Summary

Tony made the choice to make the sacrifice play and was lost. Steve chose to close the portal.

Both lived to regret it.
Notes

This is a canon divergence fic from the end of The Avengers where Tony takes the nuke through the portal, but he doesn't return. This fic is long, covers some dark themes and there is a possibility the rating may rise in future.

I do not own Marvel or any of the characters. Disney does.

I would like to thank doodlegirl1998 for her advice and help with this fic so far. Without her constant advice, this fic wouldn't be in the state it is today to be able to post. So, THANK YOU!

See the end of the work for more notes.
“Stark, do you hear me?” Nick Fury’s voice reverberated over his com channel. “You have a missile headed straight for the city.”

Tony grimaced, wincing as another hit from the Chitauri weapon bashed down against his head. Protected by the armour for now, he wouldn’t be able to stand repeated hits like this. He had to get out of this mess he had gotten himself into. “How long?” He fired one of his repulsors at the advancing Chitauri warriors in an attempt to fend them off, trying to give himself a chance to escape back into the air.

“Three minutes max. That payload could wipe out midtown.”

Not long.

It wasn’t a good time frame but Tony did not hesitate. Fury contacted him because he was the only one capable of doing anything about an incoming missile. “JARVIS, put everything we got into the thrusters!”

“I just did, sir.”

The suit thrusters engaged and Tony swooped past the Chitauri and back into the air. He flew out of the city and out over the water, scanning for the emission signature of the missile. It flew past him at speed. Firing the thrusters on his hands to swiftly bring himself to a stop, Tony twisted in mid-air, engaging the thrusters once more to shoot off after the missile.

In the space of a few seconds he knew where to put the missile. It may have a homing signal on it but the Iron Man suit was powerful enough to counter it and sway the missile onto a different path. The trajectory of the missile seemed to have been locked onto his tower. He could only nudge it so far off course. It would be a near-miss…

Designing the suit the way he had, Tony had ensured he could deal with any problem. He had never imagined he would ever use it for this however.

Then Natasha’s voice came over his earpiece.

“I can close it! Can anybody copy? I can shut the portal down!”

Shit! Don’t close it yet! I need it!

Steve Rogers voice answered back. He was the defacto head of the team. It was his call. “Do it!”

“No, wait!” Tony interrupted, wincing as he sped faster towards the Tower, beginning his fly-through through the streets of Manhattan.

“Stark, these things are still coming!”

He couldn’t lose his cool now, not when he was about to do something incredibly stupid and so… self-sacrificing. Oh god, he was going to die. Despite the fear that crept up into his stomach as the thought blossomed into his consciousness, his thoughts co-operated with his mouth and allowed him to quickly explain exactly why he needed the portal to remain open for just a tiny bit longer. “I’ve got a nuke coming in. It’s going to blow in less than a minute.” His voice quietened as his eyes focused upon the portal just ahead of him.
“And I know just where to put it.”

Catching up with the missile, he swept underneath it, placing his back against the bottom layer of it, as he lifted his arms to grasp onto the missile itself. A magnetic pulse enabled him to attach himself to the missile with not only his hands but with his back as well.

As he directed the nuke towards the portal situated above his tower, Steve’s voice came over the com-unit.

“Stark, you know that’s a one way trip,” said Steve, sounding solemn.

_I know but there is no other way._ He didn’t reply to Steve. He didn’t need to. The Portal wasn’t closing. Tony swallowed. “Save the rest for the return, J.” There was still a chance he could make it back but the suit hadn’t been built with space travel in mind. If he ever got back to Earth, he would have to incorporate that particular feature into future suits.

“Shall I try Miss Potts?”

Tony thought for a few brief seconds. If he was never going to see her again he wanted to hear her voice one last time. Oh so very much. “Might as well.”

Pepper’s beautiful face appeared in his visor. As the call began, he pulled up and began his ascent, skimming the side of the tower, narrowly missing careening into it. He shot up, past where Agent Romanov stood with Dr Selvig, and flew straight into the portal.

The call he had been making to Pepper broke down, the signal lost. JARVIS’ voice trembled and he faded. The visor darkened and he lost power to the suit. The clamps broke and Tony floated away from the missile as it headed towards its trajectory.

Ahead of him he could see thousands more Chitauri ships heading towards the portal and a large station that seemed to be their main base was rotating slowly in space. The stars around Tony began to spin.

He couldn’t breathe. The suit was failing him. His head felt light and dizzy. But he held on, knowing that he was dying but he had to make sure he had succeeded.

The missile reached home and a large, bright flash spread out across the stars as the station broke apart, scattering into pieces. He saw the Chitauri fall, as if the station had been the one thing controlling them…

And then…

He closed his eyes and knew no more.

To be continued...

Please let me know what you think!! :) Chapter One to be posted very soon. Nine chapters are already written so there will be regular weekly updates with this fic for the foreseeable future.
Steve realised they wouldn’t be able to wait much longer. He had seconds left. Above him, the wormhole remained open, yet he could see a bright, orange glow reverberating out towards them. The radiation from the nuclear weapon could contaminate Earth’s atmosphere if he didn’t make the call soon. He couldn’t order the closing of the portal yet, not when there was no sign of Stark coming back. Was he even still alive? Had he let the missile go in time? Did he still have power to return if he was?

The alien invaders were dropping all around them. Stark must have destroyed the control centre.

The explosion continued above them and Steve glanced at Thor standing beside him, his own eyes focused on the events up above. He didn’t want to make this decision but he did lead this team. In the end it was his call but he couldn’t do it and leave his conscience intact. Time was rapidly running out. He would have to make the difficult choice.

*I misjudged him. When it came to it, he didn’t hesitate to sacrifice himself. Come on, Stark.*

Tony Stark was something more than what he presented himself to be.

The choice seemed simple yet in reality it was one of the hardest decisions Steve had ever had to make.

The life of a man who was now a hero or the lives of those he had sworn to save?

Guilt wallowed through him. The choice was obvious. He couldn’t put Stark’s life in front of others. Stark had known the risks when he went through the portal. He hadn’t hesitated. Steve knew what the correct decision was.

*Always the people.*

Speaking into his earpiece, he looked up as he spoke the fated words. There was nothing they could do now. “Close it.”
He watched silently as moments later the portal began to close. His eyes scanned the horizon, searching for any sign of a metal man coming back through the cracks but the portal’s edges came together and closed off the other side of space.

Steve’s shoulders fell. Guilt welled up within him. “He didn’t make it back.”

There was complete and utter silence over the coms as every member of the team realised the implications of what had just happened.

They had saved the Earth but they had lost Tony Stark in the process.

Steve felt his legs buckle and he allowed himself to sink to the ground. He didn’t care he was surrounded by dead Chitauri, nor did he care people were starting to emerge from buildings and under the subways as it became evidently clear the fighting had stopped. He pressed the palms of his hands to his face. All he could see in front of his eyes was the face of Tony Stark, merging into Howard Stark. I failed Howard.

Steve’s opinion of Tony Stark wasn’t that high but he had always admired the man’s father. Now, he had been a true pioneer, a futurist of his time. And yet, the little Steve knew of Howard’s son, told him he had been responsible for changing the world. He had led the world into a new era of technology and now he wouldn’t see it through.

“Steve?” Natasha Romanoff’s voice broke through the silence.

The whirring of helicopter propellers were coming nearer and Steve became aware of the amount of people that were now starting to crowd around them, watching them, whispering to one another. He wondered what they were saying but his interest was so low he simply could not bring himself to really care that much. Had these people seen what Stark had done?

Emergency services were starting to arrive on the scene as well as the army and SHIELD agents were beginning to move people away from them, starting the slow clear-up of the city.

“I had no choice.” Steve finally replied. Why did he feel so guilty?

“We know.” Natasha’s voice came quietly over the com. “I didn’t want to shut the portal either… Steve, we waited for as long as we could.”

“Cap,” Barton’s voice interrupted them. “We’re going to have to get away from here at some point. People are starting to notice. I’m making my way down. I’ll be at your location in minutes.”

Steve fought down the guilt that not all of them would be regrouping.

“We need to contain my brother,” said Thor. “This is not over until we have him in custody.”

“Loki is in the tower. Hulk attacked him,” informed Natasha. “I haven’t seen him for a while, not since Hulk jumped back out into the streets.”

Steve nodded. “We’ll make our way up Stark Tower then. Barton, meet us at Stark’s private floor.” Before the battle had even begun the team had already agreed to rendezvous there if they won. There was no reason not to carry on with that plan, especially since Loki was likely still there. Of course Stark not being there… “Natasha, will we still be able to access the tower without Stark?”

“I don’t know. I’m on the rooftop but Dr Selvig and I can work on getting the doors open if security is still in place. Stark’s A.I might be able to help us out… Selvig is out of Loki’s mind control now. It was his idea to use the sceptre to counteract the energy generating from the Tesseract,” explained
Natasha.

“We will meet shortly.” Steve clicked off the comm. He turned to Thor. “We’ll wait for Barton and Hulk to join us before we move off. We need to approach this as a team.” He glanced up at the looming tower before him, seeing the ‘A’ balancing precariously on the ledge, the last letter in place that had once illuminated ‘STARK’. “How likely is it that Loki will escape?”

“I can always fly up and check,” said Thor, beginning to swing his hammer. “And, you know, the windows are all smashed. I could just fly us all up there!”

Steve mused. That had been an option he hadn’t considered. Thor could get them up to the Tower without them having to use the lifts themselves. “See if he’s up there, then come back and get us.” It seemed the most sensible option after all.

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In the end Thor had helped Steve and Clint up to the top of the Tower whilst the Hulk had leapt up high into the penthouse where Natasha met them on the helipad, arms folded over her chest as they approached her. Her gaze was fixed on Steve.

“Loki’s still in there, completely dazed from whatever the Hulk did to him. And I’ve sent Dr Selvig down the elevator. SHIELD Medical will monitor him,” said Natasha. “But if Clint is fine then he should be too.”

“I intend to return Loki to Asgard,” stated Thor boldly.

“The United Nations are not going to like that…” muttered Barton.

“Loki is not of Midgard and should not be judged here,” retorted Thor. “I will not leave Midgard without him.”

“What happens to Loki doesn’t matter right now,” interjected Steve. “What matters is we secure him so he cannot bring any more harm against us.”

With Natasha leading the way, they found Loki in the middle of Stark’s floor, slowly beginning to climb out of the hole the Hulk had decorated the floor with. He was wincing and it was clear whatever the Hulk had done had seriously winded him.

Clint grabbed an arrow from his quiver, notched it on his bow and pointed it straight at the God. Loki paused in his movement, his eyes moving across them all. His eyes seemed to briefly widen and then a sly smile crossed his face. “So you won… but tell me… Where is your Iron Man? Did he make some foolish sacrifice play that got him killed perhaps? Ironic really, especially when he was sure that his team would win.” He laughed harshly.

“Not another word!” Clint moved forward, pushing the tip of the arrow against Loki’s forehead.

“Not another word!” stated Thor, moving forward, grasping his brother by the arms and hauling him to his feet. “You will pay for the crimes you have committed against humanity! You will be returned to Asgard where you shall be judged!”

“What, not leaving me to the vultures here on Midgard?” smirked Loki.

Steve stepped forward, glowering at the god. “We know we would never be able to contain you. Why make you a problem for us when Asgard would prefer to punish you themselves?”
“Of course some of us would prefer to punish you now for what you did to them,” intoned Natasha, glancing at Clint, who still kept a notched arrow pointing directly at Loki, despite Thor’s strong grip on him.

Clint’s eyes glinted. “You can bet that. You take one step out of line and I won’t hesitate.”

Loki laughed. “As if my brother would allow you to harm me, little birdy.”

“Don’t test me!” growled Clint.

Thor began to drag his brother Clint away.

Clint lowered his bow, continuing to glare at the back of the god who had enslaved his mind and had forced him to commit terrible acts.

“He’s not our problem anymore, Clint,” said Natasha quietly. She stood beside him watching as Loki was taken away by Thor, the Hulk and Steve.

“He made me do terrible things, ‘Tasha. How can I be okay with him not facing his crimes here?”

Clint sighed. He understood… he really did. Loki was not of this world and it would be unlikely the Earth would be able to detain Loki for long. “I still want to put an arrow through his skull…”

“I think Thor would hit you with his hammer if you did,” said Natasha with a hint of a smile.

“Letting Thor take Loki away is the lesser of two evils… It is better if he is no longer here.” Clint rubbed a hand over his face. He was silent for a few minutes before he started to walk forward.

“Does the world know yet?”

“Does the world know what?” Natasha asked surprised.

“Stark. He’s dead, isn’t he? Do they know he never made it back?”

Natasha shrugged. “Cameras would have been on the city from afar. If they were watching…” She bit her lip. “They’ll have guessed he didn’t return. He surprised us all. When it came to it… he didn’t hesitate to give his life for the world. Steve was…”

It looked like to Clint Natasha was struggling to comprehend what had happened. Clint had read Natasha’s report on Stark and how she would not recommend him for the Avengers.

“I was wrong… He hid himself behind a false mask. Both Steve and I misjudged him… I think if he had survived, I wouldn’t have hesitated to recommend him to Fury to join the Avengers officially rather than just be a Consultant,” she finished. The guilt clearly gnawed at her. Her misjudgement wouldn’t have prevented this from happening. This would still have occurred. “Without my report, Stark still would have done this. There wasn’t much of a choice… We would all have died if Stark hadn’t diverted that missile. Instead of losing thousands of human lives, only one was lost.”

“One life lost is better than thousands, Nat,” said Clint quietly, even though he felt uneasy saying it, it was the truth. Iron Man was a hero to the people; Tony, himself, was well loved. His transition from playboy to superhero was one of the most inspiring stories of the modern day. Clint knew the world would mourn for him. He hadn’t known the man well at all but he couldn’t deny there was something about Tony Stark that had been missed by everybody.

Tony Stark had never been who they had once thought he was.

Clint knew Natasha would always feel guilty, despite knowing the outcome would likely have been
the same.

Out of them all, Steve and Natasha would suffer the most; Steve, because he had made the call to close the portal; and Natasha because she was the one who had followed his order.

Wandering the corridors of the Helicarrier, Steve made his way slowly to Fury’s office. He was still in his uniform, ripped clothing visible and cuts drying and crusting over. They had delivered Loki back to SHIELD custody where he was under constant guard by Thor and the Hulk. Clint and Natasha were getting looked over by medical but Steve refused to be seen by anyone.

He needed to see Fury. He made his way hastily to the bridge where he found the Director of Shield talking quietly with Maria Hill. They both looked his way as he approached them.

“Captain Rogers.” Nick Fury watched him like a hawk.

“Director Fury, I’d like to speak to you if I may,” bowed Steve, keeping to the protocol required of him.

“Certainly.” Fury dismissed Maria Hill and walked towards Steve. “Walk with me.”

Steve obliged, following the Director through the Helicarrier, until they reached Fury’s office; a room Fury usually avoided. He preferred being on deck. Steve sat down on the chair provided whilst Fury sat behind the desk, facing him.

“I think I know what this is about, Rogers,” said Fury before Steve could begin. “Stark?”

Steve nodded, the guilt wallowing within him. “I misjudged him. He did something I never thought he would ever be capable of doing. He didn’t even hesitate. He knew exactly what he was going to do. It didn’t faze him… I feel like we shouldn’t have closed the wormhole before he had more of a chance to escape. But the bomb had gone off… we could see the explosion on our side…” Steve sighed. “I do not know much about nuclear missiles but I know radiation is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of people. I didn’t want it leaking through to us… I keep thinking would it have happened if we had kept it open? Could Thor have flown through and retrieved him in time? Can Thor even breathe in space? We just left Stark there without trying to do something to save him… If he still lived when the bomb went off… Could he still be alive now?”

Fury waited until Steve had stopped speaking. “All of these questions you have are impossible to answer. We cannot go back and change things. We can only hope we made the right choice and Stark died before he knew the portal had closed. It is a harsh truth, Captain, but a necessary one. Stark’s actions will have him remembered as a hero who saved the Earth when no one else could. The Security Council, who ordered the nuclear strike, will be in some deep shit with governments of the world, Stark Industries and SHIELD.”

“Did you know Stark would sacrifice himself?” asked Steve. He had read details on Stark’s life which had pointed to him not being the sacrificing type. Even the videos he had watched had proved to Steve that Stark had only fought for himself.

“Stark was a changed man. I had a feeling he would do the right thing. He knew he was flying to his death but did it anyway.” Fury looked down and then up again, regret briefly flashing across his face. “The files you saw were only select ones. Ones that could be interpreted differently if you did not know the full story.”

“You deliberately misled me?” Steve asked. He hated the idea he had misjudged a man on deliberate
misinformation.

“We didn’t give you the full story. And we should have done. What you saw was Stark prior to his Iron Man days… and what he did in Afghanistan shortly before he announced himself as Iron Man. Those actions were selfish and fighting for himself, however his actions in Afghanistan were brought about what he suffered in the country during the three months he was held in captivity there. Not much is publicly known about Stark’s time in the hands of terrorists but the little SHIELD have managed to deduce from him suggest he was tortured. As far as we are aware he has never sought help in any professional way to help him recover from the traumatic experience he suffered. Stark’s actions in Afghanistan were a direct result of what he went through. And, despite his actions being illegal, he still helped bring more stability to the Middle East then it has had in years. Going about and destroying his missiles which were sold to terrorists under the table – without his knowledge – though selfish, he did so to ease his conscience and help prevent them being used against any other innocent people.”

Fury sighed. “He was an egotist and he knew it but he was also a great asset to this country. I wronged him when I refused him membership of the Avengers. He should never have just been a Consultant. Stark proved us all wrong and he paid for it with his life.”

Steve swallowed. “What happens now? I feel like I need to confess what I did…”

“It is not necessary for you to do so.”

But Steve didn’t want to abdicate responsibility. It was his call, his choice. Didn’t the people deserve to know? He thought back to the file he had been given about Stark prior to being given the Tesseract assignment. It had listed his parents as dead. But… “Does Stark have any family?” If Steve wasn’t going to be allowed to talk openly about his failure, the least he could do was ensure that anyone close to Stark knew the full truth.

“Stark has a girlfriend. Pepper Potts. She is the CEO of Stark Industries. We are trying to get in contact with her however she is not answering her phone. She was, according to Phil Coulson, before he died, on her way back to Malibu for a meeting with the board of Stark Industries.” Fury fixed him with his one eye. “I assume you would like to meet her?”

“I’d like to tell her the truth myself. If… they loved one another… then she deserves to know the truth,” answered Steve.

It would, at least, ease his conscience.

Even if it was only a little.

To be continued...

More will be posted next week.

Chapter End Notes

And for those who wish to know about Tony... You'll have to wait until Chapter 5... I feel it is important to show how the Avengers and those closest to Tony cope with his loss in the aftermath of the battle of New York.
Part 1: Chapter 2 - The Girlfriend and the Best Friend

Chapter Summary

Pepper and Rhodey learn the horrible truth...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Part One: The Death Of Tony Stark
Chapter Two
The Girlfriend and the Best Friend

She had seen everything from the Stark Industries plane. Having the latest technology enabled them to keep up to date with news around the world; however Pepper rarely used it on flights. This time a notification had come through on an automatic setting Tony had installed years ago if any large crisis had begun whilst he was in the air. It enabled them to act on where they wanted to land if they were heading to a place of crisis.

Thankfully Pepper had been on her way to DC but as soon as the notification had come through about the attack in New York and the giant wormhole that had opened above Stark tower, Pepper had immediately ordered the plane to turn around and take her back. The plane had been denied entry into Manhattan airspace and had to land a small landing pad away from the area.

Her worry for Tony only continued. She had seen him fly into the portal with a missile but she hadn’t witnessed him falling back out. She hoped he had and her eyes hadn’t spotted him. It was the hope that she chose to cling to, that kept her going as she sought answers to what had occurred.

When she had seen she had missed a call from Tony at the exact timestamp he had been about to fly through the portal, Pepper had tried to call back but the phone had not connected, merely stating it was unavailable. There could be many reasons for that, she had reasoned.

The suit could be down…

The phone connection embedded within the suit could have been hit during the battle…

Tony could have switched off all non-essential systems to keep the suit operational…

Her stomach twisted.

She didn’t want to even consider the final possibility. She refused to even think it.

She just waited, worrying in the car that was taking her to the closest possible point of the battle, where she hoped fervently Tony would be waiting for her.

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After seeing Fury, Steve had returned to the streets of New York City, intent on helping to clean up and ensure the citizens of New York were given the aid they needed.
Steve had only been on the ground for an hour when he noticed cordons being removed around Stark Tower and a black car came slowly into view, stopping on the other side of the road from it. As far as he was aware all traffic had been stopped so it seemed odd that officials had allowed a car through, especially since the roads were ruined, and were unlikely to be stable to allow traffic through.

He walked forward, watching as a strawberry-blonde woman stepped out of the car. Her face was tight with worry and, even from this distance, Steve could tell she had been crying. He’d never seen any pictures of Pepper Potts but he knew without a doubt this woman was her.

“Miss Potts!” he shouted out.

The woman turned towards him but the driver of the car who had helped her out of the car stepped in front her, preventing Steve from reaching her.

Steve stopped. “I need to talk to her. It’s about Tony Stark.”

Before the man could say anything, Pepper spoke softly, inviting him forward. “Let him through, Happy.” She looked worn, tired and her eyes were red.

The man named Happy stepped aside and Steve slowly approached her.

“I don’t know how to say this…” Steve hesitated. He could see she already knew the truth but hoped it would not be. “Stark… He didn’t make it… I’m sorry.”

Pepper’s lips trembled.

Now came the hardest part of all. “I gave the order to close the portal… I don’t know if you saw what he was doing or not…”

Pepper’s voice was quiet, broken as she spoke. “He had a missile on his back.”

“It wasn’t just any missile. It was a nuclear missile. It was sent to destroy the city to stop the attack. Stark knew he couldn’t just allow it to hit the city… More people would have died needlessly. He grabbed the missile and took it through the portal. I watched him go… Whatever he did up there stopped the attack. The aliens just fell like their strings had been cut. We could see an explosion happening on the other side of the portal. If we had waited longer…”

“The poisonous gas cloud could have seeped through,” finished Pepper quietly. “It could have killed millions.”

Steve inclined his head. “I’m sorry. There wasn’t any other way.”

Pepper sniffed quietly. “Thank you for telling me.”

Steve could see she was shaking, trying to hold back the tears that were threatening to cascade down her face. He didn’t know what else to say to her. He settled for a simple: “If there is anything I can do for you I will.”

Pepper shook her head. “No. There isn’t. Thank you, Mr…?”

Oh, that’s right, he hadn’t given his name. “Steve. Steve Rogers.”

Pepper inclined her head. “Thank you, Mr Rogers.” She turned and walked towards Stark Tower.

For a while Steve stood there, looking up at the building that Stark had renovated in his name. There
was beauty there, he could admit, despite how ugly it had seemed to him before. Finally, he moved away and started towards the rescue services, intending to help them.

After all, what else could he do?

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Pepper’s contacts through the government had allowed Happy to bring her to Stark Tower, despite the centre of the battle being an exclusion zone. Stark Tower was a resource of arc energy. She needed to check to ensure the reactor hadn’t been damaged. And to collect any personal files that were stored on the server. The whole building would be open to investigators, and she didn’t want them digging into personal, private files Tony had stored there.

Despite the heartache she felt at losing Tony, she knew what he would want her to do. She was grieving. All she wanted to do was curl up in bed and cry, but she had a duty to Stark Industries first and to Tony’s personal instructions. She was only filling out what he had once asked her to do. She would follow them though, allowing herself only moments to grieve when she could.

The public and the press would expect her to show a brave face.

Pepper would do that.

Make Tony proud.

She felt tears coming but pushed them back.

She had a job to do.

Heart still breaking, Pepper got to work.

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It was after Pepper had completed the work she needed to do in Stark Tower that she finally clambered back into the car and found she had several missed calls. Most seemed to be missed ones from an unknown number but a few here and there from Rhodey had been getting through between the attempts the unknown caller had tried.

Pepper played with the phone in her hands. Rhodey needed to know. He had probably seen something on the news. She knew this would be a difficult conversation, yet it was one they had to have. She couldn’t just go and see him either. He was in the Middle East, aiding the US Army as War Machine to hunt down terrorists that threatened their country. If he hadn’t of been, she was sure he would have been in New York. Helping Tony would have been a priority for him.

Rhodey deserved to know the truth.

Pepper dialled Rhodey’s number, holding the phone to her ear, waiting with baited breath.

He picked up on the first ring.

“Pepper! Tell me Tony’s fine!” Rhodey’s voice was urgent and he sounded breathless.

Pepper stilled. How could she answer? The truth, yes. “Rhodey… are you flying?”

“I’m on my way back to New York. I’m over the Atlantic.”
“Set the suit to auto-pilot.” instructed Pepper. She didn’t want him losing control and falling into the ocean over this. Tony was dead and she wasn’t going to lose another friend today.

“He’s really gone, isn’t he?” Rhodey’s voice was sullen over the phone. He’d already guessed.

“Have you set your suit to auto-pilot?” Pepper persisted.

“Yes.”

Pepper breathed out. “Then yes, Tony is gone.” She felt tears welling at the side of her eyes. She let then fall. She was in the safety of her own car. She didn’t need to hide her misery from anyone. “He… He tried to… phone me… Just before… JARVIS lost… contact…” Her voice was breaking. “I… didn’t… see it… Tony’s dead….”

Tears flowed down her cheeks. She didn’t care. She had kept it bottled up but now it needed to be let out.

“Pep…” Rhodey’s voice was sad and sullen over the line. “You couldn’t have known.” His voice was breaking too. “You know Tony… Once he gets an idea into his head, you can’t stop him.”

Pepper couldn’t reply. She just cried.

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Rhodey listened to Pepper’s sobs over the phone. He wasn’t going to disconnect the call. He was on auto-pilot so he didn’t need to worry about controlling the suit. Deep inside he wanted to shoot something, anything just to let the frustration out at not being able to save his friend again.

He’d failed to save Tony before in Afghanistan, and he’d failed again to save him from whatever had happened to him this time. Rhodey had only seen the news bulletins of the battle that had been happening in the skies of New York. As soon as he had heard the news he had received permission to leave his extended mission in the Middle East and travel back to New York.

Rhodey had wasted no time. He’d kept trying to call Pepper or Tony. Pepper’s had kept ringing without answering and Tony’s… just stated that the number was unreachable. Of course it would be if Tony was in space somewhere, lost forever more.

Rhodey swallowed. He didn’t want to think he had been unable to save his friend. Surely there was hope?

Pepper’s sobs continued down the phone.

“Pepper?” asked Rhodey. “I’m on my way to you. Where are you?” She was on the move, he could tell, her location kept moving according to his phone tracer.

Through her sniffles and tears, Pepper’s voice came over the line. “I’m heading to SHIELD. I…. think…. I’ve… had… a few… messages… from them.” Her voice was nearly breaking. “I have to be strong…”

“I’ll meet you there,” he said. No way was Rhodey going to let Pepper handle this on her own. Tony was his best friend. He would not abandon her.

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Pepper and Happy were already within the SHIELD Helicarrier when Rhodey arrived in the War
Machine armour. He was given priority landing and escorted towards the bridge, once he had disengaged from the armour and locked it down. Pepper and Happy was already on the Bridge, talking in a secluded corner with a man who wore an eyepatch. The man’s bald head seemed to glint in the light.

As he approached the man glanced up, nodded his head at him, which caused both Pepper and Happy to turn and face him.

She looked terrible.

Her eyes were red and sore from crying and her cheeks flushed. Her hair was out of place from the ponytail she usually wore it in. At this moment, appearances didn’t matter. What did was their mutual love of Tony.

Happy looked shocked and at a loss. His skin was white and his eyes were shimmering with tears though they seemed to be refusing to fall.

Pepper ran to him and Rhodey hugged her, patting the top of her head, as once more tears fell from her eyes. “He’s gone.”

“It’s okay Pepper.” It wasn’t really but what else was he supposed to say? “Tony did what he had to do…”

“But he didn’t have to if he had stopped that missile in the first place!” Pepper pointed towards the man she had been conversing with. “He could have shot that plane down!”

The man stepped forward. Rhodey had never met him before.

“I’m Nick Fury, director of SHIELD, Colonel Rhodes,” the man introduced himself.

“You made Pepper cry,” stated Rhodey, holding Pepper close. “I don’t take kindly to people who make my friends cry.”

“Is that a threat, Colonel Rhodes?”

Rhodey narrowed his eyes. “Depends.”

“On what?” Fury narrowed his one remaining eye.

“On what you say next,” answered Rhodey. “My best friend is dead. You turned Tony down from SHIELD because he didn’t fit your idea of a team, yet when the world is in danger, you bring him in. If anyone is responsible for Tony’s death, it’s you. I do not know what happened with that missile but if there is any way you could have stopped it without getting Tony involved then you need to tell me now.”

Fury sighed. “The World Security Council made the executive decision to destroy New York, overriding me, and not allowing my team the chance to end this without causing the deaths of millions. I managed to stop one plane from taking off. I didn’t expect them to have prepared a second plane to go as well. I didn’t have the weaponry to prevent it flying off before it got out of range. Our Helicarrier was sabotaged, preventing a lot of our heavy duty weapons from working. If we could have stopped the plane from taking off, I would have.”

“And Tony was the only one who could stop it…” Rhodey realised. How was it fair?

“He was,” Fury answered. “If I could have contacted Thor I would have done. But he didn’t have an
ear piece and was unreachable. I had minutes to spare before the nuke hit New York. Stark was the
only option. If it is any consolation, seeing the son of a friend sacrifice himself, knowing full well
what the outcome was going to be, was an incredibly difficult decision to make. If I could change it,
then I would. But without Stark, the loss of life would be an even greater number.”

“I hope you won’t try to protect the ones that sent the nuke towards New York,” stated Rhodey. Oh,
he knew what he was going to do to those that had ensured the death of Tony Stark.

Fury stiffened.

Pepper turned in Rhodey’s arms and caught Fury’s eyes. “You can rest assured, Mr Fury, that Stark
Industries will pursue this through the courts.” Despite the amount of crying she had been doing,
Rhodey was impressed by how strong and sure Pepper sounded. She was an incredible woman.

“Taking the World Security Council to court will not be easy, Miss Potts,” said Fury. “They acted in
what they believed was the correct thing to do. They had a whole world to protect from further
incursions.”

Pepper sniffed. “It is my understanding from Captain Rogers they found a way to close the portal
barely a minute after the missile had been launched.”

“They did but closing it wouldn’t have stopped the ones already here from attacking,” explained
Fury.

Rhodey scoffed. “And you know that how? If destroying their command ship dropped them all dead,
what if closing the portal shut off their signal to them as well? We won’t ever know now!” He
watched as Fury’s shoulders slumped.

“There is nothing we can do to change what happened. But… if you wish to take the World Security
Council to court, I will stand by you. I did my best to stop them. Ultimately I failed,” admitted Fury.

Pepper swallowed, hugging Rhodey tighter. “Thank you. The three of us need to make
preparations.” A single tear fell down her cheek. “And mourn for those we have lost today.”

Fury nodded. “If any of you need anything, you know where to find me.” It was an offer they were
unlikely to take him up on, but one they appreciated.

Taking Pepper by the shoulders, Rhodey led her away, with Happy strolling behind.

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Rumours began to swirl online and in the national news and press of the sacrifice of Tony Stark
during a battle with, what was being dubbed, an extra-terrestrial attack. There had not been any
confirmation from the government of what had happened in New York or why it had, though news
crews were already out in force, filming the devastation left by the attack and what people on the
ground had thought it was.

Most all said the same thing: it was an alien incursion.

They all spoke about the six individuals who had risked their lives to put a stop to the attack. It had
been noted by most sources Iron Man had flown through the portal with a missile on his back and
had not returned, though confirmation was still to come through he had not.

The US government released a short statement a few hours later stating merely there was an attack
on New York City and more details would be released soon. No mention of Tony Stark was made.
The clean-up commenced with rescue services piling in from other cities and states to help with repairing Manhattan.

It was the next day when the government held a joint press conference with Stark Industries that the truth came out. In attendance were the remaining members of the Avengers, who stood at the back of the hall. Thor was the only one who stood out among them, holding his hammer in his right hand, loosely at his side.

President Matthew Ellis moved to the podium. He wore a grey suit with a red and gold tie. His brown-grey hair was swiped back across his head. He didn’t smile. He placed his hands on the podium and looked out at the range of reporters that had gathered for the press conference. There was another podium next to him reserved for Colonel James Rhodes, who would be speaking on behalf of the military and Stark Industries, at Pepper’s request.

She was still too upset to make an appearance. Despite her professionalism and her desire to do her job, Pepper had known she would be unfit for a public appearance. And the government had understood, as well as the Board of Directors at Stark Industries. So far the only people who did know Tony Stark was dead numbered below twenty, all of them sworn to secrecy until the Ministry of Defence had officially announced it.

President Ellis cleared his throat. “I would like to begin today with a statement regarding the events of New York which occurred yesterday on the 4th May. At precisely eleven o five am, the Stark Tower in Manhattan was taken over by a hostile entity. Using advanced technology, stolen from other government agents, the hostile entity was able to open a portal above the tower. Beyond this portal was an intergalactic army, poised to attack the Earth. The portal was opened at eleven thirty three. Immediately on the scene was Tony Stark’s Iron Man. He engaged the hostiles in battle, in an attempt to draw them away from bystanders. Within minutes of the attack beginning, other enhanced individuals were on the scene. These were Steve Rogers, Thor, Bruce Banner, Natasha Romanoff and Clint Barton, all of whom risked their lives to help save people caught in the crossfire.” The President indicated the people at the back of the hall.

The Avengers had all agreed to waive their right of anonymity. They had all chosen to do so as their faces were on every television camera during the battle and afterwards. There would have been no way to hide their identities.

“Due to the scale of the threat and the world-wide implications of such an attack, the World Security Council decided to order a nuclear strike against Manhattan, an attack which was not sanctioned by any World Leader. A missile was deployed and would have destroyed the city and may or may not have stopped the advancing army. If it had not been for the quick actions of Tony Stark to engage the missile and direct it into the portal itself, the outcome would have been very different.”

President Ellis paused briefly to clear his throat. “Tony Stark flew into the portal taking the missile with him. Whatever happened beyond is unknown. The attacking army collapsed soon after. The hostile entity responsible for hundreds of deaths in the last few days prior to the attack on Manhattan has been detained and will face justice for their crimes against humanity.”

“It is with regret I announce the death of Tony Stark, who sacrificed his life, without any hesitation, to save the Earth, from an advancing alien armada. He didn’t return before the portal closed.”

There was a clamour of gasping from the crowd of reporters.

“I will now give the podium to Colonel James Rhodes, liaison to Stark Industries.” The President stepped aside as Rhodey made his approach.
He placed his hands on the podium, looking down at first before raising his head.

“I am here to talk on behalf of the Ministry of Defence and Stark Industries. What happened in New York is a terrible tragedy. It does demonstrate the need to prepare for further intergalactic threats. Therefore I can announce NASA will be working directly with government agencies and the Ministry of Defence to monitor any potential threats. We hope this deal will be enough to allow us to prepare for another invasion if it comes to it, as we would be able to detect any anomaly that appears in our regular data. The clean-up of New York City has already begun. We fully appreciate everyone’s time and energy who have so far helped out.”

Rhodey leaned back from the podium, straightening his shoulders. He took a deep breath and continued. “I’ve known Tony Stark since he was a teenager when he attended MIT early. We’ve been friends for years… I’ve been there by his side through some of the most difficult times of his life, but… once again I failed him. I failed him in Afghanistan when he was kidnapped and I failed him again yesterday when he fought against impossible odds to save the Earth.”

“I would like to read a statement from Stark Industries. Miss Potts is unavailable for comment at the present time.”

Everyone knew why she wasn’t. Thankfully no one dared comment.

Rhodey had to keep his composure. It would be difficult to do so but he had no choice. Pepper had entrusted him to this statement. She was too emotionally involved to be able to stand in front of a press conference and not break apart.

“It is with great regret that Stark Industries announce the death of former CEO, Anthony Edward Stark. More widely known as Tony Stark, he was the son of Stark Industries founder Howard Anthony Walter Stark and his wife Maria Collins Carbonell. Born in 1970, late into his parent’s marriage, Tony was a gift to both Howard and Maria, both of whom had greatly longed for a child. Tony inherited his father’s intelligence and his mother’s interest in charitable causes, many of whom he continued to donate to throughout his life.”

“At seventeen, his parents were cruelly taken in a car accident, Tony fell into the horror of drugs and alcohol, frequently running into trouble with the law, and gaining a reputation as a womaniser, completely happy with his antics being known about in the press. Whilst Tony dealt with his grief, Stark Industries was overseen by Obadiah Stane, the right-hand man that once stood behind Howard Stark.”

“A few weeks after Tony’s twenty-first birthday, Tony Stark returned to the fold and became the youngest CEO of a fortune five hundred company. He took up the reigns of Stark Industries and revolutionised the weapons industry with new technology and improved safety for soldiers with weapons to help better protect them in combat. The weapons he designed were advanced in every way and the technology he revolutionised continues to benefit everyone to this day. Even with his death, his work will continue to influence the industry.”

“In 2008, he flew to Afghanistan to present the Jericho for the consideration of the US Army. On his route back to base, his convoy was attack. Tony was kidnapped by terrorists.” Rhodey paused to allow the implications of the statement to sink in. “He was gone for three months. No trace was heard from his captors and everyone began to assume he was dead. His business co-partner, Obadiah Stane, began the process of transferring everything to himself. A few days after he began this process, I found Tony wondering the Afghan desert, battered and bruised but very much alive. We brought him home.”

“His experiences in Afghanistan changed him. Immediately returning home, Tony shut down all
weapons production, intent on taking Stark Industries in a new direction. It was primarily known as a weapon’s company but in the years since, it has become the first business to promote clean energy. Tony has revolutionised arc reactor technology and Stark Industries will continue to use this new revolutionary technology to produce more clean energy and reduce the amount of pollution across our planet.”

Rhodey paused. It was a long statement but Pepper had wanted to give a brief overview of Tony’s life.

“Upon returning from Afghanistan, Tony Stark created a metal prosthesis suit which was dubbed Iron Man by the press. Taking the name, Tony used the suit to track down all his weapons which had fallen into wrong hands and proceeded to aid the army in attacks on terrorist strongholds. He soon decided to pass on the CEO position to his long time personal assistant Virginia ‘Pepper’ Potts, a woman who had remained loyal to Tony for over a decade. Shortly after the attack on the Stark Expo in 2010, it was revealed Tony and Pepper were in a relationship. Pepper and Tony made a great team and their love for one another was mutual. They supported one another in everything they did. Tony purchased a tower in Manhattan, renaming it Stark Tower. It is the first building of its kind to use Arc Reactor technology to power the tower independent of power cables. Stark Industries intends to make Stark Tower a powerhouse within New York, using it as a second main site for the business, to allow for more expansion of the company across the board.”

His speech was now drawing to a close. “Tony sacrificed himself to save the Earth from the attack of an advancing alien race. Tony Stark will always be remembered for his deeds and the contributions he left behind. He will be sorely missed by all those that knew him and loved him.” Rhodey bowed his head. “Thank you.” He retreated from the platform, glad it was finally over and he could now leave and mourn for the loss of his best friend.

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A few days later, Pepper invited Steve Rogers and the rest of the team to meet her at Stark Tower where renovations were well underway to repair the building. It hadn’t suffered any structural damage, therefore it was safe to still be a functional working building whilst Operation: Clean-Up New York was underway.

Pepper had yet to return to work but she planned to do so in the next few days, no matter how much it hurt to do so. Without Tony… No, she couldn’t think like that at all. He’d want her to move on with her life. Not mourn for him for months and years. No, Pepper Potts was strong and she would ensure to honour Tony’s wishes.

Happy informed her when the Avengers were seated in the living room of what was Tony’s penthouse. It was still a bit of a mess but the window had been repaired and the Loki-shaped holes in the floor still remained. Pepper intended to make sure the rest of the building was repaired and others were too before she finally made the necessary repair to the floor.

She entered the floor via the lift, approaching the team whom had settled themselves onto the sofa and armchairs. Pepper sat down in an empty chair, composing herself for what she needed to say and ask of them.

She’d only met Steve but had seen photos of the rest of them.

“I’m Pepper Potts. I’m sure you all know how much Tony meant to me.” She paused. “I want to thank you all for coming today. I know it has been a hectic few days and one of you intends to depart later.”
“I stayed because you asked, Lady Pepper,” said Thor. “However Asgard needs me and Loki needs to pay for his crimes against Midgard.”

“I’m still… processing what has happened… Tony tried to call me before he died… I regret so much not realising he was calling…” sighed Pepper. She took a deep breath. “I know all of you have lives to lead, people you must love to get back to…”

“Anything you’d like us to help you with, Miss Potts, we will be there for you,” said Steve, reassuringly. “It’s the least we could do after what has happened.”

Pepper inclined her head. “Thank you… Tomorrow I am holding a press conference. I would like all of you there, if you can be. It would be a gesture of respect to Tony and what he did. And… Steve… I’d like it if you could talk about Tony. I know you only knew him for a short time… But it would be nice if the leader of the Avengers could speak about him. The conference will be part of a day long mourning and celebration of Tony’s life.”

“I’ll be there,” said Steve. “As will everyone else. Apart from Thor.” Steve looked around at the others, seeing confirming nods, aside from Thor who spoke up.

“Aye, I can no longer put off my return to Asgard,” confirmed Thor. “But I will return to Midgard. You have my word.”

“Thank you,” said Pepper, rising from her seat. “I will see you tomorrow… Please feel free to use the Tower’s facilities for the night. Meet me at ten thirty tomorrow morning in the foyer. We will discuss the itinerary for the day then.”

Bidding farewell to the Avengers, Pepper made her way to her room – the one she had once shared with Tony only briefly in this tower - and she sobbed herself to sleep as grief overtook her once more.

To be continued...

More will be posted next week.

Chapter End Notes

For those who may have wanted Happy's perspective on the loss of Tony, that will come a lot later on in the fic. I wanted to focus primarily on Pepper and Rhodey with this chapter.
Part 1: Chapter 3 - The Legacy Left Behind

Chapter Summary

Steve makes a statement and he and Pepper have a chat...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Part One: The Death of Tony Stark

Chapter Three
The Legacy Left Behind

Steve wasn’t entirely sure what he could say about Tony Stark. He had never really known the man. The little time he had known him, he hadn’t formed a very good opinion. Tony was everything Steve didn’t want to be.

Yet he had made the ultimate sacrifice; a sacrifice he had never considered Stark would ever do. Tony Stark had befuddled Steve. He didn’t know how to view the man anymore. Had everything Steve seen been a front for who Tony Stark really was? Had he seriously misjudged the man?

Guess I’ll never know now. If Tony was hiding who he really was… I must have really hurt him... Steve did feel guilty. He realised he would feel like this for a long time to come. He could have made a different decision. He could have left the portal open a bit longer and given Tony more time to return... But we didn’t know if he was coming back to us. I had to make the choice to close it otherwise the whole city could have been contaminated... So many people would have died... Even though he thought of all the reasons why closing the portal when he had, had been a good idea, it would never erase the guilt of leaving Tony Stark behind.

Steve knew he would always be trying to make up for that. The public didn’t know it had been his call to close it. He felt he owed it to them to tell the truth.

Steve stood to the side of the small stage and podium which had been erected in the main foyer of Stark Tower. It was a business day however, out of respect for Tony Stark, all the workers of the company had been told to take the day off work. Instead of a working day, it would be, as Pepper had said, a celebration of Tony Stark’s life.

Most employees had travelled to New York to be here for Pepper’s speech. The foyer was full of people, alongside media outlets. There were government people, the board of Directors had made the journey… Even members of SHIELD were there, though they were mainly there for protection purposes than to celebrate the life of Tony Stark.

Nick Fury was there too, standing beside Natasha, both of whom were there as part of SHIELD. Clint was somewhere in the ceiling, keeping an eye on the floor with his sight.

As everyone got comfortable on the seats provided, Pepper cleared her throat. She gripped the sides of the podium.

“Good morning. Thank you for all coming today at short notice. As you are all aware Stark
Industries has closed on a trading day so we can honour the man which brought SIA to the forefront of the weapons business and began the race for clean energy. Anthony Edward Stark died saving this city from an extra-terrestrial attack which has caused the deaths of hundreds of people. SIA will be contributing to the rebuilding of this city and rehousing efforts for the families and businesses affected by the destruction wrought upon New York."

