“What,” Tony says softly but with a great depth of feeling, “the actual fuck just happened?”

“I believe, Sir,” JARVIS pipes up from the phone in his pocket, an unnecessary amount of what sounds like glee in his voice, “that you’ve once again managed to maintain your closely guarded secret identity. Truly your subterfuge skills know no bounds.”

“You’re an asshole J,” Tony mutters back as he reaches up to rub at his temple. He either has a headache coming on or a blood clot. At this point he’s honestly not sure which he’d prefer.

“I did learn from the best, Sir,” JARVIS tells him sunnily.
Notes

This is a result of me rambling at like 5am and people going 'no wait, do the thing' and then pooling together so I actually would.

So! I hope this first installment turned out alright.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

Tony’s spent his entire life lying to people in one way or another.

It’s a fact that, amongst other things, makes him a less than ideal role model but, in his minimum
defense, Tony likes to maintain that he’d come by the skill honestly at least.

The rest of his impressive laundry list of character defects he’d picked up along the way in bits and
pieces.

But the lying?

Yeah, that Tony had learned young. Had picked it up at Maria’s knee, had it pressed into his bones
with the heavy weight of the back of Howard’s hand.

And, like with anything else Tony put his massive intellect towards, he’d excelled at it from an
eyear old.

He’d developed a bit of a routine with it too, had picked up tips and tricks along the way that made
the lies easier, better, more solid.

He was young, only seven or so, when he learned a twofold skill that would help to push him
through the rest of his life.

The first half was to pretend to be a great deal less intelligent than he was while still being an
undeniable genius. It was a tightrope of sorts that he learned to walk quickly and carefully, all too
aware of Howard’s growing resentment.

The second half of that lesson was to always lie about his childhood, about Maria and Howard and
what life was like growing up with the both of them.

Tony knew that nothing good would come out of anyone finding out about what life had been like
for him inside the manor.

He was fifteen going on sixteen and fresh out of having Sunset Bain rip his heart to pieces when he
learned to how lie to a lover until they proved they were worthy of the truth.

Which, so far, none of them ever have.

In the aftermath of that Tony had also learned to always give a half truth about any romantic
entanglement someone questioned him about unless he found the association completely and
totally distasteful.

And, from his time with Rhodey in MIT, he also learned to always embellish jokes and stories, to
add hints of the ridiculous to the mundane in order to get the greatest effects.

Or, just because they always made his best friend smile and laugh.

But one of the most important truths he learned about lying was to always, always, be honest with
the company. SI, it’s employees, it’s goals, the company as a whole was too important, had too
much of an impact on other things, to ever lie about anything even tangentially related to it.

In the end, SI and all of its associated issues became the one area of his life where Tony practiced
honesty without fail.
He’d made a game of the lying everywhere else though, had turned it into a bit of a pastime when he was younger and never really bothered to drop the habit. He’d spent a good fraction of his free time playing around with reporters and the paparazzi, had enjoyed twisting their expectations of him to suit his moods.

He’d been young and bitter then though. Had been tired of living under a microscope and chafing at the bit of expectations he’d never asked for, all while being determined to get as much out of it as he could.

So he’d twisted fact and given half truths and outrageous lies and ignored the way it stung when they were all believed so very easily. Even when it meant ignoring any evidence the the contrary that might pop up.

Now though, after a lifetime of practice, the lying has lost a lot of its shine. It’s become less of a game and more of a tedious but second nature kind of reflex that he had down to a bit of an art form.

Now, if he has to or if he wants to for whatever reason, Tony can lie as easily and intricately as he builds.

Like with coding or robotics he can make an untruth sing.

He still enjoys it sometimes, in a melancholy and faintly bitter kind of way. It’s a part of him that he knows reflects on what kind of person he truly is but it’s a skill he’s also grateful to have most of the time. That ability to trade off dishonesty for truth and then back again in the blink of an eye without anyone being the wiser.

It’s protected him in so many different ways over the years.

Rhodey’s always warned him it would come back to bite him in the ass one day but Tony’s pretty sure he never expected it to happen like this.

But, to be fair, futurist or not, neither had Tony.

He never expected that one day he would find himself in a situation where he was being completely and totally honest with the press in a way that didn't involve SI.

Or that, in that moment, not a single one of them would even come close to believing him.

“I am Iron Man,” Tony tells the reporters in the room.

Tells the whole entire world.

And then the entire world just collectively goes …

Bullshit.

~~~

“Stop laughing,” Tony pouts at Rhodey from where he’s sulking on the couch.

It’s been a few hours now since the disastrous press conference where Tony outed himself as a superhero and no one believed him and the sting still hasn’t faded.

“I can’t,” Rhodey wheezes. He’s bent double, hands on his knees, shoulders heaving and face red.
There are real, honest to Tesla tears in his eyes.

“I hope you suffocate,” Tony hisses at him once they hit the fifteen minute mark and Rhodey shows no signs of stopping.

Every time Rhodey seems like he’s close to getting it back under control he’ll just look at Tony and then it starts all over again.

“Worth it,” Rhodey chokes out as another round of laughter takes him over.

Tony kind of hates him a lot.

Like, a lot a lot.

~~~

Tony loves Rhodey more than anyone else in his life.

Because, no matter what, Rhodey’s always had his back.

From MIT all the way to a desert in Afghanistan and out the other side again Rhodey’s always been there for him.

And Tony is so, so grateful.

~~~

“Proud of you,” Rhodey bumps their shoulders together and manages to rasp out later on that night, a few beers and two pizza’s into a rare quiet night together.

His voice is legitimately hoarse from all the laughter and Tony has very real plans to put glitter in his shower head at the next possible opportunity.

But for now Tony just leans his head against Rhodey’s shoulder and smiles.

Rhodey believes him, knows that Tony was telling the truth. After his laughter had faded he’d been worried if supportive about Tony’s plans to continue being Iron Man.

So, all in all, Tony’s going to be counting it as a win.

Because even if the entire rest of the world doesn’t believe him, doesn’t believe in him, as long as Rhodey does Tony knows he can handle anything that gets thrown his way.

~~~

A large part of Tony is sure that it’ll all blow over, that the world cannot possibly be that oblivious and almost willfully blind.

People are going to realize that he’s Iron Man soon enough.

It only makes logical sense as Tony has no intention of stopping and no intention of really hiding that it’s him wearing the armor.

So yeah, this whole misunderstanding thing won’t, can’t, last long at all.

Tony just knows it.
Turns out that this is one area where Tony, like another famous Stark, apparently knows nothing.

Tony’s self aware enough to admit that he’s a bit bitter about the whole thing by the time New York rolls around.

He’s been Iron Man for long enough now that the entire world should know the truth.

Iron Man’s identity should be common fucking knowledge.

But, instead, he’s managed to make it this far with a total of five people, not counting JARVIS and the bots, knowing it’s him inside the armor.

Rhodey, Pepper, Happy, Fury, and Coulson.

That’s it.

That’s the entire roster of people who are officially in the know.

Apparently the idea that Tony Stark could be a hero is so hard for people to grasp that they’d all rather collectively dismiss the idea altogether.

So yeah, he’s more than a bit bitter, more than a bit stung.

He thought for sure New York would change things but somehow it miraculously hadn’t.

Hell he’d been falling through space and somewhere in the back of his head all he’d been able to think was, ‘welp at least if they find my corpse in the armor they’ll finally believe me’.

It, unfortunately, hadn’t worked out like that in the end.

Instead he’d gone through the wormhole, had fallen back out of it, and then been caught by the Hulk who’d dropped him on a rooftop. He’d apparently been roared back to life and then Rhodey had swooped down in War Machine and carted him off back to the Tower.

There’d been no ‘big reveal moment’ but Tony’s still pretty sure that it’s undeniably obvious that it’s him in the armor now.

Afterwards, once Loki and Thor are on their way back to Asgard, Tony’s kind of expecting it when Rogers corners him.

Captain Asshole’s obviously got some choice words to say about Tony being an official Avenger now.

Not that it matters because Tony’s ready for whatever he spits in his direction.

But, in the end, not even that goes as Tony expects it to. Rogers, or rather Steve as the man surprisingly insists, is all bashful and almost sunny as he apologizes for being rude on the helicarrier.

“It’s been a rough time for me,” Steve tells him, soft and sad, blue eyes wide and strangely compelling. “I know that’s no excuse, but it’s all I’ve got. I hope we can move past it in the future though. With you being a part of the team, and even without that, I’d like us to be friends.”
“Yeah,” Tony blinks and nods, struck just a bit dumb by the one-eighty Steve’s personality has seemingly done. Gone’s the hardass Captain America from before and in his place is this bashful giant of a man who, somehow, makes Tony more nervous than the Cap he’d met on the helicarrier ever had. “No problem Cap. I was a asshole too so no hard feelings.”

“Thanks Tony,” Steve smiles, bright and surprisingly toothy, “you’re a swell guy.”

He’s so earnest in that moment that Tony’s pretty sure he’s going to break out into some kind of rash because he has to be allergic to that much sincerity by now.

“Maybe I can call round the Tower sometime soon when I’ve got more time,” Steve says then. “We can have a chance to talk a bit more.”

“Sure,” Tony shrugs. “Tower’s always open for you and the others. Feel free to drop in whenever.”

“Great. It was good to see you Tony.” Steve nods, turns and gets a few steps away before he stops and swings back around. “Oh and Tony?”

“Yeah?”

“Make sure you tell Iron Man how much we all appreciated his help. I’m glad to know that fall didn’t take him down for good so let him know that we hope he makes a quick recovery.”

“Sure thing Cap,” Tony nods again before his brain really catches up with what Steve just said.

Steve smiles again, turns on his heel, and strides away. Tony’s pretty sure he can hear the national anthem playing in the distance but it could just be too much caffeine and not enough sleep playing tricks on him again.

Behind him Tony finally registers what Steve had actually said instead of what Tony had initially heard and his mind’s abruptly filled with a loud error noise.

“What,” Tony says softly but with a great depth of feeling, “the actual fuck just happened?”

“I believe, Sir,” JARVIS pipes up from the phone in his pocket, there’s an unnecessary amount of what sounds like glee in his voice, “that you’ve once again managed to maintain your closely guarded secret identity. Truly your subterfuge skills know no bounds.”

“You’re an asshole J,” Tony mutters back as he reaches up to rub at his temple. He either has a headache coming on or a blood clot. At this point he’s honestly not sure which he’d prefer.

“I did learn from the best, Sir,” JARVIS tells him sunnily.

“Coding you was a mistake,” Tony grumbles.

They both know he’s lying.

~~~

Things move forward and eventually Tony finds himself housing his little rag-tag group of superheroes in his Tower.

It is, Tony knows, the end of his unwanted secret identity.

He’s going to be living with two super spies after all.
There’s no way in hell they won’t realize he’s Iron Man even without him coming right out and announcing it again.

Which, yeah, isn’t something he plans to do again. Not after last time.

So, honestly, Tony’s grateful that this is all going to be cleared up, at least within the team, in a more organic and natural way.

It’ll be less stressful all the way around.

Which is a relief.

~~~

Tony’s pretty sure he’s another cup of coffee away from an actual stress induced heart attack but, at this moment, he actively does not care.

Living here, with these people, is the most stressful thing he’s ever done.

And that includes growing up with Howard and living through Afghanistan.

He has had literal torture that was less stressful than living with these assholes.

...

Okay that might be a bit of an exaggeration, but not much of one.

Really.

“If you do not attempt to lower your heart rate Sir,” JARVIS cuts through his internal freak out, voice sharp and displeased, “then I’m afraid I’ll have to channel Agent Coulson and tranquilize you for a bit. For your own good of course.”

“Do it and I swear to Thor I’ll have you working customer service for SI by the end of the day,” Tony threatens with a half-hearted glare towards the ceiling. “You can spend all your time asking people if they tried turning it off and then back on again.”

“I’ll happily embrace my fate as a help desk operator if it means you calm down Sir,” JARVIS sounds wholly unconcerned with Tony’s threat.

Which, Tony readily admits to himself, is more than a bit fair. They both know Tony can’t live without him at this point.

Losing JARVIS would be like losing an arm. It’d be painful and bloody and while Tony could probably build himself a new one it just wouldn’t be the same.

