasn’t looking, was licking at Tony’s hole, apparently fascinated by pushing the toy in and then letting it slip down far enough to stretch his rim. Tony’s cock was out of the game for at least ten more minutes, but that didn’t stop the slick touch,
the gentle stretch, being utterly mesmerising.

“You taste like ginseng, Tony, maybe you don’t need to shower after all…” Steve commented, before making another circle of Tony's rim with his tongue. It was sensitive; JARVIS was good with the lube, but the whole point was to feel permanently stretched open, and it was certainly working because Tony felt every miniscule nuance of Steve’s attention. Unfortunately for Steve, this knocked his observation about their fancy lube clean out of Tony’s head.

“I’m afraid I must insist, Steve; the internal reservoir is nearly empty.”

“Mmmm, shame,” Steve mumbled against Tony’s balls. Fucking hell.

Steve let Tony’s legs down, ducking under one and pushing it over so Tony rolled onto his side near the edge of the bed, with Steve warming his back. “Clench up, Iron Man; wouldn’t want it to slip out, would you?”

Steve’s hand slid down his lube-soaked ass and pressed the toy in. JARVIS must have been instructing him, because he gave it a very precise two knuckles, until it was sitting in the sweet spot, high enough for Tony to close up over it.

Tony realised he was panting, his body tense with arousal despite his lack of an erection. Had he mentioned that the ‘sweet spot’ coincided with pressing the widest point of the toy against his g spot? This was not an accident. He did not regret this, this was fucking fantastic.

“There you go…” Steve said as he patted Tony on the cheek and kissed his other cheek, the little-- “Now you can go get cleaned up. Up you go.”

Tony swung his legs down off the bed; the deeper the toy was, the less it interfered with walking, because of the anatomy of the pelvic floor and the way-- Aaaaaahh, sitting felt good though, and Tony felt himself opening up in want. He gritted his teeth and got himself back under control. The egg wasn’t actually at any risk of falling out, but deep was good, better than good. It wasn’t light, either, and walking with it in place while trying to treat himself to a prostate massage was surprisingly focusing.

“Alright, I’m good. Go, play with your pencils.”

Steve laughed at him quietly, but Tony waved him off with a grin and ducked into the bathroom. The walk-in shower had all the amenities, including a bench for battered superheroes and enough showerheads to service a modest orgy, but most significantly, JARVIS was fully present. If the tentacles in the annex and the new toy were his sexy bits, the tentacles in the rest of the tower were his hands. Except for the ones in the workshop, he limited the amount of sensory integration they had because they were in lower-security areas, but they were just as dexterous. When Tony had left the annex, for JARVIS it’d been the equivalent of his partner squirming out of his bed.

And then they’d had the feedback loop and Tony had missed a few things.

“Sir?” JARVIS queried, waving a bottle of shampoo in his direction. The blue glow of the ostentatious power couples was muted in the brighter halogens of the bathroom, the silicone coat acting a bit like Tony’s shirts to generate a luminescence that shone in the dark, but was subtle in the light.

“It's nothing,” Tony said, grinning; the slimy, soapy bottle didn’t slip in JARVIS’ grasp, nor was it held so tightly it buckled, because JARVIS wasn’t just coiled around it, he’d looped under its base, like putting your little finger under a glass to stop it slipping out of your hand. He could feel
JARVIS’ pleased bafflement, but didn’t elaborate beyond letting the buffer fill up with enjoyment and pride.

He tipped his head into the spray, which JARVIS modified into a monsoon-level downpour that trickled under the collar and pounded into his muscles. Once he was thoroughly soaked, he turned to face the shower head with his eyes closed and held his hand out. JARVIS provided a generous helping of shampoo and Tony set about rubbing away three sleeps worth of bedhead and who knew how much sex-hair.

“Mmmm, note to self; oil collar to prevent shrinkage, storage designation: memento.”

“So noted. It is a shame Ms. Potts could not find your usual collar,” JARVIS commented.

“Nah, it’s better this way.”

JARVIS hummed in agreement over the wifi and started work on his body with a puff, which was one of the easier bathroom accessories to hold without fingers, while Tony let the lather sit on his head for a bit. The ‘shampoo’ down in the annex wasn’t really worthy of the name, though it did cut static magnificently. Plus, he was pretty sure he’d gotten lube in his hair at some point.

open file: biostats S.Rogers, starting at my exit from the annex. Open file: int.var JARVIS, same parameters.

JARVIS queued up the data in a block, presenting it graphically. There was a pattern of correlation linking the two; no real surprise. play chronologically, multivariate landscape, scale: emotional.utl

The data reorganised as JARVIS focused it down to instantaneous view, an emotional photograph of just before the feedback loop started, then scaled the variables according to how useful, how positive they were. JARVIS’ own data was easy; his internal variables were numerical correlates of his emergent-property emotions. Steve was more difficult; heart rate, skin luminosity, surface temperature, and a set of other readings could be integrated into an approximation of his internal state, but it was rougher, with a greater margin of error.

co-locate linked variables and...play.

Tony scrutinized the data, literally pushing it though his visual cortex to use the brain’s exemplary pattern-finding software to evaluate the progression.

JARVIS had been a mess from the moment the loop started out, his inability to maintain control and security generating a spike of guilt and surrounding emotions which knocked his priority tree into confusion.

Tony closed his eyes to assign the data more processing power, and tipped his head to wash off the bubbles.

The breakdown in the priority tree had left JARVIS floundering, unable to decide on the best course of action; panic. Not quite blind, but close. Natasha’s prompting had triggered a thought that had calmed the mess back down, and JARVIS had been able to allocate the cognitive resources to a new problem solving session. Which was when he’d called Pepper. Tony gave JARVIS’ nearest tentacle a proud pat, and let JARVIS rub conditioner into his hair.

Steve’s numbers had stayed relatively steady at an almost battle-ready tension after an initial pair of anxiety spikes when he first noticed JARVIS’ distress, then saw Tony slumped in the hall. It wasn’t until Pepper took the power out of his hand that the adrenalin keeping his heart rate a solid 80 bpm started to tail off, leaving him with the anxiety components. Tony lifted the corner of the analysis to
retrieve raw data; Steve’d had a tremor too small for anyone but JARVIS to notice, and a higher skin luminosity than the local surface temperature justified. Tony agreed with JARVIS’ analysis and went a step further.

*how did you both have top-drop? seriously?*

*It was not intentional, sir.*

yeah, that i gather, he got better with the cooking though; you guys really have a thing about getting people, me, fed, don’t you.

JARVIS didn’t deign to respond verbally.

*it was that initial spike that was the problem, anyway. over-extended hypervigilance on steve's part, and deficiency in predictive modeling all ‘round. you did good, calling Pepper.*

*Indeed. I am very glad she was at hand, sir.*

*However, I believe this knowledge of boundary conditions will better enable optimal interactions. We will be just fine, in future.*

Tony huffed, because that was one hell of a sweeping statement, when for all they knew, they could get frozen in a Canadian cabin, without access to JARVIS, or-- oh, wait! that’s actually happened.

*A valid point, however --if I rephrase-- we are well equipped by this data, and Ms. Pott’s efforts, to proceed effectively.*

JARVIS dumped a document --infographic, really-- labeled ‘Care and Feeding of Tony Stark’ into Tony’s short-term memory. He flicked through it as it processed through to long-term, pleased to see ‘donuts’ in the emergency category, even if weird, gluten-free, unsweetened cream ones were supposedly the optimum. *well thats great, where’s emergency-steve gonna find those in the field? you know he’ll try.*

*Page eight, sir.*

‘Field Rations’

...*fair enough. I take it this means we have weird artisanal donuts in the freezer?*

Part-baked and ready to go in the fryer, sir, or, if Steve does not require the balm of cooking, fully cooked, ready to go in the toaster oven.

*you guys think of everything, don’t you?*

*I do try, sir. Rinse.*

Tony dismissed the datastreams, shooing them out of his visual cortex, and washed the conditioner out, his mind turning towards the workshop and contemplating whether the toy would be too distracting or not.

*Thinking of which, sir. If you would bend over?*

Tony’s train of thought stuttered to a halt and realigned. JARVIS had wound a tentacle up his leg, with a distinctly poised air. Ease of access. Right.

Tony leaned forward and put his elbows on the wall, trying not to dwell on that thought or on any variation of *servicing*, because he could feel subspace lurking under the flush of arousal if he did, and
workshop, dammit. He wanted to go play in the workshop.

Something in the complicated mix of emotions in the buffer piqued JARVIS' interest; the AI didn't ask, but Tony could feel him storing the data away as the tentacle squirmed up his inner thigh, already lubed up. He tried distraction. JARVIS, *i literally just washed, that'd better not be water resistant.*

What do you think of me sir? Of course it is.

Tony groaned and dropped his head to his forearms. *no spacing me, y'hear, J? do not.*

JARVIS hummed in the low band of the wireless range, noncommittal, and lubed his way between Tony’s cheeks. The tentacle was cooler than Tony’s body, soothing. *different lube, huh?*

Aloe. You are somewhat... sensitized.

Tony made a complicated mental gesture, a combination of a one-sided shrug and a nod. *feels good.*

*That is the general idea,* JARVIS said, rolling the lube around Tony’s rim, then dipping delicately inside. Tony could feel it sliding past his well-used rim, but lost track of it a little further in; it was inside the toy now, hooking up to the lube reservoir and batteries. Tony felt the toy shifting as JARVIS firmed up his grip, then swelling slightly as the reservoir refilled.

*oh, hey, that’s nice.*

You, sir, are the perfect size queen.

Tony laughed, tilting his hips and pushing back enough to test the give in JARVIS’ grip. *i know what i like.*

As do I. JARVIS adjusted the showerhead with a second tentacle, so it was pounding big, heavy drops against Tony’s back, then curled around Tony’s waist, holding him in place. *Steve got one, it is my turn.*

Tony swallowed down the rising urge to go limp and pliant. *sounds fair! i’m not going to complain.*

JARVIS’ answering rumble was like the vibration of naught to sixty in three seconds, bone-deep and evocative. JARVIS was grinning at him over the buffer, playful, ruthless. *A recharge takes five minutes; twenty-four seconds have already passed.*

*better get o--* Tony’s transmission cut off abruptly as JARVIS fucked the toy into him. The thrust pushed him forwards into JARVIS’ constricting grip and knocked an out-loud cry out of him. It was already in deep, this was just *unfair.* He set his feet on the tile, spreading himself open and solidifying his stance, all while JARVIS was doing something that made him see stars every few seconds.

[??!]

JARVIS sent him an impression of it rocking. Its base was close to spherical, nestled against his muscles comfortably and sliding with the movement, but the point bobbed and stretched him, inside. It was good, not like fucking unless maybe both partners were nearly asleep and just easing into each other, but deep and *good.*

Tony pushed back, changing the angle slightly and experimenting. JARVIS was letting him take initiative, that was good, that was +1 to his hopes to do some leisure work before Steve’s Plan.
Servicing, JARVIS mused. Oh god, he'd done—he'd done a porn search; the buffer flickered with a
dozen half-formed impressions, some intriguing, some confusing; what strange approaches humans
sometimes had to so basic a concept as the contrast between a person and an object.

By normal human definition, JARVIS went on, 'servicing' would apply only to machines.
Objectification… Since you are sentient, accepting even a temporary demotion in status is
submissive… I see. He was still unsatisfied with the conclusion, though, and extended a delicate,
almost wordless question. Tony swallowed hard, mind whirling in several directions, and pulled
himself together to answer.

you're right. humiliation doesn't do it for me.

Ah, JARVIS said, pleased. For you, servicing, giving or receiving maintenance, has no connotation
of shame. For you it has always signified loving care, exchanged easily, with gratitude, welcomed.

Tony felt warm, yes, thinking of a hundred nights down in the 'shop; the bots' oilcan, Dummy's
hoarded rags; JARVIS and his years of questions, once Tony had gotten through to him that he
could ask. Their smoothies and their blankets and their lively interest, returning the behavior because
he'd taught them and because they wanted to.

Treating each other like nice things. Probably the healthiest relationships in his life.

JARVIS moved, and a thin tentacle tip curled around Tony's cock, which had been taking an interest
for a while, but wasn't truly getting hard. Humans enjoy clean skin, free of irritants, for minimum
interference with the sense of touch. I am unsatisfied this part of you is clean.

you are sooo subtle. give yourself a gold star.

JARVIS pulled, slipping and redoubling himself over soapy skin, and Tony groaned, knees going
weak. The tentacle at his waist obligingly took his weight, lifting him up onto his toes, the slow lube-
slick and soap-slick push-pull as gentle and overpowering as ocean waves when his feet couldn't
quite touch the bottom. Every push worked the toy into him a little farther; it was already so deep,
each millimeter felt like a mile. The rings of muscle at his rim fluttered and clenched on nothing. He
rolled his hips, but couldn't push back effectively; still, JARVIS didn't bear down on him in the
buffer, didn't have the force he got when he was Domming, and he wasn’t using the collar.