She glanced around the foyer, taking in the expressions of everyone there. “Tony was hard at work on many projects prior to his death. Stark Industries will endeavour to continue completing the work he started. I will personally recruit a new Department Head for Research and Development within the next few months. I will remain CEO for the foreseeable future. I would also like to announce a Relief Fund which will be made available to everyone who was affected by the catastrophic events in New York. The Maria Stark Foundation will also contribute to the rebuilding.”

“Tony was due to turn forty-two on the twenty-ninth of May. He wasn’t planning an elaborate celebration. We were just going to spend it with those closest to us.” Pepper lowered her head. “However, it won’t be happening now.”

“Regardless,” she said more softly, “the day of twenty-ninth May will always be the day of the birth of the man I loved so much. His birthday will always be a celebration of his life though he is no longer with us.” She lowered her head, swallowed and then raised it again. “I would like to pass you over to Captain America, who has agreed to speak about Tony today.”

Steve approached the stage. What was he going to say? He didn’t know what. He had struggled to write out a proper speech the previous evening and the few hours he’d had this morning. Natasha had advised him to just speak from his heart in the moment. Steve hoped he didn’t say anything bad about Tony. The last thing he needed was the press to jump on him for not getting along with the billionaire. Still… when it came to it, Tony had proved him wrong.

Steve glanced out at the crowd that had gathered. He caught the eyes of both Fury and Natasha. They nodded discreetly at him. Cameras flashed as the reports took shots of him to print when they wrote about his speech. He was sure he was likely to be on the front page of the next edition of The New York Post.

“For the brief time the Avengers were together, Tony was a core member of the team. He was an invaluable asset to us. He was able to keep the skies clear as possible, whilst being in the position to intercept the missile which ultimately cost him his life.”

It was difficult to talk of Tony Stark without referring to him as just ‘Stark’. He’d never really bothered to get to know the man. They’d never really had any time. He had to be truthful. He didn’t want to speak lies to the people here. Was truth the way he should go?

“I’m not the best person to talk about Tony Stark. I didn’t really know him. We knew each other for the better part of a day… And we didn’t get along.”

Muttering began among the press and camera’s flashed, bringing light into Steve’s eyes and he had to blink rapidly to be able to clear the spots dancing in front of his eyes.

“I was found in the ice a few months ago… When I woke from my slumber I wasn’t prepared to find how much the world had changed in my absence.” Steve knew SHIELD had released a press packet alongside the United States Government detailing his true identity and he really was Steve Rogers from the 1940’s. The news had been mostly overlooked due to continued and extended coverage of the Battle of New York. “It was so different from the one I had left. I was given packages of information to peruse and learn about the new world I had found myself in.”
Steve cast his gaze over the auditorium. “One of those files detailed the life and times of one Howard Stark. I knew Howard back in the 1940’s for a brief time. It was his courage and daring that allowed me to sneak into enemy lines and infiltrate an enemy camp and rescue dozens of prisoners of war. It was also due to his scientific advancements which enabled me to receive an experimental serum giving me the abilities I have now. Howard was a good friend to me in the short time I knew him. When I learned he had died…” Steve swallowed. He didn’t know why he was talking about Howard but he felt it was the correct thing to do in this situation. “I was devastated so many people I knew were gone. When I learned Howard had had a family and a son I was eager to meet him, so I could learn more about Howard’s life. Maybe help me come to terms with waking from ice and experiencing first-hand how much the world has changed.”

“I never got the chance to speak to Tony about his father. I was advised against approaching him and I watched him from afar. I read up on his history and formed my conclusion of Tony on what I saw. He presented himself as an arrogant man who only cared for himself. I even told him when I eventually did meet him. I said to him he would never be able to make the sacrifice play… I knew from the research I had carried out that Tony Stark would never sacrifice himself.”

Someone raised a hand in the crowd to ask him a question but Steve shook his head.

“I was wrong to judge him so harshly. I thought he was selfish and arrogant. Truth is… he was only one of those things. He was arrogant. And he showed it. But he was never selfish. Tony had the benefit of a privileged life, something the majority of people will never experience. And yet… when it came to a crisis he was always there to step up. He put others first despite the danger he was putting himself in. When it came to becoming a team in New York… Tony didn’t try to take command. He listened to orders, followed them without question. When we found a way to close the portal, I ordered it to be closed. Tony said not to. The missile was coming in and there was only one place Tony could put it if he was to save everyone. The last words I said to him were ‘Stark! You know that’s a one way trip?’ Tony never replied. He shut off his communicator. We could do nothing but watch as Tony grabbed the missile and manipulated it into the portal and then through it… From where I stood on the streets of New York I could see the portal above me… Through it a great ball of fire suddenly expanded. The missile had detonated… hitting something. We didn’t close the portal straight away… I knew we didn’t have much time to waste… The alien invaders around us fell, as if a command link had been severed. We waited for as long as we could before I ordered the portal to be closed. Myself and Thor watched from below as it closed, cutting us all off from Tony. I regret closing the portal but to leave it open, invited danger. The nuclear blast would have seeped through the portal, still killing many people with its noxious fumes. I did what I had to do to save the city. But Tony… he did more. He took a risk and paid for it with his life. He died a hero… He never deserved what I said to him… He was a different person when you got to know him. What you see in the papers is a front for the true man underneath.”

“Tony Stark is a hero. And I will spend the rest of my life remembering him and what he did for us in our time of need.” Steve swallowed, nodded his head and stepped away from the podium.

Pepper approached the podium again. Tears were shining in her eyes but she didn’t wipe them away. “Thank you for your words Steve.” She looked out at the crowd and Steve had to marvel at the strength she had, despite the fact she was breaking inside.

“A memorial will be held for Tony on the twenty-ninth May. Tony has lived his life in the public eye therefore those that wish to hold their respects to him are welcome at the event. There will be a smaller service for family and friends earlier in the day. When full arrangements have been made Stark Industries will release a statement,” said Pepper. She spread her arms and grasped the podium. “Thank you all for coming today.”
A few hours later Steve found Pepper sitting alone inside the apartment. There was a glass of wine beside her and a bottle sitting next to it. Her eyes were red and she was still dressed in the suit she had been wearing earlier in the day. She looked up at him as he approached. “Captain Rogers.”

Steve inclined his head. “Do you mind?” He indicated the chair.

“No, not at all,” answered Pepper shaking her head. “By all means.” She lifted the glass to her lips and took a long sip. “Do you want a drink?”

“No thank you.” Steve declined.

“Why have you come here?” she asked, placing the glass back down, watching him carefully.

“I wanted to apologise again to you for what happened… Tony should be here with you.” Steve knew he would always feel guilty about not finding a way to ensure Tony’s safe return, even if he had returned dead.

“Tony did what he had to do. I’m sad I never got to say goodbye to him.” Pepper breathed slowly. “I will always live with the regret of not hearing my phone. For having it on silent… I don’t know what he wanted to say to me…” Tears began to fall down Pepper’s cheeks, smearing her make-up even more. “I know he loved me… I never told him enough… But I loved him too. He was part of my life for so long…”

“How long?” Steve didn’t know but he was certain Pepper had been a big part of Tony’s life for a very long while. “You don’t have to say…”

Pepper shook her head, wiping the tears away with the palm of her hand. “I started working for Tony in 1998. I was twenty-two. I had been a part of Stark Industries for a year before I got promoted to be his personal assistant. It wasn’t a job I was particularly after.”

“How did you get it?” Steve was genuinely intrigued. He wouldn’t accept a job he wasn’t interested in.

“I noticed a mathematical error in one of the financial spreadsheets. I took it to my manager who dismissed it claiming Mr Stark does not make any mistakes. I didn’t like the dismissal so I took the paperwork and marched right up to Mr Stark’s office. As I didn’t have an appointment his security guards tried to stop me from entering as they thought I could pose a security risk. When one of them grabbed me, I pepper-sprayed them. I’d been the subject of an attack before. Pepper spray comes in handy and I always carried it with me. I had already managed to get the door open before I defended myself and Tony saw everything. He was quite amused. He agreed to see me. I thought my career was over but part of my job was to ensure all financial calculations were correct. I pointed out his error. Tony told me to return to my department and then the next thing I knew he was promoting me for pointing out a mistake he had made which others had overlooked because ‘no one can argue with Tony Stark’s maths’. I saved the company from a potential loss. He said he needed a PA who was willing to call him out on his mistakes. He needed someone to rely on and to trust. I was reluctant to at first but I agreed to take on the job as it would give me experience to add to my CV. I didn’t intend to stay as his PA for long but I enjoyed it. It was a good job.” Pepper smiled lightly. “Tony had a habit of sleeping with his PA’s but I wouldn’t let him near me. He grew to respect me and like me as a friend. And I think he started to fall in love with me because I wasn’t trying to use him for his money or fame. I genuinely wanted to be his friend. And because I spent so much time with him. I saw who he really was and I fell in love with him.”
“I think he needed someone like you,” said Steve. “The Tony that I thought I knew wasn’t someone I’d want to know…” He bit his lower lip. “He showed me I misjudged him.”

“Tony never let many people into his life. In total there were only four people he could really rely on – no – not four, seven. Only seven people in the whole world knew the real Tony. You just got a glimpse of him at the end of his life. No matter what you said to him, do not blame yourself. Tony always put himself out there. He was always a kind and generous person. He was a billionaire with a heart, if you were let into his trust circle,” explained Pepper, taking another sip of wine. Steve fidgeted. “I didn’t know he couldn’t trust easily…”

“Tony had… issues growing up,” Pepper hesitated. “He was close to his mother… I never met her but I know he adored her. His father, Howard, he never got along with. The little I know of Howard Stark told me he didn’t know how to be a father. He was never there for Tony, he was always busy, looking for you. Tony looked for his admiration, hoped his father would praise him for once instead of criticising him and letting him down. I suspect the Howard you knew was different?”

Steve nodded. “I did. Howard was very carefree and kind. Smart and enthusiastic about the future… What changed?”

“The war changed him. Howard withdraw, kept things close to his chest. He built up Stark Industries after the war becoming a millionaire within a decade. He went from humble, poor beginnings to one of high society. He met Maria when he was forty-nine. He’d spent the majority of his life as a playboy, sleeping with anyone he could, working hard for his fortune. When he met Maria, he fell hard for her. They were married when he was fifty. Maria was in her early thirties. They tried so long for a child…” Pepper shook her head. “I don’t know why I’m telling you this…”

“You do not need to,” said Steve gently. It was feeding what he wanted to know but he wasn’t going to ask Pepper to continue if she felt she shouldn’t be.

“No, it’s okay. I think I need to speak. And it might help the both of us.” Pepper shrugged. “Tony was born after two miscarriages; he was a much, longed for child. His birth was front page news across the world. But as Tony grew it was clear he had inherited his father’s intelligence, perhaps more than him. Tony was inventing things at the age of three and first made news when he was four with a circuit board. He continued to progress quicker than his classmates. He didn’t have many friends and Howard soon sent him off to boarding school. Tony was a difficult child due to his intelligence. He always wanted to be learning or doing something. Howard never had the time to be the father Tony wished for him to be. Tony was close to his mother. He loved her very much and when she died he was heartbroken.”

Steve swallowed. He could understand. He’d lost his own mother and had found the weeks and months difficult to bear with. Even now the thought of his mother still hurt but it was more of a dull ache rather than one which hurt him.

“He met Rhodey at MIT. Rhodey is a few years older than Tony but they got on like a house on fire. Tony always found it hard to make friends. Rhodey has been there for Tony through the most difficult parts of his life. It took a while for Rhodey to be trusted by Tony… but he helped him at MIT when he used to be bullied for being so young. Tony appreciated what Rhodey did for him and he slowly let him in. Then, myself. It took a while for Tony to let me in but he did. He trusted me enough to hand his company over to me. And he trusted me enough to show his real heart to me. He put so much trust in me that he fell in love and wanted to have more than just a one-night stand with me. He once told me it was during Afghanistan he realised he loved me… But he didn’t know how to tell me. We danced around one another for so long…” She smiled lightly. “When we finally got together it was worth it.” She stopped and took another sip of wine.
“His mother, Rhodey and you…” Steve counted on his fingers. “Three out of seven. Who were the rest?”

Pepper smiled wistfully. “Tony had a butler growing up. He was called Edwin Jarvis. Tony honoured him by calling his first Artificial Intelligence JARVIS. Jarvis was the father to Tony, Howard could never be. Jarvis died from a heart attack a year after Howard and Maria were killed. There was also Peggy Carter. I know you knew her before you were frozen in ice. She was good friends with Howard and Tony knew her very well growing up. She was one of the few people Tony trusted but after Howard and Maria’s death she didn’t see Tony as much as she used to. I know she is still alive now but in a retirement home… Tony visits her when he can…” Pepper smiled sadly. “She doesn’t remember Tony… She always calls him Howard.”

“Shit.” Steve swore, which wasn’t something he usually did.

“Tony last saw her six months ago. Sometimes she seems to know him… but the majority of the time she doesn’t.” Pepper sighed. “And then there was Happy Hogan. Tony’s bodyguard. Tony hired him after Happy saved his life when he was attacked. Tony was twenty-five. Happy has remained a constant in Tony’s life. Always there and ready to protect him at any given moment, though his security role did become more redundant as Tony became Iron Man. But Happy has always been loyal to Tony and as a result he will remain loyal to Stark Industries too, even with Tony gone. There was only one person out of the seven who betrayed Tony. He doesn’t really count as someone Tony trusted anymore…”

“What happened?” Steve asked. He had read Tony’s SHIELD file but there wasn’t much on it. He supposed Tony had gone in and edited it.

“Obadiah Stane. He was Howard’s business partner and Tony’s godfather. Though Tony was the public head of Stark Industries, Obadiah was the real driving force behind it. Unbeknownst to Tony, Obadiah was selling their weapons on the black market for a tidy profit. He also wanted to be CEO… Tony trusted Obadiah completely. There was no hesitation in not taking his advice. It was Obadiah who suggested Tony should go to Afghanistan for a weapon’s demonstration…” Her eyes hardened as she continued to speak. “Obadiah betrayed Tony in the worst possible way. Obadiah had been dealing SI weapons to terrorists operating in the region. He paid them to kill Tony.

But the terrorists recognised who Tony was. They didn’t know it was Tony Stark Obadiah wanted killed. Instead of killing him, they kidnapped him and bade Obadiah to pay them more money to kill Tony. Obadiah didn’t which resulted in Tony being able to survive long enough to build the first Iron Man suit and escape,” said Pepper quietly. “Obadiah then tried to kill Tony himself… first by taking the arc reactor out of his chest and secondly kill him when Tony fought him on the roof of the factory. Obadiah was killed in that fight. The public do not know the truth regarding the circumstances of his death either. Tony did mourn for him but after Obadiah’s betrayal, Tony’s circle tightened and he has never really let anyone else in.”

That wasn’t in the file… Steve thought.

Pepper wiped a hand over her face, pulling back a few strings of hair. “I think, in time, Tony would have grown to trust all of you, but now it won’t happen…” She took a large mouthful of wine and swallowed.

Horror engulfed Steve. He couldn’t believe Tony had been betrayed by someone who his parents had trusted enough to name him godfather. He shook his head. The amount of people Tony Stark trusted was relatively small. Steve regretted not being able to be added to the small rank of people which had the trust of Tony Stark.
Steve bowed his head. “The more I learn of him, the more I realise how wrong I was…”

A hand patted his arm. “People assume things about Tony when they shouldn’t. He had a public and private personae for a reason: to protect himself. It was the only way he could survive in a world he was born too soon for. Tony was a futurist. He was making the world a better place… He was a pioneer of new technology. He has a legacy which has been left behind for others to build upon. Years from now he will always be remembered as the man who changed everything.”

And Steve, knowing what he did now, couldn’t agree more.

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In the days and weeks following the Battle of New York, the US Government confirmed they would be rewarding Tony Stark posthumously with two awards: Presidential Citizens Medal and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. There had been long discussion in the senate where a debate had raged over what awards Tony Stark should be lauded with. In the end they had agreed on two medals, one of which was awarded on the basis of his actions in New York.

He had performed an exemplary deed by sacrificing his life for his country earning him the Presidential Citizens Medal, whereas his contribution to the security and the nation interests of the United States, first by creating new and better weapons and then discovering a new element enabling cleaner energy to be used earned him the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

As the clean-up continued in Manhattan, Steve aided when he could, all the while wishing he could have changed the outcome of the battle.

Yet, he knew if he had the chance to go back in time and reverse what had happened, Steve had realised Tony would never have been dissuaded from taking the missile through the portal. His chat with Pepper had made it very clear Tony would have always intercepted the missile and sacrificed himself.

And that was something Steve understood fully. He wondered often, if Tony had survived, if they would have been friends in the aftermath, or just held a grudging appreciation of one another.

It was something Steve would never know.

Tony Stark was dead and there was nothing Steve could do to change it.

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

I wanted this chapter to focus on Steve and Pepper. I specifically wanted Pepper and Steve to talk to one another and considering Steve's guilt over Tony, I think it is only natural he would seek Pepper out.

It may feel I am retreading old ground that was shown in the previous chapter but I do believe it is important to show how the people left behind are coping.

Also, the two American medals given to Tony post-death are real medals presented in the US. As I'm not from America, I made sure to do my research.
PART ONE: THE DEATH OF TONY STARK

Chapter Four

The Years Between: 2012 – 2018

In the months following the Battle of New York life slowly went back to normal, even for Pepper Potts, James Rhodes and Happy Hogan. Despite Tony’s death they were able to regain a sense of normality. After all, it was what Tony would have expected of them.

They still missed him. Every single day they thought of him.

Especially Pepper. She had loved him so much. What hurt the most was she hadn’t been given the chance to properly bury him. Yes, they’d held a funeral, but it wasn’t the same without a body. She hated knowing his body was floating somewhere in a faraway part of space, dead in the Iron Man armour. She wondered if anyone would ever find his body… Would the suit protect it from decomposing? It was a morbid thought but one which crossed her mind, especially on memorial days they held for Tony.

Stark Industries continued to be the lead of innovation in technology. With Tony’s death, as per his will, his Arc Reactor technology would be shared with the world, though there was a snag in the will which enabled Stark Industries to benefit earlier from it than any other business in the world. The formula for Arc Reactor technology Tony had furiously guarded and it would only be released a decade after his death.

Though Stark Industries had already been gifted his research notes, again as per his Will, the knowledge was only kept within a small group of trustworthy individuals within the company, and those were chosen explicitly by Pepper. Out of everyone in the Research and Development Department only three employees were allowed access to the formula.

As a result of Tony’s death, over the years Pepper and Happy found comfort in one another and as it neared the third anniversary of the Battle of Manhattan, the two finally made it official and got together.
Every year, on what would have been Tony’s birthday, Stark Industries closed for business and always held a memorial event in his honour. It was an event which usually garnered world-wide attention.

Tony Stark’s legacy lived on.

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The Avengers disbanded after New York.

While Bruce Banner returned to the wilderness to protect and help the poor, Clint and Natasha remained working with SHIELD and they brought Steve along with them. In the ensuing years events occurred which required the Avengers to band together again.

The first major event involved a man named Aldrich Killian, who used an actor to terrorise the public into believing a terror group was behind all the suicide bombings which had been occurring in recent months across the world. His real target had been President Ellis but the Avengers had stepped in (minus Thor who was still off-world at the time).

The President wasn’t the only person Killian had gone after.

Pepper had once worked for him before she had been employed by Stark Industries and Killian kidnapped her and injected her with Extremis, a chemical which gave people the ability to heal themselves when injured. It also enhanced their physical ability, granting superhuman strength, reflexes and overall higher resilience. Extremis was also highly explosive if the body did not accept the changes the formula was forcing upon it.

The “suicide bombers” had been failed experiments of Extremis and Aldrich had used them to cause maximum casualties. Happy had nearly been one of those casualties. It had taken the combined efforts of Steve, Clint, Natasha and Rhodey to end the reign of terror.

The Extremis event was labelled classified by the USA government, thereby ensuring the existence of a formula, which helped the body regenerate, didn’t make it out into the public domain. It was far too dangerous to allow knowledge of its existence to escape.

At least not until it had been stabilised for everyone to use safely.

Pepper’s body had accepted Extremis but as it had been forced on her, she wanted it gone. Her experience reminded her of Tony and how the Arc Reactor had been forced on him by the terrorists who had kidnapped him in Afghanistan. It made her feel she had more of an understanding of what he may have gone through during his captivity.

SHIELD tracked Bruce Banner down and with the help of Helen Cho, a world renowned geneticist, they succeeded in crafting a formula which enabled Pepper to control her Extremis. They had discovered a way to keep the Extremis formula inactive within her body so she didn’t have to worry about growing too hot and exploding.

They managed to turn the formula into a tablet which Pepper took daily. This suppressed the Extremis in her DNA and prevented it from being used by her. They couldn’t remove Extremis entirely but Pepper was happy with the result they had found for her.

If she did need to use Extremis again, Helen and Bruce had devised another medicine which ensured the effects of the first pill were removed quite swiftly, allowing Pepper access to her Extremis powers. That pill would release a serotonin which infiltrated her cells and reactivate Extremis.
During the time she received treatment for Extremis, Pepper took a sabbatical from her role of CEO at Stark Industries as she recovered from her ordeal. She did receive continued support from SHIELD and the Avengers.

Pepper continued to live in Tony’s Malibu mansion, keeping all his suits on premises, protecting them from the hands of the government, who were eager to obtain an army of Iron suits. Thankfully Tony’s will specified upon his death, Pepper would receive the ownership, designs and trademark for the suits. To get the suits from her, the government would have to buy them off of her.

No matter how much they asked and offered, Pepper continued to refuse. She knew Tony would have wanted them kept safe rather than used by anyone else.

In time, once she and Happy had started a relationship, they lived in the house together. Two-thirds of Tony’s fortune had been left to herself, Happy and Rhodey, allowing them to live off comfortably for the rest of their lives if they wished, but all three continued to work. The rest of his fortune had been donated to charitable causes around the globe. Rhodey visited them often, usually between his missions in the Middle East.

Life for Pepper moved on, yet neither she, nor Rhodey or Happy would ever forget Tony.

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Thor returned to Earth in 2013 when the Aether was discovered by Jane Foster. He faced Malekith the Accursed of the Dark Elves, who was after the power of the Aether Jane had rediscovered. Malekith’s people had once commanded its power. Once Malekith had been defeated, Thor realised the Aether was one of the six Infinity Stones, which had long ago been lost in the universe.

Returning it to Asgard, Thor intended for the Aether to be put in a safe place. It was his father’s decree that the Aether was handed over to the Collector, an ancient and powerful being, for safekeeping.

With his father’s permission Thor departed Asgard and returned to Earth to be with Jane. It was during the next few years Thor would once again become involved with his team-mates from New York.

- - - - -

Almost two years later after the Battle of New York, SHIELD was revealed to have been infiltrated by HYDRA, who were now nearing their goal of world order, after working in the shadow of SHIELD and infiltrating every possible means of government for decades.

Stark Industries still supplied SHIELD with protective equipment however Pepper had signed a contract with SHIELD to help develop three new state of the art Helicarriers. The Helicarriers would also have the means of monitoring potential threats as well, thereby ensuring the safety of the world.

At least that was what Nick Fury thought. Little did he know HYDRA intended to use it to kill all the people who might ever stand against them.

It was during the time of the deployment of the Helicarriers that Steve and Natasha worked together to uncover the conspiracy at the heart of SHIELD and the government. After an assassination attempt to kill Nick Fury, Steve went on the run, convinced there was more going on than he had assumed. In the space of a few days he learned a few things: HYDRA was still operating and close to victory and his best friend, Bucky, who he had lost back during World War II, was very much alive and was acting as the dreaded assassin known as the Winter Soldier. Steve later found the Winter Soldier was responsible for many of the assassinations of important people whose deaths had been covered up as accidents.
One of those assassinations had been the deaths of Howard and Maria Stark. In a way Steve was glad Tony was gone because it would have been a conversation he wouldn’t have been looking forward to. But it still hurt to know his best friend had been the one who had carried out the murders.

After successfully stopping the launch of the Helicarriers and breaking the mind-control HYDRA had on Bucky, Steve, along with his new friend Sam Wilson, began their search for Bucky. Bucky had gone into hiding and Steve was determined to get him back and help him with the horror he had lived through for years as HYDRA’s prisoner and executioner.

As a result of SHIELD’s infiltration by HYDRA, Steve, Natasha and Sam had to bring down the Helicarriers, causing a lot of damage to government property as well as civilian deaths in their attempts to prevent a wider murder of the population. In order to expose HYDRA, Natasha released all the SHIELD files onto the internet, thereby exposing many people in high places in society as HYDRA minions. Many arrests were carried out and SHIELD faded into the shadows, with only a small team of people working out in the open.

On the instructions of the US government the Avengers banded together again to search out hidden HYDRA facilities, to bring down the secretive organisation once and for all. It was a result of these missions, when the team found the last HYDRA base in Sokovia, that the team were tested to the limits.

They found HYDRA had been experimenting on people using the Sceptre Loki had used to mind-control Clint during his assault on Earth. Though SHIELD had picked up the Sceptre after the battle, it had made its way into the hands of HYDRA. They had taken it from SHIELD property and brought it to their main facility in Sokovia where they experimented heavily on the Sceptre, succeeding in harnessing its power to gift humans with remarkable powers.

However, all the subjects they attempted to infuse the Sceptre’s power with, all died.

Once the Avengers were inside the facility, using JARVIS, who now worked with the Avengers when they were on missions, they found the Sceptre and reports on what would have been HYDRA’s next two experiments.

They had intended to use two young local Sokovian adults who had lost their parents in the civil war which had engulfed their country for years and was only now just settling down to stabilise. There were several files on the suitability of Wanda and Pietro Maximoff.

The one thing which had energised them into volunteering for HYDRA a few years ago was the desire to get revenge on Tony Stark for killing their parents. None of the team could understand how Tony was to blame for their loss. Thankfully, because their sole aim to volunteer in the first place was to get revenge on Stark, their suitability had fallen when Tony had died. HYDRA had prioritised other people over them. They had been the next candidates in line to be called up however the Avengers discovering the Sokovian facility were able to put a stop to any more of their inhuman experiments.

With the Sceptre now back in the hands of the Avengers, Thor departed Earth once again, after realising the Sceptre was just the casing for another Infinity Stone. Thor explained to the Avengers the stones had been lost thousands of years ago but in the past few years they had started to re-emerge, making him believe someone was out there manipulating all of this. He took the Infinity Stone back to Asgard where it was then placed within Odin’s vault, where the Tesseract lay, until a suitable place could be found to hide it.

Whilst Thor travelled the universe in his quest to learn more of the Infinity Stones, the Avengers on Earth carried about their daily lives. HYDRA had been disbanded thanks to the efforts of Steve,
Natasha and Sam. Bruce went back into hiding in India and Clint decided to take a sabbatical from SHIELD to spend more time with his expanding family.

Steve continued to search for Bucky but his friend had successfully hidden himself away.

As 2016 flew in, a few more superheroes made their debut, though some were more off the grid then the others. The first was Doctor Strange who only came to the attention of the Avengers by accident when Thor returned to Earth two years later. Strange had managed to stay underground, avoiding the publicity the Avengers had found themselves with. Then there was Peter Parker, a school boy who had been bitten by a radioactive spider, giving him spider-like abilities. The boy used his powers to stop minor crimes in Queens where he lived. JARVIS monitored his activities whilst keeping Rhody informed of the boys whereabouts. He was an asset that could potentially be useful to the Avengers in later years.

And finally it emerged Black Panther existed in Wakanda, though not many people really knew of him.

Due to the Avengers mistakes in Washington DC with bringing down the Helicarriers, a lobby had begun to have enhanced individuals answerable to the government. Though it didn’t really get anywhere due to the lack of main disasters around the world after Washington DC, it was still known about by the Avengers. They each made their identities clear to the public and all said they would willingly step up if their actions caused anyone undue harm.

And so, the world moved on, until one day, in 2018, when everything was quiet, Thor Odinson, returned to Earth, with the most gravest of news.

Tony Stark lived.

To be continued…

NEXT WEEK
on Tuesday 9th January 2018

Five Chitauri drag Tony Stark down an unfamiliar corridor…

A figure in black stands before Tony…

“Kneel.”

Tony snarls. “No.”

“I see we will have to teach you obedience,” the robed figure continued.

“Good luck trying!” Tony, defiant.

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Tony chained to a table, naked as Chitauri gather around him.

- - - -

A metallic hand grasps the arc reactor and pulls it out.

- - - -

Tony, strapped to a chair, screams as ten needles push into his skull.
Thanos glaring down upon Tony as he is forced to kneel in front of the Titan.

“I will never serve you. You may as well kill me.”

Thanos laughs. “We will never let you die.”

A blue hand strokes down his cheek. “You will be a pleasure to break.”

Tony flinches. “I won’t break.”

Nebula leans in. “You say that now, but everyone does.”

*fares to black*

PART TWO
THE BREAKING OF TONY STARK

Chapter End Notes

A few key things to remember from this chapter for later... There are two Infinity Stones on Asgard. Extremis and Killian still happened. Vision was never created. Ultron didn't happen. The Maximoff twins didn't get their powers. Doctor Strange and Spider-Man and Black Panther are still around. Bear these things in mind...

We will rejoin our heroes on Earth in Part III/Part IV.

Part II will completely focuses on Tony and we will finally get to find out what has been happening to him. This is where the warnings come in for this fic though in each chapter I will provide specific warnings so if you are not keen on something, you can avoid it. In total there are 8 chapters before we will move onto the next Part of this fic.

Thank you for all the comments so far! Next week, we join Tony...

the-writer1988
Part 2: Chapter 1 - Awakening

Chapter Summary

Tony wakes up in a not very nice place...

Chapter Notes

Welcome to Part II: The Breaking of Tony Stark! I’m not going to lie and say its hunky-dory for Tony – it really isn’t. You may want to brace yourselves… There are 7 chapters in this part in which we follow Tony and what happens to him. This is where all the warnings I have attached to this fic apply.

WARNINGS FOR THIS CHAPTER: physical torture and non-consensual touching (one time)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Part Two: The Breaking of Tony Stark

Chapter One
Awakening

The first thing he became aware of was the cold air hitting his skin, causing shivers to run up and down his near naked body. His last awareness was seeing the exploding station after the nuclear missile had impacted against it. His heart was fluttering wildly in his chest as his awareness caught up with him, as he realised, with dread pooling in the pit of his stomach that he must have somehow failed in his sacrifice.

He wasn’t dead. He should have died if he hadn’t fallen back through the portal. He had been left floating in space with his air almost gone and the suit failing him. Tony groaned as he shifted on the cold floor, becoming more and more aware of his predicament then he really wanted to be.

He wasn’t dead. He should have died if he hadn’t fallen back through the portal. He had been left floating in space with his air almost gone and the suit failing him. Tony groaned as he shifted on the cold floor, becoming more and more aware of his predicament then he really wanted to be.

He was no longer in the suit. Someone had stripped him of it and his undergarments, leaving him in just his pants. His hands were chained at the wrists in front of him, connected to a short chain on the hard floor, and his ankles and knees were bound together with two thick chains that were padlocked together.

Someone didn’t want him escaping. He was completely and thoroughly bound.

He hadn’t fallen back through the portal. He’d been captured, probably taken by the enemy that he had sought to destroy. This is not good.

Panic began to settle in and his heart rate increased. He didn’t want to be here. No, no, he really didn’t want to be. Fruitlessly he tried to pull at his bindings. But it was no use. He was stuck fast and all he could do was wait until his captors deemed it necessary to visit him.
How had he survived? Surely they hadn’t picked him up that fast? His oxygen had been running out mere seconds after the explosion, especially with no power to the suit. His panic was continuing to rise.

He was dead, either way.

If he had been picked up by the remnants of the race whose command centre he had destroyed, he knew he wouldn’t be in for a very good time. Tony shivered. The cold of the cell and the lack of warmth made his body react to the situation he was in. He felt so very afraid. He was alone. Was he a captive of war?

Tony didn’t know and he had no desire to find out.

He tried to focus on something else, something to keep his mind away from where he was.

*Pepper.*

Thinking about her hurt.

She would think he was dead. And when she saw he had tried to call her… Dread filled in his stomach. Pepper would feel incredibly guilty over that. God, he loved her, and he hadn’t been given the chance to tell her one last time.

He felt wetness in his eyes, a foreign sensation he had rarely allowed himself to ever have the pleasure of encountering. There had only been two times in his life when he had really cried. The first was when he had learned his mother had died and the second had been when Edwin Jarvis had passed. He had nearly cried during his time in Afghanistan, shortly after he had agreed to the terrorist group’s demands to build them the Jericho missile. He’d only agreed so the pain would stop and he could be given the opportunity to build something which would help him escape the hell he had been in.

There would be no such relief here, Tony knew. They wouldn’t give him the chance, whoever they were.

He waited in the darkness of the cell for them to come for him.

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It felt like hours before they did.

It probably was.

Tony didn’t know. He shivered. He was so cold.

How long would it be until hypothermia set in? Were they just going to leave him here to die? He had been responsible for destroying their army… or he thought he had been. If they had been the ones to save him… he didn’t want to think about it.

He soon received his answer when his cell door opened and five Chitauri marched into his cell. One levelled a gun at him whilst a second released the chains which padlocked his knees and ankles together. The second then moved onto the chains around his wrists, releasing them from the floor. The chain could now act as a lead to dragging Tony if he refused to cooperate.

But before he could do anything, the third and fourth Chitauri stepped forward, grabbed him by the arms on each side and hauled him to his feet. They proceeded to force him out the cell, despite his
best efforts to struggle. Their grip was too strong and he was too weak.

Tony was dragged along the corridor. His eyes did their best to take it all in, seeing the advanced technology that merited their walls. Wires of all shapes and colours threaded in and out of the walls. Just from the short time he had been here, he could tell how cyrogenetic the Chitauri were. Their advancements in technology put his own work to shame.

Their technology could only serve as a distraction for so long as he was bought to a big circular room where a large symbol decorated the floor. He couldn’t make out what it was, nor did he really want to. His eyes swept the room. There was only one entrance that he could see but directly in front of him, on the other side of the symbol on the floor stood a black-robed figure, with its back to him.

Tony was dropped to the floor.

Glaring at his captors, Tony dragged himself to his feet, wobbling slightly as he stood before the black robed figure. He didn’t know how he could stand as his muscles hurt like hell. He must have been in the cell for a while, or it was the fact he had been kept in a very awkward position where he had been unable to move at all. A tactic, he was sure, had been designed to weaken him.

Determined not to show weakness, Tony couldn’t help but feel frightened but if he was to die here, he would go down knowing he had died to protect the Earth.

The black-robed figure turned to face him.

Fear coursed up his back.

_Don’t show weakness._

He couldn’t, not ever. He was Iron Man.

Tony kept an impressive mask on despite the fear coursing through his body.

He couldn’t identify the features of the figure that well, apart from the clawed, metallic teeth and the metal gauntlets the figure wore on its hands.

The figure stalked forward. “Kneel.”

“No.” Tony refused. No way in hell would he ever bow to them.

The figure inclined its head and suddenly hands gripped Tony’s biceps hard and his legs were kicked out from under him. Tony fell as his Chitauri escorts forced him to his knees. He struggled uselessly against their hold but it was futile. He kept his head raised, refusing to make that final acquiesce of surrender.

But a hand wound its way into his hair, gripping his scalp tightly, forcing his head down in compliance.

Tony seethed inside.

“I see we will have to teach you obedience,” the robe figure continued.

“Good luck trying,” hissed Tony. He would be defiant until the end.

He was thrown forward again, landing heavily on his front, groaning loudly. He didn’t try to stand. Why bother when it was likely they would just throw him back down again? Instead his choice was to lay there in front of the creature or to stand in defiance.
“You probably wonder how you are still alive.”

Tony didn’t answer. He just lay there. He was going to be told anyway.

“You probably wonder how you are still alive.”

Tony didn’t answer. He just lay there. He was going to be told anyway.

“You weapon destroyed our command ship and all of our forces of our first army. Your friends closed the portal, leaving you trapped here… with us. We were further away in system, in our own separate command ship, as witnesses to your decapitation of our forces. You spared your world for now… Your sacrifice, however, gave us you.” A horrible grin pulled at the creatures face.

Tony shivered. He didn’t like the way the figure spoke of him. It unnerved him.

The figure continued to speak. “We saw you lose power. We watched as the gravitational pull of the portal started to tug you back, but it closed before you could reach the edges of it. We saved you. Our technology brought you to us within seconds.”

Tony was dragged to his feet once again by the two Chitauri who still stayed poised beside him.

The figure was now in his face and Tony flinched back.

“We gave you your life back when you could not breathe our air.” The figure placed a clawed hand on Tony’s cheek, patting him gently before dragging the hand down and coming to a rest on his throat. “We injected a small device in your throat, through the skin of your neck which converts our air into your air when you breathe in and converts it back to our air when you expel it. It is also a device which allows you to understand us.” The figure lifted Tony’s chin with one clawed metallic finger. “You will live until we wish for your demise.”

Tony didn’t say a word. He had nothing to say. He pulled his head away from his captor. They didn’t know it but he did have a way out.

The Arc Reactor in his chest could easily be removed in the confines of his own cell, especially if they kept his hands bound in front of him. He’d be able to end his own life without them knowing. He didn’t want to do it but how the hell was he supposed to escape and get back home? He wasn’t ever going to get free. He really only had one option.

The creature was speaking again: “Your mind has information we require. You will tell us everything we need from you,” the figure continued.

Tony blinked. “No. Never.”

The figure laughed, the crass laughter causing shivers to run up Tony’s spine. “It would be easier for you if you did.” The creature reached out and grasped Tony’s chin once again. “Tell me your name, human.”

Tony tried to pull his chin away again but the fingers only gripped harder, forcing him to look up at the alien. “Fuck you!”

The creature’s eyes burned fiercely. “Then you will know only pain. I can promise you that, human!” His captor turned away.

Tony struggled against his Chitauri handlers as they dragged him down the corridors once again. He tried kicking out but failed as the Chitauri walking behind him anticipated his move and stepped to the side, grabbing his ankle as he kicked out. The warrior refused to let go of his leg so Tony was left with one leg trailing awkwardly on the floor. Their claws dug into his arms and Tony knew when
they let go blood would trickle down.

They stopped at a large door. One of the Chitauri turned to the large mound of flesh that sat embedded within the wall, placing its clawed hand upon it. The door slid open.

Tony found himself in a small room, forced to stand. Before he could even look around at his surroundings and process the room he was in, his legs were tripped and he crashed to the floor, hard. He groaned as clawed hands pushed him down, pressing his chest into the hard metallic floor.

That was when he felt another set of clawed hands scrabbling at his boxers.

No… No…!

Tony’s mind whirled at the implications. His boxers were pulled down, even as he tried to kick out, wanting to stop them at any cost. The pressure increased in his back as the Chitauri leaned down on his spine. He choked as the pressure prevented him from breathing properly. The boxers were flung to the side.

The pressure was lifted from his back. Naked and roughly dragged forward, Tony was flung into a small capsule. He started to bang on the closed door, trying to get out of the enclosed space. It wouldn’t budge.

He screeched out suddenly as jet cold water sprung out of holes in the ceiling. He shrieked as the cold water struck his skin. He couldn’t escape. His mind flashed back as the water continued to pour hard on his body. No…No… He couldn’t go through that again… They were just giving him a shower… Right? But he kept on panicking regardless.

It went on for what seemed like forever before it stopped; the door opened as he leaned against it and he fell straight into the hands of the Chitauri.

They dragged him out. Shivering in their grip, teeth chattering, Tony was taken through into another room where he was hauled up onto a metal slab.

The four Chitauri each grabbed a limb. They secured his feet to the table, and then one placed their hand on the arc reactor in his chest. Tony stilled, breathing slowly watching the Chitauri. But the touch was merely to shock him. Before he knew it, his hands were unchained, and both were being pressed into the slab, as cuffs slid over his wrists, holding them in place.

He lay on the table, legs spread-eagled and arms chained at the side of his body. He tugged at his restraints but couldn’t move at all.

The four Chitauri trooped out, leaving Tony utterly alone.

- - - - -

He didn’t know how long he lay there for but he suspected it hadn’t been for long, despite it feeling like hours had passed. Tony had given up trying to escape from his bonds. His limbs were secured too tightly. They had already made it clear he was their prize. They had failed to gain Earth but they had taken him. He was entirely at their mercy. That terrified him.

He could save himself from further pain if he just told them his name… Saying Tony Stark shouldn’t be so bad… But he shook his head vehemently. He wasn’t going to betray himself. If he betrayed himself, he would betray his home. The questions wouldn’t stop with just his name. They’d continue past that, expecting intelligence of Earth which was something he wasn’t willingly going to give.

To the right of him, the door slid open and the being that he had spoken to earlier entered. Its black
robes swished around him as the creature paused to look at Tony’s naked body.

The being strode forward, placing a clawed hand upon Tony’s hair, gently patting it before sliding the hand down to Tony’s cheek.

“I am known as the Other. You have one last chance to tell me your name or your pain will begin.” The creature slid his hand down Tony’s cheek, to his neck, where it gently caressed the jugular vein, before tracing the hand down onto his chest.

The Arc Reactor continued to pulse inside Tony’s chest.

The Other’s hand stopped at the device. “What is this?”

Tony glared. He would not...

The Other laughed. “You refuse now but you will willingly tell us…”

Tony’s eyes followed the Other’s hand as it traced down his abdomen, down to the top of his hips, pausing to slide only slightly closer to Tony’s groin. Tony’s breath stilled as the hand paused close to an area he never wanted to be touched by anyone other than by himself or Pepper.

Then the hand moved on, trailing down his leg to his toes, before switching to the other leg and then began to drag the hand back up Tony’s body.

“It will be a pleasure to break you, human!” the Other leaned down into Tony’s face, even as its hand continued up Tony’s body.

“You’ll be waiting a long time,” sneered Tony. He spat into the Other’s face. He could barely see the features underneath the hood but he felt proud that he could piss off the Other this way.

The metallic fingers grasped his chin.

Hot breath covered his face. He nearly gagged from the stench of the Other’s breath.

“You will regret that!”

A clawed hand landed on Tony’s front, just below the Arc Reactor and scrapped down, digging the sharp fingers into his flesh. Tony buckled in his restraints, barely being able to move as pain wrecked his body, as the metallic fingers clawed into his stomach.

Blood trickled down his tummy, dripping onto the surface he lay upon. Tony didn’t dare look at the deep cuts which had been torn in to his flesh. It was burning. The wounds were not enough to kill him however.

“You can spare yourself from the pain if you yield to us.” The Other traced its fingers down Tony’s cheek, as if caressing him.

Tony’s eyes burned into the hood. “What if I don’t want to?”

“Then you are a fool,” hissed the Other vehemently.

“I’d rather die a hero than betray everything I love!”

The Other laughed. It was an unnatural sound and Tony shivered underneath the gaze of his captor. Once more the alien stroked his cheek tenderly, despite the sharp fingers, and Tony flinched.
“You’re frightened…” the Other observed.

“Still won’t break though.” _Shut up Tony! Stop antagonising him!_

The trouble was, was that Tony was incapable of shutting up.

“We will see, human…” The Other moved away. “One way or another, we will get what we want from you.”

Then Tony was alone.

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They left him for a few hours, or what Tony assumed to be hours, shivering on the surface he lay upon. He was still naked. All he had was his own mind to occupy him. He tried to think of Pepper, to use her as a distraction to keep his mind away from the real horror he was facing.

But it wasn’t enough.

His mind kept coming back to what they were going to do to him.

They were going to torture him.

He knew it without a doubt they would cause him terrible pain. They wanted what was in his head. He wasn’t going to give it to them.

_I will not break. No matter what they do to me._

It was a vow he intended to keep.

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Tony had closed his eyes by the time his captors came back for him. He hadn’t been resting. He was too scared to. He’d been sick of looking up at the ceiling. When he realised he was no longer alone, he opened his eyes. He didn’t want to not be aware of what they were about to do to him.

Two mauled Chitauri stood over him.

Tony felt fear flood through him as he watched their alien eyes scout out his body. He felt their fingers prod into his skin as they touched him everywhere. Tony stiffened as one even brushed its finger over his manhood. That frightened him more than anything else they touched.

He tried to struggle against his chains but they didn’t budge, though he knew they wouldn’t already.