“I’m pretty sure I’m in hell,” Tony grumbles as he collapses down at his worktable. He slumps forward far enough to where he can repetedly rap his forehead against the metal of the table.

“The decor seems a bit lacking for what I’ve read about the afterlife Sir,” JARVIS snips back. “Not enough flames or wails of the damned. With exception to yourself of course. I can, however, arrange to have another decorating team come in to solve the issue soon if you wish?”

“You’re still an asshole J but I can’t focus on that because. This is so. Fucking. Ridiculous.” Tony whines, head hitting the metal table in front of him after each word as he otherwise ignores JARVIS’ snark. “I’m pretty sure this stress is going to kill me. I’m not supposed to go out like
this J. This is *ruining* my plans.”

“My condolences Sir,” JARVIS sounds very tongue-in-cheek. “Either way I’m sure the funeral will be splendid. I’ll arrange for something suitably ornate but tasteful.”

Tony’s pretty sure by this point that JARVIS has some kind of independent correspondence with Rhodey.

They’re both the same kind of petty towards Tony and it’s a similarity that he can’t ignore.

Tony forces himself to take in a long, shuddering breath because he knows JARVIS is ultimately right.

He really does need to calm down because, all jokes aside, this is not the way he wants to go out.

Finally, when his heart no longer feels as if it’ll beat out of his chest, Tony pushes himself upright and then leans back in his chair.

“Somehow,” Tony sighs after a few more seconds of silence, “somehow those id-*the rest of the team* is still under the impression that *I am not Iron Man*. They’ve been here for weeks and it’s not like I’ve tried to hide it. *How can they not know?*”

“How can they not know?” JARVIS sighs with an unflattering amount of dread. He’s well versed in a number of Tony’s more harebrained schemes.

Tony just looks towards the nearest camera and blows JARVIS a kiss before he turns back towards the other half of his workshop.

He’s got work to do.
You guys are so great but remember, I did warn you that this was going to get ridiculous real fast.

Tony starts small.

Well, small is such a … relative term.

Especially, as it turns out, for him.

Because, if JARVIS’ dry comments can be taken at face value, Tony’s definition of small might, in fact, be considered a bit overboard by other people’s standards.

But considering the fact that so many people ascribe to that ridiculous ‘less is more’ philosophy Tony doesn’t think they should get much of a say in his units of measurements.

In life in general, and in this case with the situation being what it is in particular, Tony’s going to go with one of his own personal mottos.

‘More is more.’

Because it’s fucking logical and mathematically correct and anyone who wants to argue that it’s not meant to be taken literally can kiss his ass.

Except for Pepper.

Because she’s terrifying and he’s high-key frightened and in awe of her.

Honestly Happy’s a brave, brave man.

Which, Tony admits with no small amount of bitterness, might, in retrospect, be why there’s a growing faction of people who are sure that Happy is the one actually wearing the armor.

Rhodey thinks it’s hilarious, Pepper’s smug, and Happy, the bastard, preens every time the idea is brought up.

Tony’s going to be sending him on literal milk runs for the next six months.

Or at least he would if Happy didn’t spend most of his time shadowing Pepper.

But, Tony’s ever flowing well of bitterness aside, the point is that he starts off relatively tame.

His first step down the road that is pursuing option three is actually a pretty obvious move.

Tony’s going to purposefully get caught inside the armor.

There’s absolutely no way that can backfire on him.
It takes a surprising amount of timing to make the entire thing happen organically.

Tony has some standards after all, as sideways and offbeat as they might be to other people.

He isn’t going to just waltz into the middle of the common room floor during movie night while wearing the armor and then drop trou in front of the other Avengers.

Because, as Rhodey once told him, a striptease is not the answer to all of his problems.

So yeah, Tony’s not even considering that option seriously.

He’s not.

Really.

Even if them seeing him shed the armor all the way down to his silky unmentionables might actually get the message across loud and clear.

Tony shakes the thoughts out of his head for the moment and forces himself to focus completely on what he’s doing at the moment.

And what he’s doing is maintenance on the armor.

The armor that he’s currently wearing except for the helmet.

“Sir,” JARVIS pipes up then, “Captain Rogers is here to see you.”

“Let him in J,” Tony tells him as he manipulates the hologram in front of him with ease despite the gauntlets he’s still wearing.

“Tony,” Steve sounds downright chipper as he practically bounds through the door. He’s in his gym clothes and Tony’s pretty sure if he had a tail it would be wagging.

Which is both intriguing and also a thought he’d liked to never have again.

Thankfully though, before Tony can go any further down that cursed train of thought, Steve pretty much skids to a halt a few feet away from him. There’s an expression of surprise on his face, blue eyes wide and brows high as his eyes rake over the holograms in front of Tony and the armor that he’s openly wearing.

“You’re in the armor …” Steve trails off a bit. “Why are you in the armor Tony?”

“Well,” Tony drawls, unable to stop the sarcasm that comes spilling out of him as he stares Steve down through the blue glow of the hologram between them. “It’s obviously not because I’m Iron Man or anything. I’m, obviously, just doing a fitting to make sure everything’s working right.”

The projection of the armor that’s floating front and center between them is detailed and interactive. The body model in the hologram is an exact replica of Tony right down to the goatee.

It’s also, currently, making obscene gestures in Steve’s direction.

Which is, honestly, not Tony’s doing.

He suspects JARVIS’ not so carefully hidden malicious and petty streak is at work.
“Of course Tony,” Steve beams at him, still overly toothy and rash-invokingly sincere. Tony’s going to switch his toothpaste while he’s sleeping because his smile is so blindingly white it’s honestly frightening. “You’re so dedicated to making sure Iron Man’s fighting fit. He’s lucky to have you taking such good care of his armor like this. We’re all lucky to have you.”

A ball of dread and flagrant disbelief falls hard and heavy to rest in the pit of Tony’s stomach.

“I won’t keep you long then,” Steve smiles, hands on his hips and hair falling into his eyes a bit as he beams at Tony. “Was just hoping you’d come up for dinner tonight. It’s Clint’s turn to cook so we’ll be getting pizza after he stops trying. It’ll be around eight so don’t work too hard and pass out down here again.”

Steve turns on his heel and saunters back towards, and then out of, the workshop door with only another wave and a smile tossed over his shoulder in Tony’s direction.

Tony stares at the empty doorway for a while before his legs finally give out on him. He ends up sitting in the reinforced office chair that DUM-E had, probably on JARVIS’ word, pushed in his direction.

He’s completely silent for long moment.

“J,” Tony leans back so that he’s staring up at the ceiling, “put in a new order for a dozen of those red and gold silk thongs I like, you know the ones.”

“Yes,” JARVIS sounds distinctly pained, “I do indeed, Sir.”

“Good,” Tony nods decisively as he starts removing the armor. “I want solids in both colors and some nice patterns. Wait, make that two, no, three dozen. Get me some different materials too, not just silk. Ethically sourced and no fur though, that shit itches. I want a wide variety. I need options. I’m starting to think a striptease might really be the only way out of this and I refuse to be under prepared.”

“I admire your dedication and preparedness Sir,” JARVIS cuts in dryly, “and I’m sure you’re very disappointed that such drastic measures might be necessary”

“I resent your tone J,” Tony grumbles. “A man gets caught pole dancing on camera one time and suddenly it’s something everyone can nag you about instead of a legitimate fitness regime.”

“There are a total of fifteen videos of you demonstrating your fitness regime in various settings currently online.” JARVIS informs him primly. “It’s hardly a stretch to believe you might have a … fondness for the activity.”

“Fifteen?” Tony pauses, thinks for a minute, “should probably be grateful there aren’t more of those out there to be honest.”

“Indeed Sir, especially as those fifteen have a combined view count of over ten million,” JARVIS reminds him because he can never let Tony have nice things.

“Yes,” Tony’s fist pump is both elegant and dignified. “We broke ten million. Rhodey owes me a spa day and the secret to his feet. Man’s got the nicest toes of all of us and he swears he doesn’t have them done. I, personally, think he’s a lying liar who lies and he’s going to have to prove that shit to me. His feet are nicer than Pepper’s and we all know she’s perfect so he’s got to have some kind of secret. It’s only logical.”
“Once again, Sir,” JARVIS almost sighs, “you are awash with keen insights.”

“And don’t you forget it,” Tony tells him smugly.

“If only I could, Sir,” JARVIS laments. “If only I could.”

“You should tell Iron Man that he’s welcome to hang out with us too you know,” Clint informs Tony from where he’s perched on the back of one of the kitchen chairs. He’s got a fistful of chopsticks in one hand and a carton of donuts on the table in front of him. “Feel kind of bad that we don’t ever see the guy outside of battle.”

Tony has absolutely zero desire to know what he’s doing.

He’s learned that ignorance is bliss where Clint’s concerned most of the time and he has no plans on changing that stance unless he starts a fire or sets off an explosion.

And only then if they’re too big for Clint and JARVIS to handle on their own.

“Pretty sure Iron Man knows,” Tony grits out because he’s still irritable over Steve’s obliviousness from a few days before. “Since we’re the same person and all.”

“It’s good you two are that close,” Clint tells him cheerfully. “Sometimes I feel like me and Tasha are the same person too. Except she’s terrifying and has better hair. Still, wanted to make sure he knew. If it’s the secret identity thing he shouldn’t worry about it. We can all keep a secret.”

Tony stares at him in disbelief.

“Oh trust me,” Tony finally mutters as he snatches up his coffee and stomps out of the room, “I know.”

“There, there, Sir,” JARVIS soothes him once he’s back down in the workshop, his voice flat and dry. “You are a strong, independent Iron Man. You do not need their validation.”

Tony just buries his face in his hands and screams.

Behind him the bots twirl around the workshop worriedly.

“Pumice stone?” Tony repeats dubiously, one hand reaching up to pluck a cucumber slice off of his eye so he can lean forward enough look at Rhodey in disbelief.


“Fucking shower rock,” Tony grumbles as he adjusts his head wrap and then his robe and lays back down. “Should’ve goddamn known it would somehow come back to that fucking thing.”

“Shouldn’t let one bad experience ruin the beauty of a pumice stone for you,” Rhodey chides him smugly, head tilted back and cucumber slices of his own firmly in place. “Tried to tell you that’s not what it was for. Should’ve listened to me. You could’ve avoided having to sit on a cushion
for a week and you would’ve had skin like mine for years now but no. You were shitfaced but of course you still knew better.”

~~~

Before he leaves Rhodey takes the time to draw Tony’s goatee on the faceplate of the armor in permanent marker.

Tony doesn’t bother to try and get it off.

Hell, maybe it’ll help.

~~~

“I thought that might improve your spirits Sir,” JARVIS says. “DUM-E designed it and I put in a specialized order at a local shop.”

“You boys all do your old man proud,” Tony says as he shakes the t-shirt out and stares at it in glee. It’s soft and comfortable feeling and is, luckily enough for him, his favorite shade of red.

I Am Iron Man the shirt says in rich gold lettering. Below the words there’s a pretty accurate rendition of his goatee, also in gold. When Tony shifts the shirt in his hands just so he can see the faintest hint of glitter.

Tony wholeheartedly approves.

It’s not quite the clapboard sign he was debating on custom making but it’s the next best thing.

~~~

“Nice shirt,” Bruce tells him absently, cup of tea in one hand and tablet in the other.

“Thanks,” Tony grins, “the bots and J got it made for me.”

“Nice to know they like Iron Man too,” Bruce says. “Got to be a relief that he gets along with your kids like that, all things considered.”

Tony promptly chokes on is coffee.

“Et tu Bruce?” Tony practically whimpers once he can breathe again. “I was rooting for you. We were all rooting for you.”

“What?” Bruce blinks at him over the edge of his glasses, expression openly puzzled. “What did I do? Tony? Tony, was it something I said?”

Tony slinks out of the room without even bothering to answer.

He still loves the shirt though, it’s extremely comfortable.

JARVIS has excellent taste for someone who doesn’t wear clothes.

~~~

Tony steps his game up after that.

The single I Am Iron Man t-shirt becomes another. And then another. Which becomes a
sweatshirt and then a whole new set of tank-tops that are designed to look like the armor itself.

JARVIS also custom orders him a dozen silk ties from his favorite tailor with Iron Man heads and arc reactors sprinkled over them.