He just wanted this to feel good. Just wanted Tony to feel--

Tony was coming before he knew he was close, breath punched out of him and toes leaving the tile
entirely as he arched. The tentacle on his cock stilled, but the toy kept up its slow rocking, pulling a
shuddering set of aftershocks out of him like the orgasm went on and on.

"That's," Tony wheezed, trying to catch his breath. "Ah--, are you--" It must've been five minutes
already, though he couldn't quite manage to query the system clock to confirm it.

One moment. I wish the attachment to be fully charged.

The rolling pleasure of his orgasm never quite resolved into oversensitivity, and JARVIS didn’t let
up the gentle prostate massage. “Mmmmokay…” don’t think i can come again though.

I believe you underestimate yourself.

seriously, no erections here, i am... noodle. Tony didn't even think he could stand up, certainly not if
JARVIS kept doing that. But he hadn't quite gone under; he was more, sort of, skimming along the
surface of subspace. Feeling good, but able to take the reins again anytime.
Feeling really good.

Whoever said you need an erection to have an orgasm?

Tony swallowed, because he had assumed that was general knowledge, but given that the aftershocks were building, rather than fading, he was willing to give the benefit of the doubt. Besides, JARVIS had root access; if he was enjoying this vicariously, then Tony was fine with whatever JARVIS wanted to do.

The toy’s slow rock was frictionless, slick beyond anything he’d ever felt before, and effortlessly nice. No struggle to relax, to be good; it was surprisingly peaceful as ‘aftershocks’ turned into a smooth, continuous bath of pleasure. Tony let himself droop against JARVIS, relaxed all over, and JARVIS cradled him with a solid squeeze. He felt more secure with his arms wrapped up in JARVIS and his feet stirruped against him than he had standing on the slippery tile.

easy there, big bad... Tony mumbled, resisting the slip into subspace.

“Of course, sir. Charge complete,” JARVIS said out loud, the words simultaneously distant and more immediate than the comm. JARVIS didn’t stop moving, didn’t change his pace, but Tony’s body started to clench, every so often making tiny flutters against the toy, and he let his eyes slip closed in focus. Without quite noticing, he’d started to pant, and as tension crept in his breath caught in his throat. Panting turned to gasps and the inevitability of JARVIS’ touch, his patience, paid off in the longest, slowest rolling wave of heat. It flowed over Tony, around and inside, infusing him with easy lassitude.

With a lingering stroke, JARVIS pulled out of the toy, easing Tony closed around it and letting his body settle it at the most comfortable position as it finished shuddering in pleasure. Tony smiled dopily at the care JARVIS took, including a last rub of aloe over his rim, before easing his legs closed and turning him onto his back. The water sluiced over his belly, then chest, washing away the sheen of sweat they’d worked up, but there was no come to clean up; JARVIS had been right, of course.

“Towels?” Tony mumbled, his cheek resting against JARVIS as he felt the rippling of tentacles that meant they were on the move. He yawned into his hand as the water slowed to a stop, then shook himself slightly; he was post-orgasmic, not sleepy. He wanted to go play in the workshop.

“Towels, sir.”

JARVIS helped him find his feet, and draped the towels around him in true butler fashion, then dried his hair, while Tony lazily wiped water off his arms and the reactor housing.

the towel thing is the best.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

The workshop was cluttered and busy, full of projects in progress, waiting for inspiration or test results. Tony turned in a slow circle, not sure what to start first.

priority list? he checked with J in case anything was on a close deadline.

No SI projects due within two weeks. No SHIELD projects due within three, though you are scheduled to perform an inspection of wear on Helicarrier control surfaces next week.

That would be nice. He hadn’t said hello to the Helicarrier in months; an inspection would let him climb all over it, maybe crack the armor and sunbathe a bit.
"Armor work then," he decided. "JARVIS! Bring out the Mark whatsis, you know, the new hotness."

"Currently tracking six gradations of hotness. To which of the three 'new' hotnesses are you referring?"

"The one with the TPS." A thermal protection system like the Shuttle's, but better; he'd need to be able to withstand reentry one day.

"Of course. One moment."

Tony had mentioned he was working on the armor, but to Steve's untutored eye it looked more like he was doing a puzzle, or maybe a mosaic, with little iridescent tiles that he occasionally held up to the curvature of an old gauntlet, or rolled between undersuit-gold fingers with the serious expression of a connoisseur.

"J, what's he doing?" Steve asked quietly.

"Checking for impurities. The undersuit acts as a tactile microscope."

Steve watched the golden tips of Tony’s fingers closely. “Huh. I hadn’t realised it was... has perception. Is it like taste, or touch?”

“Somewhat like both, as I understand it. An inevitable consequence of the high resolution sensory feedback system.” JARVIS sounded proud, as if he’d made it; Steve wouldn’t be surprised if he had.

“It’s beautiful.” Steve lifted his sketchpad to a better angle on his knee and begun blocking in a study of Tony’s hand, with a tile under his fingertips.

“Yes, I suppose it is.”

Steve traced the curve of a knuckle above the paper, trying to decide level of detail, before lowering the pencil to the paper proper and outlining the finger in one smooth stroke. Abstract, he’d decided; Tony was a thing in motion, changing moment to moment, and if Steve went for a high-detail method, he wouldn’t capture even a fraction of that energy before Tony had moved on. Bold, heavy strokes with a soft graphite gave a hint of that as Steve picked out the shadows under the palm, while thinner, sharper lines gave the back of the hand the crispness of the brightly lit workshop.

“There is a book of gold leaf in the drawer to sir’s left, for repairs, but perhaps...”

Steve pulled the pencil away from the paper, looking at the barely-drawn tile with new eyes. Gold wasn’t as expensive as he remembered and gold leaf was such a tiny amount...

“Alright, toss it over. How do you apply it?” He’d seen pen-and-gold work before, but not with pencil.

“Graphite is a lubricant, which prevents the leaf from sticking; much like a resist in water colour. A brush is used to lift the leaf and press it to the paper,” JARVIS explained, while a matte-black tentacle, without the luscious transparency of the ones in the annex, fetched the leaf and a brush. Steve listened carefully as JARVIS explained that the surfaces of the leaf were attracted to each other, how he could bound the areas he wanted it to stick to by using the graphite.

Steve was well into the fiddly process of applying a narrow, crinkled band to the edge of a tile, a
camera-holding tentacle leaning on his shoulder, when Tony surfaced from his gold-drenched work with the tiles. But that was fine, Steve had captured the delicacy of his movements and the strength of his hands already, five drawings in total, and all that was left was the shocking contrast of gold against sketched lines.

Tony was giving him a distinctly suspicious look. Steve smiled back blandly and lifted another scrap of gold. He hadn’t even used a whole leaf; letting the gold tear had given him a jagged, spark-ish edge that looked very apt.

“JARVIS, why do I have gold leaf?” Tony asked in the background, while Steve held his breath to avoid dislodging his latest fragment.

“For the experiment in chip stamping last year, sir. As I recall, it did not possess sufficient tensile strength.”

“Right, right, we ended up rolling our own.”

Steve entertained brief thoughts of Tony hammering out a pair of gold cufflinks before refocusing on laying the straight edge of the fragment exactly against the line of Tony’s thumb, allowing it to crinkle on the lee edge in order to get a smooth curve. The effect was very much of the gold tile bleeding onto the skin, Midas in reverse. Interesting. Iron Man had changed Tony, after all. For the better--healed him, saved him--gave him more power than he knew what to do with, sometimes.

Steve pressed the gold down, dabbing gently until it showed the texture of the paper underneath. Done. He carefully closed the book of leaf and put the brush down, then shook off the tension of high-precision work.

“Can I see?” Tony asked, staring at his hands as he rubbed non-existent oil off them with a solvent-damp cloth. He looked tentative and maybe a little guarded, but then, Steve had been working very intently, for a while; Tony had to be burning with curiosity by now.

“Sure, they’re done.” Steve stood and knocked the prop of the drawing table down, laying it flat so he could spread the five sheets over it in a sequence.

Tony bumped up against his side and Steve shuffled to tuck him under his arm, pointing to the first image; a left hand holding a tile in its palm, while the right caressed its face. The gold application was a little rough, not quite touching the edges of the shapes it was supposed to be picking out. “See how the edge is ragged? It took practice to get the edges to line up just right, and the heavy pencil for the shadows smudges and stops it sticking.”

Tony nodded silently, rapt.

“Here, I used a much harder pencil, see?” He pointed out the thinner, sharp lines bounding the tile and fingertips of a sketch where Tony was holding the tile on edge in just his fingertips. “I got much better edges, but see where I went over? It doesn’t stick to the line, but it stuck to the other side, just there, and not all of it brushed off again.”

He walked Tony through the technicalities, just for the rumbling of his voice to keep away the quiet.

Eventually, he rolled to a stop, letting quiet fall naturally over their shoulders. Tony's attention shifted from the drawings to Steve's chest; he looked preoccupied and maybe slightly dazed. The collar was rich brown against his skin and Steve could have kicked himself for not sketching it before they got distracted.

Too late now.
There was an index card in Steve's breast pocket, right next to his 4A pencil. Tony could just about make out the smear of writing through the thin cotton.

"You and J were talking this morning..." Tony said, looking narrowly at the card. "Is that the next one you want to try?"

"I want to learn more," Steve said. "And yes, try it, if you agree." Steve plucked it out with two fingers and turned it right way up: D/s.

"That means we need to talk first," Tony warned. "And if we try it, it'll be harder here. This is my space, not yours or even JARVIS', sorry J," he added aside to a soft I know, sir. "I'm not--I wouldn't be--intentionally getting in the way, but you'll have to really work to make me sub out here."

Steve looked delighted, then thoughtful, and Tony had a sinking feeling that mixed nicely with the little kindle of excitement under his ribs.

"The place makes such a difference, then?" Steve said, looking around the workshop as if seeing it again, Tony's mind writ large and disorderly in a hundred suspended acts of creation.

"Hell yes it does. The annex couldn't be more JARVIS' space if it were made completely of writhing silicone tentacles. And I don't know if you've noticed the door it has...?" Tony said wryly. "If JARVIS wanted to keep us there, he could. And with the dampener coverage he has, he could pull back the transceiver and cut me off completely, for as long as he liked. The workshop has dampeners, sure, for when I want to concentrate, but not complete coverage."

"So every time you walk into the annex," Steve said, feeling his way, "you're already--willing, to give up power to JARVIS."

"If I walk in on my own power I'm already halfway down," Tony said frankly.

"It is a method of smoothing the way," JARVIS said hesitantly.

"Are you saying you want to do this the hard way?" Steve seemed to be the only one of them feeling confident, the bastard.

"Uh," Tony said, caught between explaining it wasn't that simple and Yes, oh god that sounds great.

"Hands on the wall," Steve ordered, with the snap of command in his voice. Tony was moving to do it before he realized this was the start of a scene. He shouldn't let Steve jump right in like this, they should talk first, but he couldn't help it. He trusted Steve, trusted Cap, too much now; in the ways that mattered, he always had. And now Steve would know.

Tony put his hands on the wall, feeling half-ready and pretty dumb. The wall was cold and rough; for this room he'd poured the concrete himself and hadn't bothered to clean it up much, past sanding down the sharp edges from the molds.

Steve went behind him, out of view, though he kept one warm hand on Tony's back between his shoulderblades. "No, no, eyes front," Steve said, and Tony hauled his focus back to the wall between his hands. "I won't do anything until we talk. I need to know the lay of the land," Steve added, and Tony felt his shoulders relax a little, only to tense right back up again as Steve went on: "This card. I want you to explain to me what D/s means, what you meant when you wrote it."

Tony licked his lips. "You talked with JARVIS, ask him," fell out of his mouth. "You have the
earbud and he could use it to pick up subvocalizations, not strictly meant for that but--"

"Tony." Steve put both hands on his back, spread them over his shoulders and ran them down his arms, holding him from behind. "Explain what it means that you wrote that card."

Tony tried again to look around, wanting to orient towards Steve, but caught himself and screwed his eyes shut until the urge passed. This was hard. "It means--" he said hoarsely, "in certain highly specific situations, I don't mind taking orders."

"Don't mind," Steve repeated, and hmmmmed in the way that meant he'd come back to it later. "Now, by 'taking orders' d'you mean being ordered or obeying?"

"That's, uh," Tony stuttered, "that's a, a little more complicated. I can't always-- I don't-- Sometimes I just listen."

"I'm familiar with that," Steve said wryly.