One caressed his face as the second turned away and fiddled with something in a box situated on a shelf to Tony’s right. He stiffened, fear crawling up his spine.

The hand that caressed his face moved to cover his eyes. He tried to wrench away from them but the Chitauri grasped his chin to hold his head still and then with its free hand, covered his eyes once more.

Tony felt his heart beat faster. Whatever was about to happen he simply didn’t want it. Didn’t he have a choice?

_But you do have a choice! They just want your name…_
His resistance sparked up.

No! If I give them one thing they will want more!

Then he felt the sharp tip of something pressing into his abdomen, carving down. He felt droplets of blood trickling down whatever wound they were making. The carving motion stopped and the pressure lifted away.

Tony didn’t dare breathe freely.

Another stab of pain, only this time from the side and it seemed to dig in further, dragging down, opening his skin, causing blood to pour forth.

He buckled in his restraints.

Why didn’t they want him to see this?

His brain answered almost immediately. Fear.

They wanted him to fear the unknown. Of what was coming next.

He felt more sharp stings of pain, moving all over his abdomen and then onto his chest.

He knew he was covered in blood.

When the stinging finally stopped, the hand covering his eyes was removed and his chin released from the grip of the Chitauri. From his vantage point, Tony could see rivets of blood trickling down his body from cuts made into his skin.

Then something gripped his head, sharp fingers digging into his skull. He whimpered, hating himself for sounding weak in front of the aliens who tormented him.

He could see a glittering, silver knife in the Chitauri’s hand as it was raised and pressed against his left cheek. Slowly, as if it was savouring making the wound in Tony’s face, the Chitauri dragged the knife down, splitting apart Tony’s skin. Then, with its fingers, the Chitauri prodded into the cut, making it wider.

Tony’s breathing became frantic. He could feel the fingers of the alien inside his cheek, pressing and prodding.

As the Chitauri drew its fingers back, now covered in Tony’s blood, it pressed the tips of its fingers to their prisoner’s lips. Tony could taste his own blood on his lips and he tried to wrench his head away, but the grip didn’t loosen.

The fingers trailed down from his lips, onto his chin and then onto his throat, travelling over his jugular vein.

Then the knife was pressed into his right cheek digging in, splitting the skin, causing blood to trickle down his cheek. Once again he felt fingers digging into the wound, spreading open the wound.

“No… no…” he whimpered.

The Chitauri holding his head still, hissed in his ear. “Tell us… your… name…”

Vehemently, Tony closed his mouth. He wouldn’t answer… he just couldn’t.
The finger dug in further in the wound and Tony let out a piercing scream of pain, as its claws seared away at the muscle underneath the skin. Finally, the finger was pulled out, covered in blood, dripping onto his face.

The hand descended onto his throat, tracing the blood onto his skin. Then the clawed hand grasped his throat, cutting off his air, squeezing tightly, as Tony struggled.

He felt his vision disorientating, his ability to see rapidly disappearing as his brain was starved of oxygen.

His whole body stung and his cheeks felt like they’d been torn to pieces. He knew this was only the beginning. He wasn’t going to give in.

He coughed, choking and the grip on his throat tightened.

The Chitauri that gripped his neck leaned in closer to his ear. “You will tell us everything…”

Tony tried to swallow but couldn’t. He managed a single word before darkness claimed him. “N… o….”

To be continued…
Please let me know what you think!

Chapter End Notes

So, it begins.

Tony is in a rather difficult position at the moment. They want his name and he doesn’t want to give it. He’s putting himself in pain just to protect himself. They also want to know about the arc reactor too. But Tony has other information they are after and could extract from him. He is also very defiant, even though he is terrified of his situation.

More will be posted next week :(
Chapter Summary

The Other experiments on Tony's Arc Reactor...

Chapter Notes

WARNING

There is touching of exposed organs. Please be aware of this when reading this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Part Two
The Breaking of Tony Stark

Chapter Two
Experimentation

They tortured him for hours every day until he blacked out. They persisted with one question only: “What is your name?”

Tony always refused to answer. He never said a word.

He tried so hard not to scream but they were quite imaginative with what they tried. It was always a group of Chitauri: different ones each day that inflicted pain upon him.

Tony’s body hurt all over.

And he was still naked.

God, he missed his wardrobe. Just a pair of pants would have been nice.

As he woke once more from slumber he expected to find himself surrounded. The surprise was, was that he wasn’t. Tony was alone.

How long have I been here?

Tony had long since lost track of time. It felt like he’d been here weeks at least but without knowing whether they had day and night cycles, Tony was unable to judge exactly how long it had been since he had flown through the portal and right into their grasp. As well as the continuing torture, they didn’t feed him either but kept him hydrated by dabbing a wet cloth on his lips every so often and every few days gave him a cup to drink from. It didn’t really help his thirst but it ensured he continued to survive.

I wonder if I will ever see food again? God I want a cheeseburger.
Tony longed for his favourite takeaway food; a good old American cheese burger. As he lay on the table, his stomach grumbled. He was in pain from never-ending hunger. On a semi-regular basis – Tony calculated about once a week – a group of Chitauri would free him from the table he was chained to, force him to shower, and then manipulate his arms and legs to avoid muscle wastage, getting him to walk around a small section of the ship to keep his strength up. He didn’t have enough strength to fight back whenever they did this. The first time he had attempted it, he’d been sorely punished for disobedience. He’d learned to value the time they allowed him off the table. It allowed him to renew his mental strength preventing him from falling apart the next time they tortured him.

He had lost weight though. If he ever saw himself in the mirror again, he was sure he wouldn’t be able to recognise himself.

Then he heard footsteps outside his cell and the door swung open.

Tony braced himself for the group of Chitauri to surround him and begin making him scream and bleed. He was, however, surprised when the Other appeared in his vision.

Worry instantly filled his gut, killing any hunger Tony may have had.

The Other reached out and patted Tony’s hair, stroking it as if he was a prized pet (though to be fair he probably was).

“Do you know how long you have been in our care, human?” the Other asked, dragging his fingers down Tony’s face.

He wouldn’t answer. Tony made no movement to indicate he had heard. It probably wasn’t a wise idea to antagonise him.

A hand grasped his chin tightly, twisting his head around so he was forced to look into the hood of the Other, into the dark, shining eyes of his captor.

“In your Earth time, you’ve been in our tender care for three months.”

Tony tried not to feel fear or react to the comment. The hand squeezed his chin.

“You are being brought before Thanos, the Dark Lord, who desires information from you. It would be wise if you told us before you are brought before him. If you think you have known pain thus far then you are sorely mistaken,” the Other hissed menacingly. “We are taking our journey slow to give you the chance to save yourself… Now… do yourself a favour and tell us your name!” The Other released Tony’s chin.

Tony glared at his captor. Mustering what he could, Tony spat at the Other. “Fuck off.”

“Insolent human!” the Other raged. “There is no harm in a name!”

“Yes… there is!” answered Tony. Angering the Other further seemed to be the only thing he was good at. It wasn’t like he had anything better to do.

“Then tell me why your name will harm you?” the Other asked, curving its fingers around Tony’s face.

Tony kept his lips shut. He wasn’t even going to dignify the Other with a response.

“You don’t know why, do you?” the Other purred.
The hand moved down to Tony’s chest, where the arc reactor was embedded in his chest.

“What is this piece of metal in your chest?”

It was a new question. Tony felt weary. “Just decoration,” he managed. He was certain his captor wouldn’t believe him.

“Then you won’t mind if I remove you of it.” The Other reached forward to grasp the reactor.

“No!” Tony shouted.

The Other’s carefully hidden eyes peered out from under its hood, watching Tony’s expressions change from stubbornness to fear and back to stubbornness again. “Why shouldn’t I remove it if it is just a decoration? You have no need for items of pleasure. You won’t need them again.” The Other leaned in close.

“Your breath stinks,” muttered Tony, trying to turn his head away but the grip on his chin was too tight.

The Other moved fast, its hand grasping the Arc Reactor.

Tony felt a tug and the Arc Reactor was twisted in his chest. “No!”

“Your name first,” the Other hissed.

It was still powering the magnetic field in his chest but if the Other lifted it out, the pieces of shrapnel would begin moving towards his heart. His heart would be shredded and he would die.

A part of him did want to die. After all, he was never getting back home again. He was trapped here. Having the Arc Reactor removed would be one sure way to kill him. It would be painful but it would be over soon… The thought was tempting.

“No.” Tony valiantly denied the Other the information he needed. *Bye Pepper. I love you.*

The Other pulled the Arc Reactor out of his chest.

One hand was still on his chin, and Tony closed his eyes. His chest hurt, throbbing and aching all at once. He knew the pieces were beginning to move forward, to sink in towards his heart, getting ready to pierce the chambers, and take his life…

And that was when a metallic voice sounded in the room jerking Tony’s eyes open in horror.

“WARNING: CARDIAC ARREST IMMINENT!”

The Other pierced Tony with an arresting gaze and he shoved the Reactor back into Tony’s chest, twisting it back in place.

*Damn it!* Tony cursed in his own mind.

The Other’s hand moved from Tony’s chest to his neck, squeezing. “Did you really think we didn’t have ways of monitoring you in here?”

Tony couldn’t reply. The metallic hand of the six-fingered Other was practically cutting off his air.

“You belong to our Master, human. You will only die when he wishes it!” The hand squeezed tighter on Tony’s neck. “We can take you as close to death as possible, especially with monitoring in
Tony whimpered as the Other squeezed his throat tighter. Spots danced in his vision. They didn’t want him to die but they were doing a damn good job of making him feel like they were going to kill him.

The Other released his throat and Tony coughed, gulping in air, moving his body as much as possible within the chains holding him in place.

“I know you will not answer us…” The Other’s hand curled around Tony’s chin, forcing his prisoner to look at him. “But I think I know what the device in your chest does. After all… no human has one… You are unique…”

Tony swallowed, the fear settling in the pit of his stomach.

The Other’s hand moved to the Arc Reactor again, gently caressing it. “If you are unwilling to say I will have to experiment…”

Tony stiffened.

The Other noticed. “You’re frightened. Why not tell me the truth of this device?”

Tony looked away, refusing to speak.

The Other wasted no time in twisting the Arc Reactor, causing Tony to buckle in the chains. Lifting it out of its casing, the Other turned the device over in his hands to examine it. Tony lay there in intense agony as his chest screamed at him through the pain.

It started as pinpricks before it spread across his chest and down his back. His heart beat increased and then decreased as the part of the Arc Reactor acting as a pacemaker was withdrawn. Burning pain in the centre of his chest… He was struggling to breathe.

Tony whimpered.

The Other’s fingers were at the hole in his chest. “I could touch your heart, human… You are so vulnerable to me like this.” The fingers prodded along the lining.

Tony twisted his head from side to side. He could feel the Other’s fingers inside his chest, sliding closer to his fluttering heart. “No… No…!”

His chest was hurting. His breath hard to come by… Where was the voice that alerted the Other to Tony’s imminent death?

Then…

“WARNING: CARDIAC ARREST IMMINENT!”

The Arc Reactor was placed back inside his chest, restoring his heart to a normal rhythm. The aches in his chest reduced until they were completely gone. Tony lay there, gasping for air, trying to steady his breathing as the Other watched him, fascinated by his prisoner’s weakness.

“We could do this all day,” suggested the Other, stroking Tony’s face.

Tony whimpered. He didn’t want to. He really didn’t want to.

“All we require is a name… Just one name.” The Other’s voice was seductive and suggestive. Tony
nearly gave in.

But he didn’t.

“No…” he whispered in return, sounding weak. He didn’t care. He just couldn’t give in.

The Arc Reactor was taken out for a third time.

And the cycle repeated itself.

By the time the Other had experimented removing the Arc Reactor for a further five times, Tony was at his wits end. The Other was fascinated by how removing the Reactor caused Tony’s body to fail. The handy sensor in the room that alerted his captors to whenever he was close to death prevented them from letting him slide too far from them.

His chest was in constant agony and his breathing was irregular, despite his heart being paced by the pacemaker. The effects of having it removed quickly one after the other was taking its toll on him.

Tony was moaning from exhaustion. He had tried to fight back but the bonds keeping him tied to the table were unbreakable.

Sweat adorned his face and Tony knew he couldn’t keep this up much longer. He felt weak and tired. Repeated attempts of having the arc removed was surely going to kill him eventually. There was only so much trauma his body could take.

The six-fingered hand moved to hover over the Arc Reactor once again, gently stroking it. “This truly is a fascinating object… Its power feels different… We could scan you and find out exactly what causes your heart to fail when I remove this device.” The hand moved to Tony’s scarred cheek. “However it would be easier for you to tell us. Either way we are going to find out.”

Tony pressed his lips together. No, he wouldn’t. He couldn’t.

“Or your name would suffice.”

Tony turned his head away. Refusal was the only thing he had left to use. His defiance kept him strong but he knew his will to stay strong was crumbling with each passing moment. The reasonable part of his brain was already arguing with him about his decision to keep on resisting.

The Arc Reactor was removed once again.

Tony’s heart became irregular and he started to shake as pain blossomed across his chest. He struggled to draw breath whilst lying on his back. It was becoming quicker and quicker each time before the Arc Reactor needed to be reinstalled. The Other’s finger was tracing the metal inside his chest, slowly moving down towards his struggling, but still beating heart.

“No…” Tony whimpered.

The Other paused in its movements, watching his prisoner carefully. Then he proceeded to trace his finger further into Tony’s body, getting closer to his heart.

The warning came again, prompting the need to return the Arc Reactor to its casing. Tony wasn’t given long to recover before it was removed again and the Other’s hand was once again inside his chest, tracing the inside of the casing.
And then Tony felt it.

A finger brushed his heart, as it continued to flutter, first faster and then slower and faster again.

Fear flooded within him and Tony closed his eyes. He couldn’t do it. He just couldn’t…

The finger seemed to press deeper into the surface of the organ and Tony felt his heart flutter. He felt sick to the stomach and tears leaked out of his eyes.

“WARNING: CARDIAC ARREST IMMINENT!”

The Other withdraw his hand and replaced the Arc Reactor.

Tears were streaking down Tony’s cheeks. He didn’t care now. He felt violated. He couldn’t get the feeling out of his chest of the fingers touching his heart.

“You liked it when I touched your heart, didn’t you?” the Other whispered, close to Tony’s ear. “Would you like me to continue?”

Tony just continued to sob. He was lost in the horror of what was being done to him. Of the methods they used and how far they were willing to go to get him to talk.

The hand descended again, twisting the Arc Reactor out of its casing, removing it. The fingers were inside, tracing the edges of the metal casing inside, slowly descending towards his heart once more.

“Tony!”

The Other paused in its movements, glancing at his prisoners tear-stained and fearful face. “What did you say, human?”

Tony laid there, his eyes fogged over from tears. He couldn’t… but he’d already said it…

The hand continued to move down the casing.

“Tony Stark!”

The Other stopped. “Say it again.”

Tony blinked his tears away, struggling to breathe. “Tony Stark.” He turned his head away, shame roaring through him. “My name is Tony Stark.”

The hand was removed and the Arc Reactor returned to its place inside his chest.

The Other leaned in close to Tony’s face, gripping his chin tightly in three of its fingers. “Tony… Stark…”

Tony shivered at his name being spoken by the Other. It felt wrong and it frightened him.

“That wasn’t so hard was it?” The Other caressed his face. “Now, perhaps you have told us your name, you will tell me more about this device in your chest… Or will I have to touch your heart again?”

Tony stilled; his breathing heavy as he watched the Other’s hand touch the Reactor again. He couldn’t do it, not anymore. Not if they threatened him with this each time they wanted something. It was his breaking point. “No… don’t.”
“Then tell me…” the Other urged. “Or I will feel your heart flutter underneath my fingers again.”

Tony closed his eyes. He never wanted to feel the Other’s fingers on his heart again. But he knew if he didn’t speak then he’d have no choice in the matter. Fighting back the urge to vomit at his cowardliness, Tony let himself speak, breaking that tiny bit more as he revealed the secret behind his Arc Reactor.

“It keeps me alive…” Tony turned his head away. He didn’t want to see the monster forcing him to speak. “There are pieces of metal close to my heart. The Arc Reactor prevents them from moving forward and piercing it. It’s too dangerous to remove the pieces. The Arc Reactor also acts as a pacemaker to keep my heart in rhythm.” He swallowed, still feeling sick to the stomach. He’d just betrayed himself. “There. Now you know.” He felt tears welling up in his eyes again.

He couldn’t cry. He couldn’t… but Tony did.

The Other moved away from him, finally lifting his hand away from Tony’s chest. “This has been a very enlightening experience. Thank you, Tony, for being co-operative.”

Tony felt the chains on his hands and ankles loosen. Surprised, he found the Other had released him from the chains that had strapped him down to the table. Feeling weak and utterly mortified over what he’d done, Tony barely moved, just continued to breathe as tears continued to slide from his eyes.

“We will return for more questions soon…” announced the Other. “As a reward for your co-operation, you have been released from your chains. Use the time wisely to rest, Tony Stark. This is only the beginning of your torment.”

Tony heard the door to his cell open and the Other left, leaving Tony laying on the table, cold and naked, but with his arms and legs free.

Now he was alone, the tears came freely and he wailed out-loud. Not caring that they were monitoring him, probably watching him right now. He turned to the side, finally rolling, into a protective ball. His arms wrapped around his chest, with his left hand touching his Arc Reactor.

“There’s no point…” he muttered to himself. “Even if I could…”

He could end this by removing the Arc Reactor but Tony was sure they’d stop him if he even tried. He expected there would be guards nearby who were on duty who could respond to the monitoring system if Tony was close to death. They’d chain him again and he didn’t want that.

Realisation struck that he was in a dead end. He could do nothing to help himself apart from lie there and wait for the Other’s return.

He lay in his cell, curled up in a ball upon the flat surface he had been chained upon, and waited for the pain to begin again.

To be continued
touching Tony's heart. Not entirely sure how realistic that is, or if its even touchable through the arc reactor but I really wanted to terrify Tony so I hope this works.

There is worse still to come but it is necessary to show Tony's torment. Hopefully everyone sticks with this story until we get past this and onto the next part of the fic.
Part 2: Chapter 3 - Reality or Nightmares?

Chapter Summary

Tony suffers the consequences of trying to escape his captors...

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Physical and mental torture is present within this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Part Two
The Breaking of Tony Stark

Chapter Three
Reality or Nightmares?

Tony slept. He didn’t know how he did but being unchained helped him fall into an uneasy sleep. He kept waking up, screaming in fear as his dreams descended into reliving his torture at the hands of the Other. He kept running over what had happened. He still felt ashamed of himself, of what he had revealed. He’d had no choice. Never again did he want anyone to touch his heart.

When he did finally wake, Tony didn’t know how long he’d been left alone but he did feel somewhat refreshed, despite shivering slightly. He was always cold. They warmed him enough to keep him alive. He noticed on the floor by the door to his cell was a bowl as he cast his gaze around.

“That’s new…” he muttered. They’d never left something in his cell before. But then again, they had never left him in the cell on his own without the chains on. It worried him. What were they up to? Were they ‘rewarding’ him for his good behaviour in finally telling them his name?

He was thirsty, his throat parched.

His whole body ached and he wasn’t sure if he would be able to walk or not.

Gripping the side of the table he lay upon on, Tony slowly rolled off of it, placing his feet carefully on the cold metal floor. Beneath his feet he could feel the hum of the engines. Using the table as a support, Tony slowly began to make his way around towards the door, moving inch by inch, noticing that his legs were wobbly and quite unsteady. He probably wouldn’t be able to make it to the door without falling over.

As he rounded the table so he stood with his back against the table, looking at the door in front of him, Tony steeled himself. He was going to fall he knew it… He lunged off from the side of the table towards the door.

His legs nearly crumbled and he landed on the door, and was surprised when it flew open. He grabbed the edges of the door as it opened, steadying himself.
“What?”

Tony’s grip on the door remained and he looked into the room where he was usually taken for his showers and walks when the Chitauri came to exercise him. What he found surprising was that he was alone.

And the door on the other side of the room was open.

Don’t do it! It’s trap! His mind screamed at him to ignore it. To stay where he was. But he wasn’t safe in his cell. He was too weak to fight if he was caught but he had a chance…

I can’t not try…

He was probably dooming himself to intense and horrible torture if he was caught but Tony knew he would never be able to forgive himself if he didn’t try when the opportunity had so kindly presented itself. It was a trap, he was sure of it…

Stumbling to his feet, Tony pushed himself across the room to the other open door. He fell a few times to his knees, taking in deep, steadying breaths as he did so. He felt weak and dizzy. He hadn’t moved so much in ages. Determination roared through him as Tony pushed himself through the other door and out into a dimly lit corridor.

He was surrounded by glass panes that showed the stars moving around him. He didn’t recognise any of them. He was so far from home. He almost collapsed in grief. Even if he did escape he wouldn’t know where to go or what direction to go in. He placed his hands against the panes of glass, pressing his nose against them.

I’m so far from home…

He longed to see the Earth again. He felt wetness in his eyes.

God damn it, Tony.

Pepper’s face came into his mind. He wondered what she was doing, if she had recovered from his untimely death. As far as anyone would have known, he’d have died in his trip through the wormhole. He didn’t blame anyone for not rescuing him. They hadn’t known. How could they when they were back on Earth and he had flown straight through a space portal and not returned?

Knowing he couldn’t risk staying here for too long, Tony slowly made his way down the corridor, his legs aching but managing to support himself, despite the feeling of his muscles wanting to seize up. He was very thin. The little exercise he had weekly wasn’t enough to help him get through this.

He reached the door at the end of the corridor. It didn’t open as he reached it. He collapsed to the metal grating, leaning his back against it, trying to regain his breath. He closed his eyes, resting his head back, trying to calm his breathing. Looking to the right, Tony focused upon a control panel.

Hauling himself up, he reached for the control panel, noticing the three knobs that were situated there. They were all switched to the left. He didn’t even know what they did but common sense probably indicated they were in the off position. The door wouldn’t open, so, taking a gamble, Tony turned all the knobs to the right.

The door slid open and he fell through, landing on his stomach on the metal grating. He was losing his strength.

I’m not going to give up!
Slowly he crawled forward, feeling the loss of his strength as it fled from him. He couldn’t… Why had he even tried?

Because I want to go home. He missed home so very much. I would do anything to see it again.

Finally he slumped on his tummy, out of breath and exhausted from his efforts to escape. As he lay on the floor, Tony turned his head around and found to his horror, a pair of black thickset boots right in front of him.

Fuck.

He raised his head and saw the Other looking down upon him, arms folded across his chest.

“Well, well… what do we have here?”

Tony whimpered as the booted foot pushed him onto his back.

“Surely you realised it was a trap?” the Other asked. “Leaving the door unlocked and the other one open?”

Tony turned his head away. The Other already knew the answer. There was no point in confirming it.

Shadows fell over him and Tony risked a glance to see several Chitauri warriors standing above him.

“Make him kneel,” the Other instructed harshly.

Two grabbed his arms and hauled him upright, whilst another two grabbed his legs, forcing him to bend them so he now sat forward on his knees, with his chest bowed forward. One held his head down harshly.

Tony’s breathing quickened as he heard the Other’s next instructions.

“Punish him.”

Tony saw something being loosened to the right of him. A long piece of leather.

Oh god.

He saw the shadow of an arm raise and then he screamed as the whip came down hard on his back, stripping away the flesh in one swift motion. Blood bubbled to the surface and he could feel it trickle down his skin. But he didn’t have time to recover as another hot sting fell across his flesh.

Tony screamed again and again as the leather descended, scattering his blood everywhere, even splashing against the walls of the corridor he was being held in.

He began to feel dizzy. His vision blurred as he blinked away tears at the corner of his eyes. His arms were wrenched apart and the whip came down upon them, tearing away flesh, exposing the muscle underneath.

He lost count how many times they hit him. It must have been more than ten. Tony was near conscious when the Other yanked his head up by his hair.

“This is the price you pay for your attempted escape, Tony!”

The Other pushed Tony back hard and he landed on his back, hitting his head on the metal grating.
The welts burned. The pain was too much and Tony felt blackness descend as he was lost to the conscious world.

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He woke screaming as pain ran up his back as he was pushed into a hard metal chair. His wrists were placed on the arms, with metal cuffs holding them in place. His ankles were cuffed to the legs and his head leaned back against the head rest. He tried to move his head forward but a neck cuff was strapped over his throat, forcing his head in place, giving him just enough room to breathe.

Tony saw himself in the mirror ahead of him. He couldn’t recognise himself.

His hair had grown, falling messily around his face and his fringe was settling just above his eyes. His goatee was no longer a goatee, just a mess of hair that covered the lower half of his face. His eyes were dull from the pain wracking his body.

What drew his attention away from his appearance was the large helmet situated just above his head. Scattered around the helmet, were ten holes. Tony didn’t want to know what they were for but he knew he was going to find out.

The Other stepped in front of his vision. “I thought it would best for you to see what you have brought upon yourself for once, Tony. This is your hell, now you live it, until you give us what we want.”

Tony found his tongue. He didn’t even want to know what else they still wanted from him, yet he had to ask. “What… do you want?” he managed.

A six-fingered hand stroked his cheek. “Everything you know about the defences of Earth. You were a line of defence we had not foreseen. You will tell us every little secret that is in your head. And when you have betrayed your planet, you will serve us, standing alongside Thanos as one of his enforcers.”

Tony’s eyes widened. They wanted him to fight for them? “No.”

A hand touched the arc reactor shining in his chest. “I’m sure it would be easy to convince you if I kept touching your heart…”

Shivering, Tony closed his eyes. Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it. It was a mantra he would always tell himself in years to come.

“But I do not want you to break so easily over a threat…” the Other said. “Your heart is safe from my touch for now. There are plenty of other ways to break you. And we have all the time in the universe. No one is coming for you.”

That part was true. He was all alone here with nothing but this creature to torment him.

“As further punishment for your disobedience, you will spend your time here, in this chair. You will not know whether you are in reality or nightmares… for everything you see and experience from now on you will not be able to determine if it is true or false.” The Other circled around Tony like a predator.

The helmet was lowered; Tony watched it descend in the mirror until it was resting on his head. Metal clamps came down and held his face still. Then, another device came down from the ceiling, circling his head until it was lined up with the holes in the helmet.
He saw with fear and revulsion that the second contraption was filled with needles. Thick and sharp, gleaming brightly in the dimly lit room, they lined up with the holes in the helmet.

“Sweet dreams, Tony,” the Other laughed.

Tony screamed as the needles pushed through and into his skull, pushing through the bone and directly into his brain.

Unconsciousness claimed him instantly.

- - - - -

He was back in Malibu at his mansion. It was dark outside and Tony was walking through the living room when he heard a phone ringing. He found it underneath the cushions on the settee and brought it up to his ear and was about to say something when he went limp, his whole body going still and heavy, as if he had been paralysed.

Someone was holding onto the back of his head, lowering him down onto the chair, telling him to breathe.

Shock coursed through Tony as he lost the ability to articulate his limbs, well aware it was Obadiah who had hold of his head and was gently lowering him down.

“Easy… easy…” Obadiah leaned over him, holding a device up to his eyes. “You remember this one, right? It’s a shame the government didn’t approve. There are so many applications regarding short-term paralysis.” Stane grabbed his face, turning it so he was looking up into his eyes. Stane removed his earpieces, so they wouldn’t be disturbed. “When I ordered the hit on you, I was worried I was killing the golden goose.”

A metal device, a clamp attached to his chest, through the fabric of the shirt he was wearing. Stane twisted the device, loosening the Arc Reactor from its cavity. “But, you see… it was just fate that you survived it…” He lifted out the Arc Reactor, the wire still attached to Tony’s chest, “…leaving one last golden egg to give.” Stane leaned over him. “You really think that just because you have an idea, it belongs to you? Your father, he helped to give us the atomic bomb. Now what kind of world would it be today if he was as selfish as you?”

Stane yanked the Arc Reactor out. Tony’s body jerked and he let out a strangled breath as his body fought to carry on living.

Inspecting the device, Stane sat beside Tony and started to pack it into a suitcase. “Oh, it’s beautiful. Ah, Tony... This is your Ninth Symphony. What a masterpiece! Look at that. This is your legacy. The generation of weapons... with this at its heart. The weapons that will help you stir the world back on course. With the balance of power in our hands. In the right hands... I wish you could see my prototype. It’s not as... not as conservative as yours.” Stane rose from the chair. “Too bad you had to involve Pepper in this. I would’ve preferred that she lived.”

What should have happened next didn’t happen. Even in his unconsciousness state, Tony was aware something was not right.

Obadiah didn’t leave. He turned back towards Tony.

Obadiah leaned down, close to Tony’s face. “I cannot have you recovering enough to stop me... Tony.”

Something sharp pressed against his crotch.
If Tony could move he knew he would find a knife pressed against the area. It was slowly dragged up to where the Arc Reactor once rested. All there was, was a hole in his chest and the knife circled the exposed flesh. Obadiah looked at him full in the face. “A shame I have to do this... Easy access and all.”

The last thing Tony saw was Obadiah’s hand jerking forward, a sharp knife piercing through the flesh of his heart –

Tony writhed in the nightmare he was reliving over and over. He struggled in the tight bonds, unable to wake, forced to see Obadiah stab himself repeatedly in the heart…

Again and again.

Then, the memory changed to something different.

He was in the Iron Man suit, flying at speed towards Stark Industries to stop Stane from killing Pepper. He didn’t care he was using a lot of power to get the suit there. There was only one single thought in his mind: Save Pepper. If he didn’t he wouldn’t be able to forgive himself.

Tony pressed the suit harder, seeing ahead of him, Stane pointing a machine gun at Pepper.

“STANE!” Tony roared out-loud as he soared towards his rival but Obadiah lifted his left arm and without even looking fired a missile right at Tony, who managed to dodge at the last minute, but the distraction was enough.

He heard Pepper’s yell and then silence.

“No!”

Bullets upon bullets had been laid into Pepper’s body at short range. Blood pooled from the wounds and she was limp on the floor, her face, chest and abdomen completely mangled from the force of the close-range machine gun Stane had used on her.

No... He knew this was wrong.

Pepper hadn’t died. He’d saved her.

The altered memory kept burning through his mind, over and over again until he started to doubt his own memory of the event. Had Pepper really died? Had he lost her then? Lost in the darkness, Tony started to thrash, unknowingly pulling at the restraints binding him to the chair.

Pepper was dead. She was dead...

He’d failed her.

No...

And then the memory changed to a different one.

He was in Monaco, on the race track where he had replaced his own driver, simply because he was Tony Stark and could do what he wanted. But he was lying on the floor, injured from the crash of the car he’d been in. His back was to Vanko who was walking slowly towards him, whipping his electrical whips around his body in circles, marking the road upon which he walked.

As Vanko neared him, close enough to scorch him with the whips, Tony leapt to his feet and
scrambled out the way as one of the whips landed on the race car which was leaking petrol. An explosion rent the air and Tony held his arms up to his face to protect himself, even as he stumbled back away from the flaming wreckage.

Vanko was walking slowly towards him. Tony flapped out a fire that had attacked his arm, noticing the black car coming up fast behind Vanko.

Happy drove straight into Vanko, knocking him over and pushing him against the fence as Tony leapt up high to avoid getting crushed himself.

Tony leapt down as Happy asked. “Are you okay?”

“Were you heading for me or him?” Tony accused. “Cause I can’t tell!”

“I was trying to scare him!” Happy retorted.

Pepper was yelling at him through the window, her cheeks flushed red in anger. “Are you out of your mind?”

“Better security!” Tony started to say.

“Get in the car right now!” Pepper continued to shout.

Tony yelled back. “I was attacked! We need better security!”

Happy shouted to him out the window. “Get in the car!”

Tony started to move around the car to the other side. “You’re CEO. Better security measures. God, it’s embarrassing.” He grabbed the door and opened it. “First vacation in two years.” He was about to get in when one of the electric whips cut the door in half.

Vanko was awake and still fighting.

Happy reversed the car and slammed on the accelerator, hitting Vanko again and again. “I got him!”

“Hit him again! Hit him again!” Tony instructed, trying to reach into grab the suitcase that held an Iron Man suit.

What was supposed to happen next didn’t.

Even in his unconscious state, Tony hated what he was going to see altered. He could still see his own death at the hands of Stane and Pepper’s as well. It felt so real.

The car was sliced in half by Vanko’s whips. Tony tried to reach across again, only having to duck backwards as the whip came down, slicing through Pepper’s arms as they held the case out to him. Her limbs fell to the floor, blood gouging from the wounds, her screaming intensifying.

“Pepper?” Happy yelled, peering round his seat to see his boss armless at the elbows.

“Pepper! NO!” Tony dived forward again but had to leap back as another whip came for him.

But Happy didn’t move in time.

The whip came down, slicing through his shoulder, down through the chest and into the abdomen, still sliding through flesh, muscles and bone as Vanko tore the whip back.
One half of Happy’s body fell back into what remained of the car and the other fell to the ground, the stench of burned flesh burning in the air.

Tony’s legs felt like jelly as he saw the devastation around him. “No…”

It wasn’t real. It hadn’t happened.

Pepper still had both arms and Happy was alive.

Right?

Tony felt the images merging into his brain, repeating itself again and again and again until it was fully burned into his memories. He’d killed everyone he cared for.

No… I didn’t… This didn’t happen! Tony yelled in his brain, denying it even more.

Then, the memory changed again.

“I’m only gonna say this once. GET OUT!” The helmet slid down Rhodey’s face. He pointed at Tony who was completely drunk in the suit. Walking forward, Rhodey demanded: “You don’t deserve to wear one of these. Shut it down!”

Rhodey had taken the MARK II from Tony’s workshop downstairs.

Tony merely turned around and spoke into the microphone he still held. “Goldstein.”

A man appeared from behind the DJ table, looking flustered but managed to compose himself to answer. “Yes Mr Stark?”

“Give me a phat beat to beat my buddy’s ass to.” Tony started to laugh as music began to beat around them. He was grabbed from behind by Rhodey.

“I told you to shut it down!” ordered Rhodey.

Tony just fired his thrusters and shot backwards, sending both of them through the wall and a glass panel. Rhodey landed awkwardly but Tony flipped over backwards, firing his thrusters behind him to stop himself from going over like Rhodey had done. Tony began to walk away, hoping Rhodey had got the message not to mess with him. “Now, put that thing back where you found it before someone gets hurt.”

Something hit him in the back of the head. Of course Rhodey wasn’t going to give up.

“Really?” Tony picked up the weights beside him and swung them at Rhodey who had a smaller set of weights. He hit him hard in the face, sending him flying back into the wrestling ring and out of it, hitting the wall, landing awkwardly on his face. Tony floated over to him using his thrusters. “Sorry, pal, but Iron Man doesn’t have a sidekick.”

Grabbing a pipe, Rhodey swung it at Tony, hitting him several times as Tony desperately tried to get hold of it. “Sidekick this!” Rhodey launched Tony through the ceiling, causing Tony to land on his back in the room above. Rhodey flew up to join him. “Had enough?”

Tony launched back at Rhodey, hitting him hard with his metal fists, kicking and dodging when he could. He flung Rhodey around the room, just as his friend did to him. The floor gave out beneath them and they tumbled down into the main reception area where Pepper had been herding all the guests.
“You want it? Take it!” Tony growled, getting angrier through his haze of being drunk.

Rhodey tried to grab for Tony but he launched a fist attack at him, catching Rhodey off guard. Taking advantage, Tony tossed Rhodey around, caught the back of his neck and slammed Rhodey down hard on the piano which shattered beneath the armour. Rhodey went limp beneath Tony’s fingers. Tony turned and saw the spectators watching.

Anger washed through him and he roared at them. They started to run and as the last bystander left, Tony was grabbed from behind by Rhodey, being hit hard and launched into the burning fireplace.

The fire didn’t affect the suit yet it still made Tony angrier. He got to his feet and raised his right hand, pointing it palm first straight at his friend.

“Put your hand down.”

“You think you got what it takes to wear that suit?” sneered Tony.

“We don’t have to do this, Tony.”

Tony ignored him. He didn’t care. He was too drunk and angry to listen to reason. “You wanna be the War Machine, take your shot!”

“Put it down!” Rhodey warned him again.

“You gonna take a shot?”

“Put it down!” Rhodey was determined to see this through.

“No!” This was only going to end when Tony won.

“Drop it, Tony!” ordered Rhodey.

“Take it!” Tony yelled and his palm lit up at the same time as Rhodey’s.

They both shot at the same time, a fireball meeting in mid-air. The light blinded both of them and Tony felt himself being flung back, hitting the wall hard. He didn’t see what had happened to Rhodey.

In his dream-like state, Tony knew Rhodey had taken the suit then to his superiors in the US Army but like the other memories before, it changed.

When Tony recovered enough to get to his feet, he lifted up the helmet and looked around at the devastation surrounding him. He felt guilty. Where was Rhodey? Had he taken the suit or not?

It was then he noticed a large hole in his balcony wall which looked like someone had crashed through it. As he stumbled towards it, he found the faceplate belonging to the Mark II resting on the floor, ruined beyond repair.

Panic started to set in.

Reaching the balcony, Tony peered over the side and saw Rhodey’s body, still in the Mark II suit lying awkwardly on the rocks below but then it started to slide down.

“NO!” He tried to fire his thrusters. They didn’t work.

Rhodey’s body tumbled further down the cliff edge and he saw the faceplate was off… and his friend
was unconscious. Rhodey was about to drown…

Tony could only watch helpless, unable to get the suit working sufficiently enough, to be able to save his friend in time.

Rhodey drowned over and over and over again until the memory was fully ingrained in Tony’s mind.

Tony wanted to wake up, he really did, but he couldn’t open his eyes. How much longer was this torment going to last for? The needles twisted in his head and he screamed, fighting to wake. They were keeping him under.

His mind brought up another memory. Dread settled in his stomach. He didn’t want to see… He really didn’t.

He was standing with Rhodey besides Vanko’s body. They had just defeated him after he had tried to kill Tony at the Stark Expo. He’d just died, telling them both they had lost. Tony was struggling to figure out how they had lost. When he saw the reactor in Vanko’s suit start to flash red, Tony realised he only had seconds to spare.

“All those drones are rigged to blow! We gotta get out of here man!”

But Tony had only one thought. “Pepper?” He fired his thrusters and took off, peering off to the right as Rhodey continued straight up. He was honing in on Pepper. Why would she stay until everyone was safe? She was a civilian too…

Tony pushed the suit hard, trying to reach her in time…

Tony, trapped in the feverish nightmare, already knew what was going to happen, what he would be forced to see over and over again.

He didn’t reach Pepper in time.
He saw just as he swooped in to save her, the drone that had laid a few steps from her explode in a bright flash. Tony heard a scream.

“PEPPER!”

Debris hit his suit and he went tumbling back, only righting his movement at the last minute. He landed through the smoke and saw –

Tony’s heart constricted. “Pepper…”

She was dead. Quite clearly so.

Pepper’s body was littered with blood. Her head was a bleeding mess where she had been flown back and hit the pavement. Part of her skull had shattered upon impact and as the bomb exploded, shards of metal had flown through her body. Her eyes were wide and lifeless. Dead to the world.

Tony stood, shocked and in pain. “Pepper…”

She couldn’t be dead… Couldn’t… He’d saved her… They’d kissed and got together… He’d saved her.

He kept repeating it over and over in his mind. What he saw wasn’t real. It didn’t change the fact he kept seeing Pepper’s dead and mangled body again and again and again… It was on a continuous
loop and Tony didn’t want to see anymore.

But he had no choice.

Tony found himself back in his tower in New York. Loki was there, walking towards him like a predator having just found his prey. He seemed to have entered this memory in the middle of the conversation where he had been goading Loki.

"-point. There’s no throne, there is no version of this, where you come out on top. Maybe your army comes and maybe it’s too much for us, but it’s all on you. Because if we can’t protect the Earth, you can be damned well sure we’ll avenge it." Tony was saying, sipping his drink as Loki approached him, raising the sceptre up between them.

“How will your friends have time for me, when they’re so busy fighting you?” Loki tapped Tony’s chest with the sceptre.

PING!

The god looked confused. “It should work.”

“Well, performance issues. You know…” Tony was cut off as Loki grabbed him by the throat and flung him across the room. He landed on the floor, close to the window, and struggled to get up as Loki’s hold on his throat had winded him.

But Loki didn’t grab him by the throat this time. Instead he grabbed his shirt and pushed Tony back away from the window.

A hand grabbed at his shirt again and ripped it off of his chest, leaving Tony’s chest bare and the arc reactor visible to his enemy.

“What is this device?” Loki traced the sceptre’s tip along it.

“Like hell I will tell you!” Tony wheezed.

Loki pressed a booted foot to his chest. “There are others ways to make you talk!” He moved the sceptre a few inches to the left so the sceptre touched bare skin instead. Blue mist emitted from the sceptre and drifted into Tony’s chest.

He felt darkness and a tightening on his body as something wound its way through his system. He could feel his body fighting the effects, could sense the Arc Reactor resisting the power. Yet it was no use. Tony lost almost all awareness of what was happening.

Loki had control of his body but his mind seemed to be protected by the power of the Arc in his chest. He couldn’t control his movements or what he said. He was a prisoner on the inside, watching as he was forced to do the god’s bidding.

Tony heard himself explain the Arc Reactor to Loki, trying to fight against the grip the god had on him. It was no use.

“Now that I know everything, you will do my bidding, Iron Man,” decreed Loki. “Suit up and delay and kill the Avengers.”

Tony obeyed.

JARVIS’s voice in his ear didn’t make any difference.
Tony watched from behind his eyes, trapped in his own mind, as he fought the Avengers, one by one.

He saw himself blast Clint in the stomach, snapping his bow and then stabbing him with one of his arrows.

He saw as he dropped Natasha from high in the sky, shattering her skull to pieces and watching in glee as her blood stained the road.

He fought Thor, only to position the God of Thunder in such a way that the Chitauri warriors could finish him off with ease, hacking his head from his neck with ease.

And finally, he watched as he took Steve by the legs and flew him through the wormhole in the sky, leaving him floating to death in space, as his body swelled and his lungs ruptured from the air being torn from his body due to the sudden change in atmosphere. Steve couldn’t breathe and his eyes boiled in seconds, as did his tongue.

Tony left his body to float in space as he fell back towards the portal where he would continue to help his Master take the Earth as his kingdom.

He was forced to watch all these scenarios again and again. Horror building inside his chest Tony begged to be lifted from his nightmare.

But it wasn’t to be.

The scene changed again, returning back to his conversation with Loki in Stark Tower but this time, after multiple viewings of the deaths of the Avengers at his hands, Tony wasn’t thrown away from the window.

Not at all.

“Well, performance issues. You know…” Tony was cut off as Loki grabbed him by the throat and flung him across the room. He landed on the floor, close to the window, and struggled to get up as Loki’s hold on his throat had winded him. “JARVIS. Anytime now.”

A hand seized his throat again and Loki dragged Tony towards the window.

Oh, he was totally seeing himself thrown out the window.

“You will all fall before me!” Loki declared before lifting Tony up by his throat and throwing him out of the window.

“Deploy! Deploy!” Tony yelled as he went crashing through the glass window, falling… falling…

Behind him he heard the sound of the suit being deployed but then, over the wind buffeting his body as he fell, he heard a shot from the sceptre and he saw the suit explode.

Oh shit…

He was going to die.

He fell faster and faster. He was going to hit the ground…

Pedestrians below him were watching him fall, pointing up and screaming.

He held his hands out in a desperate attempt to save himself but he was descending far too fast.
He closed his eyes and as his body slammed into the pavement –

Tony woke screaming as the needles pulled back from his brain, leaving him shuddering and sweating inside the chair, his chest heaving as he sought to regain some composure. The cuffs that had been holding him in place were no longer there. He didn’t feel like moving. He slumped back, eyes blurred with unshed tears, his mind filled with different memories and nightmares he had been forced to experience over and over.

The Other swept in front of him, patting his hair. “Did you enjoy that, Tony?”

Tony whimpered.

“I know I did… We saw everything you saw. When we return to Earth, Tony, and we will, I will personally hunt down and kill those you love. Perhaps I will even bring Pepper here… Wouldn’t you like to see her again?” The Other stroked Tony’s face.

He did want to see Pepper again but not like this. He tried to pull his face away from the Other but the alien grasped his chin, holding his head in place. Tony could only close his eyes. When he did close his eyes all he saw ingrained within them were the constant deaths of all those he had just been witnessing.