Tony himself goes in and gets another half dozen three piece suits made much to his tailor Frederick's delight.

They all come with various Iron Man themed embellishments.

Pepper takes to looking at him with something that smacks pretty closely of amused pity but Tony does his best to not let it get to him.

He fails.

But he still tries.

~~~

SHIELD falls not too long after that and Tony’s ongoing attempts to get the others to realize who’s in the armor kind of falls to the way side for a minute.

They’re too busy weeding through HYDRA’s information, shutting down active bases and agents, and hunting down Barnes.

But, within a month or two, Sam moves in and Barnes manages to make it clear that he wants some space and is in the wind of his own accord but is otherwise safe.

It leaves Steve looking like a kicked puppy as he slinks around the Tower but he does perk up when Tony promises that Barnes has a place with them when he gets done playing Carmen Sandiego.

So, beyond all of that, things do eventually get back to normal and Tony gets back to his project.

~~~

“I am Iron Man,” Tony looks Natasha directly in the eyes as he speaks.

“You should really stop doing this to yourself,” Natasha reaches up and pats him surprisingly softly on the cheek. She looks almost fond of him. “Get some sleep Antoshka. You’re not making any sense again.”

~~~

“I am Iron Man,” Tony repeats forcefully to his reflection.

His own raccoon-ish looking face stares back at him, hair a mess and circles dark beneath his eyes.

“I am Iron Man.” Tony repeats. “Right? I am Iron Man, right J? I mean … even I’m starting to doubt it.”

“Oh indeed Sir,” JARVIS agrees, “you are, indeed, Iron Man.”

Tony pushes away from the mirror in his bathroom and staggers towards his bed only to collapse onto it without any kind of grace.
“Are you sure J?” Tony asks. “Cause everyone else seems dead set against the idea. So tell me I’m Iron Man again. And also that I’m pretty. I kind of need to feel pretty right now. Maybe that’ll help. Tell me I’m a pretty Iron Man, J.”

“You are indeed Iron Man Sir,” JARVIS repeats dutifully, “and I am sure that if I were in possession of a physical body I would likely be enamored with you.”

“Good,” Tony sighs as he finally settles down. “Cause I’m awesome. I’m Iron Man. But you knew that J.”

“Indeed I did, Sir,” JARVIS tells him softly. “Indeed you are.”

~~~

And then, another month or so passes, and then everything gets thrown off course once again.

Tony turns the corner into the kitchen, mind filled with schematics and an empty coffee cup in his hand, only to stumble to a halt just inside the door.

Inside the kitchen, hair tousled but expression as bright as ever, is Steve.

But he’s not alone.

Because Bucky Barnes has, apparently, decided that he’s finally ready to come in out of the cold.

Unfortunately for Tony he decided to do that when Tony’s least expecting it and JARVIS didn’t bother to warn him.

Which, of course, means that Tony’s a fucking mess. He’s in one of his new tank-tops, his Iron Man helmet covered sleep pants are hanging low around his hips, and he’s pretty sure his hair looks like he stuck his tongue against a live wire on accident again.

And as for Barnes?

Well.

He just stands there, metal arm exposed to the room, jaw stubble covered and hair long. His grey eyes heavy lidded and gaze piercing and watchful as he takes Tony in from his head to his toes.

“Oh no,” Tony immediately whispers to himself instead of thinks, “he’s hot.”

It’s an unfortunate mistake but one he can’t really fix because his brain is too mighty for a filter when it’s 3 a.m. and he’s already six espressos into his weekly Frantic Friday Free For All™.

Or, as Clint tends to call it, “That Man Runs Off Of More Caffeine And Bad Decisions Than I Do Day.”

Which is … fair.

“Tony,” Steve looks absolutely delighted to see him and oblivious to what Tony accidentally barely whispered. “Come meet Bucky. Buck, this is Tony. He’s the one I was telling you about. He keeps all of us up and running both on and off the field. Especially Iron Man. Wouldn’t have old Shellhead out in the field with us if it wasn’t for him.”

Tony snorts bitterly at the massive understatement.
Across from him Barnes arches a brow. If he heard what Tony accidentally said he shows no outer sign of it.

Which is unfair because Tony’s arguably over caffeinated and under rested and he can’t handle all of that at the moment. Especially not when he’ll probably prove to be just as oblivious as the rest of them.

“Barnes,” Tony salutes him sloppily with his empty coffee cup. “Welcome to the Tower and the Avengers. You’ll probably fit right in, God help us all.”
Chapter 3

After that initial shock Tony scuttles back to his workshop and things don’t actually change for a while.

Steve is almost offensively chipper and nobody and nothing seems capable of getting his mood to go down.

Tony knows, he’s tried.

Steve hadn’t even blinked at Tony showing up to dinner covered in grease. He’d just smiled, said it was a good thing they were having stew, and kept right on going.

For his part, Barnes is in and out of the Tower so much that Tony doesn’t bother to have JARVIS keep track of his movements unless they’re about to run into each other.

So, new semi-resident aside, Tony goes about his life as he always does.

His days consist of things like inventing, avoiding board meetings, avoiding Pepper, maintaining the armor, hiding from Pepper in Happy’s car, and then running from Pepper when she finds him.

When he’s not doing that he’s normally doing team dinners and movies, playing his specially modded and vastly superior version of *Viva Pinata* online with Rhodey, playing ding-dong-ditch on the Baxter Building with Clint, going to charity or SI galas, or getting dragged to board meetings by Pepper.

Throw in a few battles here and there, playing his specially modded and vastly superior version of *Words With Frenemies* with Coulson and Fury, and a few nights helping the bots polish the mid sized steel statue of him in the armor that they built him for Christmas the previous year and that’s his schedule.

Like he said.

The usual.

So the last thing Tony’s expecting to have happen when he stumbles into the kitchen at 4 a.m. on a Mesturday morning (Is it Monday? Saturday? Wednesday? Tony isn’t sure thus Mesturday) is a voice speaking up from the room’s darkest corner.

“You’re Iron Man,” the low, gravely voice declares from the shadows.

“*Marie Curie,*” Tony yelps as he automatically twirls and throws his coffee cup in the direction the voice had come from.

*Barnes, because of course it’s him,* catches it before it can hit him or the wall behind him, *because of course he does.* There’s a distinctly amused expression on his face when he looks back at Tony.

“Did you just curse at me in scientist?” Barnes asks as he stands, cup in hand, and wanders back over towards the coffee pot.

Tony, doing his best to get his heartbeat back under control, just stares at Barnes wild-eyed as he pours a fresh cup of coffee and then wanders over to place it on the counter in front of Tony.

“It’s ah,” Tony clears his throat as smoothly as he can and reaches out to grab the cup off of the
counter, “it’s how all the cool kids curse nowadays, Barnes. Didn’t you know that?”

“Been a little out of touch with what’s in style these days,” Barnes says with a wry twist to his entirely too attractive mouth.

“Right,” Tony hides his wince in his cup cause, yeah, his bad. “Probably didn’t spend a lot of time on pop culture while you were playing HYDRA’s Frosty the Murderman.”

There’s a small, awkward pause as Tony slurps his coffee and Barnes stares at him.

“You’re Iron Man,” Barnes finally says.

For a long, frozen, second all Tony does is blink up at him.

Then, finally, the realization slams into him with the force of a blow as it registers to Tony that it’s the second time Barnes has come out and said as much.

‘Holy Hubble,’ Tony realizes as a giddy sort of awe explodes to life inside of his chest.

Barnes actually believes that he’s Iron Man.

And that is, of course, the exact moment Tony ruins it for himself.

Because of course he does.

“I beg your fucking pardon?” Tony hears himself say as if from a distance as indignation suddenly roars to life inside of him, sweeping the awe away. Because that is, apparently, how he rolls at ass o’clock on a Mesturday morning when someone finally believes what he’s been trying to tell the entire world for years now.

How, why, in the hell does Barnes of all people believe him when nobody else will?

‘Abort mission, abort the fucking mission,’ Tony’s mind starts to scream as the little man who lives in the back of his head immediately hits the panic button.

“You’re Iron Man?” Barnes says again even though this time it comes out more as a question than a statement.

“How dare you?” Tony clutches his cup to his chest and slowly begins to back out of the kitchen.

“Stark?” Barnes blinks at him in what looks like shock.

“How dare?” Tony says again as he reaches the kitchen doorway and slides around the jam and out into the hall.

Unable to help himself Tony pops his head back around the edge of the door and glares at Barnes one last time before he pulls back again and scuttles back towards the elevator.

~~~

Ten minutes later finds Tony in his workshop, coffee cup once again empty and abandoned.

He’s laid out face first on the floor and mumbling to himself while the Butterfingers pokes at him with a broom.

“Stupid,” Tony hisses into the concrete. “I’m so stupid. Why the fuck did I do that? Why?”
Tony sighs, flops over onto his back, and stairs up at the ceiling.

“I panicked J,” Tony announces morosely. “All this time trying to convince everyone that I’m Iron Man and Barnes pops up like some kind of sexy robo-hobo and calls me out on it and I fucking panicked.”

“It’s rather unfortunate but not entirely unexpected, Sir.” JARVIS tells him. “You’ve invested a rather large amount of time and effort into your attempts to gain acknowledgement from the other Avengers. In my opinion your panic stems from the fact that you have always been afraid of success on a personal level.”

“Woah,” Tony holds one hand up towards the ceiling in a halt gesture. “Let’s roll it back now Dr. Phil. If I wanna have my issues psychoanalyzed I’ll use that gift certificate for a therapist Pepper gives me every Christmas.”

“Of course Sir,” JARVIS says dryly, “whatever was I thinking?”

“Yeah, well, just remember it for next time.” Tony grouses.

Tony lays there, star-fished out on the floor, for a long moment and does his best to ignore the way DUM-E and U have joined Butterfingers in his game. They seem to be enjoying poking at him with a piece of steel pipe and a mop handle respectively so Tony doesn’t bother to make them stop.

“I’m in too deep,” Tony finally admits with a sigh. “I’ve dug myself so deep into this that I didn’t know how to handle someone actually confronting me with the truth. How in the hell did I manage to do something that fucking stupid?”

“A question I’ve asked daily for the better part of a decade now Sir,” JARVIS pipes up because he’s not so secretly an asshole.

Tony gives the nearest camera the finger because, while he’s proud of JARVIS' dickish tendencies, he’d prefer not to constantly get dragged through the mud in his own house, by his own kid.

“I guess the only option is to be upfront with him about it since he’s the only one who realizes the truth.” Tony muses. “Maybe I can finally tone it down a bit now that he knows. Hell, maybe the team will believe him.”

“I’m rather proud of you Sir,” JARVIS says warmly. “You’ve chosen the mature path for once.”

“On the other hand,” Tony’s frown slowly begins to morph into a small smirk. “None of them believed me so maybe they won’t believe him either. Now if that happens I finally won’t be suffering alone.”

“Sir…” JARVIS trails off with what sounds like a sigh.

“Oh J,” Tony claps his hands together brightly, “this is going to be fun.”

~~~

Bucky’s seen a lot of stuff in his life, both before and after HYDRA put his brain in a blender and made him spend the better part of a century as their murder-puppet.

The future he’s found himself in now, the future that has him out of HYDRA’s hands and living in a Tower filled with superheroes, is still more of a surprise than he’d ever thought it could be.
Or, more specifically, *Tony Stark* is more of a surprise than Bucky had thought he could possibly be.

After seventy years as a slave for HYDRA Bucky’s learned to be honest with himself so he isn’t afraid to admit that his first face to face glimpse of Stark had been burned into his brain.

He’d been in the kitchen of the Tower with Stevie when Stark had stumbled in, sleep pants hanging deliciously low, tank-top clinging to his chest, and a circle of light glowing against his sternum.

He’d been heavy eyed, clearly exhausted, and sporting hair that made him look freshly fucked.

Bucky had appreciated the sight immensely.

And, if Stark’s adorable little half asleep mumble had been anything to go by, the feeling had been mutual.

Bucky hadn’t allowed himself to linger over that moment too much in the time that passed afterward but he certainly hadn’t forgotten it either.

All of that leads him to where he is now, standing in the same kitchen once again, confusion causing him to blink slowly after Stark’s retreating form.