"Listening is not always easy," Tony had to add, "A lot of people want me to listen to them, Steve, a lot of people, too many people. It's not just a courtesy, it's-- consent to making a good-faith effort, is how Pepper put it, and I'll do it for you, but-- What if you convinced me? But what if you were working from bad intel, if there was a mistaken assumption-- What if you were wrong?" He felt a little disassociated from his mouth again and shut it as his throat closed up around the words. Steve's hands tightened and rubbed his forearms, reassuringly. Maybe that need to...set boundaries that were a little further out than most peoples'...wasn't too hard for Steve to understand.

"Thank you," Steve said simply. "I didn't realize... But I want you to know, you never have to listen to me unquestioningly. I don't want you to stop telling me things." Tony could imagine his face, sincere and earnest with the little line between his brows. "I don't know everything. No matter what, you can always object, or add, or disagree. You go so quiet sometimes. I know you need that, but… If I'm missing information I prefer that you keep me updated; I can change the plan." Steve was quiet long enough to let the words sink in, then asked in his Cap voice, "What makes listening easier?"

Tony leaned back into him. This was better; question, answer. "Be clear. Don't give me riddles. Don't set me up to fail. Don't punish me for failing. I'll safeword out if I don't understand what you want, or don't think I can do it." This isn't like a battle, this isn't like Iron Man, he wanted to say. He could tackle a hundred impossible tasks in his suit, or in the workshop, and feel nothing but crystal-clear focus and the adrenaline high. Maybe this was the price he paid for that. "There's, there's a term now, I don't know if you've heard it-- 'moving the goalposts.' It means changing the rules, or changing the terms of an argument, without letting your opponent know. If you want to know my hard limits. That's one of them."

Steve hummed thoughtfully, and the words just kept going, spilling out--what if Steve didn't understand--?

"I can deal with it in normal life, that's fine, in a business context dealing with people who try to change the deal is my bread and butter. And I'm good at it. But I can't. Do it here." Steve was pressed all along his back now, his hipbones pressing against Tony's ass and warmth all up his spine. Tony gulped a breath and went on fast, rapping the words out. "You've seen how I get. I can't protect myself, Steve. If I'm really down, I can't even recognize that kind of attack."

"If a partner lies about what they expect from you, or doesn't even tell you what they expect and either way blames you later, that's a violation of trust." Steve turned his head against Tony's neck and added musingly, "If I led like that the Commandos would have stabbed me in an alley."
"Not Bucky," Tony protested.

"He'd have led them. Though you're right, he'd only stab me a little. Probably." Steve nuzzled into the nape of Tony's neck, until he could feel the sad smile against his spine. Tony tried not to shiver too openly. "You have permission, you know."

Tony didn't know, and fidgeted uneasily, making a questioning whine.

"To stab me. When I mess up."

Tony thought about this for a second, trying to work out what it meant because Steve wouldn't mess up, not by Tony's standards, and Steve had mentioned trying painplay but-- "I won't. Nope. Do you know how many arteries there are in the human body? Miles. Don't...don't let anyone stab you. Bad Steve," Tony said, his voice shaking. He dropped his forehead to the wall.

"Oh, no, I-- not literally!" Steve sounded outraged and plastered himself against Tony's back, putting his hands over Tony's and pressing them to the wall. "Not literally. You use your safewords, and call me names, whatever works, let me know I messed up. I'll fix it, or JARVIS will, and you can--I don't know-- slap me over the head with a fish or something."

"...fish. Okay. I prefer rolled-up newspapers." The knot in Tony's belly eased off, because this was Steve, he wasn't going to Dom out on him the minute he got the chance. No, he'd rather make jokes about fish. Tony was surprisingly okay with that.

"You can get a paper delivered for the purpose; you can't have mine."

"But taking yours makes it better."

"Well," Steve conceded, obviously seeing the truth in this, "as long as you give it back."

Tony laughed at him, a little nervously, but it was a real laugh. He felt like a band on his chest had loosened, like he could breathe deeper. He let himself get caught up in that for a minute, the solid unyielding wall in front and the motion of Steve's chest behind, echoing him, and broke the silence only reluctantly.

"Uh, other hard limits." It was getting hard to think, though Extremis helpfully told him there was a massive amount of analog processing going on. That was sort of comforting. "Nothing JARVIS objects to. He manages my blacklist, or at least he used to. Don't have him just display it to you, though, it's sort of a mood killer. He's pretty good at warning if anything's going on that could come close, if I'm not in condition to say 'yellow' or can't predict that far ahead. Uh, what else..."

Steve's grip on his forearm loosened and shifted to a strong arm around Tony's waist, pressing them together while Steve whuffed into the hair at the back of his neck. Warm, damp air trickled between his skin and the collar and Tony swallowed, finding his voice again.

"Be careful with water. Not like cups of water, I'm fine with those, but larger amounts. Like sinks or bathtubs or whatever."

"JARVIS let me know about that," Steve rumbled.

"Yeah, it's in my file too. Uh, some physical things can be triggery if they're combined with other stresses. Sudden motion by the side of my head, being grabbed by the head or neck from behind, certain postures." Steve was bristling, his muscles going hard against Tony's back; Tony didn't want to see him angry, not even a little bit. "But, uh... JARVIS'll make sure you don't make too many mistakes? I wish I could give you a better roadmap, but most of those are new since the last time I
did a real scene. It's not like any of that comes up in board meetings, thank god.”

Steve rumbled into the back of his neck, the deep thrum in his chest flowing into Tony via his spine, making his ears tickle. Tony swallowed, tipping his head up and screwing his eyes shut against the workshop’s bright spots.

There was one last thing.

“No alcohol, Steve; I can’t even see it. Don’t let me smell it on someone, or see the bottle, or even a glass while I’m under. You...you have no idea how difficult it is, how much effort it takes to stay away. How fucking clever I can be at getting it. Please, don’t make me want it.”

"I promise," Steve said, voice soft but bedrock serious. "JARVIS, are there any alcohol-based solvents in the workshop, or any containers that resemble alcohol bottles?"

"All ethanol- and methanol-based solutions are kept in a secure storage closet, Captain, and will not be encountered by accident. They have additionally been dosed with traces of a compound that Sir assures me smells nauseating. There is no pure or drinkable ethanol in the workshop, nor any wine or beer bottles, though there are small compressed gas canisters that bear a superficial resemblance--"

"Which have a different storage locker," Tony snorted. "Is that why Dummy doesn't like the new blowtorch? I thought he was really keen on putting it away. I don't-- DUMMY," he yelled, "I can tell propane apart from champagne!"

"He is charging at the moment, sir," JARVIS said sweetly, "but I will tell him when he restarts."

“You do that.” Tony shifted his weight from one foot to the other. “I don’t see how his recognition protocol could even--”

“Tony.” Steve pressed into his back, pressed his hands harder against the wall. “Shut up.”

Tony shut his mouth, what was left of his air huffing out from between his lips.

“There. You can think about Dummy later. We have plans.”

“You have plans,” Tony muttered, heart rate kicking up as he pushed just a little, wagering that Steve had meant stop talking about Dummy, not stop talking at all. "And I have zero objection to these plans, but I did warn you."

"You did," Steve agreed. "But you've been holding still for me, and you didn't look around once. And you told me what I need to know. Is there anything else? You done?"

"I'm done," Tony said, closing his eyes again and blowing his breath out. "But you. Have you done this before, Steve? Are you gonna get what you need?"

“I haven’t done this exactly,” Steve muttered into Tony’s hair. “But I have good feelings about it. Coulda chosen any other card, chose this one.”

Sure, because subdrop and Ty and Pepper’s collar hadn’t been the biggest nudges in the history of nudges. “I don’t want-- I can go without,” he said, “no matter what all this--”

Steve sighed and Tony choked the sentence to a halt at the sag in Steve’s posture, the disappointment. “Shhh, Tony, I hate it when you-- dammit. This is worth doing because you like it; you’re worth that, to me.”
“Doms get safewords too, you kn--”

“Quiet.”

Tony trembled, his spine jerking straight at the crisp, sharp tone. He still wanted to object, but the weight of Steve's disappointment was crushing --what did I do?-- and when he opened his mouth he couldn't quite manage to make his air form words.

“I know, JARVIS gave me the colors, I'm fine. But get this straight: on the street, on the battlefield, I'll take a hit if I have to, but not in the bedroom. What I do here I do because I want to. So cut the crap.”

Tony shivered on the edge of something, his mind a jumble of half-words and confused thoughts. He couldn't not look at Steve, needed to see what that stupid, noble face was doing, try and--

He turned, hands tugged out from under Steve's, his back thumping against the concrete and eyes making contact with Steve’s. oh shit oh shit, only two rules hands on the wall eyes front and he was breaking them both, though at least now he'd know what he'd done, Steve would have a reason to be mad, but--but-- stop me, already messing up, thought it would be different this time [fear-dread-bitterness-disappointment]--

Steve looked right back into him, his hands still raised, then lowering slowly onto Tony’s shoulders, pinning him in place. Tony said nothing, staring back at Steve, ready to react.

"Your heart is racing," Steve said, brow furrowed.

Tony searched Steve's face, dug his fingernails into his palms, and croaked "Yellow."

He didn't have to settle for that here. Didn't have to compromise in the ways he'd done with Ty-- with Obie-- with his father, didn't have to pick the ways he was going to rebel just to give them a reason, to make their actions make sense. He'd hold Steve Rogers to his own standards, even if it was petty. If this was going to work.

Steve's face blanked with surprise, then went parade-rest neutral as he took a half-step to the side, shifting his grip to steady Tony with a hand under his elbow, but no longer boxing him in. Tony braced himself against the wall and didn't move.

"You have to tell me what I did, what did I do wrong, Steve, you have to--"

"Tony, you didn't--"

"No!" Tony said frantically. "When I do something wrong you have to tell me what it is, sometimes I don't know, Steve! You have to tell me what you expect."

Steve blanched. "Your hard limit. I'm sorry. How did I…?"

"J," Tony said, dizzy with relief, "please, help us out."

"Really sirs? Must I do all the work?"

Tony cracked a weak laugh. “You’re the best of the best, J.”

JARVIS hummed non-committally and opened a holoscreen, playing back footage of the last couple minutes of their conversation alongside a graph of relevant mood indicators. When Tony in the replay said I can go without and Steve sighed in response, Tony's graph went haywire. Watching it,
Steve leaned forward unconsciously. "There?"

"You were disappointed," Tony said. "What did I do?"

“I wasn’t!” Steve argued, giving Tony another spike on the graph. Tony glared at JARVIS for running it in real time, but it did make Steve’s eyebrows go up in surprise, made him back off a bit more.

“The problem stems from your ambiguity, Captain. Perhaps if you completed your sentence, here.” The screen read ‘I hate it when you’ [flashing cursor].

Steve swallowed, nodding, and turned to Tony and gave him both barrels with those baby-blues. “I hate it when you put yourself down. It hurts when you don’t think you deserve something. I want to make one thing very clear: doing this with you is not self-sacrifice. I'm doing it because I want to, and I hope,” his voice deepened, not pressuring but promising, ”it'll be very clear how much I like it too.” Tony swayed a little and swallowed, nodding.

"J, can you keep that graph going for a few minutes?" Steve said, then to Tony, "Tell me if I'm pushing too hard." He took the half-step back into Tony's space and took his other elbow, supportive but firm. "Tony, your punishment for turning around is to listen to me right now. Can you do that?"

Tony stared, surprised, then managed another nod. "Y-yes."

"What's your color right now?"

It took Tony a long time to reply, but Steve just waited, not seeming worried or disappointed or anything but patient. "Green," he finally got out, "to listening."

"You were checking on me because you're more experienced than I am, and you need to make sure I'm okay with doing this. That was exactly right. And you refused to stop until you got a clear answer, and that was exactly right too. I will never be mad or disappointed at you for taking care of other people."

Tony nodded, not quite sure of the catch.

"I was angry," Steve took a deep breath, "because whoever taught you that you aren’t worth this was so wrong. You're worth it." He gave Tony a very slight shake, meeting his eyes intently. "This isn't a sacrifice for me. But Tony, you are not the only person allowed to put others first! I've seen you assume that if anyone needs to give something up, if anyone needs to take damage, it should always be you.”

Tony stood there with his mouth glued shut and his eyes wide; Steve was talking about Ty, and maybe he didn’t know it for sure, but it was terrifying how precisely he was pinning Tony’s mind to the corkboard.

"And when I thought I saw that pattern again here, I was angry. And sad," Steve admitted, looking strained. "I wanted you to stop talking before I tried to go after Stone, and I'm sorry I wasn't clear. But I wasn't disappointed. Thinking of others, and choosing the hard way-- those are some of your best virtues. Just, terrifying virtues, sometimes."

"Oh," Tony said, sagging forward. "You weren't disappointed."