Wide and fearful he opened his eyes, not wanting to see it anymore.

“Have you got anything to tell us?” the Other asked quietly.

Tony swallowed. He wanted the pain to stop. It was a desire he wished so very much. Yet if he gave them what they wanted he would be betraying everyone he loved and cared for. The Earth that he had fought to protect would be destroyed and it would be his doing, even if he wasn’t the one physically giving the order. It was still the same principle.

“No…” he muttered.

The Other released his chin and Tony’s head fell to his chest.

He was so tired of it all.

“A pity you see it this way.” The Other moved away from him. “I will allow you to rest for now. You have been punished enough for your foolhardy escape attempt. Rest assured, Tony Stark, you are slowly breaking. You will tell us everything we need to know. You will serve us.”

Tony didn’t have the strength to deny the Other’s words. He stayed silent not wanting to think of the inevitable. He would fight for as long as he could.

He didn’t resist when the Chitauri came to drag him back to his cell.

They didn’t chain him back to the table either though they left the door to his cell open. He lay on the floor, on the other side of the cell, knowing they had left the door open deliberately.

They had truly broken him of his will to escape.

All he had left was the fear of more pain to come.

To be continued...

Please let me know what you think!
This was a very difficult chapter to write. I had to spend weeks going through the films and selecting relevant parts that could potentially be changed to show gruesome deaths for Tony and the people Tony cared about.

Once could argue why The Other just doesn't use this technology to get the information he wants from Tony... They have other uses for him so they do not wish to break him so easily by tearing his mind apart. If they do that, they could ruin him, thereby making him useless to them.

There may be some similarity here to elements from a fic written by Del Rion entitled 'Chitauri Apocolypse'. This story was inspired by it but anything that seems similar to it is unintentional as I spent several months trying to decide on exactly how Tony would suffer during his imprisonment. I needed a variety of different ways to showcase his struggle and I think as a result of that, some elements may feel familiar. :)

Chapter End Notes
Part 2: Chapter 4 - The Daughters of Thanos

Chapter Summary

Tony has a meeting with the Mad Titan and meets his Daughters...

Chapter Notes

My apologies in the delay in posting... I was working yesterday evening so I was unable to update. This chapter is long... 7000+ words.

As a result of the length of this chapter I will not be updating again until TUESDAY 13TH FEBRUARY. I am also rapidly closing the gap between what I have already prewritten and what I'm writing now so this little two-week gap between updates should help me get a few more chapters ahead. I do not want to catch up with myself in posting chapters as that will mean there could be month long delays until the next one is posted. I am trying to keep a weekly or fortnightly schedule for this fic :)

**WARNING: Organ touching and non-consensual kissing/touching is in this chapter.**

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Part Two
The Breaking of Tony Stark

Chapter Four
The Daughters of Thanos

Tony didn’t know how much time had passed since he’d been forced to witness alternative memories but in that time his captors had continued to torment him, trying to break down his will and force him to reveal everything he knew about Earth. The Other continued to torment him about capturing Pepper next time they were on Earth and forcing him watch them torture her. They had realised from his memories she was the most important person in his life and the one who would hurt him the most if they ever succeeded in hurting her.

Tony hadn’t been tied to the table since his escape, instead he was always dumped on the floor of his cell, the door remaining open but he never tried to leave. He knew what would happen if he did. What was the point in trying when he didn’t have the strength to escape? He was still too weak, unable to really fight back against them.

He spent a lot of his time crying himself to sleep when he wasn’t in pain. It was the only way he could cope with the circumstances he was in.

When he did sleep, however, all he experienced were nightmares. As a result he woke up feeling like
he’d never slept at all.

No part of his body was left untouched. He knew he was horribly scarred. His body’s ability to heal itself was forever undermined by the constant torture he was put through. When they came for him he never resisted, too scared of being thrust back into the horrible nightmarish landscape he had been forced to witness before. He just let them do what they wanted to him as he tried to protect his mind from breaking further.

He was aware months had passed since his capture but he wasn’t sure how many. He knew they were taking their time in taking him to their Master in the hope he would be broken before they arrived yet Tony was adamant he wouldn’t betray his home. He could betray himself but not his world. He just couldn’t.

A chill swept over him as he lay on the floor of his cell, curled up in a ball, trying to maintain some body heat. Tony reluctantly opened his eyes, aware it was likely they had come to take him away for further pain. His cell was the one place he could find solitude in. The one place he could let everything go.

What he saw, instead of the feet belonging to the Chitauri warriors, was the menacing boots belonging to the Other.

He hadn’t visited Tony in his cell for a long while, not since he had discovered the secret of the Arc Reactor.

The Other’s presence in his cell wasn’t a good sign.

What haven’t I done?

“You should be honoured, Tony,” the Other said quietly, frightening Tony by the softness of his voice. “We have arrived at our destination.”

Oh sh*t. Tony closed his eyes. He had known this was coming. He had dared to hope he might have died before they reached his final destination.

“You still have a chance to make the most sensible choice…” the Other enticed him quietly.

Tony blinked away a tear that had fallen from his right eye. It was so tempting. But if he did, they’d be able to use him against Earth. Staying strong, no matter how weak he felt now, would be the only thing saving him from becoming the killer to his own world. He stayed silent. He was scared if he said anything, his mouth would betray him.

“You are a fool, Tony Stark,” said the Other. “You will beg for death by the time our Master is through with you. He won’t give it to you.”

Tony lay there. He wasn’t going to say anything.

“You will walk.”

Tony didn’t fight the Chitauri warriors when they forced him to his knees and hoisted him to his feet. His legs were unsteady and he gritted his teeth as pain spread up them. In the time he had been kept mostly free from his chains, Tony had tried to exercise his legs and arms more but a lot of the time he was too exhausted and overcome with pain to try to help himself.

They kept his arms supported as he tripped and stumbled along, following the Other. Tony knew the warriors would just drag him along if he couldn’t walk.
If he was going from hell into the devil’s lair he wanted it to be under his own power rather than dragged by his captors. It would be so… demeaning to be dragged to a worse fate. At least if he tried to come in on under his own steam he wouldn’t feel so bad about it. Though if he had a choice, Tony would have preferred to stay with the Other. This Thanos he had heard talk of was one hundred times worse than whatever torture the Other could do to him.

Tony panted with effort as they forced him to walk. They reached a lift and he walked inside. They allowed him to kneel on the floor, resting his legs for a brief while as the lift descended.

“I had hoped to present my Master with something more than your name, Tony Stark,” said the Other.

Tony knew he shouldn’t say anything but the defiance roared through his chest so suddenly he couldn’t deny the chance to respond. “Should have touched my heart again then.”

The Other whirled on him so fast, the six-fingered metallic hand reaching for his throat and pushing him back against the wall of the lift. Squeezing tightly, the Other leaned in close to Tony’s ear, continuing to have a choke hold on his prisoner’s throat. “Don’t think I won’t take the opportunity to touch your heart, you snivelling piece of vermin.”

Tony was pulled forward and slammed back against the wall of the lift, his head hitting the side hard. He groaned, barely making a noise at the continued choke-hold.

The Other released Tony’s throat and growled at the two Chitauri warriors who had stood beside Tony. “Hold him down.”

Shit. Tony’s mind whirled. He should not have said that. He watched as the Other pressed a button on the panel beside the lift doors and the lift grounded to a halt. He tried to struggle but the Chitauri held him down firmly, pinning his arms up above his head as the Other approached, kneeling down to tenderly stroke the skin around the Arc Reactor.

The six-fingered hand grasped the Arc Reactor.

Tony’s eyes widened. Why had he said something so stupid?

A yank and the Other was twisting it out. “This device will surely fascinate Thanos… He may take it from you too…”

Tony’s chest hurt. He was far too terrified to speak. He tried to keep calm but could feel his heart speeding up as anxiety swept in.

The Other’s hand descended into his chest, scraping the side of the casing before two fingers pressed against his beating heart, stroking the organ as it erratically beat.

Tony gasped as his heart fluttered inside his chest. He wanted the Other’s hand out of him.

“Do you want me to stop, Tony Stark?” asked the Other as the fingers remained upon his heart.

Tony slowly nodded.

“Beg me.” The Other’s voice was vicious.

Tony didn’t want to beg. The sensation of the Other’s hand inside his chest, touching his heart, terrified him and it felt wrong on so many levels. He closed his eyes as a few tears leaked from the side of his eyes. He hated himself for what he was about to do but he couldn’t stand this.
Not anymore.

“Please… stop…”

What Tony could see of the Other’s face scared him. The expression was one of pure joy as he
watched his prisoner crumble before him.

The Other removed his hand from Tony’s chest and gently placed the Arc Reactor back into his
chest. Then he grasped Tony’s chin again, leaning down to spit in his face as he talked. “I can do this
anytime I want, Tony. All you have to do is piss me off. You will wish you were back in my care
once you have met Thanos.”

Leaning away from his prisoner, the Other restarted the lift.

Tony felt it vibrate underneath him and he knew he was moving closer to his doom. And he really
didn’t want to go.

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**Sanctuary: N5X2 106311411+2123518**

They were in an asteroid field. Tony was surprised. He had assumed they were heading for a planet.
He was kneeling in the control room of the ship with his hands now bound behind his back. The
position was uncomfortable as his shoulders ached.

The Other moved beside him. “This is Thanos’ dominion. He rules over this sector of space, the
Master of the Chitauri. The Chitauri army which attacked the Earth were placed at the furthest
reaches of Thanos’ own realm but he was watching when you brought down his army with one
single missile.” The Other stroked Tony’s hair. “You should feel honoured you are about to enter his
exulted presence.”

Tony bit back a retort.

“Good. You are learning to respect your superiors. You will make a superb Enforcer one day.”

Tony gritted his teeth. He would not serve. At least not willingly.

“You owe him for saving your life after all,” the Other continued. “If he had not desired you then
you would have died out there.”

After the six months he’d had, Tony would have preferred death. He didn’t want to think about what
was in store for him when he finally met this Thanos.

“We could have brought you before Thanos within a few weeks of your capture… But he wanted to
see what I could do to you first. It doesn’t please me I failed. But it is sweet you will realise the
hopelessness of your situation when you are finally brought before him. It was on his orders to take
six months to return to where he resides.” The Other explained quietly.

Tony swallowed. He wasn’t liking the sound of this Thanos. “And what does this ‘Thanos’ want
with me?” At this point he didn’t care.

A sharp hand shoved his head down. “You will not sully his name with your lips, understand Tony
Stark?”

Tony mumbled as best he could. “Yes.”
“The Dark Lord or ‘Master’ to you is how you refer to him now,” the Other continued to hiss in his ear.

“He is not my Master,” responded Tony. His head was pulled back now, stretching his neck as far as it could go so Tony’s eyes were in line with those of the Other’s within his hood.

“He will be.”

Tony fell forward unable to stop himself as he hit the floor with a thud that resounded on the metal beneath him. He groaned. His whole body hurt. He was adamant that he’d die before he ever called this Thanos ‘Master’. He was no one’s slave or puppet.

He couldn’t get himself to his knees so he remained lying on the floor, eyes moving around, watching attentively as he sought to gain as much information as possible. He had learned little during his captivity as he’d been so secluded in his cell, only taken out occasionally. He hadn’t been able to really observe much to learn more about his captors. The little he did know was from his memories of the battle of New York.

The Chitauri were formidable warriors, technologically advanced and more cyborg than flesh. They were cruel. Fought one another a lot and built new equipment to further themselves in the art of warfare. They were keen for bloodshed. And Tony knew they loathed him for what he had done to their brethren.

Hands gripped his biceps and hauled him to his feet. He shivered as he was dragged. Did they not want him to walk then?

They dropped him on his side in a compartment circle in the middle of a side-room from the bridge. The Other stood next to him. The two Chitauri warriors walked around the room, pushing buttons, setting levers and then a door slid closed, cutting Tony and the Other off from the Chitauri warriors.

“You will stand.”

It was not a request.

Tony growled. “How the hell am I supposed to stand with my hands tied behind my back?” The retort was out before he had a chance to stop it.

“You’re smart. Figure it out.” The Other smiled cruelly.

Tony glared at his captor. He knew it wouldn’t end well for him if he didn’t at least try to stand on his own.

Using his bound hands to shift along the floor until his back was against the wall, he tried to push himself up the wall until he was sitting against it. It took effort and a lot of energy but he managed it. Next was getting to his feet without falling face-first.

His legs ached. Managing to bend his legs, Tony began to push himself up the wall, using his shaking legs to stabilise himself as he moved slowly. Panting with effort he eventually got to a standing position, moving his legs back so he was using the wall as support.

“Good. Now stand next to me.” The Other instructed in his dark voice.

Tony swallowed. He wasn’t sure he would be able to do this. *Come on.* Tony willed himself forward, planting one foot in front of the other, walking slowly back to the centre of the small compartment until he stood beside his captor. He felt exhausted but used his remaining strength to
stay on his feet.

The compartment they stood in started to make noises, buzzing and Tony felt something pulling his body. His surroundings changed and knew he was being teleported. The decking beneath his feet vanished and he felt like he was floating in mid-air before a rocky surface materialised underneath them.

Tony was standing on a large asteroid, expanded by several pieces of rock, collected together through stairs. He was in space and he could still breathe. Tony dared not to think of how impossible that sounded. Ahead of him was a raised platform past a small corridor linking two flat surfaces of asteroid together. He could see a chair hovering in the distance. Fear overcame him at the sight and he knew he was doomed.

“Walk,” the Other ordered.

Tony shivered, forcing himself to move forward, well aware he was likely walking to his death. He tried to feel brave, yet the sensation inside him was anything but bravery. He also felt exposed at still being naked and uncomfortable at where he was. He pushed himself forward, moving his feet across the surface, nearly tripping but managing to save himself before he fell.

The Other ordered him to stop once they were almost beneath the floating chair.

Tony shivered and then he became distracted by the sight of two lithe females approaching them. One had green skin and red hair, wearing a tight outfit designed to give her maximum movement. Around her waist was assorted weapons and her eyes were hard and her cheek bones prominent. The other female was bald with blue skin. A metal contraption surrounded her left eye and her left arm was made entirely of metal, as if it had been replaced by a cybernetic enhancement. They bore simple armour but Tony had a feeling they were both remarkable skilled.

The blue-skinned one ran her eyes over his body, lingering slightly on his groin. She reached forward and grabbed his chin. “You will kneel before our father.”

The green one circled around him. “Or we will be forced to ensure your compliance.”

“I’d rather stand,” stated Tony, already knowing he would regret it.

The blue one punched him in the face and he crumpled to the floor.

He groaned as he tried to move his jaw. At least it hadn’t been dislocated. Someone grabbed him by the back of the neck, turning him around, forcing his legs underneath him, making him kneel. His head was forced down. He wanted to fight back but the iron grip was too strong,

“He still resists. How disappointing,” the blue one whispered in his ear.

She didn’t sound disappointed.

“He has proven difficult to break. However he does have a weakness that will bring him to the breaking point if used but it is a last resort tactic. We have not yet reached the stage where it has become necessary to use it often,” the Other said.

Tony shivered, trembling in his kneeling position. He was a thing to be tortured and broken.

“You have failed me…” A voice boomed from above them.

Fear coursed up Tony’s spine.
“My Lord…” The Other shuffled forward, spreading his arms out, bowing low before the chair that was still turned away from them. “The prisoner has proven more resilient than previously expected. For a mere human he is strong.”

“You said he has a weakness,” the voice continued. The chair still did not turn.

“He does but there are risks to it. It could kill him if used as a regular torture…” the Other continued. “Other methods have been used to break him. The walls are crumbling my Lord.”

“And does he have information worth to keep him alive?”

*Oh shit.*

“He is well known on his home world. His loss has hurt them. He holds within him information that could aid our capture of Earth. The weapon he used against us, there are many more of them. He is more useful alive to us than dead, my Lord Thanos.”

“Can you guarantee that he will serve us?”

Before the Other could reply, Tony broke in. He hated being talked about like this and he wasn’t going to sit here and wait for them to decide what to do with him. “Why not talk to my face instead of talking like I am a piece of meat ready to be ripped apart at a moment’s notice?” Tony knew it was the wrong thing to say but he simply did not care, preferring to be defiant than submissive. “I will never serve you. You may as well kill me.”

The chair started to turn.

Tony’s head, which had been forced down again after he had spoken, had to fight off the hands keeping it down. No way in hell would he bow to this ‘Lord’.

The hands in his hair let go suddenly and Tony had a suspicion they had been notified to do so. Free from the grip, he looked up and his eyes widened as he took in the monster whom had ordered his capture.

The creature in the chair was… Tony didn’t know how to describe it… but the first thought that ran through him upon seeing the menacing face was fear. Complete and utter fear. He reeked of power and Tony felt like shrinking into the asteroid. But then his defensive side sprung up. He wasn’t going to show how scared he was or how terrified he felt.

“You believe you are worthy to talk to me, defender of Earth? To demand death from me? I refuse it. You will serve me. No one denies me what I want.”

Tony took a few seconds to reply. He allowed a small smile to cross his face, no matter how frightened he felt inside. “Oh look, the big mutated purple grape can talk! Can he walk too or does his fat legs not let him stand from sitting on his hover chair for too long?”

The next thing Tony was aware of was intense pain in his mind as pressure seemed to press down on him. He screamed, falling forward onto his face, shuddering on the floor as pain wrecked his body. He could feel something inside his head, pushing down on him. He feared his mind shattering in that moment, could feel the urge to break and tell them everything they wanted to know.

He was still screaming. He could hear himself as he jerked on the floor, his body felt like it was being torn apart, his mind being pushed to the point of no return. He could end this if he chose to talk…
Resistance flared up despite the measures of pain he was in.

From his lips came a single, weak cry, yet strong enough to show he would not bow.

“No…!”

His teeth chattered and he bit his tongue.

Finally the pressure lifted.

Tony felt tears fall from his eyes as his movements stopped. He wanted to die. He didn’t want to suffer anymore. He realised they wouldn’t kill him, not when he was clearly worth something to them alive.

“That is just a taster of what you will experience if I have to force my way into your mind.”

Tony continued to lay there. He could feel his body shaking.

“The metal contraption in your chest… It keeps you alive.” It wasn’t a question. It was a statement of fact.

Tony didn’t answer. He didn’t see why he should.

Fortunately the Other did for him. “It does. When removed it causes his body to fail… That is his weakness… I have found touching his heart terrifies him. It is how I learned his name and what the device does. It is not something I would recommend on a regular basis. Conventional torture will break him, I am sure of it.”

There was a long silence in the air and Tony began to worry if they were silently communicating with one another.

“He will be taken to Sanctuary II where he will be held. Look at me, human.”

Tony blinked a few times. He knew what would happen if he refused. He didn’t want the mind crushing sensation again. Slowly he moved his aching body into a position in which he could look up at his captor. He was still laying on the asteroid’s surface but could now see the menacing gaze of the mutant grape.

“He is learning obedience.”

Tony wanted to say something but his mind couldn’t think of a retort quick enough which was probably a blessing in disguise as his mouth had the habit of getting him in trouble.

“It will take time. I believe he will be an invaluable asset to our cause once the information he holds about Earth is extracted from him.”

“Good. I will not suffer a defeat again.” The chair started to turn away. “I want all the secrets he has. Any method can be used. My daughters will personally oversee his care.”

Thanos’ visage was gone, yet Tony still trembled. He did feel frightened, unsure of what was to come next.

The two women stepped forward again, but the blue skinned one held up a hand and stopped the other from coming closer.

“He is mine!”
Tony fell forward onto his face as his left leg was grabbed by the blue woman and she started to drag
him along behind her. His body was scraped along the floor, causing cuts and wounds that bled
slowly.

His leg was dropped moments later when he was pulled onto a smoother surface. A booted foot
pushed him over onto his back and he found the blue woman peering down at him.

The other green woman moved past to a set of controls.

Tony felt something vibrate beneath him and the sensation he was being lifted up, yet he still lay on
the metallic floor. He could see the stars and asteroids around him moving. He was on a vehicle of
some kind.

The blue woman leaned over him. A metallic hand shot out and grasped his chin.

“You will be a pleasure to break.”

Her flesh hand trailed down his body, touching his chest, circling around the Arc Reactor, moving
done onto his tummy, stroking close to his groin, before bringing it back up to tap his cheek.

“I won’t break,” hissed Tony, despite feeling very afraid of this woman leaning over him.

“You say that now… but you will. Everyone does.”

Then she did something Tony had not expected.

She kissed him, biting his lips, forcing her tongue into his mouth.

So surprised was he, that he didn’t even consider biting her tongue.

“Nebula, stop playing with him. We have our orders.”

Nebula pulled away from Tony. “But he is so fun! I’ve never had a human before. He might be just
what I am looking for.”

Oh god. Tony shuddered inwardly.

She patted his cheek with her flesh arm. “But do not worry…” She purred in a sickly voice, “I think
you will break before I have to resort to that.” She stood and kicked him in the stomach.

Tony wheezed, struggling to regain his breath. He felt scared, so, so scared. He didn’t want to be
here anymore. He wanted it all to end. What could he do? His hands remained secured behind his
back. He was weak, stuck and useless here, unable to save himself from what was to come.

Nebula joined her sister whilst Tony continued to moan on the floor as pain wracked his body.

The ride was short and Nebula returned to Tony, grabbing him by his right ankle and pulling him
along behind her. Tony cried out as his body was dragged. He didn’t have the energy to kick back
with his free leg. It wouldn’t have done him any good if he had anyway.

His surroundings were now different. The stars and asteroids were gone, replaced by metallic walls
and ceiling, ranging high above them, filled with many lights ad flickering constantly. Tony turned
his head slightly and saw a range of star-ships sitting berthed within the area he was being dragged. It
was a hanger of some kind. Then he was through a door and into a smaller corridor where he was
bought to a lift.
He lay on the floor, with Nebula still clutching him by his ankle, as the lift descended. He was soon dragged out, pulled along a little further before he was bought to a black steeled door with large bolts across it.

The green woman pulled the locks back and the door opened.

Tony was dragged inside.

It was a cell, with several differences to it. There was a section of the wall with chains attached to it, resembling a rack which would hold him in place, as well as chains hanging in the middle of the room from the ceiling and the bottom, and a table was to the side, with chains at either end.

The cell doubled as a torture chamber.

“Welcome to your new home,” said Nebula as she dropped Tony’s leg, leaned down and gripped him by the throat, lifting him up one-handed.

What the fuck? How strong is she?

He was slammed onto the table. Too weak to do anything but moan, Tony didn’t resist as Nebula and her sister secured his wrists and ankles in chains.

A hand ran through his hair, causing shivers to run up his spine.

“We’ll be back for you later,” hissed Nebula in his ear. “Enjoy your solitude whilst you can, Tony!”

Laughter echoed around him as the sisters left, shutting and locking the door behind them.

Tony laid there, heart pumping faster in his chest, scared of the future and what was to come.

They wanted to use him against the Earth; take everything he knew from his brain and then shape him into their perfect warrior. He wasn’t going to allow it to happen. He couldn’t. It was another thing to fight for.

There would be no release in death.

He was here for the long haul.

Better get used to it.

The truth was Tony already was.

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He didn’t know how long he was left to his own thoughts. It was enough to allow him to become lost in dark memories. Whenever he had any solitude his mind took him back to either Afghanistan or the first days of his imprisonment with the Other. On reflection of his time in captivity, Tony would have preferred a lifetime of Afghanistan’s, rather than what was happening to him now.

He slept lightly in the position he was chained in, still painfully aware of his surroundings but enough to rest his tired mind and limbs. He was always consciously aware of noises around his cell, knowing they would be coming back to torment him soon.

When the two sisters did return, Nebula was the one who took control of his torture whilst the green-skinned one participated occasionally.
Over time Tony learned Nebula liked to use knives, cutting into his skin and making him bleed. She tore his hair out, crushed his fingers, broke his toes, his legs and arms, only to give him something to help heal the fractures so she could do it all over again. She touched him in places he didn’t want to be. She was obsessed with him. She licked him, bit his lips, sucked on his ear lobes, rubbing herself against him, getting off on him through her clothes.

She never made a move to rape him which was one fear Tony had would come eventually.

He hoped it never would.

He still didn’t know the green woman’s name. He had noted the two sisters disliked one another, yet the green one seemed contented to watch her sister play with Tony, hurting him more and more each time, pulling Nebula away from him when she went too far. Very occasionally she joined in. But she was the one who usually levelled the questions at him.

His body was covered in dried blood. Every so often he was released from his chains and exercised and cleaned. He just wanted it to end. His most used word was ‘no’ and then it was always followed by a scream.

He was terrified, his body constantly in pain. Sometimes they left him hanging from the ceiling for days on end, unable to rest his arms as Nebula kicked and punched him, making him swing. His legs could not take his weight. He cried often and spent his alone moments trying to rest, to ignore what was happening to him.

Tony lost track of time, unaware of how long it had been since New York or how long he’d been Nebula’s personal punch bag.

One time, just as he had fallen into a doze in the heap on the floor they had left him in, Tony was woken by his cell door opening and Nebula coming inside, followed swiftly by her sister. Tony wasn’t given a chance before he was grasped by the back of his neck and hauled towards the rack. Fear coursed through him. He couldn’t fight back. His weakness shone through, despite having all of his limbs unbound currently, his strength was little and far between. He was thrown on the rack face-first.

Nebula grasped his right wrist and hauled his arm up, chaining his arm up high, stretching his muscles, making him hurt. She stepped behind him and he tried to kick her but she grasped his right leg, anticipating his weak move, twisting his leg in response in his attempt to attack her. He screamed as his bones protested against the hard grip.

There was a gruesome snap and he knew his bones had shattered. He screamed as pain rocked through him.

“You think you can hurt me, worm?” screamed Nebula in his ear, grasping his hair and pulling his head back, bending his neck, putting pressure upon it as she leaned down menacingly into his face.

Tony tried to yank his head away from her grip but he couldn’t.

Nebula pushed his head forward hard.

His forehead struck the rack. His eyes blurred and darkness settled in behind his eyelids. He was dimly aware of his right arm being secured upwards and a hand stroking down his scarred back, squeezing his backside, moving between his legs, touching his balls and dick, clutching tightly before moving away from him.
In a haze, Tony couldn’t take it in.

Then, reality came screaming back at him as he was jerked from the edge of consciousness as something slammed into his back.

A scream was torn from his throat and he jerked in his chains as the whip descended again, hitting the same place as before. Then it moved slightly, hitting the space next to it, ripping his back open, and making it bleed. He could feel rivulets trickling down his skin, dripping onto the floor.

Tony screamed until he could no more.

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Tony’s back was burning. He could feel blood trailing down, coating his body in his lifeline. He hung from the rack, arms aching. He wanted to rest. It was always denied him even when he had a few minutes of sleep.

He was so cold. So tired. So hurt.

Nebula and her sister hurt him so much.

He feared Nebula most of all. She desired him. The way she touched him, spoke to him… Tony shivered in his chains. He loathed her, was scared of her. He wanted to be home, with Pepper.

God, he missed her so much. Even her light was adding. The joy and contentment he once felt when he thought of her now made him feel sad and depressed. He was never going to see her again.

Tears leaked from his eyes.

I want to go home.

But he never would.

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He eventually fell into an uneasy sleep when Tony was woken again by movement within his cell. He was not alone. The green woman was there, having somehow opened the cell door without waking him up. He stiffened. Nebula was nowhere to be seen.

She moved closer to him, noticing he was awake. In her hand was a small glass, filled with a clear liquid.

It’s probably poison, thought Tony.

She moved closer to him. “I have a drink for you.”

Tony kept his mouth closed. He didn’t want it, though he very much desired liquid to soothe his parched throat and mouth.

“It won’t hurt you,” she added.

Tony doubted that. They always hurt him, regardless.

“I know you cannot trust me, so…” She took a sip from the glass herself, ensuring he could see her swallow. “If it was designed to hurt you, I wouldn’t drink it.” She held it out to him, close to his lips.

Tony was thirsty, so very thirsty. His mouth was dry and his lips sore. He eyed the cup wondering if
it was worth it to take the risk. Just because she had taken a sip from it, didn’t mean it wasn’t poisoned. She wasn’t human. She could be immune to its effects.

But he wanted a drink.

*What the hell.*

Closing his eyes, Tony breathed in deep and took the plunge. He leaned to the side a bit, as much as he could in the chains holding him in the rack, and the cup pressed to his lips and he drank a sip, swallowing quickly, savouring the refreshing and soothing feel of the water in his mouth and down his throat.

She didn’t force him to continue, just waited patiently as he drank slower.

When he had finished the glass, she asked: “Would you like some more?”

It was tempting. He was still dry.

He felt suspicious of the kind treatment he was getting. And it instantly put him on alert. “Why?”

“Why what?” she queried.

“Why are you helping me?” he asked.

“Because you do not deserve what is happening to you,” she said simply.

Tony gritted his teeth. “Then why help hurt me?”

“I have no choice,” she answered sadly. “I may be a daughter of Thanos but I am a prisoner, just like you.”

“How?” he managed, his voice croaking.

“He’s not my real father, Tony. Surely you know that?” she answered. She reached up to his right arm and released it from the cuff. Holding him up carefully, she released his left and lowered him gently to the floor, laying him on his side. “I do not participate in your torture as much as my sister does.”

“Why not?” He still felt afraid. He wasn’t sure where this was going. He was tense, waiting for the pain to start.

“I have never taken to the role of a torturer the way my sister has done. She is broken far more than I. You will not see her for at least a week. Thanos sent her on an assignment. I will be your primary carer but I will not hurt you.”

Tony didn’t believe that. This was just a new form of getting him to relax, to feel he was safe.

“Trying to get me to break through kindness is not going to work, lady!” He lashed out, catching her arm with his fist. Though the blow was weak she still flinched at the suddenness of it.

He waited for retribution.

None came.

“Why aren’t you hurting me?!” he yelled. “I hit you!”

“I’m not here to hurt you,” she started simply. “Only to help you recover.”
“Bullshit!” cursed Tony. “If that was true you would be stopping your psychotic sister from torturing me on a daily basis!”

“Because if I did, my father would hurt me from preventing your breaking. Thanos is cruel and demands servitude of all races. He took me from my family when I was a child. He killed them in front of me and then trained me to be his perfect assassin and torturer. Despite what he has turned me in to, I have never lost my empathy. When I can help you I will yet there will be times when I will be required to hurt you but I will never do it joyfully the way my sister does.”

Tony shuddered. “She scares me,” he whispered.

“She desires you.”

“I know.” Tony closed his eyes, swallowing the lump in his throat.

He flinched as a hand wiped strands of hair out of his eyes. He had grown used to touch being a precursor to pain. He hated what was to come next.

“I’m not going to hurt you, Tony,” the woman reiterated.

He trembled on his side, still afraid.

“Will you let me tend to your wounds?” she asked softly.

*She is only trying to gain my trust. She doesn’t feel remorse for me. It is all a ploy to gain my trust so she can betray me. All this is, is another form of torture.*

“My name is Gamora. I know you cannot trust me but I swear to you, I will get you out of here.”


“When I get the chance to do so. It will not be for a while yet, but when the time is right, I will get you out of here and return you to Earth.”

He couldn’t believe it. Gamora was lying to him. At least he finally had a name to her face now. She wasn’t just a nameless captor. He wished Nebula was. He shivered as he thought of her leering over him, her hand touching him in places he hated. She was always delighted at his fearful reactions.

“I am not my sister and I am not what Thanos trained me to be.” Gamora continued quietly. “I know you want to return home. If I had the chance I would as well.”

Tony lay silently on the floor. He didn’t know what to do. The offer of aid was there yet he was frightened of what the consequences would be if he said yes. He didn’t want to believe there was any kindness waiting for him. There hadn’t been for such a long time. Why start now? He swallowed. He could take a leap of faith. Or continue to suffer. His whole body hurt.

“How… long… have I been here?” He’d long since lost track of time.

“Nearly three months,” she answered. “It took the Other six months to bring you here.”

*Nine months. Nine months of torture.*

Tony wanted to cry. He closed his eyes, fighting down his emotions. “I want to go home,” he whispered.

“Then let me help you… please,” she said quietly.
Tony knew he would hate himself for this. “Okay.”

There was a sigh behind him. “Thank you. Would you like more water?”

Tony didn’t answer, just nodded his head.

Gamora moved from behind him and stepped in front of him, leaning down. In her hand was a small cup with a long plastic stick within it. It must be their version of a straw. Slowly she lowered it to his lips.

Tony opened his mouth and the straw slipped inside. He drank slowly, enjoying the cool water on his parched throat. It felt so good. He drank it greedily but not caring. Once he was finished, she took the cup away.

He watched her, still wary, as she walked over to a bucket she had brought with her and a tray which had been covered with cloth. Gamora moved the bucket closer to him, than brought the tray over, lifting up the cloth to reveal torture equipment.

“What? You –”

Before he had a chance to finish, Gamora pressed a few buttons on the side of the tray and the image of torture equipment fizzled out to show medical equipment. “I had to disguise what was really on the tray. I could be stopped by Thanos’ advisers. I cannot be seen to be helping you. I have to protect myself too.”

“How do I know the medical supplies are real and not a hologram?” asked Tony, feeling more afraid now than he had been when he had decided to bite the bullet and allow Gamora to help him. He was already beginning to regret it.

“If I was really here to torture you I wouldn’t be so elaborate about it. I’d just do it. I wouldn’t try to deceive you either. I am considered to be one of Thanos’ most loyal assassins. I have to keep up appearances if I am to stay alive long enough to escape from him. We can either work together, help one another out, or we continue as we have been for the last few months, where I am just a shadow while my sister tortures you.”

Tony bit his lip. That was the question facing him. He had a choice whether to take the plunge and risk everything by trusting Gamora or continue to be alone in this dark place of hell he currently resided in.

*What the hell. I’m damned if I do and I’m damned if I don’t.*

He took a leap of faith.

“Ohkay.”

**To be continued...**

**Please let me know what you think!**

Chapter End Notes

So Tony is finally in the hands of Thanos and his daughters.
You may have guessed that Nebula is interested in Tony. The tags are there because of this. I will always warn you in advance, especially of any sexual content that may be upcoming.

The next chapter will be posted in two weeks time. :)
Part 2: Chapter 5 - A Touch of (Alien) Kindness

Chapter Summary

Tony is shown some kindness in the dark days of his captivity...

Chapter Notes

**WARNING** Some sexual content in this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Part Two
The Breaking of Tony Stark

Chapter Five
A Touch of (Alien) Kindness

Gamora began by washing his back. It hurt but the relief he felt afterwards was worth it. She carefully cleaned each and every wound to prevent infection. She reached for the medical tray. “I’m going to use some salve. It will sting but it should entice the wounds to heal faster.”

Tony nodded. He couldn’t see what she was doing but at least she was giving him a commentary. The right leg Nebula had broken earlier still ached and hurt. He didn’t even want to think of what the bones looked like now.

Gamora’s fingers pressed softly into his back, coating his wounds with a cooling lotion. He flinched as pain sparked up his back, causing a stinging sensation to erupt up and down his back. He bit his lower lip to stop himself from shouting out in pain. He hated to show how weak he really was now.

Pausing in her ministrations, Gamora leaned down. “Easy,” she soothed. “It will hurt but the benefits...”

“I know.” Tony gritted his teeth at the burning sensation overtaking him.

Gamora continued to apply the salve until every cut was covered in the white paste, slowly dissolving into the skin.

She then moved to cleaning Tony’s arms and fingers, even washing the grime off of his overlong fingernails before she trimmed them. The dirt on his chest, face and neck was washed off. Gamora was careful around the reactor in his chest though Tony assured her he wouldn’t be electrocuted if the arc reactor got wet. Then the left leg was cleaned before she moved around him to focus on his mangled right leg.

A large bruise had formed where Nebula’s fingers had pressed in and then twisted the skin, snapping the bone inside.
“I need to fix your leg.”

He nodded, well aware it would be painful to treat but it hurt more now with it just being left there.

“She’s snapped at least the fibula, possibly the tibia too. I am going to give you an injection in your leg, close to your ankle joint, which will encourage the bones to knit together and will ease your pain. It should be fully healed by the end of the week before Nebula returns.”

“She’ll only break it again,” muttered Tony.

“Maybe, but I’m not leaving you like this,” answered Gamora.

She began by injecting a solution close to the tip of the fibula. The solution was cold and the sensation of ice moved up his leg, suddenly relieving the pain he was in, relieving the burning sensation which had been coursing through it. The leg felt numb and Tony managed to relax a bit. Next the leg was cleaned carefully with hardly any pressure applied.

He felt cleaner too, more refreshed than he had felt in months. The showers he’d been forced to have in the Other’s ship had just been a spray of water, designed to wash away the dirt and blood covering his body. Gamora was cleaning it all off of him. She hadn’t just used plain water; she’d used it with a flowery smell in it, meaning he was able to smell something different for the first time in ages, other than the stink that came from him due to the lack of hygiene he now lived with.

“Tony… There are two areas left to clean now. I do not have to but I will only proceed with your permission.”

He knew what she meant. It helped a lot she asked instead of assuming. Swallowing away the fear, Tony spoke boldly. “Yes.” He wanted her to clean everywhere.

Careful and mindful of the pain and fear Tony harboured, Gamora gently cleaned his most intimate areas, only touching when she needed to and warning him each time.

When she was finished, Gamora placed Tony on his left side, allowing his right leg to heal sitting on top of the left.

As she placed the instruments away, Tony began to shiver, feeling cold. He was never warm these days.

“Here,” said Gamora, placing a piece of material over him. “It’s not much…”

“Thanks,” said Tony, clutching the blanket tightly.

Gamora moved around him, tucking in the sides so that the only part of his body exposed was his head. She then propped his head up by another two blankets, acting as a pillow and allowing Tony to feel comfortable for the first time in ages.

“I’m going to leave you now, Tony,” explained Gamora. “You shouldn’t be disturbed.”

Tony opened his eyes and looked up at Gamora, appreciation evident in his gaze. He felt it too. His lips twitched upwards towards a smile. “Thanks.”

“I’ll be back later,” she soothed. “If I can I will try to bring you something to eat and drink. I have to be careful in taking risks.”

“It’s okay,” whispered Tony. “It’s the thought which counts.”
Gamora didn’t reply but Tony watched as she left the cell.

It didn’t take long for sleep to take him.

- - - - -

Tony dreamed.

It started off as a nice dream.

Of Pepper and happier times.

He dreamed they were having a date night, eating at a fancy restaurant where they discussed their future together. They spoke of marriage and children: a simpler life. A life Tony could never have and had started to want in the last few months prior to the New York battle.

He was in bed with Pepper as they kissed and touched one another. Her fingers were on his cock, stroking his length to full hardness and his own fingers were inside her folds, stretching her open, filling her full.

They were moaning together, kissing against one another.

Then Pepper rolled him onto his back, a devil glint in her eyes.

“I want you, Tony. In me... Filling me...”

And he did as she straddled his hips, looking down on him, pressing her lips to his, biting the lower lip and sucking on it, as Pepper rode him like a stallion.

“God, I need you constantly! You leave an ache in me that needs to be fulfilled.” Pepper whispered huskily. She looked down on him then. “I want you and I will have you!”

Pepper’s body and face changed instantly. Tony’s arms were now above his head, chained to the bed board.

It wasn’t Pepper above him riding his cock, it was Nebula, her face stretched in a wicked smile.

Tony was screaming.

“No! No! I don’t want!”

And then he woke screaming as his whole body tried to physically buck Nebula off but she wasn’t there. Tony was still alone in the cell.

And in pain.

In his nightmarish panic, he had flung his healing leg out and it hurt like hell now, burning. Tears were coming from his eyes, more from fear of rape then of the pain he was in. Nebula’s gleeful face was still in his memory, looming down at him.

Tony didn’t want it. He never wanted to be raped. Never wanted to feel anyone other than Pepper around him. Her face swam into his vision.

“Pep… please…Pep… don’t leave me.” The tears were still falling. “I love you.” His fingers curled around the fabric of the blanket he had mostly flung off him. He shivered in fear. “I can’t… I can’t…”
Tony lay there, shivering in his cell, feeling sick to the stomach, wishing more and more if he couldn’t be back home, that he could be dead instead.

- - - - -

When Gamora returned to the cell, Tony was a mess. His body was constantly shaking and his skin was cold to touch. He didn’t seem to realise she was there. His lips were opening and closing, mumbling a word Gamora couldn’t decipher. Instead she placed a hand on his shoulder and gently shook him. “Tony?”

He seemed to come too at the shake yet he was still startled by Gamora’s presence and tried to scramble back, forgetting about his broken leg and causing himself excruciating pain in the process.

“I’m not here to hurt you!” said Gamora, holding her hands up.

Tony ceased his struggles but he still looked horrified at seeing her. The worry and the fear in his eyes reflected against her. His face winced in pain. “Fuck…” he panted. “My leg.”

Gamora scooted forward. “Here, let me help,” she said quietly, gently lifting his broken leg up. She placed his right leg back on top of his left. “The swelling has decreased. The solution is working. But I will give you another injection later.” Next she picked up the blanket Tony had thrown off him and covered him with it again.

“I had a nightmare,” whispered Tony.

“I can imagine sleep isn’t an escape for you as you’d like it to be,” answered Gamora quietly. “But you do need to sleep.”

Tony shook his head. “I don’t want to sleep. If I do, I just want to wake up back home… with Pepper.”

“Who is Pepper?” Gamora asked.

Tony closed his eyes and started to shake. He tried to curl up further underneath the blanket. He didn’t speak for a while but Gamora waited. When he did answer, his voice was low. “She’s the love of my life.”

Gamora swallowed. “I’m sorry.”

“My… fault,” mumbled Tony. “Shoulda… fell… faster…”

She knew he was referring to the events after the control station had been destroyed. Gamora remembered watching the invasion from afar, from within the centre of Thanos’ domain. She could still see it, the events in her mind’s eye.

The day she had sealed Tony’s fate.

To prevent anyone from locating Thanos if they made it through the portal (unlikely since Earth was a primitive planet), the Chitauri army was located thousands of miles across space on the very edge of Thanos’ domain. The Other was situated in a separate command ship, close to the command centre linking the Chitauri warriors together. Thanos and his two daughters remained in the centre of Thanos’ realm, watching the events from afar.

They had seen the events on Earth or Terra as Gamora knew it by, from afar. Had seen Loki’s failure to subjugate the metal man with the blue star in his chest to the control of the mind stone; had
witnessed Loki’s fall from grace as six remarkable individuals had fought back against the might of the Chitauri army and then they had all watched as the portal itself had been breached by the flying metal man, carrying a weapon which should not have been strong enough to breach the shields of the command centre but had flown straight through it.

They had seen the metal man begin to fall back towards the portal but it had closed. Thanos had been angry at his defeat and the loss of one of the Infinity Stones he had once harnessed to expand his power across the galaxy.

“We should save him,” said Gamora.

“Why should we?” hissed Nebula.

“He is a mortal man who has shown an invincibility to not be affected by an Infinity Stone. Is it not worth finding out why? Clearly he has superior technology on Terra, the kind of which we have not seen from that planet as of yet. He could be useful to us, wield secrets which we could use against Terra,” explained Gamora.

“If he is immune to the effects of an Infinity Stone then he needs to die!” retorted Nebula.

Gamora shook her head. “No. What if the technology he has is employed elsewhere and will be Terra’s defence? Why take the risk when we can take the knowledge from him? The blue star needs to be studied, cultivated and a weakness has to be found. We will not learn a single thing if we leave him to die.”

“Gamora is right,” boomed Thanos from his throne. “He may yet prove useful to me. His mind will be crushed and he will yield all his secrets.” Thanos pressed a button on his chair, opening a communication signal to the Other on his ship. “Take him and break him. You have six months before you are required to return to me.”

No one ever questioned Thanos’ commands.

Gamora returned her attention to the screen projecting the events from where the portal had opened up. The metal man’s body was now moving at a fast pace, caught in a tractor beam, towards the Other’s ship. Guilt welled up within her that she may have just condemned someone to intense torture and breaking. Still, making the suggestion to save the man’s life had furthered her standing in her father’s eyes.

But it also hurt she had ensured the human’s pain would not end until he had fully acquiesced to their demands.

Gamora opened her eyes, bidding the memory to stay away. Tony suffered because of her. She had never considered he might have fought for so long. Her motivation in saving him was not because of the information he likely held but because of what appeared to be an immunity he had to the Infinity Stones.

If Tony was unaffected by them as he had been by the Mind Stone because of what resided in his chest, Tony could potentially be a weapon who could bring Thanos down once and for all.