He isn’t sure what, *exactly*, he’d said or done to offend Stark but he’d like to find out. It couldn’t be the Iron Man thing because that was just blatantly obvious in Bucky’s opinion, despite what the press might say.

Stark and the armor have only came up once or twice between him and Stevie but there’s no way in hell it was any kind of secret in the Tower. Not with the Avengers being who they are.

So it couldn’t be that.

Maybe it was the coffee? Maybe he’d messed it up somehow? Or Stark didn’t like people to touch his food/drinks or something? Or maybe it was because he’d accidentally scared him when he first came into the kitchen?

Either way Bucky’s going to have to find out.

He might not be the smooth, well adjusted guy from Stevie’s memories who had a date whenever he wanted one but he also isn’t dead.

Stark’s a damn fine man on top of being an Avenger and being good enough to let him live in his Tower and join the team without any fuss.

Bucky’d rather not have him pissed off at him if he can help it.

Especially not over something as petty as coffee or accidentally startling him.

~~~

It’s not the coffee Bucky realizes a week or so later.

It’s not the coffee or the fact that he startled him.

It is, Bucky discovers with something like horror sputtering to life in his chest, *absolutely* about the Iron Man thing.
“Armor’s pretty impressive,” Bucky says to Steve in an aside as they watch the latest sparring session between Stark and Natasha with Clint providing support from a distance. “Wouldn’t mind seeing what he can do outside of it.”

“So would we,” Steve agrees, “but Iron Man doesn’t take the armor off. Ever. We keep telling Tony and Shellhead both that his secret’s safe with us but I guess he just doesn’t feel comfortable enough yet.”

Bucky blinks once, twice, a third time.

“What in the fuck are you on about Stevie?” Bucky twists around to face Steve as he barks the question out.

“He doesn’t take the armor off, ever.” Steve repeats, voice somehow bright and kind of sad all at the same time. “He’s got a right to his privacy though so we won’t push it unless we have to. I’m pretty sure you’ll like him once you two officially meet. He kind of reminds me of you sometimes. Well, you before.”

“Stark is Iron Man,” Bucky points out slowly. “Steve, you’ve got to know that.”

“Don’t be mean Buck,” Steve actually frowns at him. “Tony’s a good man and he does a lot of work on the armor and on our gear but he’s not Iron Man. We’d know if he was.”

Bucky stands there waiting for the punchline but Steve just looks at him all serious like.

It’s in that moment that Bucky’s forced to realize that he’s serious.

That Steve is telling the truth as far as he knows like it’s not the stupidest thing Bucky can remember hearing come out of his mouth since that time in southern France with the Howlies.

Bucky … well Bucky’s honestly not sure how to handle that.

~~~

So … yeah.

That’s the Problem™.

Aside from Bucky himself, no one else in the Tower seems to believe that Stark is Iron Man.

And the worst part of it all is that this whole thing isn’t even Stark’s fault as far as Bucky can tell.

The man couldn’t be more obvious if he wandered around the Tower in a shirt that said ‘I Am Iron Man’ on it.

Not that Stark would.

The tank tops and sweatpants he’s already seen him in aside, Bucky’s pretty sure that the man doesn’t lounge around decked out in stuff like that.

That would be ridiculous.

~~~

A few days after his disastrous conversation with Steve in the gym Bucky leaves the Tower and promptly gets cornered by SHIELD.
Or, more specifically, Nick Fury who seems to be surprisingly alright with the fact that he’d tried to kill him not too long ago.

Bucky follows him to a nearby park and they settle down together in surprisingly comfortable quiet. There’s a small rustle and Bucky looks over at Fury only to blink at the bag of what looks like hard candy being held out in his direction.

Bucky stares.

Fury rattles the bag meaningfully.

Bucky takes a few pieces of candy.

The bag disappears up Fury’s sleeve and Bucky pops a piece into his mouth.

It’s good. Some kind of coffee flavored stuff with cream in the middle. Also probably not poisoned. Not that it’d matter as he’s pretty much immune to everything anyways.

“Sorry for trying to murder you,” Bucky feels compelled to offer the words after they’ve sat in silence on the park bench for a handful of minutes. He’s eaten all of the candy Fury gave him and is trying not to think about how much he wouldn’t mind some more of it.

“You’re not the first, won’t be the last. Besides you’re an Avenger now,” Fury shrugs nonchalantly, as if it’s really that simple. He hasn’t even bothered to look up at Bucky the entire time, his one good eye focused down on his phone where he seems to be playing some kind of word game. “As long as you’re not a HYDRA mole and you keep working with the team against any threat they face then I’m willing to call it even. Otherwise I’ll do my best to make sure you become an actual ghost story this time, friend of the Captain’s or not.”

Bucky can’t help but find that outlook kind of refreshing. Especially after the way HYDRA’s half remembered but decidedly less than gentle recruitment speech keeps popping up in his nightmares from time to time.

Plus HYDRA had never given him candy.

“So,” Bucky starts off, “about Iron Man.”

“Iron Man’s identity is a closely guarded secret that must be kept in order to maintain Stark’s continued patronage for the Avengers.” Fury rattles off without ever looking up, each word obviously said by rote and empty of any true emotion.

“Stark put you up to that?” Somehow Bucky sincerely doubts it.

“No,” there’s a small smile tugging at the corner of Fury’s mouth then, “we insisted on it.”

Oh this bastard totally knows and is refusing to say anything. Bucky is sure of it.

“Good talk Barnes,” Fury pushes up onto his feet then, phone suddenly gone and the bag of candy back in his hand. This time he holds the entire bag out for Bucky to take. “Give those to Stark.”

Bucky stays where he is as Fury saunters off.

He eats a few more pieces of the candy.

He’ll give them to Stark alright, just not the entire bag.
He’s an assassin, not an errand boy.

~~~

“Oh you’ve seen Nicky,” Stark actually visibly perks up when Bucky drops the bag onto the counter in front of him. The coffee cup he seems to be constantly attached too is quickly forgotten as he pulls the bag closer to him and hunches over it like a little dragon hoarding its stuff. “He has the best candy. Not sure where he gets it or how but I do know it’s why his trench coat’s so big. It’s full of snacks.”

Stark has that pleased little smirk he always gets when he makes a reference of some kind.

It’s adorable and Bucky kind of hates him for it.

Until he gets a good look at just what Stark’s wearing.

The shirt’s red and the lettering is gold.

It says “I Am Iron Man” and there’s a pretty accurate replica of Stark’s fancy beard right below it.

It’s just the kind of thing Bucky had been so sure Stark wouldn’t seriously wear and has now been officially proven wrong about.

Now Bucky really does hate him.

And, if the evil light that glints in Stark’s attractive eyes is anything to go by, he’s pretty sure Stark knows it too.

Bucky snatches the candy back and stalks out of the room, ignoring Stark’s indignant shouts from behind him.

If this is how Stark wants to play this game then Bucky’s more than happy to oblige him.

Stark’s secret or whatever he’s doing isn’t going to last long.

Bucky’s going to make sure of it.
“JARVIS, baby,” Tony sings out happily as he stretches his arms above his head, “index me a new project file alright? Mainly gonna be surveillance so make sure you file it accordingly.”

“Of course Sir,” JARVIS answers promptly. “And what shall I name this new project?”

“Hmm,” Tony hums in contemplation for a moment before he smiles. “Let’s go with Winter Is Trolled. WIT for short.”

“How appropriate,” JARVIS says dryly even as the new folder pops into existence on the hologram in front of Tony.

“Barnes isn’t going to know what hit him,” Tony says with no small amount of spiteful glee.

“Whenever you are involved, Sir,” JARVIS cuts in, voice long suffering but inescapably fond, “people rarely do.”

~~~

Stark, Bucky soon discovers, is a more than formidable opponent in this twisted little game they’re playing with each other.

Either that or the Avengers are made up of a group of breathtakingly oblivious individuals.

Three weeks into his full on habitation of the Tower, as well as this silent grudge match between him and Stark, and Bucky’s about ready to declare that it’s some kind of hellish mix of both.

~~~

As it turns out, that “I Am Iron Man” t-shirt is only the beginning of a parade of obvious and over the top moves that are lobed in Bucky’s direction.

Stark swans around the Tower in a variety of ridiculous outfits.

There’s a whole plethora of different shirts, pants, and sweaters. Bucky learns from comments and questions that most, if not all of them, were designed and ordered by either Stark’s actual robotic children or by JARVIS himself.

In fact, Bucky realizes quickly enough, most of Stark’s clothes are Iron Man related in some way, shape, or form. Bucky’s pretty sure the man wears some kind of armor or Iron Man related underwear.

Also, Bucky’s not even remotely ashamed to admit that he’s more than a bit interested in finding out if that particular thought is true or not.

Hell, outside of Stark’s possibly themed unmentionables, even that coffee cup the man’s almost permanently attached to has something to do with the armor. The damn thing’s bright red and says “Designed it. Built it. Fly it.” in gold letters. It even has a little picture of the armor set off to the side.

It was, apparently, a gift from JARVIS and Stark is barely ever seen without it.

And yet no one in the Tower, except for Bucky, ever seems to so much as blink an eye at it.
The point though, is that from his shirts all the way down to his helmet covered socks Stark’s never without something that fits into that theme.

That includes, Bucky discovers the next time a gala Stark has to attend rolls around, his more formal wear.

The suit jacket Stark strolls onto the common floor wearing is a deep rich crimson and the matching waist-coat has delicate golden gears embroidered across it. The black tie he’s wearing even has a little jeweled Iron Man helmet acting as a tie pin.

His pants are tight, his hair is fluffy, and Bucky kind of wants to wreck him.

“Looking good Stark,” Wilson whistles from where he’s splayed out on the couch.

“You do clean up nicely Tony,” Natasha chimes in from where she’s using Clint’s shoulders as a foot rest while she paints her toenails.

“All the better to charm shallow people out of their money with my dear,” Stark says brightly.

“How’s the security?” Steve immediately pipes up. “There hasn’t been a lot of villain activity lately Tony and we’re all starting to get a bit antsy.”

“Iron Man’s going to be with him Steve,” Clint says around a mouthful of bagel. “Shellhead’ll keep him safe.”

“Pretty sure Stark doesn’t go anywhere without Iron Man,” Bucky cuts in because this is the perfect opportunity. “They’re so close that it’s almost like they’re the same person.”

“Just because they’re close doesn’t mean we shouldn’t worry Buck,” Steve scolds him lightly. “One of Tony’s fancy parties would be the perfect time for something to go wrong. Especially since none of the rest of us are going to this one. Iron Man should have some backup if things go south. It’ll be hard for him to protect Tony and any civilians until we can assemble.”

“Yeah Barnes,” Stark drawls. “It’s not like I could possibly protect myself against a threat like that if the worst happened. I mean, what do you expect me to do? Put the armor on and take care of them all on my own? I’m good but I’m no superhero.”

The rest of the group laughs good naturedly at Stark’s ... joke.

“I’m half hoping someone will attack to be honest,” Stark complains as he straightens his tie. “Might help break up the monotony since Pepper says I’m not allowed to play with whatever alcohol and chemicals I can find behind the bar anymore. You start one little fire and suddenly you’re not allowed to have fun at these things.”

“Aw explosions,” Clint commiserates around a mouthful of marshmallow fluff.

“Too bad I don’t have a date for this thing at least,” Stark keeps going. “It was last minute but it would be better than nothing.”

From across the room Steve’s face lights up.

Bucky’s pretty sure he’s developed an eye twitch.

~~~

“This is your fault,” Bucky snarls at Stark as they twirl around the dance floor together. Stark’s a
compact and warm weight in his arms and Bucky’s only slightly surprised at how well they seem to fit together.

Even their outfits somehow compliment one another thanks to the black on black suit and red tie Natasha had practically shoved him into earlier.

Bucky hadn’t even known he owned the thing but Natasha had just shrugged and said “JARVIS” like that explained everything. Which, Bucky realizes, it probably does. The AI’s proven to be just as bad as his creator when it comes to meddling.

But he does, Bucky’s forced to admit, have excellent taste in clothes.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Stark says sunnily in what Bucky’s pretty sure is supposed to be his impression of Steve’s innocent look.

On Stark it just looks some strange crossover between seductive and manic.

Which is a combination Bucky had never thought to see before.

It’s also one he knows he shouldn’t find as appealing as he does.

“I know what you are,” Bucky grits out.

“Well say it out loud then Bella,” Stark practically sparkles up at him, eyes crinkled in mirth.

“You’re a menace,” Bucky hisses into Stark’s ear as he pulls him just a bit closer. “I’m onto your game and I’m warning you now Stark. You’re going down.”

“Not on the first date I’m not,” Stark denies happily. “Now shut up and dip me Tastee-Freeze.”

Bucky dips him.

But only because he was going to anyways.