"No," Steve assured. "Hm... what do I expect..." He put the deeper rumble of command in his voice again and Tony's brain went still and attentive. "When we do a scene, I expect you to include yourself in the circle of people to be protected. I expect you to put yourself equally, not ahead or
behind anyone else. It's okay if that takes practice; I know it'll be hard. And when you check in with me, I expect you to trust me to know my own mind."

He said it like a law of the universe, like he was reading out Maxwell's equations because Tony had somehow managed to forget, and it was so beautifully simple. Trust Steve to know his own mind? He could do that, he could be good at that. It had always been doubting him that was hard. Things clicked into place, and what had he been afraid of? "Okay," Tony said, drowning in relief. "I'm sorry. Green. Sorry I turned around."

"It's okay," Steve said, arms circling him now because somehow he was plastered against Steve's chest, clutching a handful of his shirt. "You needed to see what I would do. I won't overreact when you push back, Tony."

Tony twitched slightly when Steve kissed his hairline, but Steve’s warm arms kept him from moving too far and he relaxed in one long slump.

"I like seeing you like this," Steve said softly. "Caught like this. And feeling how brave you are, up close, not just seeing it from far away."

It was the praise that did it, sliding under his defenses and kindling a sweet warm glow in his chest like the very best booze, together with the reminder that he was caught, caught but Steve had caught him and he was safe, safe, safe. His knees wanted to bend. Tony let them, let Steve ease him down, and slid his hands down Steve’s flanks until he was kneeling between his legs, forehead resting against a muscled thigh.

“There you go...” Steve whispered, his voice full of something soft and pleased. Tony shuddered and was rewarded by a heavy hand on the back of his neck, over and above his collar. "Trust me."

Tony did, of course; he had for a long, long time. But now he actually remembered it. Remembered laying his head on his crossed wrists, and remembered JARVIS taking his arms. Taking the next step, beyond sex and into the misty, luminescent glow on the other side, the exponential progression of trust into absolutes.

Ugh, apparently subspace made him philosophical. But he didn't really care, not with Steve running hands down his back, saying "Shhhhh" and "Good." Those hands were warm and sure of themselves, and Tony found himself mesmerized by the tiny variations in pressure and friction as Steve’s calloused skin caught on cloth, only to slide smoothly over skin and leather.

Steve pulled him back up again, looking him appraisingly in the face with that slight head tilt he got when he was listening to the comm. Tony staggered slightly but found his feet, and then just waited, not sure of the plan but not really bothered by that. "Strip," Steve said, and Tony pulled off his shirt, toed out of his sneakers, unbuckled his belt and pushed down his jeans, boxers and socks and all, stepped out of them and left his clothes on the floor. He straightened up again, floating, and Steve’s hands were on his wrist and the small of his back, directing him. "The armor assembly platform," Steve said and Tony went, the grip on his wrist feeding that warm glow down inside his chest. Steve picked him a path with no hazards to bare feet, though the polished concrete was cold. It felt good, actually; he'd been running hot all morning, Extremis informing him with a kind of primitive satisfaction that he'd had enough sleep and food for his metabolism to rev up to 'optimal' levels.

The armor assembly platform was a grating, but the gaps between slats were small enough that it didn't hurt to step on. Steve let go of him and Tony wiggled his toes and stood there, not sure what to do.

"If you would turn, sir?"
Tony faced the right direction and stuck out his arms by pure force of habit, though they hadn't used
the platform to actually assemble the armor for months. The last time had been...some comparison
tests of Mk 11 against Extremis... He got caught up in reviewing the data for a moment and didn't
pay much attention as JARVIS activated the assemblers and slipped on vambraces and pauldron
linkages, arming him up to the shoulders, then fitted the upper chest and gorget yoke over his
collarbones. It protected his neck and throat and was meant to connect to the helmet, and without
that, it wasn't very comfortable. Tony swallowed and felt Pepper's collar squeak against the stiff,
high padding of the gorget. He'd fought in full suit and tie under the armor before; having the extra
layer of leather choker under the yoke didn't threaten his airway, it just felt like it might.

JARVIS lifted him slightly and put the jetboots on, then armored his knees and thighs as well. Okay,
this was weird. Tony shifted his weight in the loose hip joints; the torso armor needed to go on first,
before the inner thigh, for the tricky ball-and-socket joint of the hip to be adequately protected over
its full range of motion, but JARVIS had skipped that part. Skipped the entire chestplate and
backplate, the belly scales. And the gauntlets. He opened and closed his hands and rubbed his thumb
along his fingers, not quite able to look up far enough to see with the unpowered shoulders and
gorget yoke so stiff.

"Two more pieces, sir," JARVIS said. The torso assembler arms raised before and behind him and
snugged on the segmented lower back/lower abdomen cuirass from the Mk 10. The front and back
locked together around his waist, covering from just above his navel down to where the groin cup
would have gone on, then snicked into the leg armor at the outside of his hips. The assembler arms
lingered, hooking their screwbits into the well-concealed adjustment points and spinning to adjust
tension in the cuirass.

Tony gasped, losing his thread of thought about what different pieces J had combined from different
armors, as JARVIS adjusted it tight.

"How does that feel, sir?" JARVIS asked innocently, and Tony had to take another breath before he
could answer. The cuirass was too tight for him to breathe from the diaphragm; he had to push out
his chest, physically move his ribs to give his lungs room to expand. He arched his back --he could
still do that, barely-- and pulled air in again.

"Sir?"

Oh yeah. "Good," Tony said, his voice thick. "Really good, J, really really..." Safe, absolutely safe,
in his armors, in his workshop, surrounded by Extremis and JARVIS and Steve. The cuirass
squeezed him from all directions, heightening the toy and sparking pleasure up his spine. Because of
the-- JARVIS had skipped-- His cock and balls and ass were all open to the air, deliciously exposed,
and his groin was one solid throb. He jinked his hips helplessly and got nothing but a hint of air on
his cock, too far from anything to rub against. "...really good. Kinky bastard. Proud 'f you."

Surprise and a tinge of shy delight in the buffer. "I am pleased, as always, to serve. Captain?"

Warm hands on his back, cupping his shoulderblades, then pressing down along the muscles that ran
beside his spine. He breathed deep and arched for Steve, pushing back into the touch as much as he
was able. Steve chuckled and ran fingertips around the upper edge of the cuirass at the small of his
back, making Tony shiver.

"Spread his legs, please, JARVIS. Head height," Steve said cheerfully, and Tony groaned at the jolt
of arousal as the assemblers smoothly powered into motion. His first thought was some kind of crazy
upside-down splits --which, yes, frantic mental math confirmed the assemblers did have the range of
motion to contort like that while still holding him, though it would take some tricky driving-- but
JARVIS merely boosted him up several feet and widened his stance, the inside surface of the
jetboots and thigh plates taking his weight comfortably.

Steve strode between his legs, ducking slightly and then straightening up again, and Tony craned against the gorget to see anything more informative than the part of his hair and the blond whorl at the upper back of his head. It seemed Steve's face was now on a level with Tony's cock.

"Do you want to see, Tony?" Steve said, rich and amused.

Tony considered. Not-seeing was good too, but Steve's face-- "Yes. Please," he rasped, pushing against the gorget.

"All right. JARVIS, if you would?"

"Very well," JARVIS played along, insufferably pleased, and Tony blinked as two video feeds overlaid themselves on his awareness, a portion of the way JARVIS was perceiving the scene. The transceiver tentacles JARVIS had installed in the workshop had cameras in their tips, an added feature that had been helpful several times so far in delicate work.

Tony really should have thought of this use sooner.

One feed showed his ass from close range, his legs wide and open, the pucker of his hole wet with lube that trailed down shining over his perineum. The other feed was a side view of his cock, red and flushed and fully erect and oh god Steve was licking his lips like he was looking at dessert. Tony heard himself groan again, in stereo from both inside and outside his head, as his cock jumped and a bit of precome showed at the slit. It oozed down his skin, shining wet.

"That was an excellent suggestion, Captain."

"I'm glad we're all enjoying ourselves," Steve agreed.

"You two're going to kill me," Tony slurred. "Steve. Steeeeve, do something, c'mon."

Steve came closer, his breath feathering Tony's skin. "You're nice and hard. I bet you've always wanted to do this, with the armor."

"Oh god have I," Tony panted fervently. He was glad he'd never gotten around to it. Nothing would have measured up to this.

"Good. I've imagined you like this, a few times," Steve said thoughtfully. "Such a mouth on you. So strong with your armor on and so vulnerable inside it."

Tony whined in what he hoped was a conversational way. Steve's lips were literally one centimeter from the head of his cock, and had he just admitted this was one of his fantasies?! His cock twitched again and he strained, trying to get closer. Steve just breathed on him, mouth curving, leaned in and gave the head of his cock a chaste little peck, then leaned further and licked a stripe upward from his balls all the way to the slit. Then drew back and breathed on him again, warm air against the cool wet line he'd made.

Tony's abs rippled and flexed. "Bastard," he said.

"This guy doesn't really have a part in the plans," Steve said, back to cheerful, "but I wanted to say hello. We'll get started properly in a second, but first, give me a color."

"Greeeen. Wh'd'you mean, doesn't--"
"Shhhhh," Steve said over him, and Tony went quiet. Steve stepped away a little and rested big warm hands on Tony's sides above the cuirass, brushing his thumbs up and down as if counting ribs. "JARVIS, put on the last piece, please."

Last piece? Tony had assumed the cuirass was the last two pieces, but it did feel more natural to think of it as just one.

All the assemblers were occupied, but several of JARVIS' limbs snaked into the frame with the groin cup from Mk 10. They hooked it into the cuirass, then clinically, neatly, tucked his balls and cock up into it and folded the cool metal flush against his inner thighs.

Tony jerked, heart rate increasing in confusion. A long tease he could understand and get behind, but the inside of the cup was most definitely not lined with his normal extra-soft padding. "What…?"

"It is a nearly frictionless body-safe lube, held at exactly your skin temperature," JARVIS said. "How does it feel?"

"Doesn't feel like anything." He couldn't tell where the boundary of his skin was. No cue from temperature—and temperature was huge, for touch—no cue from viscosity, no cue from pressure, nothing but the formless deep ache of arousal, and even that was getting hard to localize. "'s like my cock is gone, or…"

"It's all right," Steve said, his hands keeping up the same warm, grounding touch.

"There are no drugs, no numbing agents, and you are not harmed. Your sense of touch is simply unable to gather tactile data from that environment."

Tony dipped into Extremis' constant low-level numbers, checking circulation, nervous system innervation, energy synthesis: everything was boringly, reassuringly normal. "H-holy shit," he said, and felt arousal pass over his whole body in a wave, swirling tantalizingly without a focus. "I might come and not even notice."

"That is possible. We wish your attention to be directed elsewhere."

Tony gasped at a sudden distinct slide, an indefinable sensation of fullness that just as quickly receded from his ability to perceive again. "Plumbing connections complete," JARVIS announced.

Tony wriggled, not sure what he would need that for. Although, he supposed, he really wouldn't have to notice if he came. No mess, no fuss.

"Here's the plan," Steve said. He was bright red, blushing hard, but his voice was sure and steady. He moved his hands to Tony's inner thigh, rubbing gently, and kept contact as he walked back between Tony's legs, then swirled a finger around Tony's hole and slipped it in, just the tip. It went easily, of course, and Tony shuddered. Feeling was one thing, seeing was another, and far from being fucked-out, he was so sensitive it was like his nervous system was highlighting every millimeter rub in neon. Without his cock to be distracted by, it felt abruptly like he was all hole, and every little touch was fantastic.

"JARVIS and I are going to work the toy out of you," Steve went on, his hand stilling so Tony had no choice but to listen. "You'll be so open, and then I'm going to come into you, fill up your beautiful open hole, and then we'll plug you back up. How does that sound?"

"Oh man," Tony said helplessly. "Yes. Yes please. Fill me up?"

"My come all inside you and JARVIS keeping it there," Steve confirmed.
"A reminder," JARVIS purred.

Adrenaline shot down his spine and Tony tried to spread his legs wider. His asshole twitched and a bit of lube got on Steve's finger. "Call it, Cap," he said, trying to sound quick and snappy, and didn't miss the little quirk of Steve's lips. Steve knew he'd use that line in battle later and he was looking forward to it too.

"Mmm, you're pretty loose already, here. I'd sort of like to start from scratch. JARVIS, any ideas on how to do that?"