What troubled her was it was impossible to remove the Reactor from his chest without killing him, thereby making it impossible for Thanos’ scientists to study it and determine a weakness. But it was a good thing too as it ensured Tony’s continued survival. She knew Thanos wanted Tony broken and the Mad Titan could easily break him into submission, yet she knew from experience Thanos liked to play with his toys and have them bow to him.
Each day bought Tony closer to the breaking point. He had been a prisoner for so long, fighting to protect his mind. She hoped to have Tony out of the horror he lived in soon. It was just a matter of time and waiting for the correct moment to present itself.

She glanced down at Tony and noted he had fallen asleep. Somehow, during her flashback, his right hand had crept into her own. She didn’t have the heart to pull away. He looked peaceful and content.

*I want to help him.*

It was a thought that continued to rock her every day.

She wasn’t aiding him by watching him be tortured. She could end this right here, right now.

His neck was on display. She could snap his neck without Tony realising what had happened. It would end his torment permanently. The temptation was there. Tony was strong but even if she did rescue him from his torment would he want to fight against the monsters who had held him or would he rather run and hide?

Gamora’s eyes fell to Tony’s chest. Though she couldn’t see it due to the blanket covering it, the blue star remained embedded with his chest. The Other had said little about it, other than it was a magnet which attracted pieces of shrapnel embedded close to the man’s heart. The Other had experimented extensively upon it. It couldn’t be removed for long without causing cardiac arrest.

Thanos didn’t care enough to create another device to stabilise the human so they could take the blue star from his chest. The titan was certain the human would aid them once his mind had been sufficiently crushed and broken.

Gamora hoped to escape with Tony before it came to that moment. Though she was trusted by her adopted father, she knew she had to play her cards correctly if she was ever going to return Tony to his home.

It would have to be soon otherwise she feared Tony would break. Not through conventional torture but through a fear he harboured. Nebula was fierce and would carry out an attack on him. Thanos was losing patience with their failure to break the human. And Gamora knew if Nebula did rape Tony, she was sure he would break from the horror of it.

“I’m sorry, Tony,” she whispered, knowing he was too deeply asleep to hear her. Reaching out, she brushed a few strands of hair from his eyes. He shifted slightly in his sleep but settled down again, gripping her hand tighter.

A contented smile seemed to cross his face and Gamora knew he was sleeping peacefully.

She was going to leave him if she could extract her hand from his but she decided not to.

Tony deserved to have a peaceful sleep and if holding her hand helped give him one then Gamora would oblige.

---

For the next week Gamora acted as Tony’s carer. She looked after him, helping him sleep and checking on his healing injuries. She even managed to smuggle more water and food into Tony’s cell, giving him the opportunity to eat something for the first time in months.

Tony promptly threw up, his stomach now unused to food and he couldn’t keep it down. He narrowly missed vomiting over Gamora, who had seen it coming and moved back far enough to
avoid it.

The care she had provided him had aided Tony in building up his strength. It was only a little but enough for Tony to feel stronger than he had in ages.

Unfortunately for Tony, the peaceful period was coming to an end.

Gamora didn’t even know how to tell him the peaceful period was coming to an end. She felt sick to the stomach at the thought of her sister returning to torment him some more. Nebula wouldn’t stop until Tony was a quivering mess at her feet.

Gamora rarely slept in the week she spent with Tony. She didn’t really need it. Her genetic enhancements enabled her spend more hours awake than sleep, giving her the opportunity to be there for Tony when he needed it. He was sleeping more contently then he ever had been since his capture.

To keep up the pretence she was torturing him instead of caring for Tony, Gamora did make little cuts on his skin, though only with Tony’s permission. He knew the risks she was taking to help him. He didn’t want to lose her kindness.

But it still hurt to make the little cuts into his skin and make him bleed.

---

When Nebula returned Tony’s life became hell once more. Gone were the days of comfort and kindness Gamora had afforded him. Returned were days of intense pain as Nebula made him bleed, breaking his bones and touching him in places he didn’t want to be touched. Her desire for him had grown in her absence.

She spoke often of what she’d like to do to him and how the day was coming when Tony would finally satisfy her.

The fear surged forward and Tony fought harder against her but Nebula’s strength was too strong for him.

Each night he cried himself to sleep in Gamora’s arms. She stayed with him into the early hours of the morning before she departed to avoid detection. She was the only one who could keep him safe from the nightmares that lived in his sleep.

Bit by bit Tony Stark was breaking.

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“How… long?” Tony asked weakly.

Gamora gently wiped the blood from his face. “Over a year.”

Tony shuddered. “How… long?”

Gamora sighed. Tony wanted specifics and she hated telling him. “Sixteen months since you were captured.” She’d been helping Tony through his torment for seven months now.

Tony stayed quiet, wincing every so often as Gamora continued to wipe the blood off of his cold and worn body. He was so weak now. He barely had the energy to scream now, always disappointing Nebula, causing her to find new and inventive ways to make him hurt, just to hear his cries.
When Gamora had finished, she helped Tony fall asleep before leaving his cell. Each time she walked away guilt always flared within her. She hadn’t been given an opportunity to escape with him yet. She continued to tell him he would escape, that she would get him home, even using the words ‘I promise’.

She could tell he trusted her. She was his only comfort. Gamora felt uneasy over his reliance on her but she had encouraged it by bidding him to trust her.

The problem she had was the longer he was a prisoner, the weaker he became so any rescue would be harder to pull off.

And Gamora knew the time was coming when Thanos would intervene. He was growing increasingly impatient with the lack of information his daughters were providing him with. Thanos could easily break into the human’s mind and extract it himself. So far he hadn’t made a move to but she knew it was coming.

Every day she looked for opportunities to escape but there was always an obstacle in the way which would ensure neither of them would be able to escape. She was beginning to doubt her ability to bring Tony home.

But still she waited, not knowing time was swiftly running out.

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Tony’s blood covered the floor and walls of his cell. He was skin and bones with only a tiny bit of muscle to him. The Arc Reactor in his chest seemed to be bigger than normal but it was only down due to the loss of weight. It still functioned well enough.

Nebula had not left him alone for ten hours now.

Whenever he fell unconscious, she forced him awake, giving him more strength to cope with the pain she put him through. He barely screamed, enticing her more.

“I think you’ve done enough to him today, Nebula,” said Gamora, stepping into the cell. Tony whimpered as Nebula squeezed his throat and then licked up his neck. He tried to ignore the sound of his tormentor’s voice in his ear.

“I will have you… Stark…” She bit his ear lobe.

She clambered off of him, standing up and dusting herself down as Tony continued to lay boneless on the floor of his cell.

He closed his eyes as Gamora led her sister out of his cell, letting the darkness finally take him.

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“I was having a lot of fun with him, sister,” cursed Nebula. “Why did you interrupt me?”

“We’ve been summoned,” stated Gamora. She was glad they had. It meant Tony would be able to rest. But the summons also made her feel uneasy.

“I know what promises you’ve made him.”

Gamora didn’t react. “I have made no such promises to the prisoner.” She saw Nebula smirk out of the side of her eyes. They didn’t speak again. It didn’t sound good Nebula knew of the promises she
Thanos and the Other were waiting for them when they arrived.

The Other stalked towards them. “It gratifies me you have failed to break him so far.”

“I have not failed,” hissed Nebula defensively. “He fears me.”

“He is stronger than we have anticipated,” agreed Gamora. She had a part to play here. “My sister has been brutal with him. He is weak. I believe he will break soon.”

“Gamora’s presence soothes him,” shot back Nebula.

“Are you insinuating that my favourite daughter is betraying me?” Thanos leaned forward, anger flashing in his eyes. “That she has deliberately helped him?”

Gamora stepped forward. She had to defend herself. “The Other spent six months torturing him before bringing him to you. He failed to break him. You gave him to my sister and I to deal with. It has already been shown conventional torture isn’t the way forward with him. I decided to befriend him, to gain his trust, even promise him a chance to escape because I know if he truly believes he will return to his home, that when I betray him, it will be the final straw that will make him crumble. I have spent months gaining his trust and I have it. He relies on me to rescue him. When I don’t, that will be the moment Tony Stark will betray his beloved planet.” She felt sick but Nebula had forced her hand.

It was the only way to protect herself.

“And what if you are wrong?” the Other paced forward. “He may have your trust but he may just believe you have to betray him to keep up the façade. How do we know you are not going to betray us?”

Gamora kept still, her gaze unwavering. “I would never betray my father.”

“Then why do you stop him from breaking, sister?” Nebula asked. “You know very well what action will break him and yet you stop me. Every single time I try.”

Gamora swallowed. I’m sorry Tony. “Because rape isn’t the answer. I stop you because our father desires for him to break and to tell us everything he knows, but he also wants him to work for us. To serve him in his grand plan to take domain of everything in the universe.”

Thanos was watching them from his throne, his eyes moving from each of them as they spoke.

“It might just be the breaking point he needs!” said Nebula. “I could succeed with this if I am only given the chance to prove it is the right path to take!”

“Raping would also ensure he would be useless to our father’s goals,” continued Gamora. “He fears you. It would break him further than our father wishes for him to be.”

“You do not know that!” shouted Nebula.

Gamora turned to look at her sister then. “I think I know Tony Stark better than you. After all, I have his trust. You only have his fear.”

Nebula growled underneath her breath. “I know I can do this.”

“And if you fail and he is not useful to our father?” asked Gamora. She knew she wouldn’t be able
to stop this.

“Then I will submit myself for punishment like always, Sister!” Nebula turned away from Gamora and looked up at Thanos. “Let me do what I wish to him and I promise I will not let you down.”

Thanos didn’t respond to Nebula, instead he looked at Gamora. “I have a mission for you.”

Gamora went down on one knee and bowed her head. “Anything.”

“I have had contact from a Kree Accuser, Ronan. You will work for him and aid him in his goal in collecting a priceless artefact which I desire. You will leave immediately.” Thanos boomed and then turned his attention to Nebula. “You will join Gamora if you succeed in breaking the human. You have my permission to do what you wish with him.”

Gamora inclined her head as Nebula grinned. “Yes, father.”

It was over.

Nebula had ensured she would not be in the position to help Tony again.

Her sister threw her a triumphant look.

Gamora showed no emotions but inside her heart was tearing to pieces. She had promised Tony to rescue him but she would now break the promise. He was doomed to fall into Nebula’s hands.

And she couldn’t save him from it.

*I’m sorry, Tony.*

**To be continued...**

**Please let me know what you think!**

Chapter End Notes

You may be able to guess where this is going next based on the contents of this chapter.

I'm not going to lie about what will happen to Tony. The tags are there and it is quite graphic. Nebula has quite a sexual obsession with Tony... What I will say though is the next chapter will be the only instance of this happening in the entire story and it is an important part of what will shape Tony in the following Parts of this fic. I didn't like writing it but after discussing it with several people, I feel that it works in the end, even though it will not make for pleasant reading.

I will give complete warnings when I post the next chapter.

The next chapter will be posted in TWO WEEKS on TUESDAY 27th FEBRUARY. :)
Part 2: Chapter 6 - Desires Fulfilled

Chapter Summary

Nebula finally has her way with Tony...

Chapter Notes

So... this is the chapter I have been dreading about posting.

WARNING
This is the most graphic and, quite frankly, disgusting thing I have ever written. It is VERY EXPLICIT. Even reading it back before posting made me feel queasy. I honestly thought about cutting a lot of it down but I did want to show the full horror of what Tony goes through when Nebula rapes him, as she doesn't just have sex with him, she does other things to him and forces him to do things to her. It is horrible.

I will honestly say if you can't make it through the chapter, I can understand. Just skip to the end where my notes are which will then reveal the result of this chapter.

If you can't read it all there is another option in that I have bolded, close to the bottom of the chapter with the words READ FROM HERE which is the most important scene of Nebula raping Tony. So there are a few options...

I feel I have to include this chapter because otherwise I will not be showing the full horror of what Tony is going through.

Please heed the warnings.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

PART TWO
THE BREAKING OF TONY STARK
CHAPTER SIX
DESIREs FULFILLED

Tony slept. Uneasily but he still did. Even when Gamora was not there to help him, he had learned to doze without falling into a nightmarish scenario. He didn’t know why but he felt sick to the stomach. Maybe it was because of all the blood he had lost, the lack of food and water and the desire he had to die rather than live…

But they wouldn’t let him die, not until they had what they wanted from him.

It would be so easy to give up and break… To tell them what they wanted to know. To do so would betray his very principles and he simply couldn’t do it.

The time is coming though…
Tony knew he was breaking. He could feel it. The strength he had was crumbling piece by piece. It wouldn’t be long now.

He wasn’t bound, just curled up on the floor. He perked up when his hearing picked up the sound of shuffling feet. Tony’s stomach dropped. He hadn’t heard those shuffling of feet in a long time. It indicated the Chitauri were coming for him. He whimpered as he tried to scuffle across the floor. It wouldn’t stop them from taking him if they wished to. He just wanted to make more space between him and them. Hold off the inevitable... pitiful as much as it was... It still gave him that tiny bit of hope that he could delay it further.

His strength was non-existent and he couldn’t even fight when four Chitauri entered his cell, picked him up with a limb each and bodily carried him out, even as he tried to weakly thrash in their hold. “No… no… Put me… back!” He didn’t care if he was begging for them to leave him there. He didn’t like this change in routine.

Where was Gamora? Why wasn’t she saving him?

They dragged him through the corridors and into a wide open space. Chains hung from the ceiling and they swiftly placed his wrists within the cuffs, leaving him hanging in the air as his legs could not support his weight.

*What are they doing?* Tony felt scared. This was new. Yes, the Chitauri had cleaned him before he came into the hands of Nebula and Gamora but for them to suddenly grab him from his cell signalled a change in routine.

Cold water sprayed down upon him and he screeched as his whole body became soaking wet. He was sobbing before the water was switched off, shivering in his chains. The Chitauri approached him with sponges in their clawed hands, dripping with soap and they proceeded to clean him, rubbing hard at his dirty and blood-stained skin.

Tony was terrified.

A pool of dirt and blood mingled at his feet, draining away at the hole in the floor. His hair was washed too.

Then he jerked as he felt alien fingers prodding at his buttocks, spreading them open and a wet and soap filled cloth cleaned the area, whilst another took his cock in hand and cleaned the length of it. Tony buckled in his chains. “No… No… GET OFF!” He knew what was coming. Why the Chitauri were doing this. *Oh god. Oh god. He didn’t want it… Gamora… please... Please get me out of here...* Tears mingled in his eyes and he felt them streak down his cheeks.

His body was patted dry and they caught him in their hands when they released him from his chains. He was dragged over to a chair, forced to sit in it and three of the Chitauri held him down whilst the fourth pulled his head back. With a knife, the creature began to remove the lengthy beard he had grown over the months he had been a prisoner, scrapping hairs away and being careful not to make Tony bleed. Tony stayed still, knowing it wouldn’t bode well for him if he moved. Then the Chitauri cutting his beard pushed his head forward, took his nearly shoulder-length hair and swiftly cut through it.

Hair dropped to the floor and the Chitauri began to neaten his hair up, using the knife like a pair of scissors, levelling off the length.

Pulling him from the chair, they lifted him into their arms and carried him through another row of
corridors, stopping in front of a row of doors he hadn’t seen before. They were not putting him back in his old cell.

A fifth Chitauri stood beside one of the doors and turned to input a code into it as they approached; the door slid open and Tony was escorted inside.

The room was dull and grey, with only a sink and a hole in the floor as a toilet facility. There was a bed in the centre of the room, the head pressed up against the wall.

Tony was thrown onto the bed. The mattress was hard and uncomfortable and Tony’s hands and legs were pulled up, and chained to cuffs protruding from the head and footboards at the top and end of the bed. “No! NO!” He pulled at his chains as the Chitauri trooped out. “I won’t… I won’t…!”

“Won’t what, Tony?”

Tony stilled, fear gathering in his stomach as his eyes focused upon the form of Nebula, standing in the doorway to his new prison.

“There is no one here to save you. Gamora won’t come. She has left you behind for me to do with as I please,” said Nebula as she moved slowly forward.

Tony cringed, trying to pull away from her, well aware of how exposed he was to his tormentor.

Nebula’s eyes roamed up and down his body. “At least they cleaned you. Made you more respectable for me. I wouldn’t have you any other way.”

Tony’s heart began to beat faster in his chest. He shook his head. This was not happening.

Nebula stopped beside the bed, looking down on him.

“No… please…” It was a futile attempt. He didn’t want to beg but his fear was overriding everything. “I can’t…”

Nebula smirked. “You will.” She leaned down and grabbed his chin. “Unless you give in.” She released his chin and stroked her hand down his body.

Tony shuddered at her touch, trying to wriggle away from her but the chains were too tight and held him fast. He closed his eyes in denial as her hand grasped his cock and she began to stroke it slowly.

“Look at me.”

He refused. Only he opened his eyes when Nebula squeezed him hard.

She was leaning over him now, continuing to pump him.

“Let me tell you something. Something that may make you rethink your position here.” She jerked him hard.

He could feel his body beginning to respond to her ministrations.

*Please no…*

“My sister is the sole reason you survived. If it hadn’t of been for her, you would be dead. She was only playing you. Getting you to trust her so that when her betrayal came you would break easily. You are mine now, Tony.” Nebula leaned forward and licked him up the throat and onto his lips, nibbling at the bottom lip. “God… you taste good.”
Tony tried to jerk his head away but she held his head still with her right hand, whilst continuing to pump him with her left.

“You’re getting there, Tony…” she purred.

He was half-hard now, beginning to leak from the tip. He didn’t want to speak. He wanted to be waking up from the nightmare he was in. He couldn’t believe his body was betraying him.

“Good… You’re responding. I cannot have you not fulfilling my needs.” Her hand pumped faster making him squirm in her grip.

He didn’t want to see her face yet she was refusing to allow him to close his eyes. He knew if he did she would only do something to guarantee he would open them again.

Then she removed her hand from his cock, leaning over him. She used the hand that she’d just been pumping him with to grasp his neck, cutting off his air. “I’m going to enjoy this… I’ve waited so long… Now I can do with you what I like… Have you as many times as I want.” She licked his cheek as he flinched. “Unless you wish to tell us…” She nibbled at his lip. “What we want to know.”

Oh it would be so easy to give in. The terrible part of his situation was that Tony knew he could. He was ready to give in, to just let the pain stop. To allow them to take what they wanted. He knew it was inevitable. And yet...

_I can’t… I can’t. Pepper. Please. Gamora. Help me. Please._

He closed his eyes. He could feel his mental strength crumbling as Nebula released his throat and started to move down his body, towards his dick that stood erect and ready.

_Please go down…_ He felt shame his body had betrayed him, had responded to her ministrations.

Tony closed his eyes, biting his lower lip as he sought to ignore Nebula’s tongue as it slid over his skin, down over his chest and abdomen. She gripped his hips hard, leaving marks as she settled between his legs. He knew what she was going to do and he didn’t want it. _Please don’t…_

Her tongue licked him from base to tip.

Tony tried to jerk but she gripped him hard.

He tried to ignore the sensation of a tongue running up and down his length, sucking and dragging her teeth over the skin, whilst her fingers played with his balls.

Whimpering and crying all at once, Tony tried to get his mind to focus on something else. He tried to think of Pepper between his legs rather than his torturer.

It didn’t work.

_Pepper… Please… Pepper…_

Even as he chanted Pepper’s name, his mind betrayed him.

He couldn’t not think of what Nebula was doing to him. Knowing who it was and how he was being forced to pleasure her made it difficult to think of Pepper, no matter how much he wanted to.

He could feel something building his tummy, could feel the tightness building.
“You’re gonna cum for me…” she hissed around his length, grazing her teeth up it, taking him fully into her mouth so the tip was poking the back of her throat. She swirled her tongue over the tip, moaning at the taste. She squeezed his sacks.

Tears fell down from his eyes. He couldn’t… But he did.

He came in her mouth and she greedily swallowed, licking around the tip as it softened in her mouth before releasing him with a loud pop.

Tony lay there sobbing, not caring that he was crying in front of his enemy. He felt a body press down on his and a hand turn his head upwards. A tongue, scented with his taste, licked from his throat to his eyelid, smothering his face in the smell and taste of himself. Nebula pressed her lips to his as she rutted herself against him.

She was still fully clothed but he could feel a wetness pressing down on his thigh and he knew she’d been getting off while sucking him dry.

She straddled him then, rocking herself over his limp length. “I’m gonna have you again and again and again, Tony…”

Tony flinched, still keeping his eyes closed.

“Open your eyes.”

Tony did so, fearful of the consequences if he didn’t.

Nebula was above him, her top off, revealing her bare skin. Her breasts hung down, pert with arousal but what focused Tony’s eyes were the scars decorating her skin. His attention was drawn away when she grabbed his chin, still rolling her hips over his groin, trying to arouse him again so she could continue with her perverted pleasure.

“I need some attention from you, Tony,” she hissed. “You will suck.”

Tony tried to keep his mouth shut but she forced his jaw open, moving her right breast closer to his mouth.

He felt the smooth but scarred skin enter his mouth, could feel the areola on his tongue. She started to move his chin for him, massaging her own breast with his mouth.

NO!

Resistance flared and he bit down hard on the breast in his mouth.

Nebula shrieked and punched him in the cheek, causing him to release her breast.

He coughed out blood, spitting it onto the pillow, glaring up at her with defiance in his eyes.

She stood in front of him, half-naked, her cybernetic hand inspecting the breast he had bit into. Droplets of blood fell to the floor and she turned hatred filled eyes on him.

“You will pay for that.”

Tony swallowed.

Fuck.
He should not have done that.

She moved on him fast, unlocking the chains around his ankles, and as he tried to kick out at her, she grabbed his legs, holding them up, bending him at his pelvis.

“No…! GET OFF!” Tony yelled, trying desperately to stop her.

“I wasn’t going to do this but you’ve forced my hand,” she snarled.

Keeping his legs trapped over her left shoulder with her left arm, she used her right hand to massage his hole, pressing at the knot of nerves there before forcing a finger inside him.

He screamed as he felt himself being torn open as she added a second and then a third in quick succession. She pumped her hand in and out, watching his facial expression as he tried to struggle against her, only hurting himself more by doing so.

“This is your punishment for biting me!” said Nebula. “If you do it again I will make sure I open you enough for the Chitauri to have you as a reward for their good service to my father!”

“No… Please! No…!” Tony did not care he was begging her. “I won’t…”

“Won’t what?” She paused in her ministrations, keeping her fingers inside him.

Tony let out a sob. “I’ll suck…” He turned his head away in shame.

He didn’t see Nebula’s smile but she removed her fingers, placing his legs back down on the mattress.

“If you fight me then the threat still applies.”

Tony nodded through his tears.

Nebula didn’t chain his legs again but Tony dared not fight.

He simply couldn’t.

Not anymore.

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She left him alone for a while after he had acquiesced to her desire to have him suck her breasts. She left the room he was in, still chained with his wrists to the bed but his ankles still free from the bonds. This was so surreal for him, so sickening too. He was in the midst of being raped. His body was no longer his own. It was just a toy for Nebula to play with until she got bored.

He cried. He couldn’t help the tears falling from his eyes.

He could make it easy on himself if he just gave in to their demands. He’d fought for so long, weathered pain and agony that the thought of simply giving in was a welcoming one but it made him feel guilty. He would be weak if he did. They wanted information from him. Information that they could then use against the Earth. The nuclear weapon they desired to know about could then have a defence made, making it useless as a weapon.

Tony would ensure Earth’s fall if he surrendered.

So he couldn’t.
Yet the fear of what Nebula was going to do to him was what made him wonder how long he could truly hold out for.

He was so terrified.

He tried to think of Pepper but all he saw in his head was Nebula’s leering face as she peered down at him before licking his neck. He tried to block out the memories of her sucking him off, getting off on the fact that she had swallowed his cum.

*I can’t… Please… No.*

Tony cried harder.

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His tears had dried up by the time Nebula returned. As she entered and locked the door behind her, she pulled off her top again revealing her pert and aroused breasts. She moved over to him, staring into his fearful eyes.

“I can see you breaking before my eyes,” she smiled. “A shame Gamora stopped me from doing this to you for so long.” She ran a hand down his face.

Tony wanted to reply but he couldn’t muster an adequate response.

“But no more.” Nebula moved then to unchain his left wrist. She gave him a warning with her eyes, making him aware any resistance to hurt her would result in the same threat happening to him anyway.

Tony didn’t want this to happen to him yet he couldn’t fight back because he did not want to become a plaything of the Chitauri. He knew Nebula would carry out her threats. His left wrist was released and she placed his arm down by his side.

“You will watch,” she ordered him, even as he sought to close his eyes.

She stripped down her trousers, removing her boots as well, leaving her in thin, black knickers. Then she climbed onto him, swinging her legs over his body before she ripped her knickers off. The way she was positioned over him made him see between her legs. He could see the pert black hairs and her vagina was dripping with desire.

He could smell it on her too and he wanted to gag.

Grabbing his left wrist, she bent it at the elbow and shuffled back a bit, forcing all but his index finger down.

With her left hand she pulled the skin apart, giving him a better look between her legs before she placed his finger at her entrance and slowly began to manipulate his hand so that he was stroking her.

Tony felt sick as Nebula moaned.

After a few strokes she pushed his index finger into her, flexing it against her walls, forcing it all the way in before slowly pulling the finger out and then pushing it back in. She buckled above him as she forced his hand to fuck her. She soon pulled his hand out, but only for a few seconds while she pulled his middle finger up and inserted two of his fingers inside her. She repeated the same actions, fucking herself on his fingers before adding another until all four of his fingers were inside her.
His fingers brushed a knot of her nerves triggering her orgasm and she held his hand in place as her cum coated his hand.

Pulling his hand out of her, Nebula climbed off of his body, now guiding his own cum-coated hand to his mouth.

“This is your breakfast for being a good boy,” she pattered his hair.

Tony shuddered. He knew what she wanted him to do and didn’t resist as she pulled his mouth open and placed his four soaking fingers on his tongue.

“Suck yourself clean,” she ordered.

Closing his eyes, Tony obeyed, feeling sick. The taste of her made him want to vomit as he licked his hand clean.

When she was happy with his work she placed his wrist back in its chains above his head.

He wondered for how much longer this could go on for.

He also considered how much resistance he had left.

Nebula climbed back on top of him, scooting up his body, spreading her legs, opening herself up to him. “Now. You will do as I say. You know the punishment which awaits you if you do not submit.” She grinned down at him as she levered herself up into a position where she could grip the metal headboard with her hands, placing her leaking centre over his mouth. “Fuck me with your mouth.”

Before Tony could even muster a response she slammed her wet centre down on his partially open mouth, causing him to gag as her already wet juices trickled onto his tongue.

Disgusted and feeling sicker, Tony forced himself to do what she had ordered him to do.

*Think of Pepper. Pretend this is Pepper.*

He kept his eyes closed as he licked and sucked at her wet centre, ignoring her moans of ecstasy. He detested the taste of her and wanted nothing more than to vomit as she moved her hips over his mouth, directing his tongue in new directions.

It went on for a long while as Nebula instructed him to slow his pace. He didn’t dare defy her though he wanted this over with quickly.

He could tell when she was close as her pace quickened over his mouth and she ordered him to lick her faster.

Keeping his eyes closed, knowing what was coming, knowing that she wouldn’t move away, he felt the first trickle of her orgasm fall onto his cheek before she stilled herself, bracing her body with her arms on the steel board she gripped. She spread her legs wider as she orgasmed over Tony’s face, smothering his skin with her juices.

Stilling herself, Nebula moaned until she had finished before shakily climbing off of him.

Tony’s eyes were still shut and he could feel the wetness and the smell of her on him.

“Look at you…” she hissed delightedly. “Covered in me…” She gently stroked his hair. “This is what I’ve always wanted… You are more than worth the wait, Tony.”
He shuddered.

“I will return later, for the main event.” She tugged at his limp cock.

He whimpered.

Minutes later he heard the door unlock, open and then close again.

Tony turned his head to the side and immediately vomited.

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He wanted to die.

If there was any moment in his captivity where he had wanted to die more than now, Tony couldn’t recall. This was worse, the most awful thing he’d had to experience.

His face was dry and sticky with Nebula’s juices and he’d vomited a few times since she had left him. He could easily have choked on the vomit. It was an undignified way to go out, yet he hadn’t wanted to die that way.

His thoughts turned to Gamora. He hadn’t wanted to believe she had abandoned him, yet she was nowhere to be seen while Nebula had her play with him. Had she really just befriended him to get him to trust her? Did he really mean nothing to her? Had she really been the one to orchestrate his capture in the first place? He didn’t wish to believe the accusations.

*They have to be true. Why is she not here?*

He’d thought he had a friend in the darkness of his captivity. She had been the light holding him up and now she was gone, having betrayed him in the worst possible way.

He was alive because of her.

*I could be dead and at peace now if she hadn’t saved me…*

Tony cried again.

*What is the point in continuing to fight if I have no way out?*

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Nebula returned later.

Tony didn’t know how long it had been since she’d left.

She stripped herself naked the moment she door closed, striding over to the bed and climbed on top of him, proceeding to rub her entrance over his limp cock. “This is it, Tony. The moment we’ve both been waiting for. I’ve longed to have you like this.”

He shuddered.

She moved back, straddling his knees, using her hands to manipulate his cock. Stroking it slowly and sensually and then using her mouth to lick him hard.

His body betrayed him as he responded to her pleasures.

“No,” he whispered quietly.
Nebula leaned in close, gripping his chin with her right hand. “What?”

Shame roared through him but he couldn’t do it. He couldn’t let himself be taken this way. He’d fought for so long, been in pain for months and now he was at his wits end.

Tears fell down from his eyes. “I’ll speak.”

“Speak about what?” queried Nebula.

Tony let out a sob, biting his lower lip, trying to ignore the dried taste of Nebula on his lips. “What you want to know.”

“Oh Tony…” Nebula stroked his face tenderly. “I knew it. I knew the act of this would make you break.”

“I can’t be…. I can’t…” Tony tried to speak but he couldn’t finish his sentence. *Can’t be raped.*

Nebula leaned down and kissed him gently on the lips. “A shame really. I was really looking forward to having you release inside me. Still…” And then her face turned nasty.

Tony recognised her intentions straight away. “NO! Don’t! Please!”

And then he screamed in horror and pain as Nebula took him inside herself, sliding him into her wet centre with ease. She sank down on him until he was fully seated within her.

She laughed as she took his chin, forcing him to look at her, as tears fell from his eyes. “Did you really think I wasn’t going to have you? I’ve waited too long for this for you to stop me now.” Pulling herself back up, she slammed herself down on his cock again. “God, your dick is amazing.” She rolled her hips, slowly and sensually, taking him slowly.

Openly sobbing, Tony tried to ignore the sensations of Nebula using his body, rolling her hips and taking him fully within her as she rocked him slowly at first before quickening her pace. He tried to ignore her sly comments about how great his dick was and how she was going to have him again and again after this but the sound of her voice as she screeched in pleasure drowned out all of his attempts to pull himself away from the situation.

His face was wet with his tears and Nebula grabbed his shoulders to steady herself before she was moving fast on him.

Up and down, up and down…

With one last roll of her hips, Nebula’s body orgasmed, the result triggering Tony’s as the pressure built in his abdomen before he came inside her.

Nebula’s eyelids fluttered as she continued to roll her hips lazily, milking him for all his seed, before finally she pulled herself off of him, letting his cock loose from her clenched walls. Rolling off, she lay next to him on the bed, panting from exertion and the thrill of what she had just done.

Tony was falling into shock as tears continued to pour silently from his eyes.

After a while, Nebula moved, climbing onto her knees before straddling him again.

Tony’s eyes were out of focus, lost in the horror of his own mind but he came back to himself when she grabbed his chin.

“I enjoyed that,” she said, as she licked his lips.
Tony flinched and whimpered.

“Your dick is everything I thought it would be,” she whispered huskily into his ear. Her hand grasped his limp member. “I’m having you again.”

“No…” he managed.

She placed a finger on his lips. “Shush now… You’ll enjoy this too.”

Tony turned his head away. She didn’t stop him.

He could do nothing as Nebula raped him again and again.

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Tony protected himself by losing himself in the horrors of his own mind. Not that it did much good. He was well aware of what Nebula was continuing to do to his body. It gave him an escape of sorts. When he did manage to crawl his way out of the fog of his own mind, he immediately regretted it.

Nebula was asleep.

On top of him.

And he could feel he was still firmly inside her.

He felt sick. Wanted to throw up. He had nothing to give.

Nebula woke soon after and immediately started to roll her hips. “Ah… you’ve come back at last…” She licked the top of his nose. “I can’t get enough of you…”

Again he whimpered. He wanted this to stop.

He didn’t know how long it was before Nebula made himself and herself come again but it felt like forever as she slowly and sensually rolled her hips over his, moving herself up and down upon him.

Finally, when she was done, having satisfied herself she pulled herself off of him; he came loose with a plop.

Nebula shakily stood. “Still want to tell us everything, Tony?”

He couldn’t speak. No one listened to him when he did. What was the point?

She chuckled, pulling on her trousers, zipping them up and throwing on her top. “I have achieved what I set out to do. You’re broken, Tony Stark.”

He knew it was true as the tears shimmered in his eyes.

She leaned down to his pelvis and drew her tongue over his limp cock. “I look forward to playing with this again later.” Nebula cackled as she left the cell.

Laying, still chained to the bed, Tony whaled in despair, crying out, as tears cascaded down his cheeks.

He couldn’t do it.

Not anymore.
The fight had finally left him.

He was broken.

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

I think I broke Tony....

Well. Not think. I did. He's broken. Sorry?

More in two weeks which will be the final part of Part 2. Then we will move on to Part 3.
Part 2: Chapter 7 - Broken

Chapter Summary

Tony has been broken...

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the comments for the last chapter! I know it was a hard one to read and I appreciate the comments I received!

This chapter is the final part of Part 2: The Breaking of Tony Stark. So, after this chapter we will be moving further forward in the timeline and things will start to move pretty fast!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART TWO
THE BREAKING OF TONY STARK
CHAPTER SEVEN
BROKEN

He was kept in his new cell for days, chained with both arms still to the bed. Nebula visited often though she did not engage (much) in sexual activity, though she always took the pleasure in making snide remarks about his performance and how great his dick had been. Her words terrified him and he was scared she would shed her clothes and have him again. She clearly was gagging for more.

She was restraining herself which only made him feel more wary and scared when she was with him.

They didn’t torture him either though kept him hydrated with water and a tiny bit of food.

He was finally freed from his chains when a group of Chitauri and Nebula entered his cell. At first thought he was certain Nebula had come to follow through on her promise of allowing the Chitauri a go with him. He was tense and tried to curl up in a ball as they released his wrists from the chains and dragged him from the bed.

Hauled from the room by his ankles, Tony was taken through the ship corridors towards the hanger where he was dumped on the edge of a sled which Nebula than directed towards the throne room in the domain of Thanos.

Tony shook on the floor, terrified of what was to come next.

As they neared Thanos’ location, a dark omen settled in Tony’s stomach. He shivered again as Nebula directed the sled downwards, landing at a pad just a few steps away from where her father sat in his chair.

Tony allowed himself to be dragged. He didn’t fight. He was done fighting.
They forced him to kneel in front of Thanos.

Nebula walked in front of him. “I have broken him. He wishes to tell us what we desire.”

The cold, dark voice echoed in Tony’s ears as he responded to Nebula’s pronouncement.

“And what does he have to say?”

The question was directed at him, Tony knew.

“Speak!” commanded Nebula, gripping the back of his head, forcing his head up so he was looking upon the monster in the chair.

“The weapon I used… was one designed… to act as a deterrent for war. It will… kill many people… if used on Earth.” Struggling to speak, Tony felt as if he wasn’t all there. His words were slurring and his body and mind felt weak and tired of all the fight he had put up. He didn’t know if he was making sense or not. “The materials… the materials… I… Weapon of destruction… Didn’t think… I…”

Nebula cursed in his ear. “Speak properly worm!” She threw Tony forward.

He didn’t react to falling face-first. He just lay there, shuddering and muttering about weapons. The words were incomprehensible.

The Other moved forward from where he had stood off to the side. “You have broken him too much! Now he is useless to us!”

Nebula snarled. “He isn’t useless! We can remake him how we like! He will be an Enforcer who is incapable of betrayal because he will fear the consequences of what will happen to him! I do not regret raping him to get him to the point where he will no longer resist us!”

The words spoke were reverberating in Tony’s ears. He wanted to speak, to form cohesive words so he wouldn’t be punished again. No more pain. He tried to form words and wasn’t sure if he succeeded but he felt them all looking at his crumpled form as he spoke. “I… will… serve…”

He had once sworn he would never speak those words but his promise had been useless. Everyone had a breaking point and they had finally found his.

“See?” Nebula screeched as she grabbed Tony by the hair and wrenching him upwards. “He will serve us!”

“Yet he cannot speak on command or give us the information Lord Thanos requires!” retorted the Other. “He was kept alive because of this!”

Tony inwardly shuddered. He was kept alive because Gamora had suggested it. Had formed a bond with him, made him believe she cared about him… It had all been lies.

“If he will not speak then I will just take what I want from his head,” decreed Thanos.

“No…” Tony whispered brokenly. No more pain.

“You are incapable of comprehensive speech. You are shattered, torn to pieces. You are useless for information and I want what is in your head.” The titan’s words were cruel and curt. “I have been patient and waited for this day. You will serve me and I will take the information you carry. Earth will fall, by your hand.”
Tony whimpered. Why couldn’t they just let him die?

Nebula grabbed him, hoisting him to his knees. Tony’s head hung loose. He simply did not have the strength to resist.

It began by the sense of something pushing into his brain; the feeling of fingers fiddling through it, pressing into his memories, pulling them apart slowly. It didn’t hurt at first but the pain continued to grow as the sensation felt weirder and stranger.

“I could have just as easily taken what I wanted from you when you were first captured,” said Thanos quietly. “I was convinced you were more worthy alive. I wanted you to be punished for your destruction of my army. Therefore I ordered your suffering. The Other could have brought you to me within days but you deserved pain. This is why we will never let you die. You will be the destruction of Earth, and then, only then, may I give you mercy and allow you to die.”

And then his head exploded as the foreign sensation suddenly got worse.

He screamed. He couldn’t stop himself, buckling in the grip of Nebula.

Images flashed in front of his eyes as the fingers prodded further, ripping through the barriers that protected his mind. His head was hurting. Painful and aching, Tony shuddered, wanting to curl up into a ball and die.

He gurgled, hardly able to breathe as Nebula finally dropped him to the floor. Jerking and twitching, he could feel his mind being ripped apart, being pulled apart piece by piece and not being put back together.

Memories were pulled to the surface of his brain and he could see them in his mind’s eye before they were tossed aside as insignificant.

Then the missile was at the forefront of his mind. The one he had used against them. He could see the memory in clarity as Thanos slowed down his assault on his prisoners mind to inspect the memory further. Information scrolled forth. The mechanics of the weapon… The firepower, the range…

Tony was screaming louder than ever before as the monster pulled the memory to the side, digging in further, looking for more.

He couldn’t think, couldn’t stop the tears descending from his eyes as he flipped on the ground, his body twisting so he now lay on his back, his limbs splaying in every direction.

“Oh god… Help… PLEASE!” Tony’s mouth worked on its own. He couldn’t… His cries turned to more screams as the pressure increased again and intense sharp pains spread through his head.

“No one is coming to save you,” stated Thanos.

Tony writhed and then…

He was taken back.

To Afghanistan.

And the Mad Titan forced him to relieve his torture there, to see how he had fought back to create Iron Man, an opportunity his alien captors had not given him in his time with them. But Thanos focused upon the building of Iron Man and then dug further into his mind, pushing further back into
Tony’s past.

Tony managed to stutter forth, despite the pain he was in. “You… Have… What… You.. Want…!”

The cruel laughter echoed in his ears as the pressure in his brain was lifted for just a moment. “Maybe so… But I have discovered something more worthwhile to pursue…”

“Please…” Tony knew his pleas would fall on deaf ears.

The pressure descended again. His body jerked, his spine nearly bending in an unfathomable position.

Images whirled into his mind of all the weapons he had ever designed, each ones schematics pulled up from the recesses of his brain and examined thoroughly by Thanos. He could see every detail, could sense Thanos’ pleasure at discovering Tony’s sordid past in weapon designing and dealing.

It felt like forever before Thanos finally pulled out of Tony’s mind. He was left on the floor, shaking and muttering incomprehensibly, his mind and body unable to take any more pain. His head hurt and his memories seemed to scramble together like they were pieces of a crust that needed to be put back together but kept falling apart.

His fingers barely moved as he tried to curl them and his mouth stayed open as he lay weakened at Thanos’ feet. He was looking away from the Mad Titan when Nebula stepped forward and tenderly turned his head so he was looking at the Titan.

Fear welled in his gut as his body shook.

“You are an intriguing specimen.” Thanos leaned forward, looking down upon Tony. “Before you became a hero you were a destroyer. A weapon’s designer. Not only do you hold a device which is capable of immunity against the greatest power in the universe, you are also highly intelligent to design weapons that are far beyond the reach of normal humans. I should be thankful my daughter Gamora convinced me to allow you continued life when you destroyed my army. You are full of surprises. No matter how broken you are.”

Tony shuddered.

“You will help me, Tony Stark.”

Tony knew he would. He didn’t have a choice in it. Not now he had broken.

“The possibilities with you are endless,” commented Thanos. He moved a hand and Tony felt himself automatically moving up, his limbs bending at the Titan’s will until he was keeling in front of the Titan, being held up by an invisible force. “This pleases me.”

He didn’t know what to say. He had lost control of his body. And his mind was screaming at him as it continued to ache.

“You will be allowed to rest and build up your strength. I cannot have you dying, can I?” Thanos chuckled darkly. “You will train under the Black Order. If you fail tasks you will be punished. If you succeed, the reward is the knowledge you will not be punished. You will design and build weapons for me. Weapons that can be used to harness the technology in your chest and you will build stations that are incapable of being destroyed by your own Earth-weapons.”

Tony felt his spine bending forward as he bowed.
“You will comply with my demands or you will suffer for all eternity. Death will not be an escape for you.”

“Yes…” Tony knew what he had to say, what was expected of him now. And he hated himself for the word he was about to mutter. “Master.”

Dark chuckling echoed in front of him. Thanos was pleased by his words. “Good.”

Tony didn’t fight when they dragged him away.

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He was ordered to have a shower.

Tony stood in the cubicle, with Chitauri warriors outside of it, as he carefully turned the knobs on the wall, making water to spurt out down on him. The luke-warm water coated his body, trailing down it, wetting his hair as well when he moved his head under it. He had a small raggedy cloth which he used to clean himself with, alongside a small bar, of what he presumed, was soap. It was difficult to stand on his weak legs. Sheer will-power helped him stay on his feet, no matter how much his legs hurt at being used.

Once he was done he was given a towel to dry himself, though he was under constant guard. He was then surprised to find long trousers and a tunic given to him.

Tony stared at the material for a long while, unsure of what to do with it.

Had they really given him clothes?

After all this time of keeping him naked, were they finally going to let him wear something?

He pulled on the trousers first, finding the material strange on his skin. It was soft but it offered enough protection to keep him warm from the cold air that brushed through the ship he was – had been? – a prisoner on.

Next he pulled on the tunic. Pulling it over his head, Tony rolled it down over his chest and abdomen, still finding the sensation of soft material on his skin strange. He supposed it would take him a while to get used to it since he had been deprived of any luxury items whilst they sought to break him.

He felt numb and weak, unable to comprehend what he was going to have to do. Most of all he was scared of failing and being tortured for eternity. Just by being in the presence of Thanos, Tony could tell he would be quite capable of extending his life if he so wished for Tony to suffer for years on end. He didn’t want to get on the bad side of him. The most Tony could wish for is that he died in the field, unless they kept him here to build their weapons arsenal. He loathed the idea of designing and building weapons again, yet the threat was clear. He could no longer deny them what they wanted.

He was going to betray Earth just to stop them from hurting him again.

Weak.

I’ve always been weak.

His father had once told him that during a moment of being drunk. Howard Stark had never loved his son. If he had, he hadn’t known how to show it.
“Dad was right,” he muttered quietly. “I’m weak.”

A surge of self-hatred ripped through him but then disappeared as the sense of loneliness overcame him. He was all alone out here. He had found hope in Gamora who had betrayed him.