~~~

A full month in and Bucky’s beginning to suspect that magic might be involved.

Hell, Bucky’s full on praying that magic’s involved somehow.

Because the alternative is just … too horrifying to consider.

~~~

They’re fighting some kind of sentient ooze a week or so later and, heat of battle or not, Bucky’s pretty sure he’s a hair’s breadth away from choking Steve out in the middle of the battle field.

It wouldn’t be fatal of course, but maybe a forceful nap would fix whatever’s wrong in his best friend’s head.

A hard restart as it were. A little bit of cognitive recalibration to clear this whole damn mess up.

“He literally said the words “I should probably armor up for this” not three minutes ago.” Bucky half screams as he ducks behind a burnt out car to avoid yet another explosion. “He said it right to your face, Steven.”
“He was obviously calling for Iron Man to come help, Buck.” Steve tells him all sunny like, soot streaked across his face and hair tousled because he’s, *once again*, managed to lose his helmet.

Which, now that Bucky thinks about it, might explain some things. Multiple blows to the head even with the serum could actually be the root of the problem here.

Maybe.

Hopefully.

Please let it be actual head trauma.

Still Bucky’s so taken aback by Steve’s bullshit that he stares at him for so hard and for so long that he’s completely oblivious to what’s happening around him and almost gets clipped by flying debris.

“Soldier, watch your six,” a voice that is *obviously* Stark’s chimes in as Iron Man swoops down and covers both of them. “Hate to have something happen to it, cause it’s such a *nice* six afterall.”

Bucky twists enough to glower at the faceplate of the armor.

The faceplate that has a version of Stark’s goatee drawn on it in slightly faded marker.

“Thanks Shellhead,” Steve calls across the comms without even bothering to turn. “Hope Tony got back to the Tower safely.”

“Don’t worry your pretty little head Cap,” Stark replies happily enough. “Tony Stark is right where he’s supposed to be. Really, *I am*.”

“Good,” Steve grunts as his shield impacts another ooze monster, splattering it’s bright green body across the ground in front of him. “As long as he’s safe.”

Bucky’s pretty sure he’s had a stroke or something because, again, he’s seen and done a lot of things in his century of life.

But this level of blindness?

This degree of sheer obliviousness?

It’s *goddamn* breathtaking.

All Bucky can think as he lines up his next shot is, ‘*these are the idiots who are supposed to be protecting the world*?’

Either way the battle ends surprisingly quickly.

Or maybe not so surprisingly.

Bucky has a lot of pent up rage after all.

~~~

Bucky gets a package a day or so after that battle.

Or, to be more accurate, he walks into his room and finds a familiar bag sitting innocently on his pillow with a note.
The note says, “keep up the good work” in surprisingly loopy handwriting. Bucky snorts, slaps the note on the side table, and scoops the bag up.

The candy’s just as good as it was last time.

And at least he doesn’t have to share these with Stark.

~~~

Bucky steps up his game a little bit after that.

He brings up Stark’s identity in any conversation that can be even tangentially brought back around to the subject.

Which is, to be fair, more than Bucky had really thought possible.

He even manages to get a sign stuck to Stark’s ass that says “I Am Iron Man” because maybe, for some reason, no one’s been paying attention to the front of his shirts.

But then, with an ass like that, Bucky can’t really blame them.

Still, no matter what he does, Stark gives as good as he gets. His tongue’s fast and agile, quips and comebacks rolling off of it in a way that makes Bucky want to take the man on in more than one setting.

Preferably one with a bed, or a couch, or at least a semi-comfortable horizontal surface of some kind.

Honestly Bucky would be more than happy to make due with a secluded and sturdy section of wall too.

He’s adaptable and willing to put the work in either way.

~~~

Eventually, three months in and no progress made, Bucky decides to stop being subtle about the entire situation.

The team’s all together and outside of the Tower for once when an explosion rips its way through midtown. Even from blocks away Bucky can hear the screams and what sounds a lot like lasers firing.

“Avengers assemble,” Steve says, already pulling his shield from the portfolio case he always carries it in. “Tony, call Iron Man.”

“Gotcha Cap,” Stark says as he steps to the side of the street, phone already at his ear. Bucky knows JARVIS is on the other end and that the armor has, more than likely, been inroute since the initial explosion happened.

“Stark is Iron Man,” Bucky bites out as he watches Stark step into the newly arrived armor. He reaches out and grabs the nearest person, which happens to be Clint, and tugs him around so he can point emphatically at Stark. “See!”

“Obviously I’m not Iron Man,” Stark says even as he puts the helmet on slowly, never breaking the intense eye contact that’s sprung up between the two of them. “Just holding the armor until he can get here.”
“That’s real nice of you Tony.” Steve tells him happily as he takes point and starts jogging in the direction of the disturbance. “Make sure you get out of here safely when he shows up.”

“Goddamnit Stevie is your brain still frozen!?” Bucky bellows after Steve’s quickly retreating form.

“That’s rude Buck!” Steve calls back just as he turns the corner.

“Let go Barnes,” Clint, the fucking heathen, chirps as he chooses that moment to bite Bucky on the wrist of his flesh arm and wriggle out of his hold. “We can talk about your crush on Stark and Shellhead later.”

Bucky drops to his knees in the middle of the street and screams in rage, both hands coming up to tug sharply at his own hair.

It’s either that or cry.

~~~

Seething, Bucky spends the next week referring to Stark as Iron Man only, both on and off of the field.

Stark always answers with a sunny smile.

Nobody else seems to notice.

‘This’, Bucky decides with a sort of manic finality, ‘must be what going mad feels like.’

~~~

Determination bright in his soul Bucky decides that the only course of action is to take the battle to a different plane.

Maybe if he does some more reconnaissance he can figure out exactly how Stark’s managed to keep the wool pulled over everyone’s eyes.

So, that thought in mind, Bucky takes his latest bag of candy courtesy of one of Fury’s post battle drop offs, with him and heads down to Stark’s workshop.

“Well well well,” Stark beams at him as Bucky steps inside, “fancy seeing you here. What can I do for my favorite matryoshka murder doll?”

Bucky’s silent for a long moment because stepping into Stark’s space is a lot like stepping into another world.

It’s bright, manic, and filled with unbelievable and ridiculous stuff that Bucky only half understands but kind of wants to get his hands on anyways.

Much like the man himself.

Finally snapping back to attention when some kind of one armed robot waves what looks like a fire extinguisher in his direction, Bucky tosses the bag of candy in Stark’s direction and then strides over to the couch in the corner and settles down.

“What’s this?” Stark shakes the candy in Bucky’s direction. “Is this a threat? A bribe? Rent? That’s it isn’t it? You think you’re going to rent out my couch with candy?”
“You gonna tell me no?” Bucky arches a brow in Stark’s direction because the man’s already
popped at least three pieces of candy in his mouth.

With his cheek puffed out, hair wild, and a smatter of grease across one temple Stark looks so
much like a manic mouse that Bucky feels kind of disgusted with himself over how attractive Stark
still is to him.

HYDRA, it seems, ruined his taste in men. Just one more sin to lay at their doorstep.

“How don’t put words in my mouth,” Stark snips as he throws himself back down onto his stool, candy
tucked unsubtly to the side. “At least not without asking first.”

Even from where he’s sitting Bucky can tell that he’s working on what looks like upgrades to the
armor.

The file name at the top of the interface declares the project’s name to be “I Am Not Iron Man”.

The body model in the hologram, complete with Stark’s goatee, is currently blowing kisses in his
direction, complete with little blue hologram hearts that burst into helmet shaped sparkles.

Bucky hates one man.

It is this man.

~~~

A few hours after Barnes plays one final game of catch with the bots and then slinks back out of
the workshop, Tony hums happily as he sucks on a piece of candy and lovingly curates the newest
additions to the WIT file.

Barnes has proven to be an exceptionally entertaining opponent and Tony’s not afraid to admit that
he kind of likes the guy.

He’s intelligent, tough, has an unbelievably attractive appeal with his sexy robo-hobo aesthetic, and
is, overall, pretty outspoken but easy to like for someone who spent seventy plus years as a
homicidal Hot-Pocket.

Tony could almost pity him for being so close to being tipped over the edge of what’s left of his
sanity.

Almost.

Instead he’s going to gleefully give him those few final shoves.
Tony has a plan.

Well, like with most things that don’t directly relate back to science, the armor, or SI, Tony has at least twelve percent of a plan.

JARVIS is, like always, in charge of the other eighty-eight percent.

They have a system worked out and Tony has all the faith in the world that J will pull through for him if push comes to shove.

If not then he can always call Rhody who is, despite what everyone always thinks, normally down for whatever shenanigans Tony can think of as long as they don’t involve things like unprovoked/unjustified murder or treason.

Or, oddly enough, anything to do with the entire state of Delaware*.

Rhodey, for some reason, has a mental block on the entire state but has never actually been able to explain to Tony why.

After all these years of Rhody’s adamant refusal to step foot in any part of Delaware Tony’s reached the conclusion that he’s pretty sure Rhodey was traumatized there in another universe or something.

The point is that Tony has a plan that should help him give Barnes those few final pushes over the edge.

It’s time to get aggressive, to get up close and personal and see just how much heat the Winter Soldier can really take.

Tony’s looking forward to it.

~~~

It’s official.

Stark’s actively trying to drive him mad.

Bucky knows it.

No matter what Steve says or how much he protests, Bucky knows that Stark’s got it in for him.

But, to be fair, if Stevie told him the sky was blue these days Bucky would have to find a window and check. That’s the level of confidence Bucky has where Steve’s word outside of the battlefield is concerned these days.

So, yeah, Stark’s out to get him.

It’s the only explanation.
He’s everywhere Bucky goes these days, with his sarcasm and his fluffy hair. The man’s practically haunting Bucky’s footsteps with his stupidly attractive doe eyes and his ridiculous Iron Man paraphernalia.

It’s a twenty-four hour assault on the senses, a full blown siege of the mind.

If it keeps on like this then Bucky’s either going to run jibbering mad into the night never to be seen again or he’s going to finally shut Stark up by hitting him.

Right in that entirely too entrancing mouth of his.

With his own mouth.

Repeatedly.

Because, by that point, the only option besides retreat will be mouth to mouth combat.

Either way Bucky knows he’s close to snapping and when that finally happens it’s going to be a toss up as to which of the two he does.

It also, Bucky is only mildly ashamed to admit, depends at least a little bit on what Stark’s wearing at the time.

If it’s one of his ridiculous “I Am Iron Man” t-shirts then Bucky will probably have to deal with outrunning Stevie for the rest of his life.

If it’s one of those tank-tops that clings to him like a second skin and shows off way too much olive toned skin …

Well.

If that happens then all bets will probably be off.

Bucky is a man of simple tastes these days.

Tony Stark, fresh from his workshop, hair a wreck and dressed in low slung sweats and a clinging tank-top, just happens to line up with most of them.

Damn him.

~~~

It’s early morning when Bucky comes across the holy grail in the form of a video.

He watches it once, twice, three times and feels his own incredulity grow with each viewing.

The video is, objectively, perfect.

Stark’s somber toned in a way Bucky’s never seen him outside of the most serious of battles.

Seriousness aside he’s still naturally compelling, still draws the eye and someone’s attention like a magnet.

He’s especially interesting to Bucky with the way that Bucky can see the tell-tale signs of barely concealed wounds beneath his carefully applied makeup. Added to that is the fact that the dark, non-flashy suit he’s wearing doesn’t hide the way he’s obviously favoring his left side.
Stark looks calm and open in a way that oozes authenticity in Bucky’s opinion as he announces to the world that he is Iron Man.

It’s a video of the infamous press conference where Stark had, according to popular opinion, tried to deflect attention off of the real pilot of the Iron Man armor.

It’s obviously bullshit. Hell the look of outrage, disbelief, and flashes of bitterness that dances across Stark’s face before he locks it down would have been enough to convince Bucky he was being honest on the spot.

Now, with months of Stark being blatantly obvious about his identity, Bucky can’t understand how no one had believed the man.

That’s going to change though, if Bucky has his way about things.

Because this video, the sincerity Stark practically oozes at the camera, might be enough to make Steve finally believe him.

Or at least he really hopes it will be because Bucky’s running out of options by this point.