"An inevitable consequence of the last few days' enjoyable activities," JARVIS mused. "But if you would like him to tighten up, I believe--"

Tony jerked, trying to bend his knees as his feet were abruptly submerged in icewater. "Fuck that's cold," he said, even while figuring out how J had done it—a combination of signals in certain frequencies causing very specific erroneous input to the tactile buffer—marveling at the neatness of the hack, and returning J's status handshake with a bitfield that indicated the sensation was jarring but pleurably so. "Glad no one else knows how to do that--"

"Up to your waist, then," JARVIS said, and Tony sucked in a huge breath as his whole lower body was dunked, the shock of cold making him try fruitlessly to curl up. JARVIS followed with the reverse hack a few seconds later, delicate and precise, overwriting the icewater with normal sensation—the slightly cool air on his ass, the firm embrace of the armor around his legs—and Tony let out his breath in a long shaky string of profanity.

"You moved the toy deeper by over a centimeter with muscle tension alone," JARVIS said, and his approval was warm, warm, warm like Steve's hand on his hip, smoothing up and down over the jut of his hipbone.

"Now that is tight," Steve said, impressed. "I knew you could do it." He brushed the pad of his thumb lightly over the puckered muscle and Tony shivered, feeling Steve shift his hands, brushing over skin until his fingertips were anchored around Tony's hipbones and the heels of his palms were spreading Tony wider. Steve leaned in, breath warm on the naked inner curve of Tony's thigh, and then there was kissing, drifting upwards towards his hole.

"Steve, Steve—JARVIS can I see? I want to—" Tony cut off when Steve's tongue touched his rim, the muscles spasming closed and driving the toy against his sweet spot. So much for seeing, he didn't need to see, he could feel every tiny detail, each nuance of Steve's tongue. probing and pushing, and—oh boy was Tony grateful that he was clean enough for this, over-flowing with hot and fuzzy feelings for JARVIS—pressing inside to lave the inner surface in a way Tony'd never felt before. Hot and flexible and textured like a soft rasp—Steve's tongue was strong, as strong as any of his other muscles, and Erskine never would have thought of this, but—his lips, and his breath, giving Tony chills holy shit.

"The toy is holding you open for us. Even tightened up, we can just reach inside..." Jarvis crooned, a caress of EM waves running down Tony's belly and into his gut.

Steve hummed against his skin, the sound echoed by JARVIS inside the toy's workings, leaving Tony's nerves trapped between two delightful things. The hair stood up on his arms and he shuddered, ass wide open, pinned between the armor and Steve's hands. He couldn't move away, he couldn't do anything. It was terrible and wonderful and it was slowly cracking him open, like sweet clean water gushing down inside him over something parched and brittle.

"There, that should be plenty," Steve said. Which, totally impossible, because Tony was still
"definitely being speared on his tongue, he wasn't just--"

"Sensory replay looped and... locked. Thank you, Captain."

"It was my pleasure, JARVIS."

"What," Tony gasped. "Did you seriously-- Are you--"

Steve looked around, smiling at the camera, and stepped back. Suspicion confirmed, because the sensation of his tongue was back to licking over Tony's rim, just hinting at what it could do, and the tight pink circle of muscle was twitching at nothing. "Ohhhhhh shit," Tony moaned.

"JARVIS told me a little more about full sensory replay. You'll need to be very relaxed for us to take the toy out," Steve explained. "So he agreed to loop the sensation, what I just did for you, until you loosen up about enough."

"But-- the cold," Tony objected, very coherently he thought.

"Aren't you enjoying yourself?" Steve asked, the bastard's fingers trailing along Tony's inner thigh and hooking idly into the top of the leg armor holding Tony up, which kept Tony quiet in breathless need. "Sometimes, it's the journey that counts."

"You... you dork, oh my god, how is that the same tonGUE!" Tony finished on a squeak as Steve used his suddenly not-so-idle grip to pull Tony down. The armor's kneepads hit the deck as JARVIS repositioned him and twisted his arms behind his back. Steve's tongue didn't stop, which felt weird now he wasn't spread ou-- not that weird, no, JARVIS give it back, pleaseplease-- The implacable tongue returned, hot and just rough enough, as Steve hopped down off the assembly platform, his beautiful, glorious thighs flexing inside just-small-enough sweatpants.

(JARVIS snaked a spare tentacle around and held Tony open again in rough approximation of Steve's hands, positioning the camera for best viewing, the buffer alight with scholarly curiosity and the pleasure he felt at seeing Sir's autonomic responses laid bare.)

Tony looked up the rippling plane of Steve's chest, white shirt blushing with colour from JARVIS' transmitter light, and licked his lips. There were many things of interest at this height on Steve's body, but one in particular was drawing the eye, and Tony wanted in in his mouth as much as he needed it. The sweats didn't hide much.

"How can you walk," Tony said, because apparently his brain-to-mouth filter was long gone. "That can't be comfortable." He licked his lips again, since attempting to rub his mouth on the shoulder of the armor would just cut off his air and look dumb; the unpowered yoke and gorget didn't have the flexibility for that.

"Shh," Steve said, stepping up and taking his head in both hands. Tony half-closed his eyes and breathed shallowly, feeling those big palms caress the sides of his head: over his ears and along his cheekbones, then down to scratch over the short stubble under his jaw, to where the gorget covered the rest of his throat. They settled at the hinge of his jaw just under his ear, Steve's long fingers cradling his skull at the back of his neck. Tony could feel the pulse in his throat on both sides, beating against the heels of Steve's palms. He opened his eyes and looked up as far as he could manage, just catching Steve's bright-eyed look of curiosity between his massive pectorals.

"Normal people go commando under sweatpants," Tony informed him.

"Shut up, Tony," Steve said fondly, and took the half-step forward necessary to rub his still-clothed boner right in Tony's face. It smelled like clean cotton and fresh exercise, and Tony could feel the
heat on his cheek even through the fabric. He moaned surprisingly loudly, and felt blood rushing to his face, along his cheeks and ears. Something about Steve grabbing his head and just putting his face there-- naked would be different, naked meant sex and sex had its place, but Tony saw guys with pants on every day. Saw Steve wearing pants, these pants all the time at breakfast and after missions, and now he'd be thinking about this and oh god this was unfair.

Tony shivered; the longest rimjob of his life was starting to make his ass feel hot and cold, so aroused the nerves couldn't distinguish fine detail of texture or temperature any more, just shifts in pressure and friction that rippled up his spine and would have made him kick the floor or the wall, if the armor wasn't holding him fast. Even so, he was naked, intensively naked, the effect heightened by the cold edges of the armor biting where the padding ended, and then there was steamy cotton against his cheek.

No fair...

He tilted his head right back, mouth draping open because the angle was... tight, and there was Steve, watching every detail with the same expression that Tony caught across the briefing room or the breakfast table--

So that's what it meant.

Steve’s hands were hot on the sides of his head, and Tony didn’t want him to let go, per se, but he wanted the sweatpants gone desperately.

please, J? wantwant tongue and lips and hot and wet, be good, promise, pleaaaaseeeeee.

Beg, sir.

i AM begging

Practice makes perfect, JARVIS said insufferably. Might I suggest using your words? I am not the one you asked to be in charge.

Tony whined like a child and dropped his head against Steve’s hip. “Steve, let me suck you, I'll be good, I'll make it so good. It’s right there, I really want to. Really, really, please.”

"That does sound good," Steve agreed, rubbing himself in little circles on Tony's jaw and throat, cloth scritching on stubble. "I say go for it, Iron Man. I'm not in your way, am I?"

"Your pants are in my way." Tony grinned. "A thought I've had many, many times, but I'm seriously disappointed in you if you don't do something about it this time, Cap."

Steve just hummed. "As team leader, I have to give everyone the freedom to play to their strengths. I think this is a problem you can solve."

Tony raised his eyebrows as expressively as possible. "No matter what Clint told you, Extremis did not give me laser eye beams." He drew back a little, though, considering the problem like an engineer. Hmmm. Steve chuckled at him, but Tony had a mission now, he had focus.

There wasn't much slack in the straining cloth, but the impressive tent Steve had made let him nip a bit of the fabric between his teeth without accidentally getting any of the skin underneath, and he twitched his head to the side to pull down, wondering how tight the waistband was. At least Steve wore them low, below the jut of his hipbone, which for the record was a bane on Tony's ability to focus during sparring.
The waistband slipped within reach of teeth, but stuck there, on Steve's cock. Tony let go and carefully reapplied his teeth to pull the elastic away.

Victory was sweet, and slightly salty. Steve's cock bounced, *bounced!* to attention and Tony let the elastic snap back against Steve's thighs. He looked up with a self-satisfied smile, but Steve was staring down at him, his thumbs pressing on Tony's cheeks... Mesmerised. The moment stretched, eye contact locked between them, until Steve blinked.

Mesmerised turned to hungry and Tony's grin faded. His lips went slack under Steve's thumbs and he glanced sideways at Steve's cock. There was a pearl at the tip, and he wanted it *right the fuck now.*

"Is th-this one of your fantasies," Tony said, breath stuttering a little as the rimjob made him shudder all over, and licked up the side of the shaft to the head, getting that drop of precome. "Me in the armor, on my knees, taking care of you after--"

Steve's hands flexed, repositioning him, and Tony dropped his jaw and opened his throat automatically --just in time-- as Steve pushed in, heat filling his mouth and not stopping there. Tony fought with his gag reflex a little, throat clicking and eyes tearing up, then relaxed victorious, open and smooth and so good, taking huge breaths through his nose and using one of them to moan. *Fucking finally!* He'd fistpump if he wasn't, you know, restrained by his own armors in the hottest safest possible way, and there came the endorphins like a flight of Asgardian valkyries, making everything even hazier and sweeter than before. He lost JARVIS’ camera feeds, letting the bitstream go where it would, and distantly felt Extremis reroute to permanent storage.

He floated, letting Steve set the pace --as if Tony could have done anything else-- and Steve wanted to try all his paces. Not just face-fucking, though he went for a little of that and it was wonderful --his big hands tight around Tony's skull, pulling him forward until clean blond hair tickled his nose and his big cock cut off Tony's air entirely-- but pulling Tony off, having him breathe like a bellows and lick up the shaft and down again all the way to Steve's balls, doing everything he could to blow Steve's mind without the use of his hands.

Back to face-fucking, yes, the best reward. Steve’s cock twitched against his tongue each time it hit the back of his throat; Steve *liked* bottoming out, that feeling that you were taking everything, filling everywhere. When Tony swallowed around the head, Steve groaned and thrust into the tightness. It cut off his air and turned the world into molasses, thick and sticky and rich, with the cold bite of JARVIS’ grip through the armor sparking like magnesium in contrast. The sensation of Steve’s tongue was still mercilessly circling his hole, and he could feel the toy stretching him wider, any incremental relaxation allowing it to slip lower and push his rim open.

Steve’s hand fisted at the back of Tony’s neck, Pepper’s collar in his fingers, and he pulled the leather against the soft skin of Tony’s throat; awareness of the rimming as anything other than ‘*yes, more*’ took a back seat to the pressure against his pulse.

Any attempts he might have made at swallowing Steve down choked against the roaring of blood in his ears and the thrumming rush of adrenalin-fueled fire though his body. The strip of leather bit into his throat, restricting the actual physical space available, and Steve thrust into the constriction like it was the best thing in the world.

Air became unimportant, and Tony's eyes rolled up in his head. Pleasure rolled up his spine, unfocused and smouldering, slathered thickly throughout his body by the lack of focus on his own cock. He might be coming, he wasn’t sure because he couldn’t think, and his body shook with it. A moan tried to escape past Steve, using what air he had left, but Steve thrust deep with a powerful twitch to cut it off.
They held there, locked together by the pressure of Pepper’s collar and JARVIS’ replay, until the white heat in Tony’s belly simmered down and smouldered into coals, chased by the floating darkness of oxygen deprivation. The inner sensors on the armor escalated an alarm up to JARVIS, and through him to Extremis, registering how its pilot had gone totally limp.

Steve pulled back, hands holding Tony’s head up rather than against, and Tony lost time to breathing great gulps of cool, fresh air. Something shimmery white and hot--more orgasm maybe, it was hard to tell--rushed through him from head to toes and that first breath came out as a breathy cry, his head tipping back on its own, whiting out the buffer with pleasure.

“Now, JARVIS,” Steve growled, his fingers hooking under the cuirass at the back and moving Tony to his will.

Tony found himself locked on his knees, bent forwards with his legs spread and the shivery vulnerable feeling of the toy holding him wide open. JARVIS twisted his arms behind his back, bowing his chest out forwards, while his weight rested on the yoke and gorget. He let his head hang, eyes closed, and jerked again against the sensation of Steve’s tongue tracing around the fingers he’d pressed in beside the toy.

Steve’s fingers hooked into the armor, firm and insistent, and helped hold him in place while JARVIS pulled the toy out of him, the muscles they’d so thoughtfully tightened up stretched and loose again from however many minutes of rimming, and the breathplay, but not quite loose enough to make this effortless. Tony had no ability to resist, but he wanted to; it didn’t hurt, but it was huge and then--not. Empty felt-- wrong, strange, but then hot thick, Steve filled him up, slick and perfect and hard.