*She lied to me. She claimed she wanted to help me. She promised me to get me out and back home. She lied to make me think I could trust her. She abandoned me here.* Tony gritted his teeth. *I relied on her. And yet… The truth hurts. Gamora is the reason I survived.* What hurt most about her betrayal wasn’t the fact he had grown to trust and rely on her, it was because Tony had started to have feelings for her. He’d seen her as a saviour and his hope to escape had transitioned to attachment. She had helped him in ways no one else could. *I fell for her. She kept me safe…*

He realised the implications of what he was feeling then.

*I loved her. I fell in love with her because of her compassion and caring for me. She treated me like a human being.*

But as he came to understand his feelings and the implications of them, he felt a surge of hatred rip forth for Gamora. He loathed her. She had left him. Saved her own skin and left him to be Nebula’s sexual toy. She’d allowed him to be broken and now he had no choice but to serve her father, the being she had sworn to save him from.

He had believed her.

And it had been his downfall.

“I hate her.” He looked up, staring straight ahead of him, at the corridor he was now being dragged down by Chitauri warriors, holding his arms tightly. They didn’t seem to notice what he was saying. If they did, they were trained enough to ignore any rumblings from a helpless prisoner. “I’ll kill her.”

And he meant it.

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They took him to new quarters, away from the cells, dragging him through the ship. He’d never seen this area before. They reached a long, well-lit corridor, which was littered with sliding doors, which opened at the press of a button to the side of them.

Tony was dragged to a door, third on the right side, where the Chitauri hauled him inside and hoisted him up onto the bed there. They left him there as the door slid shut behind them.

Glancing around at his new accommodation, Tony noted it was very bare. Much like the room he had been raped in, it held a sink and a hole in the floor acted as the toilet. In addition to this there was also a cupboard which Tony presumed would have the same type of clothes in he was wearing now. He didn’t bother to check. He didn’t feel he needed to.

For the first time in a long while he was free to do his own thing.

And he didn’t know what to do with himself.

He lay there, well aware of what he had to do and what he was going to become now that he had acquiesced to their demands. He felt hatred for Gamora and for his captors but also fear of Thanos.

*I don’t want to be tortured again.*
But he didn’t want to betray Earth either.

Yet I have.

There was no turning back.

He was torn in two, his mind still recovering from the trauma it had suffered. He already knew they would never let him die until he had completed the goals they had set him. His mind and heart was still his own, yet he was a shadow of his former self, unable to fight back for fear of more pain.

Tony hated himself.

He’d learned long ago there was no point in trying to kill himself. They would always know and could always stop him.

He was stuck, unable to really help himself, locked away in a nightmare which had broken him. Tony rubbed his eyes with his palms. Don’t cry. Don’t cry. He didn’t but it was difficult not to.

Eventually, consumed by his own thoughts, Tony fell asleep, hugging the pillow and wrapped up tightly in the covers of the bed, a luxury he hadn’t had the privilege of in years.

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Someone grabbed his throat, waking him from his slumber.

He was so used to being a prisoner that Tony didn’t even fight back, despite his capacity to use his hands now. He was lifted up and slammed against the wall before he was able to discern his attacker. His eyes focused upon Nebula and dread settled in his stomach.

“Hi Tony.” She cocked her head to the side, an insane smile pulling at her features. “Liking your new home?”

Tony’s eyes widened. Fighting to breathe, scrabbling at her arm in an attempt to loosen her hold, he nearly choked. She allowed him a little breathing room by loosening her fingers slightly, refusing to relinquish her grip on his neck.

“Are you not going to answer me?” asked Nebula, closing the gap between them, nuzzling into his neck, taking in the scent of him.

“Let… Me… Go…” he hissed.

Nebula abruptly dropped him, surprising Tony with her compliance. He dropped to the bed with his legs crumbling beneath him as he took in deep lungful’s of air. Hauling himself up, pressing his back against the wall, he watched warily as Nebula paced his room. What did she want? He now served her father, surely there was nothing she could do to him now?

“I’m leaving soon. To join my sister.”

Keeping his face impassive, despite the surge of anger he felt at the mention of Gamora, Tony listened to Nebula, well aware she could turn on him in any minute. If she still had free reign to hurt him…

Nebula was suddenly in front of him, hands planted down on the bedding, leaning forward close to Tony’s face. “I’m going to miss the fun we had together.”

Eyes widening at that statement, Tony shook his head in disbelief. Before he could mount a defence,
Nebula’s face was close to his own. He avoided looking at her, determined to not be intimidated.

Her hand turned his head back as he was forced to look into her eyes.

“Did you not enjoy it?” she whispered huskily into his face.

Biting his lower lip, Tony tried to turn his head away, yet Nebula’s steel grip stopped him doing so.

Moving him down the wall until he was flat on his back, Nebula straddled him. “I’m surprised you are not putting up a fight. Or are you too broken and scared of the consequences to do so?”

She wanted him to fight back, he could tell from her disappointment that the allure she had for him was lowering because he simply did not wish to resist her. She didn’t find him so enticing yet it didn’t stop her from straddling his hips and begin gyrating against him. She stopped her movements and pushed her pelvis down on him.

Lowering her lips to his ear she whispered succinctly into it. “If you were naked and were hard, this position here, you’d be inside me and I’d be riding you.” She bit his ear lobe, licked down his throat, continuing to move her hips against him.

Her hand came for his throat again and he choked as she squeezed tightly.

“Let me make this very clear for you, Tony. You may now serve my father but you will still make mistakes. You will still fail. And when you do, you will be mine. Every single time.” She pressed her lips to his, moaning at the taste of him, before removing her hand from his throat, moving it down to his groin and squeezed tightly. “I will see you when I return from my mission. And if you’ve been a bad boy…”

Cackling, Nebula left the room.

Tony lay still for a few more moments before he wrenched himself up off the bed, stumbled to the hole in the floor and promptly vomited.

“No… No… Not again… No…”

Trembling in fear, Tony leaned back against the closest wall, pulled his legs up to his chest, buried his head into his arms and cried.

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It wasn’t long before Tony had another visitor. His tears had dried and he had managed to crawl back to the bed. When his door slid open again, his whole body tensed up. He wasn’t even relieved when his eyes fell on the figure of the Other. He just stiffened more, moving himself up the bed, pressing into the wall.

“You’re afraid. Good,” the Other muttered. “I remember when you were so defiant; refusing to believe you would ever break… And here you are, nearly two years later, a shadow of your former self.”

The dark laughter echoed in Tony’s ears.

“Nothing to say?” The Other’s face stretched into a horrifying grin. Despite the hood shielding its features, the scarred face was one of twisted glee.

Tony simply turned his head away from looking at the horrifying creature in front of him.
The Other’s throaty response floated in his ears. “You will have a period of two weeks rest. During this time you will be escorted to the training area where you are expected to build up your strength for an hour each day. The rest of your day is for you to do with as you please, however your movements aboard this ship will be monitored. Food will be delivered to you twice a day. Once this rest period has finished, you will be taken for re-education and your intensive training will begin. You know the price you will pay if you do not satisfy us.”

Tony swallowed. They wanted a rise out of him. He wasn’t going to give them what they wanted. It was laughable really. They had achieved in breaking him to use him against his family and friends, yet now they wanted him to resist. It was a ploy he realised, to see how far they could push him. Tony wasn’t going to fall for it.

Something was thrown at him, landed on his chest. He jerked back.

It was a pad of some sort, judging by the loose pieces of paper within it.

“In your rest, you are also required to begin your designs, utilising the technology within your chest. We expect a few designs in two weeks.”

Tony nodded numbly. There was no point in resisting the inevitable.

“After your rest period, when you are fully working to aid our glorious cause, you will be checked up on in hourly intervals to see how much progress has been made. Do not fail us,” the Other warned.

Tony tried to work his dried mouth. It didn’t mean much to him.

“Remember what the consequences will be if you fail us.” The Other demanded before turning away and walking out of Tony’s new home.

It took him a while to respond to the orders of the Other. Taking the pad, Tony carefully turned it over.

*I hate I have to do this.*

In the end he knew it was a choice of betrayal or pain.

*I don’t want the pain.*

Betrayal it was then.

**To be continued...**

Chapter End Notes

So now you know what Tony’s future role will be in this story...albeit it is reluctantly and through coercion and being broken through intense torture. He hasn't had a very nice time... at all.

Part 3 will start posting in two weeks! In that part we will catch up with Thor so if you haven't seen Ragnarok there will be spoilers! And we will catch up with Gamora with the Guardians of the Galaxy... And Thanos sets his plan in motion to conquer the
universe.

This story has evolved in to a 'my version' of Infinity War. I hope everyone sticks through it with me!

More will be posted on **Tuesday 27th March**!
Part 3: Chapter 1 - Ragnarok

Chapter Summary

Thor's ship is attacked by Thanos and the Black Order.

Chapter Notes

Welcome to Part 3 of 'Fateful Choices'! This part has a total of 5 chapters planned for it. I am still writing chapter 3.

This chapter will have spoilers for Thor: Ragnarok and also contains dialogue from the end of the film and middle-credit scene!

It may be best to refresh yourselves with 'Part 1: Chapter 4 - The Years Between 2012-2018' as it may be beneficial to learn more about where the current Infinity Stones are... If not I will provide a list in my end notes of this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART THREE
THE WAR BEGINS
Chapter One
Ragnarok

Aboard The Statesman, Post Fall of Asgard

Asgard was gone, fallen at the hands of Surtar.

So much had happened in such a short space of time.

Thor stood, looking out of a large glass pane, at the expense of stars ahead of them. The Asgardians were now without a home and they needed to find a new one. Heading to Earth seemed to be the most suitable option. How could he have lost Asgard in such a short space of time? Thor closed his eyes, thinking back upon the days just passed.

Thor had been looking for Infinity Stones, trying to trace them amongst the universe, since they had been emerging in the last few years. It worried him four of the six had been found and he didn’t like the notion that someone was likely manipulating events so they could get their hands on them. Ultimate power and the ability to weave the universe in one’s own image was swiftly closing in on them. All Thor knew was he had to stop it. Even one Infinity Stone in the hands of the wrong being could cause untold havoc across the universe: much like the fiasco on Xandar, where a small group of heroes had banded together to stop a Kree Warlord from destroying the planet.

Thor had heard of that particular tale on his wanderings before he had returned to Asgard, before he had unmasked Loki, before their father had died in Norway on Earth… Thor swallowed… And before their sister Hela had returned from her imprisonment to take the Asgardian throne which was
rightfully hers by birth-right.

His father had led him to believe Thor had been his first-born, his one and only heir, only to find out upon his father’s death Thor was the second-born, who had no claim to the Asgardian throne, unless his older sister, Hela, was dead. What irked Thor was his father had trained him to be a ruler, yet had hidden a vital piece of information from him. Hela had wanted dominion of all people, had wanted to continue on her quest to subject all the realms to her rule. It had been the reason she had been imprisoned in the first place only to be freed when their father had died, thereby ensuring her return to Asgard.

Hela had succeeded in banishing both Thor and Loki from the Bifrost as they travelled back to Asgard, ensuring they didn’t return and aid their people. Both had landed on Sakaar though at different times and places. Loki had already integrated himself well into the customs of the planet whilst Thor had been imprisoned and forced to fight in the arena. The adversaries he had faced were not that impressive and Thor had beaten them all, though one opponent had proven to be tough to beat. Thor had succeeded after intensive struggling, quickly becoming the favourite of the Arena. He’d used his new-found fame on Sakaar to escape, managing to convince Loki to come along with him and a former Valkyrie, who had once fought Hela, to return to Asgard and help save it from Hela’s rule.

Loki had, which was usual with him, betrayed Thor, but had redeemed himself by coming to Thor’s aid when he needed it on Asgard, quickly atoning for the sins he had committed by rescuing his people.

In order to prevent Hela gaining control of Asgard, Thor had decided to unleash Surtar, thereby fulfilling a prophecy which had once foretold the end of Asgard by his hands. It had been the only way to defeat Hela and ensure the safe rescue of the people of Asgard. While Thor had kept Hela busy, Loki had set off Ragnarok.

Now, they were navigating away from the ruins of Asgard, having watched their home perish in a blaze of fire, unsure of where to go or how to proceed. *The Statesman*, the ship Loki had commanded on Sakaar to escape, with a bunch of inept gladiators from the arena, was large enough to accommodate what remained of Asgardian’s people. The ship Thor and Valkyrie took, *the Commodore*, was docked on top of the ship and could remain a useful ship to use if they needed to dock somewhere for supplies.

Thor glanced up at his reflection in the mirror. The wounds he had obtained at the hands of Hela were healing though his missing eye would never heal. He would always be one-sighted but it was a mark of battle, one he wore with honour, even if it was covered by an eyepatch.

“It suits you.”

Thor whirled and saw Loki standing by the door to Thor’s suite. He was smiling slightly.

“Perhaps you’re not so bad after all, brother.” Loki had, after all, helped rescue his people from Hela.

“Maybe not,” mused Loki.

“Thank you, Loki.” Thor turned and picked up a soap dish. He was well aware of Loki’s tricks now. “And if you were here, I might even give you a hug.” Loki never appeared to him in the flesh now. He threw the dish at his brother.

Loki caught it. “Do we have to hug now?”
Thor smiled. Loki really was here.

Stepping out onto the main deck, Thor saw an assembly of both Asgardian and Sakaarian refugees who were awaiting him. With his father’s and Hela’s deaths, Thor was now the rightful ruler of his people. Slowly, he walked through the crowd as it parted for him, looking at each face. They looked hopeful for the future now. They didn’t cheer for him instead they inclined their heads in a gesture of respect, smiling as they raised their heads, grateful to him for what he had sacrificed to get them this far.

Once upon a time Thor would have swaggered through the crowd, basking in the glory of being King yet what he had survived had changed him. No more was he impulsive or arrogant or cocky. He was stately, contemplative and dignified, understanding now how his younger self had been unfit for rule. In a roundabout way, Loki needed to be thanked. If he hadn’t sabotaged Thor’s coronation years ago, this moment may be very different now. Without Loki, Thor wouldn’t be here.

Standing by the viewing port, next to the Captain’s chair which faced outwards into space, were Loki, Valkyrie and Heimdall. In light of an actual throne, the Captain’s chair would still cement Thor’s place as Asgard’s King.

Valkyrie smiled at Thor as he reached her. “Your throne.”

Thor paused, staring at the chair for a few moments before turning and sitting down upon it, flanked by Valkyrie and Heimdall. Loki stood to the side.

“So, King of Asgard…” Heimdall began as Thor looked around behind him at the thousands of people staring, silently awaiting word from their new King. “Where to?”

“I’m not sure,” admitted Thor. “Any suggestions?” He glanced at his new companions. “Miek, what’s your home planet?”

“Oh,” Korg looked down at Miek who he was holding in his arms. “Miek’s dead. I accidentally stepped on him on the bridge. I’ve just felt so guilty I’ve been carrying him around all day.” But then the creature in Korg’s arms wriggled to life. “Miek, you’re alive! He’s alive everyone! What was your question?”

Thor smiled and looked forward already certain of where he wanted to go. “Earth it is.”

He had thought long and hard about his choice. He trusted the people of Earth would welcome them. His people were homeless and if Asgardians could live together with mortals… It could be beneficial for both races.

Later Thor stood alongside Loki, looking out at the stars. He had joined his brother in his own cabin. Now they seemed to understand one another better, Thor’s brotherly relationship with Loki was stronger and better than it had been in years.

The stars moved slowly past them as they travelled through the vastness of space. It would take them a few months to reach Earth but they would make it, despite it being a long and arduous journey. They would need to stop at the nearest habitable system so they could gather more supplies but they had enough for now they didn’t need to worry about it.

“Do you really think it’s a good idea to go back to Earth?” asked Loki quietly.
Thor’s reply was instant. How was it not a good idea? “Yes of course. People of the Earth love me. I’m very popular.”

“Let me rephrase that. Do you really think it’s a good idea to bring me back to Earth?”

It was a valid question. Loki had laid waste to New York a few years ago. Showing up on Earth with him wouldn’t necessarily be a good idea.

“Probably not to be honest,” replied Thor. He glanced towards his brother. “I wouldn’t worry brother. I feel like everything is going to work out fine.”

After everything that had happened recently, it felt like things were finally going their way.

But as they stood there, staring out of the viewport, a shadow fell over them. Ominous feelings developed in Thor’s stomach as a large ship, over fifty times the size of The Statesman rose up in front of them.

“You were saying, brother?” Loki mentioned.

“Shut up Loki,” responded Thor.

“That’s Thanos’ warship,” continued Loki. “We have no chance.”

“Maybe they haven’t noticed us?” Thor’s response was hopeful but unlikely. He saw Loki hesitate. “What is it brother?”

“I think I know what has brought them here.” Loki sounded very quiet, afraid even.

“What is it?” Thor took his eyes from the ship bearing down upon them.

Loki took from his robes a small blue cube. One he had attempted to steal and then use against Earth a few years ago.

“LOKI! How could you?” glared Thor.

“They were coming for it anyway,” admitted Loki. “Thanos is after the Infinity Stones, brother.”

“Why did you take it? Why not leave it?”

“Brother, you know it is not in my nature to leave a useful bargaining tool behind. Besides, do you really believe Surtar’s fury could destroy an Infinity Stone? If I hadn’t stolen it, they would have plucked it from the ruins of Asgard,” explained Loki, sounding quite reasoned. “I spent time with Thanos. I have the measure of him.”

Thor shook his head. “Thanos cannot be reasoned with. He will take what he wants and kill everyone aboard this ship!”

Loki shook his head. “No.” He tucked the Tesseract back in his pocket. “I have a plan.” Loki’s eyes glanced over Thor. “Seems like it is rule for one yet different for another, brother.”

Thor threw his brother a sharp look. “I know not of what you mean, Loki.”

Loki dared to laugh, despite the worrying circumstances they had found themselves in. “I may have an Infinity Stone, but so do you, brother!”

At a loss for words, Thor gaped at his brother in astonishment. “How do you know?”
“My sceptre which you retrieved from Earth held one of the six Infinity Stones. It was the one stone Thanos had before he leant it to me. You were supposed to put it in Odin’s vault but you didn’t. You kept it on yourself. And I only know because I was father at the time you returned with it! You felt the same as me: wary of having two so close together! You said it was in the Vault when it was really on you! Hidden in a small crevice of your undershirt? Barely noticeable to anyone unless they really went looking for it?” Loki stood there with his arms across his chest.

“That’s completely… It’s not… What.”

“Don’t tell me it is not the same.” Loki rolled his eyes. “It is. We both have a stone. Either way this ship would still be a target for Thanos. He was on his way to Asgard to retrieve the stones. He may not have known the mind stone was in Asgard but he is well aware of the space stones location! Chances are he would have attacked this ship because it would be the only one fleeing from the destruction of Asgard!”

Thor deflated. “You may be right, brother, that we have both made mistakes.”

“Do you believe he cannot sense when a stone is near?” Loki pressed cautiously. “He had a stone for years, enough to become attuned to its power. Even if it was the stone I carried that bought him here, he still would have gained it from the ruins of Asgard. And…” Loki paused for dramatic effect. “We can still save our people with the Tesseract.”

“How?” Thor asked.

“To get to Earth I manipulated the energy of the Tesseract. I needed a larger device to make the portal big enough for the Chitauri army… but if I can manipulate it here, I can hold it open whilst everyone escapes. I can send them to Earth, Thor! You would need to distract Thanos. But… the only problem…” Loki shifted on his feet. “I will not be able to go through, not if I am manipulating the Tesseract to stay open. I wouldn’t be able to bring it with me if I did go. Thanos would acquire it.”

“We cannot allow him to gain any Infinity Stone,” retorted Thor.

“What choice do we have?” countered Loki. “He’ll come to Earth eventually but at least you’ll be able to prepare them for his arrival. He will not stop looking for the stones. And the stone you have? How are you going to stop him from taking it from you if he knows you have one too?”

But Thor ignored Loki’s question. “You’re not going to Earth. You’re staying here.”

Loki nodded. “Yes. I served Thanos once before. I can do so again… if he spares me for my failure of New York. You need someone on the inside Thor, who may be able to help you stay one step ahead of him. I can help you with that but I can only gain his trust-of-sorts by handing him the Tesseract. And… it may give us the time we need to get our people to safety.”

“You may be right, Loki. I do not like it.”

Loki reached out and placed a hand on Thor’s shoulder. “What other option do we have, brother?”

Thor couldn’t articulate an answer.

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They had estimated they had only minutes to spare to begin their plan of evacuating the Asgardian people before Thanos’ entourage boarded their ship. Thor had to be quite verbal to ensure Valkyrie was going to leave without putting up a fight against their boarders. Their people needed a leader in
case Thor did not survive. Though Heimdell was formidable, he was not one for leadership whereas Valkyrie, which she now preferred to be known as, rather than by her real name, had a proven history of leadership. She’d be able to help their people more than Heimdell ever could.

Thor calculated the enemy were going to board the ship in multiple places. They only had a small chance of getting this right, of ensuring his people survived. He had to trust in Loki. Even now, Thor could not think of any other way that could prevent Thanos from obtaining an Infinity Stone.

Loki had been correct about Thor carrying an Infinity Stone. He had never placed the Mind Stone in the vault on Asgard. He hadn’t wanted two Stones to reside close by. Instead he had taken it upon himself to guard it, knowing he was capable of resisting the power to use it. There had been great dangers in keeping it to himself however there had not been any alternative.

He didn’t have the Stone anymore, having passed it on to someone he could trust to keep it safe. For Thor to allow Thanos to obtain two stones was out of the question. If they had to give him one, then one was the most Thor was willing to give up.

Thor stood close to a section of the hull, where they knew boarding ramps were already beginning to pierce into this section of the ship. One thing was for sure, this ship would not fly again once Thanos was finished with it.

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It had taken a lot of power for Loki to rig a device that could harness the energy of the Tesseract. Though he didn’t need a large portal to materialise, he did need one large enough that more than one person could pass through it at a time. They didn’t have time to waste. Thankfully both he and Valkyrie were able to put a system together which allowed them to harness the power of the Tesseract in a greater way.

The portal was now large enough for groups of five to go through. Loki had rigged the device’s location to send his people to Earth, to a place where he hoped they would be less noticed, though he was sure the Earth’s security forces would pick up on the foreign signal or at least recognise the signature of the Tesseract.

Still, it was the only way to save the Asgardians. Loki did love his people even if he never really showed it.

He turned to face Valkyrie who was helping to shepherd everyone through. “You should go.”

“If I am to leave then it will be as the last one,” she stated coolly. “Regardless of what Thor thinks.”

“If the Tesseract signal is picked up on Earth, they will unleash their armies against us. We need you there to protect them and to at least make a case for us,” stated Loki. He hated being the voice of reason but it seemed he was more often that these days.

“Why can’t it be you?” she shot back.

Loki had forgotten Valkyrie didn’t really know much about his history. He decided to enlighten her with the simplest answer he could muster. “I doubt the Earth would welcome me or our people if I tried to vouch for them, considering I invaded their planet with a Chitauri army.”

“You did what?”

“It’s a long story. One best saved for another time. I had my reasons,” he admitted. “Thor trusts me. All I care about now is getting our people to a safe haven. Besides, I’m needed here.”
Valkyrie shook her head. “Thor told me you had a plan here other than helping us escape.”

“I do. I’m not letting you become partial to the other half which does not involve you.”

“Nice.” Valkyrie rolled her eyes. “Besides, I’m not the best negotiator. The people have Heimdell. He’ll protect them. I’m staying.”

Loki sighed. Valkyrie would go through the portal. She didn’t know the full details of the plan. It was obvious she would not want Loki to surrender an Infinity Stone to Thanos. Still, as long as Thanos wasn’t here, he would be happy with her company.

As they watched the people to continue to pass through the portal, the ship juddered hard and the Asgardians stumbled to the floor as the shakes continued.

Loki gritted his teeth, holding onto a pole to keep himself upright. “They’re on board.” Scrambling to his feet, reaching out for the first Asgardian he could, Loki spoke swiftly: “Hurry!”

They needed to be quick.

---

The explosion threw Thor back as the door shattered on impact and his body hit the durasteel metal of the floor as he landed. Scrambling to his feet, he pulled on his power and lightning ripped through his body, crackling around him as he stood, watching as the first members of Thanos’ famed Black Order stepped onto the ship.

Thor had never had the pleasure of meeting them in person before, but their deeds were well known among the universe. They acted upon Thanos’ will. Taken from their families as children, twisted and corrupted to serve his purpose, they were completely loyal to their adoptive father. They were some of the most wanted people in the universe, with several bounties attached to their names however no highly skilled individuals had ever beaten them in combat.

The first to step through onto the ship was large, heavily muscled, tall and wore heavy armour covering their body, leaving their arms and head without protection. They were reptilian in looks, with hard skin and glowing black eyes as he thundered towards Thor, a satisfied smile crossing his face.

Thor raised his fists, lightning circling around him. He didn’t need his hammer to fight; the power had always been within him. He had learned, very recently, he could channel this power himself. Now would be a good time to further test out the powers he now knew he had.

“You shall not pass!” stated Thor.

“You are just one obstacle against the Black Order,” the creature said darkly. “You are no match for Cull Obsidian!” The creature leapt forward, pouncing towards Thor at haste, the beefy fist of his right arm extending forward, in line with Thor’s face.

Thor grabbed his power and hurled it at Cull, pushing him back as lightning struck his body before he was even in reach of the god of thunder.

“How dare you!” Cull stomped forward, uninjured from the blast of lightning.

Thor kept his focus. “Come any closer and I will do it again!” He clenched his fists, standing poised for another attack. “Leave and I will let you live!”
Cull showed many teeth as he grinned. “You cannot stop us. You are just a sapling compared to Thanos. He will rule this universe and you will bow to him as a loyal subject. My brothers and sisters already invade this ship from other directions. It is futile to resist us.”

“You’ve lost your chance,” growled Thor. He flew forward, hands crackling with lightning but Cull was prepared for the attack and swiftly turned, allowing his back to be struck, but he’d planted his feet hard against the metal grating, managing to withstand the assault and not be forced from his position.

And then Thor went flying as Cull twisted and punched Thor in the face.

The lightning stopped and Thor crashed into the wall. His vision swam as he tried to regain his balance.

Cull stalked towards him. “I don’t have time for you. We are here for a purpose. Desist and you will live.”

“No.” Thor flew forward again but Cull battered him aside like he was a flimsy toy. He hit the wall again, wincing in pain. With each hit, Cull was moving further down the corridor, towards Loki and the rest of the Asgardians. Thor wasn’t stupid to believe Cull was the only boarder. He was just unfortunate to be facing him whilst the others probably slinked through the ship to Loki’s position from other entrances.

Cull reached forward and grabbed Thor by the throat, lifting him up.

Clenching his fists, Thor let his power flow through him, summoning as much power as possible, as the force of the strike from being so close, caused Cull to let him go and fly backwards.

But Cull had been pushed further into the ship rather that away from it. The alien grinned malevolently. “You lose, Prince of Asgard!”

“I thought the Black Order was supposed to be the most lethal force in the universe and you’re running away from a fight now?” Thor yelled in an effort to antagonise Cull. He couldn’t let him get any further into the ship.

“Oh we’re not. It’s just Cull has somewhere else he needs to be.”

Thor turned and saw a figure, floating in the air, covered in black armour, with very thin red and gold stripes across colouring the gauntlets on its wrists and ankles. The helmet the figure wore obscured their face but the voice seemed vaguely familiar, yet Thor couldn’t place it.

Before he could do anything in response, the figure raised its palm and shot Thor straight in the chest.

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

So... This figure? Now who could they possibly be? *grins*

Okay, Infinity Stones. Here are the current locations of the stones at the end of this chapter:
Mind - Used to be Thor, current owner unknown.
Space - Loki
Reality - The Collector
Power - Nova Corps, Xandar
Time - Doctor Stephen Strange, Earth
Soul - Unknown

Because Ultron never happened, Thor retrieved the Mind Stone. As a result of this:
Vision never existed and Pietro and Wanda Maximoff never received their powers.
(This is covered in Part 1: Chapter 4.)

I hope to update again in two weeks (Tuesday 10th April). I'm hopeful this weekend I
may get a lot of writing done, but we will see.

Until then,
the-writer1988
Chapter Summary

Thor continues to battle with the Black Order...

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone!

Getting this chapter a day early because I'm working tomorrow evening.

Many thanks for all the wonderful reviews! I hope this chapter does not disappoint...

PART THREE
THE WAR BEGINS

Chapter Two
The Enforcer

“You need to leave,” muttered Loki to Valkyrie. He could feel members of the Black Order getting closer. It wouldn’t be long now until they reached his position. Some Asgardians were remaining behind to help defend the ship and most had already resigned themselves to dying in battle, yet if it helped to ensure the continued survival of their people… their sacrifice would be worth it.

He didn’t agree with their philosophy but some had already started towards the intruders in a bid to hold them back to give Loki more time. The majority of the Asgardians had managed to escape. Only a few left remained, mainly those that had elected to stay behind to help out. Loki fully intended for them to escape as well, it was just convincing them to leave.

“I told you I’m not leaving.”

Valkyrie was adamant to stay behind.

“Thor will kill me if you are not with our people,” stated Loki matter-of-factly.

“It’s a risk I am willing to take,” she replied.

Loki raised an eyebrow. “Thanks?” He wasn’t sure if he should feel pleased or insulted. It didn’t matter anyway.

One Asgardian warrior’s body came flying back, hitting the floor close to them. He remained unmoving, the twisted nature of his body signified he was already dead.

Loki tensed. The hair on the back of his neck rose and he hissed as a member of the Black Order strode into view. “Get out of here!” he hissed at Valkyrie. He had his daggers but they’d be useless
against his enemies. “If you stay, you’ll compromise my plan!”

Valkyrie was already shaking her head. “No.”

Frustration welled within him and Loki did the only thing he could in those spare moments he had. He lunged and physically pushed Valkyrie into the portal. Shocked and surprised by his sudden attack of her, Valkyrie was unable to stop him from shoving her through, sending her towards Earth at a cascading speed.

With a quick flick of his wrist, he switched the machine off. The Asgardians that were fighting to defend the ship against the hostile force had known they would likely die; had understood they may have to sacrifice their own survival to ensure the safety of the rest of their people.

Loki hated the loss of life but he had a job to do. The people were safe. He tucked the Tesseract inside his robes and started to move forward, holding his ceremonial daggers in both hands. He didn’t intend to truly fight.

He could at least ensure he was sincere in his return to Thanos’ side.

Stepping around the corner he found one of the members of the Black Order, Cull Obsidian, battling an older Asgardian who was waning in his strength but still seemed to hold their own against Thanos’ mighty children. Cull was the oldest and the strongest and the one to fear the most. He wasn’t the one Loki would have particularly liked to surrender to yet his options were limited.

The Asgardian never saw it coming as Loki stepped forward swiftly and stabbed the warrior thought the chest, right into the heart, taking his life instantly. Withdrawing his blade and with blood dripping from it, Loki vanished his daggers.

“If it isn’t the traitor…” Cull sneered. “Thanos will be pleased with your head.”

Loki shook his head. “No. I come with a proposition.”

Cull cocked his small head to the side. “Why should I even consider it?”

Loki smirked. “Because I have something Thanos wants.”

“And what is it that you have which you believe our father would spare your life for it?” A feminine voice spoke from behind him.

Proxima Midnight held a spear in a stance behind him, having boarded the ship on the opposite side of it. She had clearly encountered no opposition on her way to Loki’s position.

“And why would I tell his minions what I carry when you could easily kill me and take credit for it once you know what it is?” Loki was clever. He knew they would kill him. He’d betrayed Thanos after all. “I’m not so stupid to surrender it to you when the aid I could bring Thanos would be better utilised if I am kept alive. Kill me and you will fail.”

“I say we kill him now!” Cull decided yet Proxima raised her hand to stop her older brother.

“No. Even if he plans to trick us, bringing him before Thanos will ensure his death. He will not have a chance to betray us.” Proxima Midnight hissed. “He will stand before Thanos and he will decide whether the God of Lies has anything of worth to give us.”

Cull growled underneath his breath though Loki’s advanced hearing picked up on it. “He’ll betray us…”
Loki didn’t let them see the smirk on his face. He wasn’t known as the trickster for nothing.

- - - - -

Thor slammed back into the bulkhead hard. He got to his feet quickly, facing his new attacker, fingers crackling with energy. “Stand down now or I will kill you.”

The figure shot another blast at him. Thor dodged, rolling to the side, launching out his lightning attack but knowing he had to be careful in the confined corridors of the ship, lest he tear the whole ship apart from over-exertion of his abilities.

“Which one of Thanos’ children are you?” Thor had knowledge of them but this one didn’t seem to match any description he knew of. Had Thanos taken another individual from their home and twisted them to his nefarious needs? It seemed likely since the Mad Titan had a history of doing so.

“I am not a child of Thanos!” hissed his opponent darkly, lunging forward towards Thor, extending his palm outwards, shooting at him again.

Thor ducked, sliding underneath his attacker, summoning his power as they flew over him, hitting his attacker straight in the chest. In that single moment, Thor saw, through the armour covering its chest there was a slight blue glow emanating from it. He found it familiar yet couldn’t place it, same with the voice he was sure he recognised.

His opponent fell to the floor, the hit of its armour on the metal grating reverberated throughout the area, ringing in Thor’s ears as he stood to face him, fists at the ready.

“Give up, God of Asgard,” his opponent taunted. “We will have what we came for. We may leave you alive.”

Thor didn’t believe it for one second. He knew how Thanos worked. Those that sided with him knew no mercy. They would kill him as soon as they had the chance. “No thanks.”

“I won’t let you get past me to save your trickster brother,” spat the attacker harshly.

“Loki can take of himself.” Thor wouldn’t let this pitiful attacker taunt him. His hands started to flicker with lightning. “If you do not stand aside I will be forced to kill you.”

“You cannot defeat the Enforcer. I know you, Thor Odinson. We’ve fought before, you and I. Neither of us won, nor did any of us lose. I will change that today.” The Enforcer shot forward, using the jets in his boots to propel him along towards Thor at a frightening speed.

As Thor prepared to unleash his power, the attacker weaved to the side and then went down, skimming the bottom of the walkway before colliding directly with Thor’s legs. They both went to the floor as the Enforcer scrambled to pin Thor, his metallic hands choking the God as they found a grip on his throat.

Thor kicked out, his legs hitting hard metal plating, protecting the Enforcer from serious injury. The choke hold tightened, yet Thor’s hands began to crackle with energy, as he drew upon his power, despite his inability to breathe.

Lightning crackled and Thor put power behind his strike, throwing his attacker off, pinning them up to the ceiling of the corridor, continuing to channel his power through his finger-tips, intent on preventing his attacker from harming anyone else.

The Enforcer screamed as the black armour he wore burned bright, beginning to smoke, signifying
internal damage and the helmet began to melt.

Thor lowered his hands, rolling to the side and the Enforcer dropped to the grating, his body landing with a loud thump, groaning in pain as the armour slowly began to cool.

“You’ll pay for that!” the Enforcer hissed, pulling away the melting helmet and revealing his face.

The God of Thunder stopped his advancement upon the Enforcer, shock adorning his features as he took in the face of the man he fought. “Stark? Tony Stark? How are you alive?”

But the man did not answer. The thrusters on his feet fired, his fist pulled back and thick, sharp metallic knives shot out of his fist as he flew forward, scraping Thor’s cheek as the God ducked his attack, but Tony twisted in mid-air, stabbing his armoured hand downward into Thor’s shoulder. He extracted his hand and moved to stab again but Thor fired lightning at the suit, sending Tony back.

Placing a hand up on his shoulder, Thor pulled his fingers away to find blood coating them. Eyes focusing upon Tony floating in front of him, Thor raised his arms, almost in a gesture of surrender. “I just want to talk.” He couldn’t fight Tony, not now he knew the identity of the Enforcer.

Tony’s lips pulled back into sneer. “Too bad. I’m not talking!” His armour suddenly started to change around his body, moving to cover the damaged areas caused by Thor’s electrical attacks, whilst still maintaining cover on the rest of his body. “I will not fail in my mission. If you stand in my way, I will kill you!”

“Stark, whatever they have done to you, I can help!”

Tony raised his palms to point directly at the god’s facial features. The sneer disappeared from his face as Tony’s mind processed the Asgardian’s words. “No. You can’t help me.” His words were quiet, almost regretful.

Thor could see Tony’s eyes. Once they had sparkled with life, filled with fun and joy and intelligence, now the contrast in them was so different. They were dull and lifeless, the enjoyment sucked from them to be replaced with pain and fear. Tony’s facial expression couldn’t hide what Thor was seeing in Tony’s eyes. “Your eyes do not lie, Stark. Whatever they did to you, you do not wish to be doing this.”

Tony’s eyes flashed, hardening in a second. “You know nothing!” The repulsors flared brightly, fired and Thor ducked, rolling forward and tackling Tony down, even as he tried to float up and out the way. “You have no idea what I’ve lived through!”

Thor rolled on top of Tony, pressing him down, fighting to prevent his legs and arms from combating his grip on the slender human. “Then tell me!”

But Tony was quick, lithe and skilful enough that Thor found it difficult to maintain his hold. He used his thrusters at his back to fly upwards. The resulting crash of Thor’s back against the ceiling made him release Tony and the former armoured Avenger flew away as Thor fell back to the grating. “You did nothing to help me. I do not owe you an explanation! Now give me the Infinity Stone in your pocket!”

Thor climbed to his feet, lightning echoing around his fingers as he loosened his fists. “Why would I be carrying one of those around?” he asked simply, trying to keep his voice as nice as possible, so as not to antagonise Tony into attacking further.

“You took the Mind Stone from Earth. Thanos knows you carry it,” stated Tony harshly. “And I will take it from YOU!” Tony’s thrusters came on at full power. His gauntlet hands grasped Thor by the
shirt and flew him back into the bulkhead, before he raised one hand to hold the god in place before using the other to punch Thor repeatedly in the face. “GIVE IT TO ME!”

Thor allowed Tony to punch him. He could see the darkness in Tony’s eyes and the desperation in his voice. He didn’t want to fail. He feared the consequences if he did, Thor could sense it. The punches stopped and Thor raised his eyes to look directly at his attacker.

“Why aren’t you fighting back?”

“Because…” Thor uncurled the hands he had formed into fists and brought them, placing them directly on Tony’s chest plate. A burst of lightning erupted and Tony went flying, his body hitting the bulkhead at the far end of the corridor, his head slamming back against the wall. No longer protected by the helmet Thor had melted earlier, the human’s head bounced hard and Tony’s limp form fell to the ground.

He didn’t move, slumping forward, completely boneless.

Thor walked forward slowly, looking down at his fallen comrade. “What did they do to you, Stark?” But he didn’t have time to think about it. He had to make Loki’s capture/surrender authentic.

Turning, Thor raced away, regretting he had to leave Tony behind, but there was nothing he could do for him now.

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“LOKI!”

The god of mischief halted as he was escorted through the ship by Proxima and Cull. Both of the Black Order members stepped in front of him as Thor approached, his arms crackling with lightning.

“You’re with them?” hissed Thor.

Loki smiled. “Surely you did not believe I would ever not betray you? Self-perseveration is my speciality after all.”

Thor growled darkly and lunged forward only to be intercepted by the larger of the two.

“You will move!” Proxima Midnight issued the order to Loki as Cull engaged Thor in battle.

Not wasting any time Loki stumbled past, swiftly followed by Proxima Midnight, keeping her spear pointed at his back. The only thing keeping him alive at the moment was the Tesseract. He guessed they likely already knew what he carried. He was relieved he didn’t needed to fight them to prove his worth, yet a part of him wondered if Thanos already knew he was here and had ordered his capture regardless. Thanos did have unfinished business with him.

As Loki and Proxima Midnight neared one of the exits the Black Order had made to board the ship, the God of Mischief paused. On the floor, in front of them was a human Loki had long since thought dead: the one who had ultimately stopped the invasion of New York.

Proxima paused, moving her spear away from Loki and moved over to the fallen figure. “I knew he’d be useless. Pathetic human.”

Loki didn’t speak. He knew it was wise not to, not when his survival meant on what he had to bargain with. The spear poked him in the back.
“You will carry him.”

In any other circumstance Loki would have refused or made a shrewd comment but his survival instinct was too strong. Thor was relying on him. Putting aside his indifference and the retort which was on the tip of his tongue, Loki heaved Stark into his arms, whilst Proxima watched him.

“Move.”

Loki rolled his eyes and stepped forward, through the opening in the ship’s side into a docking port before coming into Thanos’ ship. It was dark and the corridors were large, with only a tiny little bit of light visible to guide his way. “Where to?”

“Throne room!” Proxima poked him in the back again. “Lord Thanos will see you there!”

Obeying, Loki obligingly set on his way, well aware of where he needed to go as he had once been on Thanos’ warship before. It wasn’t a place he had ever wished to set foot on again but as of right now he had no choice.

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Thor was trying everything in his power to get past Cull yet he wasn’t succeeding. He’d probably made it look authentic enough now he could back away from his pursuit of his brother. “What are you after?”

Cull’s lips moved upwards in a sinister smile. He didn’t answer instead choosing to swing his fist at Thor’s face.

Ducking underneath Thor kicked out, striking his leg, failing to topple the giant. He rolled away, coming up on his knees, finding himself in front of another figure who wore little armour. Thor glanced up and felt himself freeze.

Thanos stood before him.

With one swift movement, the Titan reached out and grasped Thor by the head, squeezing his skull.

Thor screamed as pressure increased and he could feel his skull cracking through the tight hold. His fear increased, pulsing himself with lightning in an effort to make his enemy drop him.

A blast of light and the pressure decreased and Thor landed on his knees, his head aching. He could barely raise his head as his vision twisted.

“He doesn’t have it. Return to the ship and prepare for departure. I will be with you soon.”

Thor barely registered Thanos’ orders, ignoring Cull as he swept past him. Still on his knees fighting for breath, Thor managed to raise his head, spitting at his foe as he spoke. “You won’t get them. The stones. There will always be people to protect them from you.”

“More for me to kill…” smiled Thanos, clenching his fists. “A pity your fight has ended.”

Thor breathed deeply, exhausted, unable to fight back after the near crushing of his skull. “Tell me one thing before you kill me… What did you do to him?”

Thanos laughed. “Your friend suffered beautifully. He serves me. He cannot be saved. He failed me here today. His suffering will be exquisite and he knows the taste of pain quite well. You on the other hand will be dead.”
In one last burst of energy and of defiance Thor threw himself forward only to receive a backhand across the face. His body twisted, hitting the framework on the wall, his head smashing hard into the bulkhead and he collapsed in a mess of limbs as unconsciousness claimed him.

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

And now you know Tony's name is 'The Enforcer'. He's not really a child of Thanos. He's just a broken toy they can use. There is a lot more to Tony than I have revealed here. He is a very complex character... And it's been 4 years since he was broken.

The next chapter will be posted on Tuesday 23rd April, which in my mind is Infinity War week... because it is really... :D

Until then,

the-writer1988
Chapter Summary

The Guardians of the Galaxy encounter a body in space...

Chapter Notes

IT'S INFINITY WAR WEEK!!!! So excited for it but scared of them killing my favourite characters! I'm seeing it on Thursday. And then I've got a whole week off so I can see it more than once. Maybe. Depends if I like it. But I am seeing it twice at least.

Anyway, on to the story... This chapter got a little long... And sorry, cliffty at the end too...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART THREE
THE WAR BEGINS

Chapter 3
The Gods of Asgard

Earth Year 2014, just after the destruction of Ego

If anyone had proclaimed to Gamora a year ago she would be trouncing around the galaxy saving it from all sorts of threats within twelve months, she would have labelled them as crazy. Strangely enough, that was how her life had panned out. After being sent to Ronan to aid him, Gamora had taken the first opportunity to escape from her father's control, choosing to betray him and sell on an orb she knew Thanos was after.

She hadn't realised it contained an Infinity Stone until she had seen it. They had been lucky to retain possession of it at the end of the day, especially once it had fallen into Ronan's hands for a brief time. Now the Infinity Stone was safely in the hands of the Nova Corps, sequestered away and guarded at all times. They didn't need to worry about it anymore.

Their latest adventure – or universe saving endeavour – had resulted in her reconnecting with her sister, Nebula, after she had tried to kill Gamora. They had come to an understanding of their respective childhoods. They had been shaped by Thanos and could not be held responsible for their actions. Nebula still had a price on her head but Gamora felt if she herself had received an official pardon, Nebula was due hers, especially after her involvement in stopping Ego from spreading over the galaxy.