~~~

“You,” Steve clears his throat slightly, brow furrowed and mouth turned down in concentration, “you’ve given me a lot to think about Buck. Just give me a bit alright? I’ll get back to you, I swear.”

Bucky watches Steve leave the room feeling more than slightly underwhelmed.

Steve’s reaction to the press conference video and Bucky’s admittedly impassioned speech about Stark’s identity had been … less than what Bucky had been expecting.

But then again maybe Bucky’s reading too much into it.

Maybe this finally got through to Steve and now he’s really thinking about it, is connecting the dots as it were.

Maybe Bucky will finally be free of this hell crafted out of other people’s obliviousness.

~~~

Bucky gets his answer two days later when he and Stark come up together from the workshop. They’d spent the afternoon together going over some adjustments for Bucky’s arm and then having an increasingly heated debate over everything from mantis shrimp to the merits of roller-blades in a battle situation.

The elevator stops on the common floor and they step out together. Bucky’s not really paying attention, secure in the knowledge that JARVIS is pretty much all knowing and would warn him of any danger to himself but most especially to Stark.

Plus he’s willing to admit to being distracted by the way Stark’s eyes light up when he talks about his plans for a water filtration system he’s been cooking up.

That’s why the loud cracking sound and the cheer that greets the both of them the second they turn the corner catches him so off guard.

Bucky’s half way in front of Stark, a knife in one hand and the other reaching for the gun he’s not
wearing when he freezes.

The rest of the team, including an amused looking Rhodes and a blank faced Fury, is gathered in the living room of the common floor.

The loud crack came from a grinning Clint and Wilson who’re both holding what look like some kind of streamer poppers in their hands. The floor in front of both of them is littered with confetti and crepe paper.

They only capture Bucky’s attention for a split second though because his eyes are immediately caught and held by what’s hanging above the gathered team.

‘Happy Intervention!’ the large and surprisingly well made banner screams in huge, blocky gold letters.

“Oh shit,” Stark whispers at his side, “not again.”

“Bucky,” Steve chooses that moment to step forward. “We’re doing this because we care about you.”

“Oh sweet baby Sagan it’s not for me,” Stark slumps in relief and goes to move away from Bucky’s side.

Bucky moves on instinct and reaches out to hook his fingers in the collar of Stark’s ridiculous t-shirt. He tugs Stark back to his side with barely any effort and settles his metal hand on the back of his neck in a silent gesture to stay.

There’s no way in hell Bucky’s doing this, whatever the fuck it’s supposed to be, alone.

Besides, something’s telling him that this all loops back to Stark somehow anyways. Most things in Bucky’s life do these days.

“Rhodey,” Stark whines but it’s easy for Bucky to ignore. Stark doesn’t try to get away from him again though. Only reaches his hands out in the direction of Rhodes who isn’t even paying attention anymore because he seems to be doing his best to smother himself in a pillow.

He’s obviously trying to conceal his laughter if the way his shoulders are shaking is any indication. The asshole.

“Stevie,” Bucky says with an applaudable amount of calm, “what in the fuck is going on here?”

“It’s an intervention Barnes,” Wilson calls from across the room and Bucky flips him off on reflex alone. Wilson always provokes that reaction from him for some reason.

“We’re worried about you, Buck. I’m worried about you,” Steve says gently as he steps forward some more, hands out stretched like Bucky’s a skittish animal he needs to gentle. “This obsession of yours … well we thought it was time we talked to you about it. See what there is we can do to help. Because that’s all we want to do Buck, help you.”

“My obsession?” Bucky’s eyes track from Steve’s concerned face back up to the banner. It really is attention grabbing with its dark red background and golden letters.

There’s also a concerning amount of glitter.

Bucky’s fully ready to blame Clint and Wilson for the entire thing even if the laser precise edges of
the letters screams Natasha and the overall color scheme and layout screams Steve.

This, whatever this is, was obviously a group effort.

“We know you’ve had a hard time getting adjusted after everything,” Steve keeps going earnestly. “I had a hard time too but the team, well they helped pull me out of it. So we want to do that for you too.”

Bucky’s eyes track back to Steve then back to the banner.

Back to Steve in his khakis and pressed shirt.

Back to the red and gold banner.

Back to Steve with his stupid hair and puppy eyes.

Back to the red and gold banner -

Wait.

No.

No.

Bucky refuses to believe this is really happening to him.

But, like with so many other things in his life, the unbelievable seems determined to keep coming true.

“We need to talk about how you’re obsessed with Tony being Iron Man,” Steve finally cuts to the point. “Letting your feelings for the two of them get twisted up like this isn’t healthy Buck. Let us help you.”

Beside him Stark cackles with glee.

Bucky feels absolutely no guilt in using his hold on the back of his neck to push him to the ground.

~~~

The intervention is actually pretty nice once Bucky stops trying to strangle Steve and Rhodes stops basically screaming in laughter.

There’s music and fruit drinks. The team comes by and tells him how much they care about him, even Clint and Wilson. Rhodes manages to look him in the eye for an entire six seconds before he breaks down again and stumbles away.

The Hulk drew him a pretty cool card and Bruce, as it turns out, has baked a truly massive chocolate orange cake with toffee bits.

Bucky feels no shame in eating half of it on his own because it’s his goddamn intervention and that means the cake is his too. It’s good enough that two pieces and half way through Steve’s next heartfelt speech his mood has mellowed out a bit.

He doesn’t even mind the way Stark picks bits and pieces of it off of his plate like the scavenger he not so secretly is. Instead Bucky just sighs and makes sure he gives the bastard most of the icing off of his portion as well.
An hour in and Fury swoops down on him like the giant candy bat he is.

“Good luck with that,” Fury says as he dips his head towards where Stark’s currently hanging off of Bruce’s arm, “you’re going to need it, you poor bastard.”

Before Bucky can riddle out exactly what Fury means the man drops two extra large bags of candy on his lap and swoops back away.

Finally Bucky shrugs, pockets one of the bags of candy, and automatically holds the other out to Stark who’s already making a beeline for him.

Maybe interventions aren’t so bad after all.

~~~

Tony steps back from the armor, polishing rag in hand.

Yes, this … this is perfect.

Truly a masterpiece.

Tony has, once again, outdone himself.

“Just as I think you cannot outdo yourself you somehow rise to new heights Sir,” JARVIS chimes in solemnly. “Or perhaps you sink to new depths. It is, I have found, rather debatable.”

“I know, baby boy,” Tony says proudly, chest heavy with emotion. “It’s the burden we geniuses have to bare.”

“Your humility is truly your greatest strength,” JARVIS snips.

“You know,” Tony props his hands on his hips, head tilted to the side as he stares at the armor, “I almost feel bad about this, what with the intervention and all.”

“Are you having second thoughts Sir?” JARVIS seems genuinely surprised and curious.

“Please J,” Tony brings a hand up to tap at the arc reactor, “don’t be offensive. Second thoughts are for quitters.”

“As you say Sir,” JARVIS replies, “as you say.”

~~~

The battle’s nothing serious, not really. Just AIM goons intent on being annoying like they normally are at least once a month.

Overall they’re really nothing to worry about.

Which is a good thing considering how Bucky freezes when Stark shows up on the scene, landing on the street directly in front of him.

Bucky blinks, takes a moment to internalize just what he’s seeing, and then forcefully shuts that part of his mind down.

He can’t deal with this now.
Later maybe.

Definitely.

But not now.

~~~

Bucky’s discovered over the past three hours that he can’t get drunk anymore no matter how hard he tries.

And, sitting with his back against the window of his floor’s living room, surrounded by a sea of empty liquor bottles, he’s actively trying.

He’s pretty sure most people would be dead by now if they drank even half of the liquor he has in the past few hours.

Yet another sin he can lay at HYDRA’s doorstep. And, at the moment, it’s the one that’s hurting him the most.

“Well,” a infuriatingly familiar voice chimes in, “J said you were down here trying to drown yourself but I can honestly say this wasn’t what I was expecting.”

There’s a clink of bottles and the padding of footsteps and then Bucky can feel Stark crouch down at his side. A hand comes up and pats at his hair.

“Did you knock over a liquor store or something Cold Stone?” Stark asks. “Am I gonna have to hide you from the fuzz?”

Bucky just makes a grumbling sound in the back of his throat as he curls in on himself tighter where he’s balled up on the floor, depressingly sober.

“Aw, use your people words,” Stark tugs lightly at his hair.

And that right there?

That’s the breaking point.

Bucky surges up out of his curled up ball and into Stark’s space so fast that the other man jolts back with a small yelp. Bucky doesn’t let him fall backwards though.

Instead he reaches out, curls both hands in the front of Stark’s tank top, and pulls him close until their noses are practically touching.

“How could they not know?” Bucky’s hands clench in Stark’s tank top. He can hear the desperation in his own voice, knows it’s mirrored in his expression.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about Klondike.” Stark tells him with a ragged sort of determination. Bucky knows that it’s because, by this point, he’s in too deep to take any other stance.

“I have literally watched you step out of the armor.” Bucky shakes him just a bit. “It’s custom built to your fucking pocket sized ass. You put a decal across the back that says ‘Tony Stark Is Driving’.”

“There there,” Stark reaches up and pats him lightly on the shoulders. “Obviously it’s all a
coincidence. Although you’ve got to admit that decal is a work of art.”

“They’re so stupid.” To his horror Bucky can feel actual tears well up in his eyes. “They’re stupid. We’re all going to die someday because they’re too stupid to live.”

“Aw Bucky, babe, I’m proud of you,” Stark, Tony, practically coos at him as Bucky hunches over so that his face is buried in the crook of his neck. “The first step is admitting there’s a problem. And you’ve just done that. Now the healing can begin.”

And Bucky, well, he’s reached his breaking point and Tony is wearing one of those clingy fucking tank-tops.

So he does the only thing he really can do.

He picks his head up, pulls Tony even closer, and finally kisses him.

It’s deep and hot and heady. Tony tastes like sugar and coffee and his goatee scratches against Bucky’s own stubble in a way that makes Bucky think about beard burn and red marks left on olive skin.

It’s so, so good.

“Oh sweetheart,” Tony says breathlessly when they finally pull apart, both of them flushed and panting, hands buried in each other’s hair. “Welcome to the dark side.”

“Shut up and kiss me Tony,” Bucky huffs in exasperation.

Then he makes sure that Tony’s mouth is too busy to do anything else.

Chapter End Notes

*I have absolutely no problem with the state of Delaware. This is a joke calling back to my other fic ‘The Limitations of Wax’ because I’m a fucking dork and is in no way meant to be offensive. Please do not send me hate.*
“So,” Tony pants, lips kiss swollen and body flushed with afterglow, “wanna make a bet?”

“Hmm?” Bucky hums his question, mouth apparently still too occupied with sucking red marks across the line of Tony’s collarbone to be bothered to use actual words.

Tony can’t help but wonder if HYDRA dosed him with fucking vampire blood or something. It would explain why he’s so obsessed with gnawing on Tony.

Not that Tony minds, of course.

In fact he is the exact opposite of someone who minds.

He plans to be completely supportive of Bucky’s newly revealed fetish.

Because he’s a naturally helpful and supportive kind of person.

“Bet you it takes them at least three months to catch onto this,” Tony flaps his hand to indicate the way the two of them are sweaty and entwined on the floor together.

“Nope,” Bucky finally pulls back enough to answer him. His eyes are heavy lidded and there’s a telltale flush high on his cheeks. “Not taking any bets over those idiots. It’s asking to be disappointed somehow.”

“You’ve got a point on that one,” Tony agrees as he reaches up to thumb at Bucky’s lower lip, breath hitching just a bit when he nips at the pad of his thumb. “I’m pretty sure we could fuck on the common room floor during dinner and they’d ask us if we had fun playing Twister instead.”

“Stevie’d probably ask us how long we been sparring together,” Bucky admits even as he dips down and kisses Tony again. His metal hand trails teasingly down the side of Tony’s rib cage and then keeps going. “Then I’d have to kill him ‘cause he’d probably ask to join.”

“Hm,” Tony hums as he arches up into the solid line of heat and muscle that’s nestled between his thighs. “Interesting i-idea there, ugh, sweetheart, might have t-to revisit that.”

“Shut up myshka,” Bucky tells him with a surprisingly fond roll of his eyes.

And Tony does.

But only because he was going to anyways.