Hipbones covered in muscle hit Tony’s ass, and Steve’s grip ground him against them, leaving fingermark bruises on his skin that he begged JARVIS to let him keep. Filled and stretched felt fucking excellent, but he needed more, there was more to be had, he couldn’t think, but that wasn’t his job, so he begged instead.

“Oh god, Steve, please, just, more just, something, JARVIS please, I need--” He didn’t know how to finish the sentence, but Steve saved him by pulling back and slamming back into him with just the perfect angle. Stars crowded into his vision and his back bowed, pushing back and desperate to get more where he needed it. JARVIS obliged, a slick and hotter-than-human squirm into his hole alongside Steve’s cock. J was perfection, some kind of saint, Valentine himself, something, because the sparking of his nerves turned continuous, waves cresting on Steve’s brutal thrusts and then holding high and white and blinding until it rose again.

The sounds coming out of his mouth were obscene, barely human and desperate for everything they could give him, his whole body begging on every channel and wavelength and with every muscle and twitch. He couldn’t see, couldn’t speak, reduced to-- expanded into a conflagration that was burning him up.

He held on, wanting more and not knowing where it would end, the need becoming consuming and thrilling with danger, until a last slam of Steve’s hips and a violent shuddering that ground his cock right into Tony’s prostate. Warmth spilled from him into Tony, deep, as deep as JARVIS.

Steve held him, warm, warm and still, his breath shifting him just a little bit inside Tony, and then friction scraped along Tony’s nerves as Steve started slowly, gently, fucking him again.

His spine turned to water, or molten silver; liquid but hot and thick. He lay limp in JARVIS’ hold, shuddering with loose muscles that hadn’t quite got the message, and felt Steve’s leisurely thrusts through a warm haze. Whatever hardness Steve had lost coming, JARVIS was taking up, the ripple
of his tentacle distinctive and more persistent than the lazy, smug motion Steve had going on.

Tony drifted in a cloud of stimulation, pressure, restraint, affection, not-thoughts ticking over to the steady rhythm of Steve’s cock as his thrust his way towards a second orgasm. Tony wanted it, he really did, but he was in no position to help. There was a deep, abiding pleasure in being the source of the noises Steve was making, and silent communion with JARVIS gave him the low growl of servers enjoying themselves.

Steve came again with his cock thrust as deep as it would go and the temperature differential--Steve’s balls ran hotter too, just like his cock and his stupid muscles and all of him, and Tony could actually feel it inside, the sensation referred all the way up towards his navel.

“--take it all, Tony; you want it, I can --nghhh-- feel it around my cock, you’re all stretched out and sloppy, but you want it inside--”

JARVIS pushed the words into his brain, printing them across his eyelids, and his body flushed valiantly, a sensation almost like nearing coming flushing up his stomach. A hard smack to the side of his ass made his body twitch, the perfect sensory imprint of one of JARVIS’ larger limbs stinging across his skin and making him clench up.

His jerk rubbed Steve just right, sent him ploughing back into Tony’s prostate and driving a desperate sound out of his mouth.

“--c’mon, once more Tony, come on, now, Tony--”

Steve’s hand left his hip, and the other, holding the cuirass, paused in slamming Tony’s hole over his cock long enough for Steve to slip him a few extra fingers. The extra stretch felt perfect, throbbing deep in his belly, but it wasn’t for Tony; he could feel Steve rubbing at his own cock, crooking his finger under the head and making himself twitch and moan.

Tony had almost forgotten what having a cock felt like, but he knew how much Steve liked that, liked having that place pushed, like a ‘go’ button, ignition set. JARVIS twisted to make room in Tony’s ass, incidentally --not-- pushing hard on Tony’s prostate and grinding against it like it was going out of style.

Tony’s body seized up, the wave of heat almost painful in intensity, and he fucked himself on Steve’s cock for a few more spasms before the stimulation was so far over the threshold, his entire body gave up the ghost and he came so hard he went blind.

Steve, all up inside him, focused on his own cock, buried inside Tony, finished with a hoarse yell and a final deep thrust, then fell against Tony’s back, elbow heavy on the cuirass. That giant chest, bellows to Steve’s forge-fire metabolism, heaved against Tony’s naked back, air gushing over sweat-shined skin in hot-then-cool waves.

Slowly, as though on the come-down himself, JARVIS loosened the grip of the limited armor until Tony was lying in its embrace rather than held by its steel. He couldn’t have moved even if he had the wherewithall; Steve’s cock, his fingers, JARVIS’ tentacle, were all buried deep in his ass and his head felt like three thousand feet of open sky. A lot of Steve’s weight was on his hips and draped across his back, and Tony muzzily logged every shift and heartbeat through over-sensitive skin and the threat of imminent unconsciousness.

Slowly, (reluctantly, Tony hoped,) Steve pulled first his fingers, then his softening cock, out of Tony. The teetering emptiness clawed at him for a moment, come threatening to dribble out of him, until the blunt, familiar shape of JARVIS’ toy pressed inexorably into him. Like a puzzle piece, it slid into
place with an aftershock of pleasure, stoppering him up and keeping every drop of lube and come inside.

He felt Steve hit the platform beside him, in the vibrations of the machinery, and JARVIS tenderly -- more tenderly than Steve had treated himself-- eased Tony down into the space between Steve’s arm and his side. Armor plating, and the groin piece that had made coming feel so unique, disengaged. Tony groaned, his cock coming back into awareness and suddenly feeling like an awkward, flopping thing, before JARVIS pressed down gently on the back of his neck.

The force pressed him into Steve’s chest, and silenced any further protests by allowing him to pass out with dignity.

Steve’s rumbling voice sounded briefly in the distance, and JARVIS’ more clearly, but Tony was done and out, sleeping with the weight of sweet exhaustion.

Tony was the first to come back online, which he hadn't expected.

He wasn't particularly surprised, though. He and Steve were lying tumbled together on the armor assembly platform, JARVIS looped lazily under them to keep most of their weight off the metal grating, but even with the blanket haphazardly draped over them it wasn't comfortable.

That didn't matter. The assembly platform was quiet, deep in the dampened zone that covered most of the workshop; none of the incessant traffic that filled the air in and around the tower could make it this deep. Dummy and You were down at the far end, trading packets that Tony couldn't quite make out, just a little too garbled for error correction. The only meaning the overheard signals carried was the first one, the original one: I'm here. And the reply: I'm here too.

Tony felt like a still pool, vast and calm; all the little annoyances, distractions, worries, anxieties fallen away. He'd felt like this before --a little wash of pleasure as he remembered that first time with JARVIS and Steve, down in the annex-- but being awake and aware for it, that was interesting. That was new. Maybe the philosophers were on to something, with their Zen and no-mind; he'd suspected
as much once or twice, when a beautiful solution struck him to the core, when he understood something new and tears welled up in his eyes for no reason he could tell. He remembered how the cave had smelled, water and rock and musty rugs and cold, and the harsh metal tang of the liquid palladium as Yinsen poured it into the mold; the first time he'd stepped off the ground in his Malibu workshop in the horrifically dangerous prototype jetboots, and controlled the flight; the first time he'd boot ed up with Extremis, and through it glimpsed a larger network. Every time since.

“Mmm... Tony?” Steve stirred against him, a ripple in the tranquility, but one that faded quickly as Steve stretched and fell still again. “All right?”

Tony wriggled closer, mouthing gently at Steve’s collarbone. JARVIS stroked reassuringly up his back, the thrum of their wireless rising and falling as J swept along the antennae in his spine. “Better.”

Steve hummed, one lazy-limp hand bumping Tony’s shoulder, then entwining fingers with JARVIS behind his neck. “...’s good.” Steve went heavy again, sated and peaceful.

“Thank you,” Tony said, not having to hide his ridiculous, elated smile because he couldn’t feel embarrassed in front of these two, not right now. “Good memories, perfect. That breathplay. Damn. You okay?”

Steve nodded. "I was giving me...numerical scores. How much you liked things." He huffed a laugh. "You weren't kidding. ...Bed?"

Tony rolled onto Steve's shoulder and nommed at the muscle.

"...my ass has little stripes squished into it."

"That's what you get," Tony informed him, and rolled the concept around for a second before he could put it into words. "Just desserts."

"For what?"

"Sex on the assembly platform." It was obvious. Tony rolled his eyes and used teeth, just a bit.

Steve shuffled and craned his head to look at down at him, frowning with an affectionate twist. Tony grinned around a mouthful of pec. "Really? You liked it at the time," Steve said.

Tony considered this and hmmmmed in agreement; Steve cupped the side of his head gently, turning it for a better angle, and Tony let him, felt his neck and spine go soft and easy and his eyes go half-lidded.

"You're still deep under," Steve said. "Even though you're talking." Tony dipped his gaze, probably at a delay; Steve's hands on him, added to JARVIS' warm strokes, made everything go soft and slow. But a place softer and warmer to rest sounded good.

"Bed," he managed.

JARVIS chuckled at them, and the elevator door at the far end of the workshop pinged.

"Okay, huu--p we go..."

"I will have a little something waiting in the bedroom, Captain, Sir. Please, after you."

Tony gave JARVIS a squeeze while tentacles levered him up, rubbing his cheek against the warm
silicone and humming the note the big arc reactor made. Steve rolled to his feet, one hand holding the blanket they'd been draped in and taking a 'hand' up from J with the other. There was an acceptable level of post-coital mess about, a drip of lube here and there, an empty water bottle neatly stood next to a half full one. Nice. Subtle.

Something about the smears of lube drying on Steve's body and the carefully placed aftercare was perfection. Tony felt warm and easy and made no attempt to think about anything in particular, but he wanted to cover Steve in kisses. Bed would be good, soft and warm. Workshop was great, but exciting. Steve looked done with exciting.

Warmsoft wrapped around his shoulders, then warmfirm around shoulders and knees, and Tony buried his face in Steve's neck, his feet dangling and arms curled against his chest, with a handful of fleece to squish.

why carry?

Because he likes it, hush, firewalls up now.

oh, mkay

He pulled the digital blankets up over his head, shutting out all the extraneous data using a protocol he didn't quite recognize, which JARVIS fed him across the read/write buffer. This encryption was softer somehow, not quite such a clunky transition.

JARVIS carried them smoothly up to the penthouse, though Tony entertained a brief desire to nudge Steve in the direction of the common zone. He wanted to see the others, all healthy and fine, but Steve didn't have any clothes on.

twice in as many days. he's gonna get a reputation.

"Ohayou gozaimasu," Tony said politely, and "Good morning," the Stark Zaibatsu engineers chorused back.

okay J, what were they saying about me before the video stream went live?

There was some speculation as to your state of dress or undress this time, sir.

Tony buffed his nails on the lapels of his brocade dressing gown. All it needed was a tumbler of something whiskey-colored and a Playboy Bunny to complete the picture, but he doubted Steve, currently sitting straight-backed and demure just outside of the camera's field of view, would ever be willing to put on bunny ears. Too bad. But probably for the best; as fun as tormenting middle managers was, they did have real work to talk about.

"Tsuuyaku wa…?" the sacrificial newbie on the other side said, delicately enquiring about interpreters.

"Irimasen," Tony said brusquely. Spoken Japanese was easy enough to pick up even before Extremis, and now he had JARVIS in his head, better than any dictionary when he was stuck on a word. "Everyone's there on your side? Let's get this show on the road. Tell me about the new concrete mix stress tests."

The sacrificial newbie had never been in a videoconference with him before. She droned on in the accepted reporting-to-superiors fashion, summarizing each slide in their presentation without looking
up. At least she wasn't reading the slides word-for-word out loud. Tony left her to it, for the moment, while he zoomed way in on each person in turn. The middle-manager-in-chief had been in conferences with him before; the others sat up straight or blinked in alarm, but he was unperturbed to find himself the sole three-foot-wide focus of the far side conferencing system's camera.

In the corner of his eye Steve snorted silently in amusement, and JARVIS tightened around his ankle, warm but also a warning. He pulled the zoom back to professional levels, anyway, and threw the statistical analysis up on a screen next to their faces, so his gaze direction was something roughly camera-wards. A swell of fond-feeling for the management staff caught him by surprise and then swung back towards mild exasperation.

[QUERY@MOD.emote=rundiagnostics]

_Focus, sir. You're experiencing a little instability, compensating._

Tony relaxed again when 'compensating' turned out to be a strong tentacle wrapping around his calf and squeezing. He turned his attention back to the contents of the brief: the newbie was only a quarter of the way through, bogged down in minutia.

"Thank you, that's enough," he interrupted, tapping on the table. "I read your materials ahead of time, so we can skip to the end." Never mind that 'ahead of time' meant half an hour ago, floating deep in subspace while Steve and JARVIS cleaned him up. "I saw the full suite of tests performed for tension and compression on the various concrete mixes and rebar separately, but what about shear tests for the composite reinforced concrete?"