One thing always tugged at Gamora however.

Tony.
A day hadn't gone by when she didn't think of him. Even if it was just a small thought, he still went through her mind, and it made her wish she had been able to help him more, to free him from the torment he had long suffered whilst in the hands of her father. Having to abandon Tony had hurt a lot more than she had let on. He would hate her, she knew. If he was still alive... She didn't even know if he was. I always knew what Thanos' plans were for him. What he intended for Tony to do. She had endeavoured to save him from it. She'd been so close getting to the point where she'd be able to free him before she had been sent away.

She watched Nebula leave. Peter was mourning the loss of the man who had raised him. Yondu may have kidnapped him from Earth, taking him away from his family, but he had taught him to survive in a hostile galaxy, giving Peter Quill the necessary skills he needed. Gamora knew Peter needed to be alone so she snuck away, following her sister towards the hanger deck.

She didn't want Nebula to leave without having talked to her properly, not without giving her the chance to understand why Gamora had always looked after herself during their rigorous training as their father's assassins.

"Nebula!" she called out.

Nebula turned toward her, avoiding looking in her eyes.

"I was just a child. Like you. I was concerned with staying alive until the next day – every day. And I never considered what Thanos was doing to you. I am sorry."

There was a small inclination of her sister's head noting her acknowledgement of Gamora's apology.

"I'm trying to make it right, everything I did. There are little girls like you were – little boys – all over the universe – who are in danger. You can stay with us, and help them." It was an offer Gamora hoped her sister would take her up on.

"I'll help them by killing Thanos!" hissed Nebula.

"I don't know that's possible," admitted Gamora.

Shrugging, Nebula moved to leave but Gamora grabbed her by the arm and before her sister could react to her rough hold, Gamora pulled her into a hug, embracing her for the first time in her life like a sister should. Nebula remained still, unsure of how to react.

"You'll always be my sister," whispered Gamora.

Nebula reached behind her sister's back with one hand, attentively returning the embrace. She pulled away after a few seconds but stopped and returned to face her sister. "I'm sorry for what I did to Tony. He didn't deserve what I did to him."

Gamora slowly nodded. "You did what you had to, to survive. Now I know what Thanos did to you growing up... What you were forced to endure for each failure... If I'd realised I think things would have been very different between us." She hesitated, wondering if she should inquire further about Tony. She did want to know. "Is... Tony alive?"

Nebula nodded. "Yes." She turned away. "I raped him."

Gamora bowed her head. She had known he would have suffered the indignity of being raped by the hands of her sister. "Did it break him?"

"Yes. I told him I wouldn't continue if he broke... told us what we wanted to know..."
A cold feeling of dread filled Gamora's stomach. Guessing what had happened was easy. She didn't want to hear any more.

"I did it anyway… I was… awful to him. It wasn't just a simple rape; it was a horror-filled nightmare for him."

Gamora swallowed, fighting to contain the anger she could feel building inside her. "There was a reason why I tried to help him. Why I protected him from you. I always intended to betray Thanos and I wanted to bring Tony along with me. He deserved to go home to the people who loved him."

"I never understood why you sought to protect him, what made him special enough you would risk your position as the favourite daughter," said Nebula. "It made me jealous, feel more determined to hurt him just to get to you."

"I thought he could help us defeat Thanos," admitted Gamora.

"How?"

"You were there when I convinced Thanos to spare his life. The device in his chest keeps him alive. It stopped Loki from controlling him. He carries with him an invincibility against an Infinity Stone. We know the Tesseract was on Terra for years. We all know of the files Loki cultivated from their planet's databases."

Loki had been under the control of The Other, though still allowed free will. The Other had been able to access Loki's mind whenever he desired and see through his eyes. One such occasion had allowed them to learn more about how the Tesseract, the container holding the Space Stone, had been found.

"I do not know specifically what they revealed," stated Nebula. "You were more involved than I ever was."

"The Tesseract was found by a man called Howard Stark… I'm sure he's Tony's father. There were records of Howard Stark studying the Tesseract. In a secure file which Loki managed to access, there was an entry which described his research on the Tesseract and how he created a new element from it. He couldn't synthesize it as it was beyond his time…" Gamora frowned, unsure whether she should be continuing, but it was a theory she had been holding for a while. "But the device in Tony's chest emitted the same light as the Tesseract… What if the device has the same properties as an Infinity Stone? What if Tony can be unaffected by all of them? What if, because of the device, he is able to wield an Infinity Stone?"

Nebula stayed silent not allowing her sister to see her thoughts.

"I know it's a long shot but the technology Tony possesses has been evolved from studying an Infinity Stone and its container. He could be the defence Terra needs to hold back Thanos and beat him. If he is broken, he might not be able to fight Thanos now. He would be a minion to him and my plan would have already failed," explained Gamora.

"I think given the right motivation he may still be able to fight," answered Nebula.

Gamora felt doubtful. Tony had been close to the breaking point when she had left him. "I'm not so sure. Tony suffered a lot at your hands. I do not want to put blame on you, Nebula, but Tony was already damaged when he was captured. I think any fight left him when you broke him."

Nebula lowered her gaze. "Then we will all die fighting Thanos."
"Maybe…” whispered Gamora. "Maybe not."

- - - - -

Four years later – 2018 Earth Year

Gamora entered the cockpit as an alarm went off. She moved to her station in the middle of the cockpit behind Peter and Rocket. "What's been picked up?" she asked over their voices, raising her own to be heard by the arguing pair.

"Distress signal," answered Peter. "Rocket doesn't want us to answer it. It's only a quick jump away from here."

"Then we answer it," stated Gamora, siding with Peter.

Peter smirked at his furry co-pilot. "See! Two against one!"

"You're always siding with Quill! Can never count on your support!" Rocket moaned.

"I am Groot!" The flora colossus in the seat to the left of Gamora answered. Now a teenager in his native species, Groot's vocabulary considered of only three words but there was always a deeper meaning behind them.

"See, Groot sides with me!"

Gamora shook her head. "Groot always disagrees with Peter." They'd all agreed it was a phase Groot was going through and he'd grow out of it.

"Where are Mantis and Drax?" inquired Peter. He was making his way to the jump point anyway.

"Peter just go for it… There is no harm in looking," said Gamora.

"Fine but this goes badly I'm blaming you," retorted Rocket, glancing at her.

She rolled her eyes.

It was only a short jump to the sector of space where the distress signal originated from. Drax and Mantis arrived in the cockpit just as they arrived at the coordinates.

Gamora looked out of the view-shield. "Oh no…” she breathed.

Ahead of them was debris, scattered across the system, the last remnants of the ship they had received the distress signal from. Torn to pieces and destroyed, completely unsalvageable.

"I guess we're too late…” Rocket muttered.

Peter piloted them through the debris. "It was a big ship… Who did this?"

Gamora looked at her controls. "Sensors are picking up a warship accelerating towards a jump site on the other side of the sector." She peered forward, using her right hand to point it out. "There…” Her eyes widened when she witnessed the scale of the warship. "No… Peter, power down the engines! We do not want that ship detecting us before it leaves the system!"

Quill didn't even hesitate. He shut down all systems, save for life-support, allowing the ship to drift in space.
"That ship has you frightened… Why?" Peter glanced over his shoulder at her.

Gamora bit her lower lip. "It's Sanctuary II. It's Thanos' personal warship. He rarely uses it but it was built for warfare."

"Thanos? We should kill him," said Drax. His vendetta against Ronan had now transferred to Thanos.

Gamora sighed. "He'll kill us straight away with no thought or mercy if we even try, Drax! We're letting them leave!"

"But where is he going?" said Peter. "Can we triangulate roughly where he may be jumping to?"

"We can once we get power back up," answered Gamora. It was too risky to power up yet though a part of her wondered if Tony was on that ship. If Thanos was finally making his move against the universe… If he was really searching for the Infinity Stones himself… She didn't want to consider it anymore.

They watched as the warship jumped from the system a few minutes later. Relief washed around the cockpit has Peter powered up the engines again.

"Triangulating trajectory now," confirmed Gamora, as she waited for the system to do the mathematical calculations. It only took thirty seconds but it felt like minutes before the system beeped to confirm it had finished its calculations. Gamora sent the coordinates to Peter who studied the results.

He turned back to face her. "Are you sure about this?"

Gamora nodded. "I am."

"We have to warn them," said Peter, already beginning to turn the ship in the direction of the jump point.

Gamora sighed again. "We won't get there in time. Thanos has a head start."

"What are you two blathering about?" Rocket protested. "We're not going after the mad-house!"

"Thanos is heading to Xandar," said Gamora weakly. "The Nova Corps has one of the Infinity Stones."

"I am Groot!"

"Groot, why are you siding with them?" Rocket complained.

"I am Groot!"

"It's the right thing to do?" responded Rocket. He groaned, hitting his head on the controls. "Why do we always have to do the dangerous stuff?"

No one answered him.

The ship continued to drift through the wreckage, making its way towards the jump point but as they did so, Mantis leaned forward, her antennae glowing softly.

"I feel… despair… Hopelessness…" She tilted her head to the side. "Someone is alive out there."
"Don't be silly. Nothing can breathe in space." Drax stated obviously.

"Gamora is there anything-" Peter began before he stopped as something large collided with the viewport. It was a body. So shocked was he, that Peter didn't react as quickly as Rocket did.

"What the hell is that?! Get the dead body off! Use the wipers!!" Rocket was trying to reach forward to the controls when Gamora halted them.

"No, don't. The sensors are picking up life signs from him. Drax, get out there and bring him in," instructed Gamora. "If he is still alive, he may be able to explain what happened here. If we are going to go after Thanos, we need to have as much information as possible. Did this ship just get in his way and he destroyed it mercilessly, or was there something upon it which he desired?" It was a logical conclusion to make. They needed info and this… human? on their viewport could provide it if he still lived.

They waited as Drax brought their uninvited guest into the hold.

Gamora rose from her seat first once Drax had confirmed all the airlocks were once again sealed and their rescuee was lying on the table in the hold.

It was time to find out what had happened here.

- - - - -

Forced to kneel in the centre of the throne room, Loki kept his head bowed; knowing any slight movement would render his entire plan useless. Thanos' four children stood behind him, arrayed in a line, waiting for their father and – to an extent – their Master return from what remained of The Statesman.

The figure of Tony Stark, whom Loki had carried aboard Thanos' ship, lay in a heap off to the side. His body seemed bruised and battered but he still seemed to have kept his limbs which were unusual for a child of Thanos. Anyone he 'adopted' ended up having multiple mutations done to their mind and body to enhance their ability and life-span and yet Stark seemed unaffected.

He didn't have time to consider why as the pounding footsteps behind them signalled the arrival of Thanos who marched right past his children and captives (Does Stark count as a captive? thought Loki), and sat upon his throne, inspecting Loki with dark eyes.

"The Trickster God who failed me… Who lost me both the Mind Stone and the Tesseract… Was it not promised you would long for something as sweet as pain if you failed me?"

Loki swallowed. He had never forgotten the threat.

"You failed to deliver the Tesseract, failed to crush the resistance on Earth… There is nothing which can save you now."

"I bring a gift for you," said Loki, keeping his head bowed. "I may have failed six years ago…” He reached into his inner pocket and withdrew the Tesseract. "But I bring you the Tesseract now, as a gesture of good-will and my respect for you. I apologise for the lateness but I was imprisoned on Asgard for a time and –"

"And yet you still found time to depose your father and send him to Earth to live out his days?" countered Thanos. "You have had plenty of opportunities to deliver the Tesseract to me when it lay within Asgard's vault!"
"I didn't know it was there!" Loki protested. "I only realised when I walked right past it a few days ago! As soon as I saw it, I scooped it up with the sole intention of finding you and handing it to its rightful bearer! Look into my mind! You will see I speak the truth!" He wasn't but Loki felt comfortable enough he'd be able to get away with the lie as it was mostly true, with a little bit of a lie pushed in. "I have never deviated from your glorious cause of cleansing the universe! I beg for your mercy and the chance to re-join your ranks." Bowing his head, Loki kept his arms raised, offering the Tesseract up for Thanos to take.

"Bring it to me."

Loki rose and walked towards Thanos, still holding out the Tesseract. Once he was in front of the throne, he bowed again, going down on one knee and raising his arms up. The casing which held the Infinity Stone was plucked from his fingers.

Raising his head, Loki watched in fascination as Thanos crushed the casing of the Tesseract with his left hand, and then plucked the Infinity Stone from its shards. He held it in his bare hand, even as a blue light began to swirl around his body, dust rising from the floor of the throne room, circling around the titan.

Beside the throne was a glove. Taking it with his right hand, Thanos placed the space stone in the second slot away from the thumb. There was a bright flash –

Loki winced, raising his arm to cover his eyes until the brightness subsided and when he dared to open his eyes, he found Thanos standing in front of him, wearing a gold, metallic glove – the Infinity Gauntlet – with one of the stones resting in its proper place.

"I will spare you, for now, God of Lies. But if you betray me again, a swift death will come for you."

Loki declined his head. "Thank you, thank you, Master. Thank you." He scuffled backward on his knees, back to the line of where the other children of Thanos stood before getting to his feet and standing beside them. There was no need for him to remain on his knees now Thanos had accepted him.

"We have only just begun our quest to collect the six Infinity Stones together and muster their power. A second was aboard their ship, I sense it has travelled to a planet we will soon visit. First, before we head to Earth, I need to retrieve the stones held by the Nova Corps and the Collector." Thanos' voice boomed around the room. "Now, leave me whilst I deal with the failure." His eyes focused on the unconscious body of Stark, whose armour had somehow mysteriously disappeared from his body.

Loki began to turn away, moving with the other members of the Black Order, only stopping when Thanos spoke again.

"No. The God of Lies can remain. He can witness his punishment be set upon the human that defeated him all those years ago."

Loki pivoted. "Whatever you wish for, my Lord."

Thanos narrowed his eyes.

Loki wondered if he suspected the duplicity his new servant was attempting to carry out.

On the floor, Stark was beginning to stir. The human gradually returned to full awareness, only to jerk upright upon realising his location and whose presence he was in. Stark hadn't noticed Loki yet.
"You failed me, Enforcer." Thanos' words were hard and fury was laced within them. "I gave you the task of retrieving the stone from the King of Asgard. You did not beat him enough to search him. You would have found the stone passed on… If you had succeeded in learning this, you would escape punishment now… But, you allowed yourself to be beaten, knocked unconscious."

Stark bowed his head. "Forgive me, please."

"No."

"Please… another chance to prove myself."

"No."

Loki watched the exchange. Thanos was uncompromising. A simple, failed mission would have Thanos inflicting intense pain upon anyone.

And then Stark's body jerked and he fell forward, hands gripping his head, as whatever ailed him pulled a scream from his lips.

It went on for many minutes, screams being ripped from Stark's lips every few seconds. Finally, Thanos seemed to release him from the mental grasp he'd had on the human.

Stark curled up into a ball, moaning softly, hugging his legs to his chest, eyes tightly screwed shut.

Loki had the sense to realise the punishment would have been worse if it had been him. Stark was clearly useful to Thanos otherwise he wouldn't have made the punishment so light, though he doubted it had been light for Stark.

Thanos caught Loki's gaze. "Get him out of my sight."

He didn't hesitate to do what Thanos commanded. Perhaps this opportunity with Stark would allow him to learn a bit more information and whether Stark could become an ally…

---

Thor woke suddenly as if something had dragged him back to the waking world quickly. He rolled off the surface he was on, launching himself forward to grab onto the wall, panting and bringing in much-needed air. How had he got here? This wasn't his ship. The last thing he remembered… Oh no.

Senses returning to him, he had the feeling he wasn't alone, as if several pairs of eyes were watching him from behind. Thor swirled and saw six beings of different races watching him.

"Who the hell are you guys?"

The only human of the group smirked, opened his mouth but was cut off by the small furry creature beside him.

"We're the fricken Guardians of the Galaxy."

Thor winced, his head pounding. He'd received one heck of a concussion. "I've heard of you. You defended Xandar from the Kree four years ago? It was said you withstood the power of an Infinity Stone." In his travels he had learned the story yet it seemed strange that this rag-tag bunch had really managed to withstand such terrible power.

"Yeah…" the human started. "That was me. I'm half human, half Celestial. Or was. Bet if I held one now it would kill me right-out."
"I need to get to Earth."

"Why would you want to visit that old junkyard?" the furry creature criticised.

"Can you tell us what happened here?" a green-skinned woman asked. "My name is Gamora." She pointed to the human. "He's Peter, the big one is Drax, this is Groot, Rocket, and Mantis." She indicated each one as she identified them. "We received a distress call from this sector. Was that from you?"

"It was..." He hadn't ordered a distress call to be sent out. Someone must have made the decision instead. Not that he minded. It had led to his rescue. "Thanos attacked. He boarded our ship. All of my people were on board. My brother had an Infinity Stone on him... He used it to get our people to Earth. But he was there for the stone... I fought the Black Order for as long as I could..." His thoughts strayed to Tony. He couldn't believe he was alive. "I fought Thanos but he was too powerful. I know not what occurred when I was rendered unconscious."

"Did he get the stone?" asked Gamora, a little bit of fear in her voice.

"They took my brother with them. I can only assume he has come into the possession of one of them." Thor got the sense Gamora wasn't telling him the whole truth. She seemed visibly distressed at the notion of Thanos having access to an Infinity Stone. Yes, it was a bad thing he had one, but she seemed more upset than anyone else on board.

Gamora seemed to notice Thor's gaze at her. She turned away to face the console stationed on the wall. "Thanos raised me as his daughter, to be his personal assassin. I'm the last of the Zehoberei race. He came to my world when I was a small child... He slaughtered everyone in front of me, everyone I loved... But chose me to raise as his own. Thanos is obsessed with cleansing the galaxy, to wiping out half of all life."

"Why only half? Why not all?" asked the human Gamora had identified as Peter.

"I do not know why only it is one of his goals. If he gathers all six Infinity Stones, Thanos will be able to wield unimaginable power... He could wipe out half the universe with the snap of his fingers." She snapped her fingers. "Just like that."

"We must stop Thanos before he gets any more stones, before any more innocent people suffer," said Thor. "Can you track his ship?"

Rocket answered, folding his arm across his chest. "Who said anything about helping you?"

Thor blinked. "Then why-" he started before he was abruptly cut off by the creature's hysterical laughter.

"Just messin' with ya. 'Course we'll help."

"Rocket, that wasn't very nice," scolded Peter.

"Hey, we're probably gonna die following that ship, so I'm gonna laugh about it!"

"Just ignore him," advised Gamora. "We were heading to Xandar anyway before you hit our ship. We need to hurry if we are going to stop Thanos before he claims another stone."

---

Tony stirred, his head aching from the vicious assault Thanos had inflicted upon him for his failure.
He gasped as his brain banged against his skull, sending a throbbing sensation through his whole body. "Fuck…"

"Language, Stark."

Tony's eyes opened wide and he whirled quickly on the bed at the sound of the voice, trying to get up and out of the bed, only to fall and stumble onto the floor. "Fuck it!" he swore again, unperturbed by the other voice. Finally, he glanced up and his eyes turned to slits. "What are you doing here, traitor?"

Loki, God of Lies, the Trickster who had invaded Earth, stood before him, leaning against the wall of Tony's small room. "I don't think I'm a traitor. I believe that word better classifies you."

Tony snarled. "It's because of you I'm here in the first place!"

The god raised one immaculate eye-brow. "I don't recall being the one who told you to take a missile through the portal."

"If you'd never invaded, none of this would have happened!" spat Tony. He wasn't in the mood to play games.

Loki stepped forward. "How about we exchange information? There may be an advantage to us working together…"

Tony laughed. "I would never work with you."

"You have a lot of anger. It is worth discussing, Stark, especially if you want to make it out of here alive."

"Who says I want to make it out of here alive?" retorted Tony.

Truthfully, he didn't. The only reason he didn't try to kill himself was that they would know instantly, considering the monitors they still kept on him. He had tried once, during his training, to remove his reactor, within the safety of his own room. The alarms had gone off and he'd lived to regret this attempt to kill himself. He hadn't tried since. He didn't even consider trying to kill himself on the battlefield either. The fear they'd find a way to stop him from doing so overrode any desire to attempt it. The punishment would be severe.

"For a man who was so full of life, you've definitely lost it." Loki mused as he walked forward, causing Tony to step back. "If you are not willing to share…"

Tony held up his hands. "Do not dare to read my mind! I don't know what you're doing here or what you hope to accomplish but I will have no part in it! Whether you are truly on my Master's side… I don't care. All I care about is dying when this is all over!"

"Don't you mean not dying? Haven't you got things to live for on Midgard? But you are not as you were… who knows if they'll even like you now. A wretched mortal without any fight hardly lives up to the Man of Iron who jested with me before. I saw you as an equal then, unusual as that is. Now I know that you weren't worthy of making an exception for."

Tony gritted his teeth. Over the years he had been filled with resentment and anger at those he blamed for his current circumstances. Loki was a high priority on his list. Without him attacking Earth in the first place… Gamora was first on his list and one he wanted to kill before Tony finally took his own life. She could have left him to die in space yet had convinced her father to save him. It was her decision which had caused his suffering. The fact that he had no choice but to continue
living galled him. There were others he could blame as well. Someone had given the order to close the portal. He would never know if he would have fallen back through but if the portal hadn't been closed… It was either Romanoff or Rogers who had made the call to close it. Ultimately they both deserved the blame for Tony's situation. If he ever saw them again, he might just kill them too.

"Do not tempt me!" snarled Tony in warning.

"Why not?" smirked Loki. "You used to be so smart and full of-"

Tony lunged forward. "SHUT UP! YOU KNOW NOTHING!"

But Tony had fallen right into Loki's trap.

He couldn't stop his momentum as he lunged out, aiming to punch Loki in the face, but the God twisted and vanished, reappearing behind him to grasp Tony by the shoulders and thrust him into the wall.

Pressing his arm into Tony's back, Loki reached around and pressed his hand against Tony's forehead.

Tony shrieked! "NO! DON'T! GET AWAY-" His shouts were cut off, his protests denied as images flashed through his mind, memories he didn't want to remember.

_The Other stood there, smiling as the whips fell on Tony's back, the blood gushing forth from the wounds as if the spilled blood was an offering in a sacrificial service._

"Tell us what we need to know and your pain will end."

"No!"

Tony scrunched his eyes shut trying to block it out.

Many images rushed through his head as Loki buried his way through.

_Nebula's contorted features appeared._

Tony flinched, new strength erupted from him. "NO! NO! DON'T MAKE ME SEE THIS! NO! NO!"

Loki forced him.

Until the Trickster realised what he was forcing the man to relieve and moved away from the memory.

Other images burned through Tony's mind, but by now he was sobbing, still trying to weakly twist away.

Then the memories changed to his training, of how he was made into the Enforcer, of the enhancements he had been given that were just not obvious to the waking eye. Loki was taking everything from him.

Everything would be ruined; all of what Tony had worked for… No! No! NO! NO MORE!

Loki released him and Tony crumpled to the floor, falling onto his hands and knees, groaning, tears still trailing down his cheeks, and his head aching from the intense battering it had received.
Pulling his knees up, Tony wrapped his arms around them, bowing his head, trying to protect himself from further violation. That's all they ever wanted to do to him. He'd been violated in so many different ways; a part of him wondered why he wasn't used to it by now.

The horror of what he had lived through still terrified him. Tony was a broken individual, trying to find a way to leave the world at a time of his choosing. Why did everything hurt so much?

"I didn't want to do that to you, Stark. You left me no choice," said Loki, not sounding sorry at all.

Tony didn't answer. Loki had no need to do that…

"You've given me a lot to think about, Stark. We will see each other again." Loki turned and strutted out the door.

Tony cried.

---

It didn't take long for a further summons from Thanos for Loki to find himself back in the company of Thanos. With him were the other adopted children of Thanos and Tony, who was now a lot more composed after Loki had left him.

They were nearing Xandar where Thanos proclaimed another Infinity Stone was located. They were each given assignments to complete. Loki was put under the watchful eye of Proxima Midnight and Cull Obsidian. They were tasked with keeping the authorities on Xandar distracted their true goal whilst Tony, who had been given another chance, infiltrated the Vault and stole the stone.

Once completed, Thanos would destroy the planet, desecrating all life from its surface.

After obtaining that stone next on the list was visiting the Collector.

And then, finally, Earth, where Loki knew more than one Infinity Stone was located, though Thanos presumed only one was there.

Loki hoped he would run into Thor soon, though he didn't know if his brother had survived the destruction of their ship. He hoped he had otherwise Loki's role in their plan would be pointless.

Glancing at Stark, Loki kept a watchful eye on the human. He was trembling, looking out of place amongst his superiors. Stark clearly hadn't used his full potential during the previous attack. Thanos had ordered him to unleash everything he had in his arsenal. Stark still did not have the suit on.

Where does it come from?

---

By the time they arrived at Xandar it was already too late.

The planet was in chaos. Cities were being destroyed and the people slaughtered. It was decided that Thor and Gamora would secure the Infinity Stone from the Vault whilst the others ran interference to try to help the citizens to escape.

Thor had wanted to come on his own but Gamora had wisely countered it by stating if Thanos was there, it would be better for her to distract him and allow Thor to take the stone and escape. She admitted she didn't believe Thanos would make an appearance as it seemed he was leaving the collection of the stones to his children.
Their route to the Vault was clear, signalling that Thanos and his minions were leaving the way clear to prevent the Nova Corps from realising what his true goal was and to allow someone to sneak through and take it.

The Vault was secured deep within the Ministerial building, below the ground, where only a few select people had the code to access it.

Everywhere they went people were dead. Ordinary guards and workers were dead, ruthlessly cut down.

It didn't look like Thanos was the one who was here, judging by the wounds they had died of.

Gamora stepped forward through the rubble scattered over the floor which led down into the Vault. "We need to be careful. If they already have the stone…"

Thor nodded. "They sent a human after the stone before. A human who was a friend… before we lost him… I hope it is him who is here."

"A human friend?" Gamora asked. Was Thor instigating he knew Tony and he'd been involved in the attack on Thor's ship? Nebula had told her Tony had entered their father's service... If he was being utilised to take the Stones…Gamora didn't know what to think or hope for.

Thor raised a hand, motioning a signal to stop her moving further forward. "Someone is coming."

They were close to the entrance to the Vault.

Gamora paused, waiting as a figure walked out of the Vault, whose doors had been pushed in. Smoke poured from behind them, indicating a fire was taking route inside the Vault. That wasn't their concern right now, not with the casing which held the Infinity Stone, clutched tightly within their enemy’s hand.

She wasn't surprised when she saw Tony standing there, watching them both wearily, and holding the casing tighter against his body. He didn't wear any armour but there was blood on his fingers and his arms.

Heart pounding in her chest, Gamora moved slowly forward, motioning for Thor to stay behind her. "Tony?" She held out her hand towards him. "I know I broke my promise to you… I had no choice. Please… let us help you… I can get you out now… Take you home…” She waited for a response. "Please… trust us. All we want is to help you…"

A small smile crossed Tony's scarred face as he placed the Infinity Stone's casing into a side pocket of the jacket he wore before a shade of metal appeared from nowhere and covered it over.

She didn't know whether she should be unnerved by his expression or not.

His voice was soft when he spoke. "Why would you want to help me when it was your fault I lived in the first place?"

It was the only warning she got before he leaped forward, his hands extending towards her, as swords emerged from both arms as his armour suddenly folded around him, encasing him in black armour, as he lunged for her chest and throat.

To be continued...
You may have noticed I am being deliberately vague about what Tony looks like. I want to leave how he looks like fully for a certain character.. but I am leaving a few hints around to give you some idea.

What do people think of Tony and Loki's interaction?

The next chapter hasn't been finished yet so I cannot promise an update in two weeks but I will try to get it done by then. Unfortunately my excitement for Infinity War has hindered my ability to write. I'm hopeful that after Thursday I may be able to make a lot of progress on this fic.

Until next time...

the-writer1988
Part 3: Chapter 4 - The Broken Promise

Chapter Summary

Gamora and Thor face-off against Tony...

Chapter Notes

So, who has seen Infinity War? Wasn't it great? I'm pretty sure I had several panic attacks during that film...

I was asked if Infinity War would affect this fic... There will be some elements that may be brought over to this story. It may influence this story but I do not think too much. The only thing that may be brought over is the Soul Stone stuff... but I'm still thinking about it.

I also had a few comments regarding Gamora's forgiveness of Nebula for what she did to Tony... It wasn't made clear in the previous chapter... Gamora hasn't forgiven Nebula. Gamora will mention this.

Without further ado, here is the next chapter... I only finished it yesterday.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART THREE
THE WAR BEGINS

Chapter Four
The Broken Promise

Gamora leapt back, twisting out the way as Tony slashed down at her, the two swords extending from his gauntlets which had formed around his hands. She barely managed to avoid them. Tony was fast.

_They enhanced him._

Gamora didn’t want to harm him yet he came for her again, once again causing her to jump to the side.

“Aren’t you going to fight me like the warrior you are trained to be?” spat Tony at her, eyes flashing furiously at her.

“I don’t want to fight you, Tony. I’m sorry for what happened to you. But there is so much you do not know… If you just-” She bent her knees suddenly as Tony lashed out, swinging his right arm in the direction of her neck. She narrowly missed the blades as they coursed through the air above her where her throat had been mere moments ago.
A hand grasped her elbow, yanking her back. “He won’t listen to reason,” hissed Thor in her ear. “We need to get that stone off him now!”

“Then help me disable him!” retorted Gamora, racing from Thor’s grip and jumping up, using her legs against the wall to pivot upon it, somersaulting off of it, to land behind Tony. Her hand snaked to her holster during the stunt, dragging her blaster out, switching the settings from kill to stun before firing at Tony who was in the midst of turning towards her.

His arm came up and a shield appeared, absorbing the stun blast. Tony smirked. “You think you are the only one with superior abilities here?”

“You didn’t seem to have those abilities when you attacked me on my ship,” noted Thor.

“You’re lucky I chose not to use them on you.” Tony’s reply was dark and cold.

“Why would you choose to not use them?” asked Gamora.

Tony’s lips pursed up into a snarl.

But Gamora had guessed. “You don’t like what they did to you, do you? They took away your humanity, didn’t they? What made you fundamentally human…” She stepped forward, well aware of how fast he was if he chose to attack again. “Thanos did that to me too. He changed me to something I shouldn’t be.”

“Then why didn’t you let me die?” Tony snarled, clenching his fists. “My suffering is on you, Gamora! Without your interference I would be dead now and probably much happier for it!”

Gamora signed. “Tony…” She moved a step towards him. “I made a mistake, I acknowledge that. I should never have convinced Thanos to save you.”

“You did what?” Thor broke in, clearly shocked by the turn of events, and forgetting his place in this.

Tony laughed. High-pitched and insane-sounding. “Has she not said? I’m supposed to be dead! It’s only because of her I am even alive!” He softened a bit, his voice becoming low. “I wish I could kill myself… But I can’t… They always know! And it’s your fault!” The jets fired on the bottom of his feet and he flew forwards, hand shaped in a fist, flying right at Gamora.

She twisted out the way, swiping her leg out and knocking his legs, shoving him to the side in his flight. “I can help you!” she shouted back.

“You said that before! You promised you would help me!” Tony kicked, his boot impacting against Gamora’s stomach. He fired his boots at the same time and she leapt back screaming as the jets burned right through her clothes and burning her skin. “I will never trust you again!” He landed, raising his palms, the swords once again sliding forth from the armour he wore.

“Tony. Stop. Please!” Thor moved in front of Gamora, raising his hands.

Tony’s eyes narrowed. “You’ve never called me Tony before. What gives you the right to call me ‘Tony’?”

“We were a team,” started Thor before Tony broke into laughter.

“Really?” he managed. “We were a team?” His eyes turned hard. “Don’t make me sick. We were never a team. Never will be.” He shot forward again, this time aiming for Thor, swinging the swords
from his wrists into a fast arc, aiming to behead Thor, but the god ducked, lunging forward himself and grasping Tony’s legs as he flew past.

“Stark! Please! You don’t want to do this!” Thor tried to negotiate. “If you give Thanos the stone then you will never find peace!” He pulled back, swinging Tony back towards the Vault.

Tony managed to save his landing by firing his thrusters, righting himself before he hit the cold, marble floor.

Thor stepped forward but Gamora grasped his bicep, shaking her head.

“No.”

“You want to let him take it?” Thor grasped her meaning.

“You can’t stop me anyway,” interjected Tony. “I’ll die before I let you take the stone from me.”

Gamora smiled sadly. “I can’t kill you, Tony. I still want to save you. Things didn’t go the way I planned or hoped they would go. But that can change today if you come with us. We can take you home!”

“Lies,” hissed Tony. But he didn’t attack.

She took that as a good sign she was getting through to him. “Thanos is heading to Earth, isn’t he?”

Tony didn’t answer.

“If you help him, you will never see your planet again, not in the way you remember it. How could you call it home? Don’t you want to see Pepper again? Hold her in your arms and tell her how much you love her? Help us stop this and you’ll get that chance!” Gamora pleaded passionately.

Tony looked conflicted. His armour began to retreat and his hand moved to the pocket of his jacket and removed the casing which held the Infinity Stone.

Gamora held her breath. Please let me save him.

“You want me to give this to you, don’t you?” asked Tony quietly.

“Yes,” she answered. “Don’t let him have it…”

Tony swallowed.

Gamora was thankful Thor was staying silent. She was reaching Tony, she could feel it and see it.

Tony extended his arm out but then hesitated, drawing his arm back towards him. His armour started to appear on his legs and started to swivel up his back and abdomen. “I… I can’t.”

“Tony… no! Please!”

Then his demeanour changed completely. “You betrayed me. I can never forget it. You left me when you promised to save me! You broke your promise to me! You have no idea what they did to me after you left! And I can’t go against them like you did!”

“Tony-” began Gamora. But then she dived to the side as fire blast flew past her. “Tony! STOP!”

But then he was attacking her again, arms reaching for her throat, even as she tried to struggle against
him. She knew she would not be able to push him away. But someone grasped Tony by the shoulders, flinging him away from her.

Tony flew back, landing on his back, his arms and legs sprawling open. He snarled yet Thor was on him, strong hands gripping his arms, pushing him back to the floor.

“LET ME GO!” Tony struggled. “She needs to die!”

“Thor!” Gamora stepped forward. “Let him go!”

“No! If we can obta- Oof!”

Thor winced as Tony kneed him causing the god to release his arms momentarily but it was enough for Tony to allow the armour to fully encase him once again and with the added strength of the suit he wore, he was able to kick Thor away from him.

“Tony! Please!” Gamora still begged him. She hoped she could reach him but the chances of that were rapidly dwindling.

Tony shot up into the air, using his feet thrusters to propel him forward. “I will keep to my mission!” He fired two shots at once, one from each palm.

Gamora ducked and Thor rolled to the side. And Tony was above them and shooting away from them and the Vault.

He paused in his flight and turned back. His helmet visor came up revealing his face and he looked at Gamora with hatred burning in his eyes. “You’re lucky you’ll escape death this time, traitor!”

Gamora flinched.

“Get used to the idea that I’m beyond saving. There is nothing you can do for me, unless it involves you dying!” He turned and shot away, firing his thrusters to increase speed and was gone from their sight before they had even made it back to the entrance of the Ministerial building they had been in.

Gamora felt heavy-hearted. “We have to find him. Get the stone back. If he hands it to Thanos…” she shuddered. She didn’t want to think about the implications of Thanos acquiring another infinity stone, which would only increase his powers and become more impossible to defeat.

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They had decided to split up. Thor would return to the others to help evacuate the planet as much as possible whilst Gamora pursued Tony. Thor hadn’t liked the idea but appreciated that Gamora at least understood Tony’s predicament. He did, however, intimate he wanted to have strong words with Gamora about how Tony had survived his trip in space. Gamora had promised him she would answer his questions, once she had retrieved the stone.

She knew where Tony was heading and stole a speeder bike before beginning her pursuit. The technology Tony was using for this suit indicated he had spent a lot of time developing the technology since she had betrayed her father. It was almost nano-tech, could even be a more advance version of it.

The city was in ruins, structures crumbling or collapsed, roads ripped up and sent in spiralling directions. Smoke plumed from almost every building. Thanos’ warship hovered overhead, its menacing look bearing down upon the city. Nothing the Xandarian guards could throw against the warship was capable of penetrating its shields.
Every now and then she saw a turbolaser strike forth from Thanos’ ship, hit a random part of the city, causing even more damage and fires to sprout forth.

Gamora piloted her speeder bike, steadily gaining altitude when her eyes picked up a dot on the horizon, heading up towards Thanos’ warship.

“Tony…” she breathed.

The speeder bike was unlikely to be able to reach the heights she needed to reach him.

“Damn it, where is the Milano when I need it?” she cursed. Activating her wrist com, she spoke into it. “Peter? Are you in the air?”

Static came over her communicator and she could just about hear Quill’s voice.

“Yeah, we are! We had to flee. There isn’t much more we can do here, Gamora. Thor’s just arrived back. Where are you?”

“Pursuing Tony. He has the infinity stone!”

“Who’s Tony?” Peter asked.

Gamora had forgotten she had never told Peter about Tony. He didn’t know what Tony meant to her. “Never mind who he is. All that matters is stopping him from reaching Thanos! If you see a man in a suit on your sensors, that’s him! Don’t kill him! Are you close to me so you can pick me up?”

She sent off her location to the Milano’s computers.

“We’re not far from you,” confirmed Peter, seconds later. “But that suit guy is quite close to the mothership! I could take a shot at him from here and probably kill him…”

Gamora shook her head. “No!” She pushed the speeder bike higher, knowing the engines were straining against the height she was trying to build. “Just… stop him somehow!” She didn’t want Tony to die.

She saw the Milano advance towards Tony’s position.

And then Thor flew out of the Milano and collided with Tony in mid-air. The two scrambled with one another; Tony’s suit moving around him flawlessly, trying to remove the god from his persons.

Gamora kept her eyes upon the duo, altering her course slightly so she could enter the Milano, leaping off her speeder-bike and landing just inside the hatch of their ship.

There was a blast from outside and Thor went cascading away.

Gamora peered out and saw Tony speeding away, covered in a shield. Quill was firing shots but they rebounded upon the shield, causing the Milano to take evasive action to avoid being hit by its own turbo lasers.

And then Tony reached Thanos’ warship.

It was over.

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They had no choice but to abandon Xandar.
As soon as Thanos had received the Power Stone, he had teleported down to the planet and completely destroyed half of the planet’s population, simply by setting the stone, in his Gauntlet, to the ground.

They felt guilty about leaving the planet but there was nothing else the Guardians could do.

“What do we do now?” Quill asked, leaning back against the wall, arms folded across his chest.

Thor walked slowly forwards. “I’d like to know how you know Tony Stark.” He looked pointedly at Gamora. “He said it is your fault he suffers, that you betrayed him.”

Gamora’s shoulders shook. Peter moved to comfort her.

“First, I think we all deserve to know who this Tony guy is! Why couldn’t we kill him? He’s working for Thanos!”

“Peter… It’s not that simple,” replied Gamora.

“Then explain.”

Gamora closed her eyes. “You’ve heard about Thanos’ attack on Terra a few years ago? The Chitauri army?”

“Yeah, ‘course. It was the talk of all the Ravager bars,” said Quill. “Rumour was a mere human made it through a portal to deliver a fatal blow to Thanos’ army, halting the alien attack. I wasn’t sure whether to believe it or not… Earth isn’t that advanced to be able to have developed technology enough to make it into space.”

“That mere human was Tony Stark,” interrupted Thor. “He was ahead of his time. He had a suit of armour, the most impressive piece on Earth that could withstand anything. It was highly advanced. I was there that day. My brother, Loki, was leading the army against Earth. Six of us fought to save the Earth. The government of that world turned on us, sent a missile to New York, in the hope of exterminating the threat. It would have done nothing to stop the invasion if the missile had hit. Stark intercepted the missile, took it through the portal in the sky. None of us know what happened next. Only that he never returned.”

Gamora picked up the story. “I was there with Thanos on the day of the invasion. We saw Tony falling back towards the portal before it closed. He didn’t reach it in time… Only a few seconds more…”

“We should have waited longer,” muttered Thor quietly.

“We were going to leave him to die in space after what he had done but I suggested saving his life. We had seen this man, this simple human, resist the effects of one of the Infinity Stones. Thanos had sight, he had a connection to Loki and was able to see things through his eyes. Tony was immune to the stones when he tried to take over his mind. I knew there was a chance Tony could be useful to us… I argued for his life to be spared. Thanos agreed. The Other, one of my father’s former advisors, was instrumental in saving Tony. Thanos ordered Tony to be bought to him but he wanted him broken.”

Thor turned away. “He was tortured.”

Gamora nodded. “Yes. For six months before he was even bought to Thanos. When he arrived he wasn’t broken. He was still fighting… Such horrible things had been done to him. We knew his name and about the arc reactor but that was it. Myself and Nebula were tasked to break him. Nebula
took to this role eagerly.”

“Doesn’t surprise me… She’s psychotic,” Rocket said.

“I helped Tony when I could. Healed his injuries, promised him I would save him and return him to Earth. Nebula wanted Tony, she desired him. I did everything I could to stop her. Nebula managed to persuade Thanos that raping Tony would break him…” She couldn’t stand to recite this so Gamora turned away, leaning against the wall, aware that her companions were watching her. “I argued against it… I had Tony’s trust. I was this close to getting him out and getting him home… but then Ronan happened and I was ordered on assignment there. I only found out what happened to Tony when Nebula and I resolved our differences after Ego…”

“Oh man…” Peter shook his head. “Now I know why you feel guilty about her still.”

“I can’t forgive her for what she did to Tony. She raped him brutally and that broke him. He’s been forced into servitude because of what she did to him. But Nebula will still be my sister… And I hate myself for being able to sympathise with her. We both grew up in a horrible environment. I always let her down, I always protected myself… I can only sympathise because Thanos trained us to be cold and cruel and to take what we wanted. I’ve never raped someone before but I’ve come close to it. But what she did to Tony is unforgiveable… And I know she regrets it now… Especially after what I told her about Tony.” Gamora sniffed, not wanting to feel upset now.

“What did you tell her about him?” prodded Thor. His tone was hard and there was disappointment reflecting in his voice.

Gamora made the effort to look at Thor. “I think he may be the key to defeating Thanos once and for all.”

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

It may be a bit of an abrupt ending but I felt this was a good ending to this chapter. What did people think of the confrontation between Tony and Gamora and Thor?

The next chapter is the last chapter of Part 3... I hope to post it in two weeks though I have yet to write it :)

Until then,

the-writer1988
Part 3: Chapter 5 - The Gathering

Chapter Summary

Thor returns to Earth...

Chapter Notes

So... this is the last chapter to Part 3. You will find some plot elements of Infinity War dropping into this chapter so if you haven't seen it yet, beware! I will further talk about the IW plot elements at the end of the chapter.

Without further ado, I present the next chapter...

PART THREE
THE WAR BEGINS

Chapter Five
The Gathering

Everyone stared at Gamora for her words.

“Wait. So, you’re sayin’, that the guy who is currently working for your daddy, is the key to defeating him for good?” Quill stared at Gamora, his eyes wide in surprise and his mouth slacking open. “Geez man, that officially sucks. The universe is doomed.”

“Maybe not yet,” replied Gamora wistfully. “I still think there is a part of him that wants to fight… But he is too scared of the consequences to do so. Tony has invincibility against at least one of the Infinity Stones. This could extend to all six of them if Thanos ever got his hands on them all. Something about that arc reactor of his is the key. I know Thanos wanted to use his brain to create new weapons, new technology for his armies. Tony has certainly done that with his own armour. His arc reactor was formed from a new element that was discovered from studying the Tesseract, the container which held the Space Stone.”

“And which Thanos now possesses,” confirmed Thor. “Asgard retrieved that stone after my brother’s attack on Earth. We kept it safe and hidden… until Asgard was destroyed. I thought we didn’t have the stone but Loki retrieved it. Thanos attacked us because we had two of them.”

“Two? Are you crazy carrying two of those things around?” Rocket shouted.

“I am Groot!”

“I just said that, Groot!”