~~~

“Wait a minute,” Tony jolts upright two or so hours after they finally stumbled their way up to Tony’s floor and his giant bed.

“What?” Bucky mutters from where his face is pressed against Tony’s stomach.

“Did you call me little mouse?” Tony pokes at his cheek with a finger. “That’s a ridiculous name and I demand you take it back.”
He sounds so legitimately offended that Bucky immediately vows to call him *myshka* as often as possible.

“No.” Bucky tells him seriously. “It suits you. You’re small, your hair’s soft, and, most importantly of all, *you’re unbelievably annoying*. It’s perfect.”

Tony deliberates for a moment.

“Alright,” he finally sighs as he flops back down, eyes already drooping sleepily, “you might have a point. I don’t agree with the small part but I’ll allow it.”

“Shut up and go back to sleep,” Bucky pauses for a second, “*myshka.*”

“My revenge will be sweet,” Tony mutters. “And unexpected.”

Bucky’s honestly kind of looking forward to it.

~~~

The next morning the two of them stumble through an exceptionally long shower together because they seem to have a problem with actually getting clean.

By the time they’re done and dressed Bucky’s pretty sure that no one could possibly miss what they’ve been up to.

But he’s learned the hard way not to make assumptions about what is and is not obvious to other people. If something looks obvious to him then the others probably wouldn’t notice it if it slapped them in the fucking face.

*Or flew around in a personalized suit of armor.*

Still, serum keeping Bucky himself unmarked or not, the way that Tony looks so freshly fucked, bite marks obvious on his collarbones and lips still swollen, should set off alarm bells for anyone with functioning eyes.

So, again, he’s pretty sure no one else in the Tower will notice.

If they keep missing out on the fact that *Tony is Iron Man* then there’s absolutely *no way* they’ll pick up on the fact that they’d spent the last ten or so hours doing filthy, filthy things to each other.

No way in hell.

~~~

“Hey Nat,” Clint calls as soon as they step into the kitchen where the others are gathered. “You lose. Now you owe me *blint.*”

Natasha turns from her place at the counter, takes one look at Bucky and Tony, and curses viciously before she heads to the pantry and starts pulling down ingredients.

Bucky’s momentarily mystified.

“What the hell kind of bet did you beat Itsy Bitsy out on?” Tony asks with an appropriate level of awe.

“About when you two were finally gonna fuck,” Clint grins around his half eaten eggo. “She had
you pegged for about two months from now cause you’re both oblivious idiots. But Winter has finally come so that means I won.”

Bucky is immediately frozen and from the look of it Tony’s no better, mouth gaped open just a bit and expression as incredulous as Bucky feels.

‘Oblivious idiots’, the phrase reverberates in Bucky’s head. He dared ...

“Congratulations you two,” Steve beams brightly as he moves around Wilson who’s slumped against the counter. “It’s about time. We’ve all been waiting for it to finally happen. I’m glad the intervention helped you two finally set things straight with each other.”

“You … you’ve been waiting?” Tony sounds almost as dazed as Bucky himself feels.

“Yeah,” Steve grins at them, smug and pleased. “You were both really obvious. Besides, we’re the Avengers Tony. I can’t believe you thought you could hide something like this from us.”

‘Obvious,’ The word rings like a death knell in Bucky’s mind. ‘We’re the Avengers.’

Now this, Bucky knows, is exactly what going mad feels like.

“I’m going to kill ‘em,” Bucky says serenely as he turns enough to look down at Tony who’s slumped, shell-shocked and obviously overwhelmed, against his side. “Hope you’re ready for a life on the run, myshka, because I’m gonna murder every single one of them.”

“Sure thing, sweetheart,” Tony says faintly. “I’m a ride-or-die kind of girl.”

~~~

“Obvious,” Bucky snarls a few hours later, hands raised up like he’s trying to strangple the air in front of him. “Did you hear that bullshit? We were fucking obvious. Like they’re not the stupidest fuckers I’ve ever met. I didn’t get defrosted for this shit.”

Tony would poke fun at him if he wasn’t currently feeling the same sort of hysterical rage.

Because … how?

Just, that’s the question that keeps ringing in Tony’s head.

How?

How did the biggest band of oblivious idiots Tony’s ever met clock the fact that him and Bucky spent the night defiling each other? Especially when they can’t even tell that Tony is Iron Man when he announced it at a press conference?

Tony can feel the yawning abyss of madness reaching out for him the longer he keeps trying to rationalize the entire thing.

“I’m going to become a supervillain,” Tony realizes in a moment of startling clarity. “They’re going to drive me the rest of the way over the edge and I’m going to turn to evil to cope. I’m going to take over the world and then I’m going to make Pepper run it. It’s inevitable.”

Tony finds that the idea doesn’t upset him as much as he assumed it would. Actually there’s an amazing amount of peace and acceptance coursing through him at the moment.

On the other side of the room Bucky’s busy cursing and bending steel pipes in half in an effort to
expel his rage, the muscles of his shoulders rippling as he moves. The bots are crowded around him, offering new things for him to break from the pile Tony set aside for just that purpose. They seem to be a mix of commiserating and gleeful if the beeps and clicks Tony can hear are any indication.

Tony settles back into his chair to watch.

He might not have teammates who could deduce their way out of a paper bag when it comes to anything that isn’t sex or a battlefield strategy but least he has this.

~~~

After that initial bump in the road, and the following two weeks of Steve pouting after Bucky stops trying to passive aggressively murder him, things even out a bit.

The dark side, as Tony insists on calling it, turns out to be way less stressful than whatever side Bucky had been on before.

It’s like once Bucky stops resisting the inevitable he and Tony fit even deeper into each other’s space, both physical and otherwise, than before. They slot together with almost ridiculous ease, their parts complimentary instead of opposing.

Bucky starts spending even more of his time in the workshop with Tony and the bots. It’s comfortable and entertaining and feels like home.

In return Tony slinks out of his workshop to spend some time in the gym with Bucky in the afternoons.

And they’re now each others automatic plus one to any event they have to attend so there’s no more boring galas with no dates and a lack of explosions.

It’s surprisingly … easy.

The best part, in Bucky’s opinion, is that whenever he gets the urge to lay hands on Tony’s too tempting ass, or bite that pouty bottom lip, or tug at that messy hair of his, he doesn’t have to knuckle under and ignore it anymore.

So, yeah, that’s a major bonus.

Beyond that initial bit of friction, life in the Tower in general smoothes out.

Steve stops looking so worried all of the time and staring at Bucky soulfully from a distance, thank Thor. Everyone else stops watching Bucky with that special mix of pity and wariness they’d adopted at the height of his ‘Tony Is Iron Man You Stupid Fucks’ phase.

Of course most days Bucky still wants to strangle all of them.

But only just a little bit, a tiny strangle at most.

Thankfully he’s learning to move past that gut impulse.

With the help of JARVIS’ deep breathing techniques, and a lot of time spent mouthing at Tony’s collarbones, Bucky is officially working on rebuilding his emotional moorings in a place that falls somewhere between serenity and sheer heart stopping rage.

It’s a work in progress.
“We all are, sweetheart,” Tony always says with sage wisdom right before he does something that, inevitably, causes him to get doused with DUM-E’s fire extinguisher.

So life in the Tower, with the team, with Tony, is good.

~~~

“Present time, orso polare.” Tony shoves the box into Bucky’s chest, surprisingly nervous for something so simple.

“Polar Bear?” Bucky cuts an unimpressed look in his direction even as he grabs the box. “That’s the best you can do myshka?”

“You’re large, spent a long time in the ice, and are, most importantly of all, prone to murderous rages,” Tony shrugs. “It suits you. Now open your present.”

Bucky squints at him for a second.

“Fair,” he finally admits. “Now what in the hell is this?”

“Open it and find out,” Tony prompts as he throws himself into his chair and picks up a screwdriver to fiddle with.

Bucky cracks the box open with ease and reaches a hand inside. Tony watches as he pulls the first thing out of the box and shakes it out until he can see what’s on it.

“Well?” Tony prompts after a too long moment of silence.

“It’s hideous,” Bucky says softly even as he proceeds to immediately switch the shirt he’s wearing for the one he’s just pulled out of the box.

Tony watches fondly as he runs silver fingers over the gold lettering that’s stretched across his chest.

‘My Boyfriend Is Iron Man’ the red and gold t-shirt proudly announces. It, just like Tony’s own shirts of the same style, also has a perfect replica of his goatee at the bottom.

It’s also a symbol of just how serious Tony is about this thing between him and Bucky.

“I hate it,” Bucky insists as he rounds the corner of the table and bends down to kiss Tony deeply. “Thank you.”

“No problem,” Tony grins up at him. “JARVIS’ apparently had a whole line of stuff drawn up and set aside for a few months now.”

“I had anticipated they might be needed Sir,” JARVIS chimes in.

“Thanks to you too then,” Bucky nods at the nearest camera.

“A pleasure Sergeant Barnes,” JARVIS assures him. “I also included some new items for Sir as well.”

“Oh, more goodies,” Tony squirms out of his chair and around Bucky to start rooting through the box because he hadn’t greenlighted more stuff for himself. Leave it to JARVIS to anticipate his needs in this too.
He finally pulls out a long sleeve shirt that’s obviously more his size than Bucky’s. It’s black, except for the left arm that’s been printed to match Bucky’s, complete with the red star.

The red letters across the front proclaim that ‘My Boyfriend Is The Winter Soldier’.

Tony absolutely **adores** it.

“You’re perfect J,’’ he can’t help but grin as he pulls his tank-top off and slips his new shirt on. “How’d I make you so perfect?”

“A question I wrestle with daily, Sir.” JARVIS says smugly.

“Well,” Tony turns back towards Bucky who looks more than a bit intrigued at the sight of Tony’s new shirt. “You’ve already joined the dark side. We’ve got a matching wardrobe and everything now. So I’d say it’s time to get to work.”

There’s a moment of silent contemplation.

And then …

**Bucky smiles.**

~~~

Bucky’s shirt gets a few raised brows and one truly severe frown from Steve but no one says anything.

They also don’t say anything about the Iron Man sleep pants Bucky takes to wearing or the red and gold color scheme the new goggles Tony makes him take on.

Bucky would say he’s surprised but he’s honestly not.

By now there’s probably not much that could surprise him.

For his part Bucky’s surprisingly fine with the fact that most of his casual clothes have ended up either branded with *Stark Industries* or are some kind of ridiculous novelty shirt that JARVIS and the bots obviously thought up.

Tony, as it turns out, is just as territorial over Bucky as Bucky is over him.

It’s **nice**.

~~~

“Obviously we’re going to have to step up our game,” Tony informs him seriously. “Let’s take this to the next level.”

“Fine,” Bucky agrees.

**Working with Tony is, as he’d discovered early on, far more satisfying than working against him.**

~~~

Bucky stares in fond exasperation as Tony zooms by him in the armor, repulsors flaring as he cuts through the Doom bots that have infested the street around them.
The ‘Property of Bucky Barnes’ decal that sits low down on the armor’s back is a nice touch in his opinion.

The ‘tramp stamp’ as Tony calls it, goes well with the ‘Tony Stark Is Driving’ decal that runs across the back of the armor’s shoulders.

~~~

In the aftermath of the battle Bucky waits until the others have all finished their respective jobs before he strides over to where Tony’s standing in the armor and reaches up to knock on the faceplate.

“Open up myshka,” Bucky commands, not even making effort to speak lowly.

“Yes dear?” Tony says as he pops it open immediately.

Bucky doesn’t answer, just reaches up, pulls Tony closer with a hand on the back of his neck, and kisses him deeply.

Right out on the street, in full view of the gathered press and all of their teammates.