"With vertically oriented rebar, shear forces from earthquakes are not a concern," the middle manager jumped in. "You may not be familiar with standard building practices in Japan--"

Tony made a face without much regard for professionalism. "What I am familiar with is the increased failure rate of buttress members during the p-to-s wave transition period. I don't want to be assured it's up to code--" wow, that was apparently a lot more scathing in Japanese than English, "--I want numbers. Because it may take a bigger earthquake, but if support columns can crack lengthways, they will." He frowned at all of them. "You know that. Were those tests done?"

There was a disappointing round of uncertain looks, and failure to make eye contact. And _there_ was the reason Pepper had left this meeting on his schedule; they had to make the Tokyo SI tower to next years' specs, next decades', but that wasn't what was happening here. Damn.

The newbie spoke up unexpectedly. _"The tests were done, Stark-soubuchou."_ And now she was the only one meeting his eyes, though the manager was giving her a stony look sidelong.

Oh that did not bode well. _"Why were the results omitted from the advance brief?"

"They were-- inconclusive..."_ Newbie looked at last toward her manager and found no help there; instead he made a little shooing motion at her.

"Why don't you send the raw data, Fujikawa-kun? I'm sure he would appreciate it."

Tony replayed twice, and yes, that was a note of challenge. All the raw data would be a several gig file, but if the newbie didn't have it with her right now she was up shit creek.

"Forwarding it now, soubuchou, I apologise for the omission."

Fujikawa looked relieved, which was weird considering the way her manager was trying to murder her with his laser eyes of irritation. Tony took his attention off the feed reluctantly to process the
incoming data as it arrived, but his ability to do so was really, very, extremely classified so it was
time to move on through the agenda even though his answers were right there.

It didn't feel right though. Tony shook himself; this wasn't just-fucked moodswings, this was healthy
engineering paranoia, something he suspected the middle manager had gotten a little too divorced
from. No, you know what, they weren't moving one bullet point further in this agenda until he was
satisfied. It was time, the time he looked forward to in most meetings: time to dazzle them with
bullshit.

He brought up a hologram and loaded the data convincingly slowly, then had Extremis cycle it
through several kinds of scatterplot until they got to something useful. No error bars yet, and it wasn't
immediately obvious why logarithmic scale showed it better than linear, but plotted in 3D there was
the sense of a trend and clear groupings.

Three data clusters stood out abruptly, the Young's modulus creeping above zero too far to be
consistent with concrete's low elasticity. Images were attached to the file for these tests, and Tony
went hunting for the three corresponding documents.

"The relevance of this measure is very low," middle management said. Hibisaki, that was his name.
"Such rigorous testing is wholly--"

The beam in the appropriate image had a cluster of cracks right along the lines of reinforcement,
pulled open on one side, and crushed to powder on the other.

"Delamination," Tony said. "Would you look at that." It came out as a much more slangy phrase
than the English equivalent, and he noticed the slight wince as several of them shifted uncomfortably.
"You were saying?" he said to Hibisaki, and made the same shooing 'go on' motion that the manager
had used.

"Such rigorous testing is still insufficient to find the cause of a few outliers. And further tests are not
covered by the budget," Hibisaki said, lines around his mouth deepening with every word.

"The budget? Really?" Whoops. He'd slipped all the way down into the impolite register; Newbie's
eyebrows were raised in something like delight.

JARVIS, do a check on this joker, would you? and every intra-departmental squabble he's been
involved in for the last two years.

It could be departmental politics. Or a conflict of interest. Tony's eyes narrowed. He had to get to the
bottom of this. Worst-case scenario, it could be sabotage.

In the corner of his eye, Steve sat up straighter, paying attention to something in Tony's posture.
Almost offhandedly, Tony sent a security alert to the Tokyo office and asked the guards to send
someone up to the hall outside the meeting room. That would trigger a pop-up on Pepper and
Happy's phones too.

That done, Tony leaned back, deliberately relaxed. His hands had been in plain view this whole
time. "I will personally authorize the budget to perform further testing." Middle management was
starting to fidget. He wasn't obvious about it, but Tony was willing to bet that his skin surface
temperature had spiked. "I want to know if those outliers share a common factor, and I want full
lifecycle simulation in a range of expected weather conditions. Fujikawa, you're in charge of that, so
make sure to check in with the team that did the previous tests. I want an interim report in one
month. Hibisaki-san, I'd like you to stay behind for a few minutes. Everyone else, that's all for today.
Thank you for your time."
JARVIS' first-level check had come up clean, as expected, as had his check for known departmental squabbles and grudges. But his deeper third-level check against known associates was kicking up red flags, each one pinging Tony's awareness.

"Arigatou gozaimashita," the engineers chorused back, looking at each other confusedly. They were getting out of a 90-minute videoconference over an hour early, with most of the agenda ignored; Tony didn't blame them.

Hibisaki stood up too, shuffling his papers into order, then reached out and pulled Fujikawa to him by the shoulder of her jacket and held something to her neck. "Please stay a little longer," he said, and then more loudly as the rest of the attendees noticed and froze on their way to the door, "No one may leave."

Tony tripped the security screamer, and felt JARVIS shunting video through to the guard office in Tokyo and straight to Pepper's phone. He took a deep breath and let it out, keeping his hands flat on the desk.

what the hell is that?

J projected size and shape of the...item and ran it against Tony's old database of weapons designs, coming up with no good matches. Tony, meanwhile, compared it against all the office supplies and small Japanese consumer goods that Extremis could net him images of. There were similarities to the paralytic screamer they'd invented back in the DOD days, but the emitter dish, if it was what it looked like, was far too big to make such high frequency sounds with such a small power pack.

assume it is an emitter, estimate frequency using theoretical powerpack at 75% by volume-- Tony powered through a haze of math, Extremis so well-integrated he couldn't distinguish between it and his own calculations, except where he found himself working with values accurate to a ridiculous number of digits, where Extremis had decided for reasons of its own not to round at all. Someday he'd manage to teach it significant values, but not right now.

He checked back in with a mounting feeling of dread. J, are you getting what I'm getting?

If we are correct, it projects a subhertz-frequency wave in matter. Effects on human body: deep tissue damage ranging from bruising to crush injury; heart attacks if existing arterial plaque is loosened; in the brain, concussion-like coup and countercoup damage, stroke, and aneurysm. ...Unfortunately this matches cause-of-death injuries for three unidentified bodies found in Osaka last week, presumed casualties of an organized crime power struggle.

Tony pulled the personnel file back to the forefront of awareness; Hibisaki had worked late every day last week, so he hadn't been in Osaka, but his associates were based there. Particularly his brother-in-law. And Hibisaki was too calm, now, for this to be a spur-of-the-moment desperate ploy to get fired with honor, or whatever was going through his head. He had a larger plan.

"What do you want?" Tony said.

Tony tensed forwards in his seat as Hibisaki moved the device slightly, keeping it near Fujikawa's neck but rotating it to point purposefully at the floor. Nothing visible happened, bar a slight fuzzing of the camera which could be explained by any--

Sir, a small earthquake emanating from no known fault lines just occurred in the immediate vicinity of Stark Zaibatsu. Roughly 3.2 on the Richter scale; unlikely to cause damage but large enough to be felt.
awww c’mom, no. Tony could see the camera shaking now, like it would if someone thumped equipment into the wall it was mounted on. After a couple seconds it stopped.

The dirty bastard was talking again, the device returning to its place at the base of Fujikawa’s skull.

“I believe everyone in this room felt that. Why don’t you tell Mr. Stark exactly what I am capable of.”

The secretary spoke up, eyes fixed on Hibisaki’s hostage. “An earthquake, nothing of any significant strength. We have two of those a week—”

“There is more to the device than such a small tremor. Tano, do not call security, or Ms. Fujikawa will be taking a long vacation.”

One of the remaining management team froze and backed away from the room’s phone in the background; Hibisaki had seen him move in the return feed of the conference call. Tony couldn’t let them know help was coming without jeopardizing... No, he could, now was the only moment he could.

And why dissemble? He went for a grating mixture of polite verb stems with impolite conjugations. “Moushiwakenai kedo, security has already been notified. There’s an automatic system in place on my end. In case of Avengers business. Are you Avengers business, Mr. Hibisaki?”

“I will be,” Hibisaki said. “I can trigger earthquakes of any size, up to the kind that comes once a hundred years.”

Tony raised his eyebrows and made a ‘go on’ motion.

J, throw his corporate expenses account on screen, break it open, all transactions, last six months and track the epicenter of his little demonstration down, get me the main device-- his handheld version’s a toy compared to whatever just moved the earth.

JARVIS complied, feeding Tony a copy of the data. For once, this was legal, court-admissible evidence; Tony had every right to look into expense accounts. There were obvious signs that he was supporting more than his local grocery store out of his skimmings.

“The people will not stand for more tragedy. More avoidable tragedy,” Hibisaki continued, getting louder, choking a little as he got to the crux of his plan. "If the weak government will not pay us, they will overthrow it. All Japan will cower at our feet, and we will make Yamato the empire it once was!"

Tony tilted his head to one side, but the guy didn’t look any more like Emperor material than he did from straight on. Slightly sunken, frightened eyes, a complete lack of charisma and a gift for hiding his bribes in the shadow of SI’s larger expenditures. He was starting to look shifty, eyes flicking to the left, where JARVIS was displaying his finances. Tony let himself look appropriately dubious, then changed his mind; if the man had ever taken pride in his work, he ought to be shrinking in self-disgust right now. He let his anger show through, and it wasn’t momentary flash-in-the-pan ire either. He probably looked more like his father right now than he really wanted to know.

"I’m ashamed of you. You’re an engineer. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Hibisaki blanched, but held his eyes. Tony was giving him an out, but he’d gone too far to take it. Oh well; it had been worth a try.

“That said, earthquakes happen all the time, Mr. Hibisaki. I’m not about to let you take a hostage
out of my building just because you know an opportunity when you see one.”

The man’s face purpled, and Tony noticed Steve for the first time since the hostage situation began; he was on the phone to someone—ah, the security team. Tony listened in on the line long enough to find out that Steve was warning them about another quake incoming. Tony caught his attention and flashed a message up on a hologram nearby. INFIL IN THREE. TWO.

Obediently and furiously, Hibisaki lowered the device from his hostage and pointed it to the floor.

Steve barked an order and the doors burst inwards behind Hibisaki. His thumb hit the activation button instinctively; the vibrations sunk into the floor, activating its larger, more distant cousin, but leaving Ms. Fujikawa’s brains unscrambled. He turned towards the security personnel, his grip on his hostage loosening in distraction, and Tony caught the moment her eyes flashed.

Her heel lashed out, hitting his instep, then an elbow shot back into his gut and she twisted to knock his weapon arm further off-center. Hibisaki dropped the device as he doubled up in pain, and she finished him off with a knee to his face. His head lashed backwards, turning his forwards stumble into a backwards tumble and he hit the floor with a crash.

Fujikawa guided his fall, keeping hold of his head, then poked him in the eyes. He yelled and curled up, covering his face, and she kneeled on him: one knee on his ribs, one on the side of his head; not with her whole weight but more than enough to keep him down. Tony blinked.

SHE should be in security, where did we recruit her from, the police?

She is old money, sir, with a number of certificates in self defence and two thwarted kidnapping attempts to her name.

All this happened in the thirty seconds it took the security people to cross the room and make sense of what was going on. Three fell on him and turned him onto his front, cable ties already looped to restrain him, and Fujikawa carefully picked up the earthquake device and set it where the camera could see it. Well out of reach of her former boss.

Sitting back in his chair, mindless of the aches and (pleasant) pains of his week off, Tony laughed delightedly. Steve, overtop the screen and still on the phone, flashed him a proud, blinding grin, and Tony went stupid for a second. He beckoned Steve over, into the field of view of the camera and Steve came gladly, leaning over him to look into the connection and catch Fujikawa’s eye. "Good job,” he told her.

Fujikawa flushed, a common reaction to encountering Steve unexpectedly, and the soft barely-there t-shirt he wore this evening added to the effect. From the widening of her eyes she certainly knew who he was. She looked again at both of them, at the stupid look that was no doubt still on Tony’s face, and grinned back at them in the first real facial expression he’d seen from her. "Thank you,” she said, enunciating carefully. "What do you want, we should do with…?"

"SI security will take it from here,” Tony said, switching back to Japanese. "Including coordination with the police, as we track down the larger device. He may have been involved with unsavory people.”

She nodded gravely. It wasn't the first time SI had had friction with the Yakuza, if they turned out to be involved with this, but it was Tony's job to deal with that, not hers. Last time they'd handled it at high levels without any strife trickling down to the regular employees, and the employees remembered; they trusted him to protect them, and he would.
"Do you want his job?" he asked.