~~~

“Bucky how could you?” Steve looks absolutely crushed when he confronts him in the shared common room a few hours later after everyone’s cleaned up and gathered together for food.

“What’d I do this time Stevie?” Bucky sighs tiredly.

“Tony,” Steve turns towards Tony then, expression earnest and beseeching. “I swear I didn’t know, none of us did. But you’re my friend too and I can’t let this go.”

“Gonna need an explanation Spangles,” Tony points out wryly.

“Bucky’s stepping out on you with Iron Man,” Steve blurts with a wince like he’s throwing some unbearably painful news in Tony’s direction. “He kissed him after the battle, right in front of everyone.”

Tony abruptly chokes on his own tongue, hands flying up to cover his face as he hunches forward, shoulders shaking.

“Steve you fucking snitch,” Bucky deadpans as he reaches up to pinch at the bridge of his nose. His best friend’s a fucking idiot. “I’m betrayed. You’ve betrayed me.”

“It’s only right Buck,” Steve stares at him narrow eyed and openly disappointed. “How could you and Shellhead do that to Tony? I know we wanted you to work out your feelings for the two of them but not like this.”

Beside them Tony wheezes out a snorting breath.

“Look at him,” Steve steps forward to place a large hand on Tony’s hunched back. “He’s devastated Bucky. How could you do this?”

Bucky stares at him and then looks down at Tony who seems pretty close to having a laughter induced seizure.

“At this point,” Bucky answers candidly, “I’m honestly not sure myself.”
“Sergeant Barnes,” the reporter starts, “is there any truth to the rumor that you’re cheating on Tony Stark with your teammate Iron Man?”

Bucky cuts a look at Tony who’s sitting beside him in his civilian clothes, red and gold sunglasses firmly in place, looking ridiculously attractive in his red blazer and black Winter Has Come t-shirt.

The hand he has on Bucky’s thigh beneath the table slides teasingly upwards.

“No.” Bucky answers after a small pause, leaning back so that his Iron Man’s Boyfriend t-shirt is on full display.

“So the photos of you kissing Iron Man after the Avenger’s latest battle two days ago aren’t proof that you’re being unfaithful?” The reporter looks smug, like she thinks she’s caught Bucky in some kind of scandalous lie.

“Ain’t steppin out if Tony knows about it,” Bucky says with a deliberately nonchalant shrug because why the fuck not? This plays right into his and Tony’s plans and it’s not like they’d believe him if he told them the truth anyways.

Predictably the crowd of reporters go wild.

“I want you to know I support you,” Steve claps him on the shoulder earnestly after they finally escape the press conference. “I’m sorry I jumped to conclusions about everything. I should’ve trusted you, Buck.”

“Yeah,” Bucky drawls with no small amount of irony. “If only you’d trusted me. We could’ve avoided so many misunderstandings.”

“I promise to do my best to believe in you even more in the future.” Steve promises sunnily. “Still, despite all of that, it’s nice to know that all three of my best friends are happy together.”

The exasperated screaming that’s been beating around in the back of Bucky’s head since he first moved into the Tower abruptly ramps up another notch.

He’s going to need some quality time with Tony’s collarbones after this.

‘Barnes/Stark/Iron Man Caught In Illicit Gay Threesome,’ the headlines proclaim the next day.

The large bold letters are set above a photo of Bucky kissing Iron Man sitting side by side with a picture of Bucky pressing Tony up against a tree in the nearby park.

Tony gets multiple copies of the headline framed and hangs them up in the lab, the penthouse, and on the refrigerator on the common floor.

JARVIS gets a set of matching t-shirts made up for him with the page proudly displayed on the front.

Tony makes sure to wear his the next time he leaves the Tower.

He’s trying to be supportive after all and it’s not everyday he’s accused of being in a threesome
with a supersoldier and *himself* because his boyfriend couldn’t help but taunt some reporters.

Needless to say he’s very proud.

~~~

The #IronStarkSoldier that hits the internet and rapidly takes on a life of its own is one of his finer works if Tony does say so himself.

Bucky, because he has zero taste in anything except for his taste in men, seems to prefer the #WinterIronStark

JARVIS ends the argument by creating the #IronTucky name and proceeds to gloat smugly when people latch onto it instead.

Traitor.

~~~

Time flies by in a haze of battles and laughter, in kisses and exasperated fondness, weeks and then months passing by with ease.

In that time Tony learns a lesson so deep and profound that the realization almost brings a tear to his eye.

*The couple that trolls together, stays together.*

~~~

And then, of course, Tony gets kidnapped.

~~~

“*You do know that SI doesn’t pay ransom demands don’t you?”* Tony asks, eyes holding steady on his captor’s faces even as his fingers work at loosening the ropes behind his back.

“You can keep your money Stark,” Head Goon snaps. “We want Iron Man and you’re going to give him to us.”

“Oh for fuck’s sake,” Tony groans even as the ropes loosen. Thankfully the watch on his wrist has been buzzing against his skin in confirmation for the past fifteen minutes or so. The armor, and likely reinforcements in the form of a severely pissed off Bucky, should be here soon. “Is it too much to ask for some decent villains? I’m already on a team with a bunch of *goddamn morons* and now I’ve gotta put up with being kidnapped by them too?”

“*Hey,*** Random Goon #2 bites out indignantly from the back of the room.

“Fuck you very much Random Goon #2,” Tony snaps back. “This is *bullshit.* I could be home right now, down in the workshop reinventing an industry or something. Or I could be busy getting felt up by my *criminally hot super soldier boyfriend.* Or hell, maybe both because I’m a *multitasking fiend.***”

Head Goon blinks at him dumbly. Which Tony can plainly see because *he was too stupid to wear a mask.*

“But no,” Tony drawls the word out, “instead I’m here, my head hurts, and I’m stuck looking at
you assholes who all seem to think I’m going to what? Hand over the armor to some no name thugs who only got the drop on me because I stopped to pet a fucking cat?”

There’s a long moment of silence in the room that’s abruptly interrupted by a slightly muffled explosion from outside.

“And that,” Tony says triumphantly as he throws his now free arms up in the air, watch gauntlet now fully active, “would be my Murder Muffin now.”

Another, louder, explosion sounds closer than before and the walls of the room shake just a bit and Head Goon abruptly goes pale.

“We can either do this the easy way or you can resist and well,” Tony shrugs, “that won’t end well for any of you. So, choice is yours. Personally I’m kind of hoping you’ll resist.”

Surprisingly enough, even when faced with a rapidly approaching Winter Solider and a currently pissed off Tony Stark, they still choose the second option.

~~~

“Couldn’t even get kidnapped by competent villains,” Tony grumbles even as Bucky kicks Head Goon in the ribs again despite the way he’s tied up and obviously not going anywhere.

Honestly they hadn’t been much of a challenge for Tony to take down and he’s pretty sure that Bucky’s just pissed because Tony already had them subdued when he showed up with the armor at his back.

“Stop bitchin,” Bucky snaps as he turns away from Head Goon. His arm snaps out and he tugs Tony closer, pulls him to his chest and bends down so he can kiss him hotly, relief obvious in his every move.

“Hey,” Tony says softly once they pull apart, “I’m okay. They didn’t even bruise me. I’m Iron Man, remember?”

It’s the first time Tony’s ever come out and said the words in all seriousness despite everything else that’s passed between them.

“Yeah,” Bucky says roughly as he presses their foreheads together. “Yeah you are.”

~~~

The team’s appropriately grateful when he gets back to the Tower unharmed except for the headache. Stretched out on the couch on top of Bucky Tony takes a few to bask in their genuine care.

“Only you could get kidnapped because you tried to pet a cat,” Clint slaps Tony on the back roughly. “That’s why I keep telling you that dogs are where it’s at. Besides Iron Man needs to step up his game if he’s letting you get nabbed a bunch of pathetic bastards who don’t even have villain names. Cap’s gonna give him an earful next team training. He’s probably gonna want you to take up some training too since you never join us for sparring.”

Beneath him Bucky’s chest rumbles in barely suppressed laughter.

Tony just sighs, shifts his head a bit, and bites down meanly on Bucky’s nipple through his ‘My Boyfriend Wears Armor’ t-shirt.
The yelp he gets in return is worth the way Bucky dumps him off the couch a few seconds later.

~~~

“It ever bother you?” Bucky asks him later on that night when they’re sprawled in Tony’s bed, flushed and sweaty with the sheets sticking to their skin. “Them not believing you?”

“Eh,” Tony raises a hand and makes a so-so gesture, “little bit. Used to be worse, in the beginning. Then you popped up. Being bitter mostly took a backseat to torturing you. Now I’m pretty fine with it.”

“Not sure if I should be offended or touched,” Bucky admits after a moment.

“When in doubt go with both.” Tony tells him around a yawn.

“I still think we’re all gonna die one day because they’re too fucking stupid to function.” Bucky points out. “Or I’m gonna kill ‘em myself.”

“Probably,” Tony agrees lightly. “But, either way, we’ll do it like Spangles always says. Together.”

“Sounds pretty good I guess,” Bucky’s smile is evident in his tone. “Always figured Stevie’d get my ass killed one day anyways.”

“Well, just look at it this way,” Tony rolls over and props his chin on Bucky’s chest, “they might be idiots, but they’re our idiots.”

“Hmm,” Bucky hums as he reaches up and tugs at Tony’s hair. “Yeah, they kind of are.”

~~~

They’re in the kitchen when it finally happens. Tony’s making coffee for the both of them while Bucky leans against the counter and stares at his ass.

“Hey Bucky, Tony,” Steve’s voice is hesitant, unsure in a way that Steve normally never is.

“Yeah Stevie?” Bucky cuts a look over his shoulder towards Steve as Tony waggles his fingers in Steve’s direction. “What’s going on?”

“I don’t know how to ask this so I’m just going to come out and say it,” Steve rakes his hands through his hair and his eyes keep darting between Tony and Bucky. “Is … do you think … I know this might sound ridiculous but … Tony are you … are you Iron Man?”

Bucky freezes for a split second as his mind reboots.

Across from him, hands held frozen in the air above him, sugar spilling off the side of the spoon he’s holding, Tony looks like he’s in the same kind of position.

Because this, this is the moment they’ve both been waiting for for so long now.

The moment they’ve both come to accept would probably never happen.

But, despite his previous quest to expose the truth, Bucky knows that in this moment this isn’t his answer to give.

He catches Tony’s eye, his brow arched and question plain in his features.
“Don’t be ridiculous Steve,” Tony scoffs from across the bar even as he dumps the spoon into a familiar red coffee cup and then reaches out to hand the other silver ‘Single. Taken. Dating Iron Man’ cup to Bucky. There’s a little red x in the box beside Dating Iron Man of course. “What in the world makes you think I’m Iron Man?”

And then he waves, turns on his head, and walks away. The ‘Single. Taken. I Am Iron Man.’ plain to see on the back of his shirt. The x is, of course, right where it should be.

“You heard the man,” Bucky says as he reaches up, claps Steve on the shoulder roughly, and then takes off after Tony, coffee cup in hand and eyes glued to his ass.

He’s finally reached a peace of sorts with the whole situation, thanks in no small part to his and Tony’s relationship.

If Steve’s finally going to catch a clue-by-four to that thick ass head of his then that’s fine.

But Bucky’s done holding his hand and trying to lead him to that particular well of truth. Hell, by this point he’s more interested in making things more difficult for Steve and the others.

Besides, he’s got more important things to worry about.

Like the fact that Tony’s wearing those underwear he likes best, the lacy black ones with the little red stars all over them.

Bucky intends to make sure he’s not wearing them for much longer.

Everything else is secondary.

Chapter End Notes

This is the end guys.

I know, I know. I hate to see it come to a close too.

I want to thank everyone who was nice enough to pool together to get me to do this and I really hope all of you readers enjoyed this ridiculous, entirely not serious ride as much as I did!

End Notes

Let me know what you guys think of this and feel free to come holler at me on tumblr.

http://rayshippouuchiha.tumblr.com/
Works inspired by this one: 

[[Podfic] The (Not So) Great Pretender by RayShippouUchiha, saltyunicorn]

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!