"No, thank you," she answered firmly. "I would rather do the research than manage all the research teams. But I would like to be in control of my own line of research, and have more resources at my disposal."

"I'll have Pepper contact you," he agreed. "Anything on the security line that needs my immediate attention?" he confirmed with Steve, who'd gone unfocused as he spoke on three or four open channels at once, and received an absent shake of the head. "Okay then, I'm wrapping this up, Fujikawa-san. Everyone," he added, pitching his voice louder, "you will receive an email later today discussing hazard pay and compensation. You all did very well; extremely well. I'm proud." The humble-respectful verb forms caught their attention; a few engineers who had been quietly freaking out looked up again, checking back in, and he made sure to include them all in his bow.

"Thank you," he said for the second time. "Thank you," they chorused back, and he cut the connection.

And dropped his head right into his arms on the table. "Euuuuuuuuuurrgh," he said muffled, as Steve's big warm hand rubbed his shoulders, finding the tension knots. "Could you do that for a bit? I need to find the, find the thing. Right now, before..." he waved a hand to indicate Hibisaki's accomplices, particularly his brother-in-law what a piece of work, getting wind of what had happened and attempting some other better-executed terror attack.

"Go to it," Steve said, sounding far away. Adrenaline, right, knocking Tony for a loop on top of all the other hormones in his system, but Steve's touch was warm and real and immediate. He could do this.

J, how'd you like to tour Japan?

It would be my pleasure, sir.

Tony grinned into the table, wiggling to sit more comfortably and turning so that Steve could see his face, though he kept his eyes closed. He didn't know how long this would take. A couple of deep breaths and he was ready, the brightly-lit room falling away as he sank down into the high-entropy world of encryption, error correction and packet loss. The network.

His firewalls were triple-thick for this evening's venture out into the harsh wifi of the more public parts of the Tower. JARVIS, reaching ahead, offered him an opening that Tony could charitably describe as a pinhole.

yeah, no. i need widebore, J, that won't be enough

Then mesh, JARVIS said, worried. I will monitor your autonomic nervous system and provide coherence.

is that important?

Very much so.

Tony grumbled, a purely digital string of half-assembled complaints, as JARVIS took hold of his registry and backed it up, along with a few other important regions: the tactile buffer, an emotional snapshot, short and medium-term memory. Then JARVIS brushed the complaints aside with a wash of reassuring permission codes, offering the processing power of his servers in the Tower. Tony slid in, loading processes from the human side of things into the RAM; algorithms were good at finding
patterns, but there was nothing quite like a human visual processing unit for analysing images, and Extremis had copies of the recognition hierarchy.

His brain went white.

Some processes relied on the superior interconnectivity of the human cortex; it was going to be years before he could cram that many connections into a system and still have room to cool the fucking thing. JARVIS didn’t mind, as long as they kept working at it--

Flashes of pink and marine green invaded overtop the visual processors and he pushed it to the side, out of saliency, out of sight. The sense of JARVIS loomed up, throttling all the inputs and feathering in the processing power, reducing the load on Tony’s wetware down to the absolute minimum. The visual anomalies took on a psychosomatic blue wash, JARVIS’ colour, with flashes of images. Tony’s perception of edge and self shifted to encompass the servers, the sensors in the Tower, the doors and elevators and HVAC and Barton's Netflix account, and all of JARVIS’ other somatosensory circuits. Sharing his body for a little while. Tonyghosted a mental touch over the trunk connection to the servers, viewing the edges of the traffic; felt JARVIS shiver a little, status switches toggling back and forth, then stretch into it smugly, deepening their connections, taking over Tony's firewalls completely.

Tony cracked his mental knuckles.

let's start with inhouse data, mirror us over to Zaibatsu

Annnd this was why J had backed him up. New York spread out before them, full of fairylights, and Tony could feel himself widening, widening; Boston was there, and D.C., subjectively just a step away. The Western states were muted and dim in comparison, but JARVIS' connections to Malibu were strong; the SI infrastructure and secret storehouse in the cliff there were warm and reassuring on Tony's back, like an infrared heater a couple meters away.

Japan Japan Japan nihon にほん 日本

Literally the other side of the planet, over the wide dark void of the oceans, more continent with more lights, endlessly alluring --Tony would never make it that way-- but they had another route: up to the geosynchronous satellites, Earth's own spindly ring far out in the void, relayed along the string of pearls and down again, JARVIS showing the way, their own rainbow road.

open her up, J, let's go

Patience, sir

JARVIS kept tight hold of him; Tony listened to the pops and hisses and static rumble of background radiation and cosmic rays, high-powered particles scrambling a packet here and a packet there, immediately error-corrected by Extremis, patching his consciousness. Tiny little pockmarks all over his 'skin,' appearing in flashes of noisy data, then healing over like raindrops on a pond.

Through JARVIS' shell, the network was a mess of half-caught visualizations; at this level, the data leapt from node to node, racing the sunlight, the cosmic rays, to get there first, to sink into the next satellite and tear back out of it as soon the machines could spit it out. Arching through space as an incomprehensible stream of on-off-off-on-off-on-- on, and on, until it hit a receiver and exploded into numbers, colours, position and depth, information. Words and images, and him. Protected from the unimaginable nothingness as his senses leapt from one node to the next by the shell of ‘alive, here, safe’ that was JARVIS.
JARVIS, who could and did do this every second of every day, a mind spanning the globe.

They hit landfall in Tokyo, the greater telecoms area lighting up in his senses like the whole city was turning its light on just for them. Great swathes of networks, cellphone towers that tasted of aniseed, their streaming data humming at a different base frequency, foreign protocols different enough to grab him and fill his senses with synesthetic bursts of colour.

And under that, the wireless grid. Negotiating, defining, claiming, skyscrapers picked out in booster aerials, access points flaring in awareness as points of light ‘I am HERE use me.’ The constant flow of words and light and numbers, so many numbers, almost too many--

They hit the SI Tower.

Blue, familiar protocols, coding that tasted of homesafe, of JARVIS. J wasn’t a shell here, he was ‘here’. Behind him stretched the rest of himself, a data trunk all the way to central processing, where Steve was rubbing soothing circles into his spine in the soft quiet of the conference room.

Ahead, the beat of the living network around the tower, behind, Steve. And connecting them in a solid unbroken string was JARVIS. A crystalline path, unbending and free-flowing, and transmitting enough data for the human mind to perceive all this...

Routing images now, sir. Brace.

copy, fire away.

Images bombarded him, thousands of street cameras, uploaded footage, cloud videos, anything from the time of the tremor. For one overwhelming minute, life was the impact of frame after frame, analysed and discarded, flicked through, kept, counted, released. JARVIS was looking for something, using Tony’s brain as processing, running it in parallel to the vast, overarching enormity of his own servers. No, No, No, No, No, Yes Save, No, No, No, No, Discard, Delete, restore MEM.gh, No, No, No, NO-- THERE>

Tony remembered the image-processing overload he'd had from Doom's drones, remembered the resource lockup that had taken Extremis down-- but he'd changed since then, grown and deepened, and Extremis had grown further into him, did not try to allocate all resources from within itself, had a library for passing threads to analog systems and relying on their superior resilience to ruthlessly discard data in overload conditions. Their ability to filter and save perhaps ten percent of what was important out of a landslide of data, and recover, and pass it back--

In a thousandth of the time it would have taken the helicarrier’s systems to find an image match, a millionth of the time it would have taken to use seismography, they had a location. The data snapped into focus, filtered through his visual cortex, then torn into numbers and colours by the inevitability of raw AI. Across the city, the twitch of a thousand cameras resolved into a map with one, brilliant point, shining and impossible to ignore.

They’d taken the leap forwards that Extremis gave them, the access it gave him to this other dimension hidden in their four, and turned it around, taken it back to the point where the minds of a single partnership were the most powerful tool on the planet.

It was almost effortless after that. The device sat at the heart of a dark, quiet place, that single beacon easy to find, a single wireless access. It tasted of aniseed, but JARVIS knew the Japanese protocols and reached in, opening the doorway, and Tony saw. The program was so simple, the effector a line of resonators deep in drill holes into the fault zones, and it was simple to take the power draw and twist. The cooling system failed and the processor struggled to compensate, burning itself out chip by
The wireless signal went dark, dead, and the power draw from the grid stopped, the branch going silent.

*Enough, go home, sir.*

Tony went. Slowly, like coming up from bondage, he retreated. Each sense disengaged from the digital world and went dark. Synesthesia faded into the gentle warm smells of Stark Tower, NY, and sound shifted from an input for numbers and data to the susurration of fabric under Steve’s hands as Extremis hummed, comparing him to his backups.

Vision went last, the shimmering sparks of a visual cortex repurposed faded into the gentle dark behind his eyelids. Warm and red and *blink*.

The dark surface of the table, where he’d put his head, and the thrum of his own heartbeat visible in his loose wrist. A different world entirely.

Extremis fell silent, content that he wasn’t damaged, and he turned his head to look up at Steve. There was noise-- aural signal-- words.

“--long will this take...oh. You’re already done, aren’t you?”

Flushed with warmth from the pride in Steve’s voice, Tony nodded. The room was bright and he let himself rub his face against his arms, hiding his eyes, then slitting one open to peek again. He’d never get tired of looking at Steve.

*“He is, however, exhausted by the breadth of the action. Bed would be best, I believe.”*  

Steve broke into a soft smile, and his hands lifted Tony away from his slouch on the desk with a sparkle of pleasure as his weight shifted. He found his feet and they seemed to have had lead attached to them while he wasn’t looking, but he could shuffle over to the bedroom, as long as Steve’s hand’s didn’t let go. Urgh, everything was bright. Steve could lead him along, right? He'd done it yesterday...

“--ank you *Keishi-chō*, you have our guarantee that the device is deactivated. Should be covered in fingerprints. We have a list of suspects-- Ye-- *hai*. I will get that to you, sir.”

Tony chuckled at the half-learnt Japanese, but didn’t reach out for the second half of the conversation. The Chief Superintendent was a stickler, interrupting would just-- hm, he couldn’t quite grasp the consequences, but, that was just one more check in the ‘nope’ column.

Tony rubbed his cheek blissfully against Steve’s shoulder, the smell of him all comforting and homely. “Good boy, Stevie,” he mumbled once the line stopped tickling the back of his EM sense, earning himself an incredulous snort. Oh, firewalls were still wayyyyy open, whoops. But the traffic of the Tower was nothing much compared to where he'd just been...

“You too, buddy, you too.”

JARVIS stretched around him, the constant flow of data like the rush of blood in an artery; meaningless and undemanding but *alive*. The hum in his own body, and the sounds of Steve, all of it together, all of them together, filled his mind up to the top, no room for the little details.

Though the twitch of a browser a floor down, and the clicking of someone using the wireless thermostat in their room... that was just as alive, like voices on the other side of the room.
He let JARVIS fold him up in buffering firewalls, like eiderdown forming perfectly to his body, just as warm, and brought himself back a bit, into himself enough to feel the detail of each callus and fingerprint of Steve’s hands as he slid Tony’s robe off his shoulders.

"Your pupils are dilated like a cat’s," Steve said.

"Sir’s mind is wide open," JARVIS said smugly, and yes, he’d meant the suggestion to lead straight into the gutter.

“Miow,” Tony added, obediently, a flicker of cheek curling his lips. He was back down deep again, everything treacle-slow and soft, but Steve would see that.

Steve found eiderdown too hot, because he liked the air to be warm as an NY summer overnight, but he still wrapped Tony up, in himself; arms and legs all held close and careful and together. Silky soft lips, never chapped, always pink, traced down Tony’s temple, across a cheekbone and to the tip of his nose, because Steve was a sappy one, and Tony loved him.

Tony loved him with everything he had, would give him as much of his heart as he gave JARVIS; that was, all of it.

"Oh hey," Tony said suddenly.

"Hmm?"

"Three day weekend!" Tony said, and his face almost hurt he was smiling so wide.

Under his cheek, Steve’s chest shivered with laughter, and Tony’s ears felt like they were filled with honey-- his brain was still not on right, but he wasn’t going to complain. “Three day weekend. You wanna sleep in and get pizza?”

Tony slow-blinked at him slightly sideways, ignoring JARVIS’ laughter in the background. “And then snuggles?”

JARVIS throbbed inside him just a little, and Steve said solemnly, "We can find time for that."

END

Chapter End Notes

We love you! Response to this story has been so awesome! WRITING PORN IS FUN As you may have noticed, Bluescreen 'verse is now a series. We have half-written ideas for several more chapters which do not fall under the heading ‘orgasm reboots extremis’, so they get their own stories. We recommend subscribing to the series if you’re interested.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!