“So he now has three stones,” clarified Gamora.
Thor shook his head. “No. Only two. We also had the Mind Stone, which I retrieved from Earth not that long ago. I was going to place it in our vault but I decided to keep it on my person. At least that way I knew it was safe. Most of my people made it to safety. Valkyrie and Heimdell should be on Earth and with them should be the Mind Stone. We need to find out where Thanos is intending to go next. Asgard hid another Infinity Stone with the Collector in Knowhere.”

Quill jerked back, surprised by the admission. “Why would you give him an Infinity Stone? He has no idea how to contain one!”

“Of course he does, he’s kept it safe all these years. Why would it be a problem?” Thor said. “I trust the Collector to keep it safe. He has not let me down yet.”

“We have to go to Knowhere.” Gamora was certain that was where Thanos would head next. “We need to retrieve that stone before Thanos gets it.”

“I’m not going to Knowhere,” replied Thor. “I have to get to Earth, back to my people, and warn them about Thanos. And the Avengers deserve to know they may just end up fighting one of their former team-mates.”

Gamora shook her head, her long hair spilling around her shoulders. “No. Our priority should be getting the Infinity Stone from the Collector.”

“Here’s an idea,” said Quill, stepping forward, raising his hands in a gesture of peace. “How about Goldilocks here –”

“Excuse me?” Thor demanded.

Quill ignored him. “-takes one of our pods and goes to Earth. We follow later once we have the stone.”

“The idea has merit,” mused Thor. “Earth needs to be warned of what is coming but...”

“Thor? What is it?” asked Gamora quietly.

“To stop Thanos for good we need to kill him. Ordinary weapons will not work on him,” explained Thor. “I do not have my hammer anymore. I have a decision to make.”

“So he’s invincible, just great,” muttered Rocket.

“No one is invincible,” said Drax, “but they can be invisible, just like me.”

Quill rolled his eyes. “You cannot be invisible Drax!”

“I can if I make no noise.”

“Guys! This isn’t the time!” Gamora interrupted them. “Thor. Is there a weapon that could kill Thanos?”

“Yes.”

“Great! Then where is it?” Quill said.

“It hasn’t been made yet,” admitted Thor.

Quill hung his head. “Oh boy. This just keeps getting better and better.”
“Where can this weapon be made?” Gamora asked.

“A place far from here. Nidavellir.”

“But that place doesn’t exist!” Rocket said.

Thor laughed. “Oh, it does exist. But… I do need to return to Earth…”

Rocket walked towards Thor, holding up his right paw. “Now this may seem like simple logic but don’t we need a Thanos-killing weapon? Surely that would be the obvious route to take!”

“It would be if Stark wasn’t alive. If Thanos is heading for Earth, the others need to be prepared. It is a difficult decision to make. Once they are aware I can go to Nidavellir. They deserve to get the truth from me.”

“Thor’s right.” Gamora felt the decision was the right one, though her support of it may be linked to her guilt over the pain Tony had suffered. “If you go to Earth, I want to come with you. I know stopping Thanos is a priority… But, I can’t be near him. Not when he is on this quest. It’s best if we split up. I’ll go with Thor to Earth… The rest of you can go to Knowhere and collect the Infinity Stone.”

Rocket folded his arms across his chest. “Is there an option where Groot and I get to go with you and Quill, Drax and Mantis go to Knowhere instead?”

“You just don’t want to be anywhere near Thanos, do you?” Quill interjected, sneering down at Rocket.

Rocket shrugged. “Who would want to be anywhere near him? I’ll stay as far away from him as possible.”

“Whatever…” Quill shook his head.

“I see no problem with them accompanying us to Earth,” stated Thor. “The more company the better. Earth isn’t used to other life-forms. It accepts me because I helped save the planet on multiple occasions however if they see more than one different species willing to help then they may be more opening to other species visiting.”

“That’s a yes then,” confirmed Rocket, looking smugly at Quill.

“We’ll take the pod,” said Gamora. “It should have enough fuel and jump range to reach Terra. Though it won’t have enough to return us to the Milano. You’ll have to come for us as soon as you have that Infinity Stone.”

Quill saluted with his right hand. “Will do.”

“Okay then,” Gamora looked around at everyone in the hold, “let’s stop Thanos.”

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Tony had been rewarded for his successful mission to bring Thanos the Infinity Stone. It was one of the few assignments he had succeeded in. He always tried his best to complete his mission. Pain was always the punishment for failure. He felt relieved he didn’t have to be put through more pain.

He was in his workshop, a small area of Sanctuary II, which Thanos had bequeathed to him after a previous successful mission years ago, so Tony could work on his tech and the weapons Thanos
desired. Tony had used his own Arc Reactor to study the energy of the Infinity Stones. He could easily have an operation to remove the Arc Reactor and the shrapnel if he so desired, but it wasn’t something he was particularly interested in doing.

He also knew Thanos would forbid him from removing the Arc Reactor. It was an easy way for them to control him, and both he and they knew it. The Other had been killed four years ago, shortly after Gamora and Nebula had been sent to work with Ronan. But that hadn’t stopped Thanos from forcing its removal from his body. It was one of his favourite tortures for Tony for his failures.

He still remembered the time he had failed so badly that Tony had, had to endure over twenty-four hours of having his Arc Reactor removed by every single member of Thanos’ Chitauri army. But that hadn’t been all. His mission had been such a disaster that some of the Chitauri had tormented him by touching his body intimately.

Tony had been in such a state after the torture that he had been useless to Thanos for a few weeks, his mind shattered by the horrendous experience. He had slowly recovered from it, though his sleep was always interrupted by nightmares of his torture from years back and any recent bouts of it.

Most of all, the touching the Chitauri had carried out, had bought back the full horror of what Nebula had done to his body.

Thanos was a cruel Master and Tony strived to ensure he never had to suffer like that again. He hoped one day, one of his rewards would be the safety of death. It was the only thing Tony could hope for.

He was working on enhancing his suit when his senses tingled and he turned to find Loki standing at the entrance to his lab. He shuddered inwardly. “What do you want?”

“I understand congratulations are in order for the Enforcer who successfully brought Thanos another Infinity Stone to add to his Gauntlet,” the God of Lies stepped forward.

Tony shivered. He hated Loki’s presence. He declined to answer and continued to work on the device in his hand. It was a smaller arc reactor which he attached to the one in his chest, where the suit could be stored within it. He was able to create anything with the suit. The technology he had now mastered gave him an advantage against any Earth-based opponents.

He declined to answer, choosing to ignore the God’s presence.

“This is very unlike you. Are you that broken you will not even speak to me?” Loki was deliberately goading him.

Tony gritted his teeth and continued to fiddle with the smaller Arc Reactor.

“Don’t you want to kill Thanos?” Loki prompted quietly.

Tony stopped, raising his head slowly. “To even attempt it is to walk into death.”

“But you want to die. You told me yourself and I saw it when I read your mind. Surely the gift of death would be enough for you to attempt it?” Loki pressed.

Tony swallowed. Oh, he had thought long and hard about trying to kill Thanos himself. “He wouldn’t kill me. I’m too useful to him. He would just subject me to pain for the attempt.”

“He still has a use for you on Earth, doesn’t he?” Loki said. “You know what it is, don’t you?”
Tony did know. And he hated it. He knew, no matter what he did, Thanos would not kill him until Tony had accomplished his task upon Earth. He was trapped in a horrible nightmare with no way to escape. “The Arc Reactor keeps me alive. They know as soon as I try to take it out."

“And they force you to live on,” mused Loki. “What’s on Earth that he needs you to get it?”

Tony chewed his bottom lip. How could he talk to Loki like this? The God of Mischief had broken into his mind. “Stuff.” He didn’t want to elaborate.

“Your tech?” Loki wasn’t going to let him forget this.

Anger sprouted into Tony’s chest. “Why do you have to be so insistent? I don’t want to talk about it!”

Loki laughed softly. “I think there would be mutual benefit in us colluding together. I’m only here because I can help Thor this way. I handed Thanos an Infinity Stone as part of a larger plan we have.”

Tony’s eyebrows rose in surprise. “I could take that information and have you destroyed for that.”

“But you won’t.”

Tony grasped the smaller Arc Reactor, squeezing it tightly.

“Do you want Thanos to win?”

Tony had no answer for that. He didn’t care, as long as the outcome resulted in himself finally being able to die.

“I’m not going to pretend anymore. I know exactly what Thanos wants you to do, Stark.”

“If you know, why not tell me instead of asking me?” shouted Tony angrily. “Or, better, get out of my lab and leave me in peace!”

Loki smirked. “No. I think I will go for your first option.” He started to walk around the small space. He stopped behind Tony, giving the human the feeling he was being observed.

Tony turned to face the God. He looked up and Loki’s hand came up to place his hand on his Arc Reactor. “Get off!”

“This is the key, isn’t it? The one object that stopped me from mind-controlling you. I wonder if it would have protected you if I had placed the spear on your skin instead?” the God mused. “Thanos doesn’t want the Earth to utilise this technology, does he? The Arc Reactor technology could prevent him from ever reaching Earth if it was designed on a global level. The Infinity Stones would not affect it.”

Tony physically pushed Loki away from him. “If you touch me again…”

“You’ll kill me?” Loki laughed. “And suffer punishment for doing it? Do you really want to subjugate yourself to more pain?”

Tony snarled.

“You’re a smart individual, Stark. Your technology could save the Earth. Thanos does not wish for them to have it, does he? He’s sending you to Earth to retrieve those plans and destroy them before the humans can use them against him.” Loki moved back. “It’s a good plan. Wise choice. But will
“I have nothing to prove,” replied Tony. He clenched his fists. “GET. OUT!”

Loki was smiling. “Oh, it is so easy to make you snap.” He began to walk backwards. “Stark, before I take my leave, let me just ask you one thing: It’s not just you who knows how to access these plans, is it?”

And then Loki was gone.

And Tony threw the smaller Arc Reactor at the wall, screaming. “FUCK YOU LOKI!”

Sinking to his knees, Tony curled his arms around his legs. He knew what he would have to do. He knew what the price would be if he failed in retrieving/destroying his original plans for the Arc Reactor. It wouldn’t be him paying the price – even though he would be tortured for his failure – it would be Pepper.

Thanos knew of his former love for her. He knew a human woman was Tony’s weakness.

He would take Pepper and force him to watch as they slowly tore her to pieces in mind, body and spirit before executing her.

And he couldn’t fail because, despite who he was now, he still did have feelings for Pepper. She didn’t deserve to suffer the indignity of the abuse Tony had suffered at his captor’s hands.

“I won’t fail you, Pepper. I’ll make sure you’ll never be hurt again,” mumbled Tony into his clothes.

It wouldn’t be long until they made planet-fall for Earth.

Tony had to be ready.

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Earth, 2018

It was just another training day for Steve Rogers when the call came through that an identified spaceship was rapidly approaching Earth and showed no signs of stopping. The Avengers facility, which had been built by Pepper, was where he lived and trained. They had missions occasionally but Steve spent most of his time keeping up his fitness and catching up on things he had missed in the world during his seventy years frozen in ice.

It wasn’t just Steve who was assembling today.

Natasha, Bruce and Clint were all there, alongside security officials with weapons ready as the spaceship came in to land. They were unsure of the occupants but a coded transmission from the pod had indicated Thor was there, though the code had been scrambled and difficult to decipher.

It was the mention of Thor in the message that the World Security Council decided to allow the spaceship pod to land, close to the Avengers facility, as they did not wish to accidentally kill Thor. If the occupants of the pod proved to be hostile then the Avengers and the soldiers would deal with them.

“Let’s hope Thor is on that thing,” noted Clint. He had his bow out but no arrow was notched. “Would be nice to see him again. It’s been too long.”

“JARVIS was only able to decode a small portion of the message. A shame it was such terrible
“Stay sharp,” ordered Steve, his eyes tracking the ship down as it started to land.

“Hey... there is someone who looks like Thor in there,” squinted Bruce, through the wide screen of the pod. “And a green woman and what looks like to be a tree and a racoon?”

They didn’t have to wait too long for the answer to be known.

Thor descended from the pod first. “This is a bit of a welcoming committee,” he said, looking at the soldiers who still had their guns trained on him.

Steve smiled as he stepped up to his old friend. “Well, we have to be more cautious now, especially after a few thousand Asgardians suddenly appeared in Norway and decided to settle there.”

Thor’s eyes widened. “They made it then!”

Steve nodded. “They did. They’re only allowed to stay because of their affiliation with you. Norway is happy for them to stay where they are for now. I guess something bad happened to your home?”

Thor inclined his head. “My sister.” He didn’t elaborate.

“Oh.” Steve patted him on the back “It’s good to see you. You look better with your hair short.”

Thor ignored the compliment on his new look. “Yes it’s good to see you all too, though I bring some rather sombre news with me.” Thor turned back to the ship. “I would first like to introduce you to my new friends.”

The green woman emerged first. “This is Gamora.” Then the tree walked down the ramp. “Groot.” Followed by the Racoon who was carrying a rather large gun. “Rocket.”

“Welcome to Earth!” Steve said, motioning for the soldiers to retreat, which thankfully they did on his command.

Thor shook everyone’s hand before Steve indicated they get in the jeep and proceed to the Avenger’s compound. Questions were asked about what had brought Thor and his new companions to Earth but all declined to answer. Steve noted there was a new weariness to Thor, one that indicated he had suffered much in the last few months.

As the Avenger’s compound came into view, Thor whistled. “Wow. New complex. Who is responsible for this?”

“Pepper,” explained Steve. “She thought it might be something Tony would want.” He saw the green woman’s eyes – Gamora – widen. “She’s been very supportive of the Avengers Initiative.”

When the Jeep grinded to a halt everyone filed out and Steve led them inside the facility, first into a large foyer. There were two sets of staircases – one to the right decorated red and one to the left emblazoned with gold – with lifts situated in the middle at the back of the foyer. In the centre of the foyer was a statue.

Steve watched curiously as Gamora stopped in front of the statue, looking up into the face of Tony Stark. It had been Pepper’s idea to have a statue – or rather a memorial – for Tony in the foyer of the new Avengers complex. She’d had it sculpted in memory of the Tony she had known. It was a casual pose, still wearing a classic suit, but his eyes were bright and he had a charming smile on his face. Steve always felt guilty when he saw the statue. He couldn’t help but think he should have
waited longer before issuing the order to close the portal.

The Avengers led their guests through the Compound to a briefing room within the centre of the building. There was a table situated in the middle of it with the Avengers logo embedded within it and in the seat at the top of the table sat Nick Fury.

Introductions were done again before Thor and his companions took seats at the table on one side and the other Avengers situated on the other.

Fury was the first to speak. “I was supposed to be retired when a portal opened up in Norway and your people started to arrive in quick succession. Care to explain that event, Thor?”

“Getting straight to the point I see.” Thor observed them all as he looked around the room, catching their eyes with his own, as if he was studying them all individually. “My father died. My sister returned and tried to take over Asgard. We fought… I had to bring about Ragnarok in order to give my people a chance to escape.”

“And then what happened?” asked Steve, leaning back in his chair.

“We left the ruins of Asgard, intending to make our destination Earth. But we were attacked by Thanos and his children. Loki was with me… He helped save our people. I know he is not Earth’s favourite person but he is our best hope for learning where Thanos is heading. Loki had stolen the Tesseract from our father’s Vault. It was that which Thanos was after. He hopes to collect all the Infinity Stones and wipe out half of all life in the universe. Loki voluntarily surrendered the Tesseract to him.” Thor held up a hand to quench the sounds of protest that had abruptly arisen. “It was the only way to ensure our people’s survival. And… the Mind Stone was also with us, the one we retrieved from Sokovia a few years ago. Thanos knew we had it but I’d already sent it away with my people.”

“An Infinity Stone is on Earth?” Fury’s one remaining eye focused completely on Thor’s face.

“Yes.”

“With your people?”

“Yes.”

“So, if this Thanos invades the Earth, we can blame you?” clarified Fury.

“It’s not a matter if he will invade, Thanos will come here.” Thor sighed. “I hope he will limit his damage to where my people are. I intend to seek them out and take back the Infinity Stone so innocents can be protected. We will lead the fight away from Earth.”

“Loki is trying to work from the inside to bring Thanos down. I am working with him.” Thor knew that particular piece of news wasn’t going to go down well. “I know you have no reason to trust him but I do. He has shown his loyalty to Asgard and me. If you can’t trust him, at least trust my judgement.”

Steve shook his head. “I don’t like it… but I don’t think we have any other choice, do we?”

The others inclined their heads in agreement.

“Question is, what do we do now, with a potential alien invasion on the way?” Natasha leaned forward. “We’re not prepared for this and unless your three friends here can help us, we may be in even more trouble than we thought.”
Clint leaned back in his chair. “Man… an alien invasion on the way. Stark would be very useful to have right now if he was alive.”

Thor’s head bowed at the mention of Tony.

Steve watched him curiously. “There’s something you’re keeping from us. What is it?” He spoke softly, hoping to entice Thor to open up.

“My friends…” began Thor, wincing slightly, “there is something I must tell you. There is no easy way to say it.” A few moments passed in silence as the others waited for Thor to elaborate further. The silence felt like it would last forever before the dulcet tones of the Asgardian finally broke through.

“Tony Stark is alive.”

To be continued...

End of Part Three

Chapter End Notes

Infinity War plot points: Thor's new hammer is one of the plot points I am working into this story, however he has chosen to prioritise going to Earth first because of Tony's survival. The Soul Stone plot thread will be very similar to IW but that is only if Thanos gets his hands on Gamora... which is why I decided to split her up and have her go with Thor instead. Gamora's passion for wanting to stop Thanos getting the Infinity Stones only extends so far... She failed Tony and she wants to do right by him. She also knows Tony will be returning to Earth... Having her on Earth with Thor means Thanos is going to find it very hard to get the Soul Stone...

Loki is still around and I'm quite enjoying writing his and Tony's dynamic - there will be more from Loki.

The next chapter should be posted in two weeks, though I will be updating on Monday 4th June as I am working late on Tuesday 5th June so you'll get the next chapter a day earlier... Though I may post it Tuesday morning before I go to work... We'll see!

Until then! :)
Part 4: Chapter 1 - Strategy Planning

Chapter Summary

The Avengers learn of how Tony survived and begin to make plans to counteract the threat of Thanos...

Chapter Notes

Hello all!

We are about, probably, halfway through this story now. At least in terms of how many Parts there are. In total there are 6 Parts which all vary in length.

And for all those who have been waiting for a description on what Tony looks like... It's in this chapter...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

PART FOUR

THE WAR ON EARTH

Chapter One

Strategy Planning

There was complete and utter silence before a combination of voices broke out in the conference room at Thor’s declaration. Steve zoned out completely, the guilt he still felt building up within him once more, threatening to crumble his spirit and let him drown in the dark abyss that was his regret of his actions from that day six years ago.

Bruce had shot out of his chair, hands placed on the table, leaning across it whilst Natasha had just risen and Clint starred open-mouthed at the God of Thunder. Fury, on the other hand, had punctuated his reply with: “What the mother-fuc-” before being cut off by Natasha by hitting him on the arm.

“Thor,” implored Bruce, “please tell me you’re lying.”

Thor’s eyebrows crinkled in confusion. “Why do you want me to be lying?”

But it wasn’t Bruce who answered, it was Gamora who did so, causing everyone in the room to stop speaking and look at her. Even Steve seemed to bring himself out of his stupor.

“Because they want it to be true he is alive, but that he didn’t experience anything bad in the years he has been lost to them.” Gamora rose her head and looked at each of the Avengers in turn.

“Did you know him?” whispered Steve quietly. He wanted it to be true.
Gamora glanced at Thor. “It’s... complicated.”

A bad feeling welled up inside Steve.

“Thor, how do you know Tony is alive?” asked Natasha.

“I think its best if we start at the beginning,” replied Thor. “I only met him in the last week. He is not who you remember him to be.”

Steve groaned, putting his face in his hands.

Gamora stood from her chair, moving to stand behind it “I’m one of the daughters of Thanos.” She raised a hand to prevent another outcry. “I used to be one of his greatest assassins... and his favourite daughter. He’s not my father biologically. He raised me as his own daughter after he killed my family. I’ve always hated him and sought many ways to escape from him. I was with Thanos on the day the Chitauri invaded this planet through the Tesseract engineered portal. He was watching from afar.” She gripped the back of the chair. “We saw a man in a flying suit come through the portal, destroy the Chitauri command ship and he began to fall back.”

“No…” Steve whispered brokenly. “He was coming back to us?”

“He was unconscious. The gravitational pull of the portal was dragging him back. He would have fallen through...”

“If I hadn’t given the order for it to be closed,” muttered Steve. He shook his head, his fists clenching in anger. This was what he had been afraid of: that Tony had been alive all this time and had been so close to falling back when it closed. “He’d be here now...”

“Don’t feel guilty about it. You cannot change it now,” said Gamora.

“What happened to him?” asked Natasha. Both she and Bruce had retaken their chairs.

“We were going to leave him to die, floating in space. He had, after all, thwarted one of the most powerful beings in the galaxy from accomplishing his goal of retrieving a second Infinity Stone.” She hesitated then, unsure of how to continue. “It was because of me Tony was saved. And I know he hates me for that.”

“I convinced Thanos to save his life. We had seen Loki attempt to control him with the Mind Stone...”

“Wait, when did that happen?” Clint searched her eyes.

“Just before the portal opened,” answered Gamora. “Thanos had a connection to Loki. He could see through his eyes. The Mind Stone was in the sceptre. Tony was invincible to it. It didn’t work on him. I used that information to save his life.”

“What do you mean?” stuttered Bruce.

“It’s complicated to explain right now. I will get back to it. Please hear me out.”

“Please, continue,” inferred Fury.

“Thanos decided to save Tony but he wanted him broken before he was brought to him. Tony was nowhere near us but one of my father’s advisors was. The Other rescued Tony, brought him onboard his ship. I know in the six months it took the Other to deliver Tony to us that he was tortured.”
Steve started to grind his teeth together. He hated how badly he had failed Tony. He hadn’t liked the man but he’d still laid down his life when he had to. He hadn’t even hesitated. All these years later it still hurt that he had sorely misjudged the man. And now, hearing he lived… God, I messed up.

“Did you torture him?” Fury’s voice was cold and unforgiving.

Gamora shook her head. “No. I helped him when I could. My sister, Nebula, did the bulk of the torturing. I hurt him only when I had no choice. Nebula was more than happy to force Tony to live through her depravity.”

Steve didn’t even want to consider the deeper meaning to the alien woman’s words. “How long was he tortured for?” It was his fault. Tony had suffered because of his inability to wait just a little bit longer. “Before he broke?”

“Nearly two years,” answered Gamora solemnly. “Most prisoners break within days or a few weeks. Tony was strong… Defiant… If he wasn’t usefull to Thanos then he would have been executed long ago.” Her shoulders slumped, her hair moving over her shoulders. “I tried to help him when I could. Comfort him, heal him… I promised him I would save him and bring him back to Earth…” She turned her face away, bowing her head. “I broke my promise and I had no choice to. After that… he broke. Tony… He serves Thanos now.”

“Oh man…” Clint murmured. “That… sucks…”

“Is there any hope for him?” queried Bruce. “Any hope he could come back to us?”

Gamora bit her lip. “I think there might be. But he will fight you. He wants to kill me.”

“I fought him when Thanos and his children attacked the refugees of Asgard.” Thor glanced around. “I managed to subdue him… We had a plan in motion that needed to be carried out. Here we can regroup and fight back. Thanos will concentrate on my people rather than attacking yours. He’s used Stark to collect the Stones before… There is no reason why he won’t do so again.”

“How many of these Infinity Stones are there?” asked Natasha.

“Six.” Thor counted them down on his fingers. “Space. Power. Reality. Time. Soul. Mind. He already has Space and Power and is likely in the process of obtaining Reality. Gamora’s friends are attempting to collect it before Thanos does. Mind is with my people. Time… I’m not sure. And Soul… no one knows where it lies. They can be anywhere in the known universe.”

“Time is on Earth,” interjected Gamora. “I don’t know who is in possession of it but Thanos has always known there was already a Stone here. He would have been coming regardless of Thor’s people in possession of one. He’s just waited this long to do so.”

“We’ve got two battles to fight then,” grated Fury.

“No. Asgard will fight our own battle.”

“Can we just remove the Stone from Earth and take the fight elsewhere?” Steve felt he had to try this solution.

“Even if I could take the Mind Stone from Earth I wouldn’t, not with Time still here. Better to fight here now I know there are two Stones,” explained Thor. “I know it is not ideal.”

“What can you tell us about Tony? I think we deserve to know more about him,” asked Bruce. “If there is a way to save him…”
“I do not think we should concern ourselves with saving Stark, considering we’ve got an alien army on the way to attack us for some magical gems,” stated Fury, harshly.

Steve shook his head. “No. We failed Tony once. We’re not going to fail him again. I will try my hardest to bring him home.”

“And if he tries to kill you?” Fury shot back.

“Then at least I know I will have died trying to save him,” replied Steve.

“If I may?” Gamora raised a hand. “I think saving Tony may be a wise choice. The Arc Reactor that sits in his chest… It made him immune to Loki’s control. I think… if given the right motivation, Tony, could be the one who could destroy Thanos.”

“What do you mean?” whispered Steve, shock registering on his face. “How could he be the key?”

Fury stared at Gamora with hard eyes. “I’m sure we would all like to know why you have such a belief.”

Gamora sighed. “I said before Loki tried to use his sceptre on Tony. He attempted to mind control him. It failed because of the Arc Reactor in his chest. The sceptre held an Infinity Stone. There is no known material in the universe that can successfully resist Infinity Stones and yet Tony Stark wields a device within him that can do just that. I do not know if this extends to all of the stones but it’s a theory we need to discover.” She looked around at them all. “Thanos will want to prevent Earth from utilising Tony’s technology.”

“Stark has already ensured we cannot use it himself,” stated Fury. “Not for another four years. A decade after his death we will be allowed access to the formula he used to create the Arc Reactor. Until then we are unable to experiment ourselves.”

“Thanos doesn’t know that. I’m sure he will deploy Tony to ensure the formula and any research notes he has are destroyed. This will be an ideal time to strike back.”

“But where would he hold such information?” asked Bruce. “If Thanos is after this information to prevent Earth from fighting back… Where will Tony go?”

“Stark has a private server,” explained Natasha. “It’s not accessible anywhere, apart from in his mansion, in his lab, which only Pepper has access to. And JARVIS, his A.I, will not allow anyone access so we cannot force our way in. And to do so would be tarnishing Tony’s memory.”

“So they’ll attack his home then?” Clint verified.

“No, they won’t,” stated Fury. “Stark’s private server is also accessible elsewhere, something which Pepper Potts arranged shortly after his death, so the technicians at Stark Industries could continue revolutionising technology with Arc Reactor energy. It was written into Stark’s Will, a measure he put in himself. Stark Industries Headquarters is another place they could choose to attack.”

“The more public option is what Thanos will choose. He will want maximum destruction, maximum disruption from this. And he’ll love showing off what he did to Tony, what he has become,” noted Gamora quietly. “You need to be prepared that Tony’s arrival will be broadcast to millions of people. Thanos will want an audience and he will deliver.”

Steve cleared his throat. “So we need to camp out Stark Industries and intercept Tony when he arrives.”
Fury looked like he was about to explode. His lips were pursed and his eyes were following the conversation intently. “I think our main priority would be to stop this Thanos before he can send his reinforcements down. In fact, if Stark Industries is being targeted, then evacuating the employees is essential.”

Gamora shook her head. “No. I know Thanos and I know his other children. If they detect no one is in the building for them to terrorise or hold hostage then they will avoid the place. They would then choose Tony’s home to go to and make a big show out of destroying the neighbourhood. Do you want to risk families being killed?”

“I will intercept Thanos and his minions with my people,” said Thor. “I do not require backup to do so. We do not know where the Time Stone resides on Earth. We cannot adequately provide assistance or deploy to protect it when we lack the knowledge of its location. We’ll have to act when we hear of an attack. The only part of this attack that we can control is preventing Thanos from having Stark destroy his own formula.”

“And you’re sure he’ll go for the Arc Reactor technology?” Bruce enquired quietly.

Gamora nodded. “I am. Thanos was far too interested in Tony. For him to allow for a planet to develop weapons from an element that can defend against the Infinity Stones would be folly. If we capture Tony we can take away one of Thanos’ assets as well as prevent Earth from losing any data that could be essential to defending her. Tony being involved makes it personal… but in the end, if he has a special affinity to deflect any of the Infinity Stones, he will be the only one who could counter-act Thanos.”

Steve caught Fury’s gaze. “No matter what happens, this team will always try to save Tony. We’re not going to kill him when we failed him so badly. Especially if what Gamora says is true and he is the key to defeating this threat. We cannot eliminate him. He deserves a second chance, whatever he does as part of Thanos’ forces… He’s been forced in to it. Like Bucky was for Hydra. It’s the same situation.”

“It isn’t the same if Stark is willingly complying with their demands, unlike Barnes who was brainwashed and didn’t know what he was doing!” shot back Fury, agitated.

It was then Rocket decided to speak, drawing the attention to himself. “You know, the more you humans argue about this, the closer this Thanos guy is gonna get to us before you do anything about it!”

“I am Groot!”

The Avengers looked at the plant-tree creature in confusion.

“Erm… what did he say?” asked Steve, speaking for them all.

“He said he thought you humans would be more interested in organising a fight than sitting around a table talking.”

“Groot!” hissed Gamora. “That was rude.”

Steve sighed, clasping his hands together. “Fury, we failed Tony six years ago. We have a chance to bring him home. I’m not going to miss that chance. And if Gamora is right in Tony being an ally we can turn against Thanos… Why not use it? We need Tony to combat this threat. And he is in the best position to do so. We will defend the Earth from this threat but I will not be able to kill him, not when I sentenced him to the hell he’s lived through.” Steve pushed the chair back and got to his feet.
“Thor has the best plan. The Asgardians do not need our help. They are able fighters and are capable of defending themselves. The rest of us can help plan a trap for Tony.”

“And what about the location of the other Infinity Stone, Rogers?” Fury watched the Captain carefully.

“What can we do?” shrugged Natasha, answering in Steve’s place. “We don’t know where it is. We can only act as quickly as we can when they attack. It’s the only option, and all of us want to bring Tony home. That day in New York, we all failed him.”

Steve turned bright, determined eyes on everyone in the room. “And we won’t fail him again.”

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Gamora stood looking out at the green fields which spread out from the Avengers Complex. It was peaceful here, the sun beating down upon the land; the people of the planet unaware of the threat that was moving fast towards them. Thor, Groot and Rocket were preparing to leave for Norway to reunite with Thor’s people. Gamora had decided to remain with the Avengers. If they were going to attempt to bring Tony home, she was their resident expert.

“This place is so beautiful,” she whispered, hearing footsteps behind her.

Steve Rogers moved to stand beside her, hands placed on the bar she gripped on the walkway. “The Compound or the planet?”

Gamora grimaced. “The planet. Thanos will come here and mar its beauty.”

“We can only try our best to minimise the damage,” explained Steve. “He still would have come even if Thor’s people were not harbouring an Infinity Stone. There is still one here. I just wish we knew where it was.”

“It will become known in time,” she answered quietly.

Steve didn’t answer but kept looking out at the landscape. Finally, he turned his head to look at Gamora. “I know it isn’t my place to ask… But will we recognise Tony?”

“Yes… and no,” replied Gamora. “I didn’t know him for the first six months of his captivity. He was already slowly breaking by the time he arrived in Thanos’ realm. He’s changed. Filled with a lot of anger. He hates me, has already tried to kill me. But he did show signs of listening to me which is why I believe we have a chance of turning him back. I fear his hatred of me will mean he is lost to us for good. I want to save him, give him a chance to live a normal life…”

Steve watched her intently and when Gamora looked at him he could see the sadness reflected in her eyes.

“He won’t be who you remember him to be. He’s hurt and suffering constantly. He also looks different. Things were done to him…” she trailed off.

“How so?”

Gamora closed her eyes. “Thanos takes people and remakes them in the perfect image of a warrior or an enforcer. Tony is an Enforcer. Like me, he’s been enhanced.” She reached into her pocket and pulled out a small round device. “This is an image receptor.” She tossed it to Steve. “Press the blue button on the side.”
She watched as Steve did so and an image of what Tony Stark looked like now appeared, projected by the small device. The image was full length, putting Tony’s image as exactly the height he would be in real life.

Steve’s hand came up to his mouth in shock. “Oh god…” He could only step back.

“I’m sorry,” said Gamora. She could see wetness in the human’s eyes as he fought to contain the tears.

The image of Tony showed a man who was broken. His hair was dull, flattened against his head, curling very slightly at his neck. He had a beard, peppering around his jaw, but there was no hint of the usual Stark facial hair Tony had always ensured he had. He looked messy, his cheeks gaunt and his eyes dull. His body looked thin, underneath the clothes he wore. But what draw Steve’s attention were the scars on Tony’s face: two on each side of his face, pulling at the skin but completely noticeable amongst the facial hair. But on his forehead was one long, thin scar from the tip of his left ear, all the way to the tip of the right.

“They didn’t…” Steve breathed.

Gamora nodded. “They did.”

“They dissected his brain?” His face was pale and he looked sick.

“This happened after I joined the Guardians, after Tony broke. But I know Thanos’ practices. Tony would have been awake for the procedure. They put a chip inside his brain. It’s a control chip, one that Thanos can use whenever Tony moves out of line. It can also be used to kill Tony instantly if Thanos so desires. Even if we succeed in liberating Tony…” she trailed off, already realising Steve knew what she meant.

“Is there a way to deactivate it?”

“It can be removed…” she answered. “But you’re only seeing his face. It’s worse, so much worse.” She felt her own tears in the corner of her eyes. “If I could have spared him this, I would.”

Steve closed the image, not wanting to look at the visage anymore. “Does he want to die?”

Gamora reached out to take the disc back from him. “Yes, he does.”

Steve nodded numbly and then walked away.

She watched him and felt tears fall down her cheeks. She wiped them away. If they wanted to save Tony, they might have to kill him, just to give him the peace he deserved. And if it came to it, Gamora knew she wouldn’t be able to end his life.

Not when Tony still had people who wanted to help and love him still in the world.

You deserve to have a life again, Tony. I will try my hardest to make sure that happens. I can’t kill you. I just… can’t.

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The most difficult part of learning Tony was alive was debating whether to inform Pepper or Rhodey. In the end Steve decided it would be better for Pepper to remain unaware, even if Tony may attack Stark Industries Headquarters, whereas all the Avengers agreed Rhodey should be informed as he was technically an Avenger, despite still serving within the United States Army.
The only one who did seem to think Pepper should be told was Gamora. Despite not knowing her, Gamora was adamant keeping secrets from Tony’s loved ones was not going to be beneficial to them, especially with the impending attack incoming. If Pepper was at Headquarters when the attack hit…

But Steve wanted to protect her from the horror of what her former lover had become. What he was being forced to do. Deep down, he knew it was the wrong choice, yet he couldn’t help wanting to protect her from the knowledge that Steve wished he could forget himself. If he could go back to his past self he would tell himself to leave the portal open for just a little bit longer.

Rhodey arrived at the Compound a day later. Thor, Groot and Rocket had left for Norway and Clint and Natasha were busy in the training rooms, whilst Gamora waited with Steve in the common room. Steve had also put out several calls to Avengers who were not officially part of the team: Sam Wilson, Peter Parker – a young boy who’d gained abilities after being bitten by a radioactive spider and who JARVIS and Rhodey had been monitoring and in contact with for the last few years – who was an unofficial member, and finally the Black Panther from Wakanda, a place Steve knew very little of. T’Challa had agreed to join them. His father ruled Wakanda but the country was now expanding out in the wide-world, sharing advanced technology previously unseen in the world. Steve had only learned of T’Challa’s secret identity as the Black Panther by accident. T’Challa’s sister, Shuri, had helped to remove the triggers and Hydra conditioning from Bucky’s brain and both were jetting into the Avengers Compound to help boost their numbers so they could capture Tony and stop Thanos.

“You called me back from active duty, requesting my presence as an urgent matter of national security. This had better be worth it, Steve.” Rhodey stood behind them, arms crossed over his chest.

“And I see we’re hosting aliens now?” He motioned to Gamora sitting on the sofa.

“Gamora has special clearance to be here,” stated Steve, stepping forward and holding out his hand.

They shook hands and Rhodey moved to sit on the chair opposite. “I gather something big is coming our way if we’ve got a visitor here.”

“Gamora arrived with Thor. She’s part of a group called the Guardians of the Galaxy. Apparently they’ve saved the universe a couple of times,” explained Steve. “Thor informed us of a threat that is coming our way. There are magical stones on Earth which have garnered the attention of a Titan called Thanos. Gamora is his adopted daughter… though estranged from him. She’s here to help us fight him whilst the rest of her little group are off elsewhere in the universe trying to stop Thanos from getting another stone.”

“Right…” Rhodey swallowed. “Big alien coming to Earth, got it. And you’re assembling the Avengers again?”

“Yes, and more.” Steve swallowed and glanced at Gamora. “But there is more… I don’t know how to say it, but Thor brought back with him not just information on Thanos… but on Tony too.”

Rhodey’s expression changed to shock in the matter of moments. “What?”

“I understand you are Tony’s best friend?” queried Gamora quietly.

Rhodey confirmed, nodded his head slightly. “Yeah…”

“He’s alive and coming back to Earth but as an Enforcer of Thanos. A lot has happened to him since he went through the portal. You’re gonna have to fight him just to protect this world.”
“But we’re not going to kill him,” said Steve.

“You better not. Does Pepper know?” Rhodey’s voice was quiet, still stunned by the news his best friend was alive.

Steve shook his head. “No. She doesn’t. I think it is wise not to, not until we have Tony contained here.”

Rhodey frowned. “It’s probably a good choice but so many things could go wrong with it, Steve.”

“I know. But isn’t protecting her more important? We don’t know if we can rescue Tony… What if we can’t? Why let her hopes go up when there is no guarantee we can save him?” questioned Steve. “I hope we can save him and bring him home, but it makes our job harder if Pepper knows.”

Rhodey leaned back in his seat, pressing his back up against the soft cushion situated behind him. He ran a hand down his face, breathing slowly. “I hesitate to ask what happened to him.” He opened his eyes and locked gazes with Steve. “Do I want to know?”

The soldier couldn’t keep Rhodey’s gaze. “No, you don’t.”

“I should know.” Rhodey’s face became hard. “Tell me.”

So they did.

- - - - -

It was a few hours after Rhodey had arrived and been told the truth regarding Tony that the Avengers received an alert. T’Challa and Bucky were still inbound but both Sam Wilson and Peter Parker had arrived at the Compound.

Unfortunately, they didn’t have much time to bond or get to gel as a team before JARVIS alerted them to the presence of an alien spacecraft that had appeared over Manhattan.

As they boarded the QuinJet, Steve spoke quietly to Gamora.

“Do you think Tony will be there?”

“It’s likely,” she answered. “He was before, for all the other Infinity Stones.”

“We’re not going to attempt to kill him, right? Only disable?” Steve wanted clarification on this.

“Capture, if we can. But our priority here is to stop the Infinity Stone from being taken,” she warned. “If we have to leave Tony one more day, we’ll have to make that sacrifice.”

“I know.” Steve sighed, closing his eyes. “We’ll save him. We will. No matter the cost.”

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I marred Tony's lovely face!!! I'm sorry! The two vertical scars on his cheeks were made at the very beginning of his torture by the Chitauri... And I decided not to show the dissection of his brain... Thanos has a sure-proof way of killing Tony if he needs to.
Tony's private server? Probably a bit of a stretch but I think Tony would want his company to continue benefiting from the new technology with Arc Reactors and I do not think he would want his rivals to learn the formula, at least not for a long while. And I doubt Pepper would allow Stark Industries employees to Tony's house for a formula so they created a secure server there which only Pepper has access to. This is a little hint to what is coming in future chapters... ;)

And the rest of the Avengers (like Spider-Man, Black Panther, Bucky...) will all be introduced in this part. But their roles will be relatively minor compared to the roles of the original Avengers in this story.

I hope to update again in two weeks on Tuesday 19th June!

the-writer1988
Chapter Summary

The Avengers encounter a familiar face on the streets of New York...

Chapter Notes

My apologies for the delay in posting this chapter! It was supposed to be last week but it didn't transpire...

I hit a roadblock on all my fics for the last few weeks and I only finished this chapter on Saturday.

I find it really difficult to write and honestly? I still do not like what I've written. Hopefully, it is adequate enough., I'm posting because I feel I have done all I can do.

PART FOUR
THE WAR ON EARTH

Chapter Two
The Inner Sanctum

It was only a short flight to Manhattan. Upon approach, they could see a large, rounded, donut-shaped ship, whirling round in the air, as it hovered over the city.

“What’s the plan, Cap?” asked Clint, as he piloted the ship closer to the alien spacecraft. “Reports are coming in of two creatures fighting a man in a cape and the other is in robes. The cape guy did something to stop the ship from reaching the ground. But there is more… There have also been sightings of a man in armour being likened to as an outer-space Iron Man in the reports.”

Steve gritted his teeth. Little did the news reporters know it was likely the man in armour was Tony Stark. A hand gripped his shoulder and he glanced back to see Gamora there.

“Leave Tony to me. I can distract him enough to allow you to get the drop on him,” she said. “Protecting the Infinity Stone is more important than saving your friend.”

Steve swallowed. He knew that, no matter how much it hurt. “I can try,” he promised, “but I can’t fail him again.”

“We won’t.”

“How far out are we?” Natasha called out from behind Steve. She was making sure she had all her weapons with her, triple-checking they were all in the places she needed them to be.
All the Avengers were there, apart from Bruce, who had elected to stay at the Compound. They didn’t want to unleash the Hulk. And they had more than enough back-up to hopefully contain the threat. Steve was Captain, with Rhodey as his deputy. They split into two teams, though Gamora had insisted she would act independently of the team and focus more on securing Tony. She had already explained he would go for her whenever he could.

Natasha and Clint’s primary objective was to clear the area of civilians, whereas Steve, Parker, Wilson and Rhodey would work together to push the alien invaders back. If something befell Steve in the battle, Rhodey would immediately take over.

The QuinJet was flying over New York now. Ahead of them, they could see a large, round, doughnut looking space-ship, hovering just above the streets the city.

“I am detecting eruptions of magic in the area,” confirmed JARVIS. Tony’s AI was now in command of the jet whilst Clint got himself into position. The AI would get the Jet as close as it could before taking the Jet to a safe distance away from the battle, once all of them had been deployed on the streets below.

“The magical disruptions will make it difficult to land in the street or hover overhead.”

“Get us as close as you can. The next street even. We’ll jog,” instructed Steve.

“Yes, Sir.” JARVIS was programmed to obey Steve or Rhodey on the QuinJet. It was the only place Steve had the ability to command him.

JARVIS navigated the jet to the street closest to the attack, hovered over the road, giving Steve and the others a chance to disembark.

“Be ready for quick extraction!” Steve ordered. He didn’t even pause to collect himself, just sprinted for the corner. A gust of wind hit him in the face and Steve raised his shield and pushed through, emerging into the street where he saw two men battling against two aliens of different height and builds, but hovering above them was a man in armour, his features hidden by the helmet, yet Steve knew it was Tony. “Alpha team, line up!” Apart from Clint and Natasha, the others flanked Steve, moving forward, their weapons raised.

“It seems the rabbling man has got back-up,” the tallest of the aliens noted as they approached.

“Your timing is appreciated,” said Strange, keeping his eyes focused upon his attackers.

“We know why they are here. And we’re not going to let them wreck New York, even for you,” said Steve, pushing forward. “Leave this planet! You are not welcome here.” He directed that at the two aliens.

“We are the Children of Thanos and have come to this world to take what belongs to him,” the slender looking one declared, spreading his arms wide.

Steve grimaced. “That’s not happening!” He raised his shield.

“Oh Cap, yes it will.”

And then Steve was flung backwards as the man in armour flew at him with terrifying speed. He landed on the concrete, away from his team, head bouncing on the road, but Steve lashed out and managed to kick away his attacker. “Tony! Don’t do this! We can help you!” If it hadn’t been obvious before it was Tony, his voice had confirmed he was.
“Funny.” Tony was hovering inches above the ground. “Gamora said that too. And she failed. No one can help me.”

“That’s not true!” Gamora leapt down from the roof of the building she had been standing on, kicking Tony to the ground. “I did everything I could to save you! I just wasn’t given the chance to get you out!” She held just a sword in one hand.

“Tony, please do not fight us!” Steve implored.

There was slight hesitation before Tony retorted. “I have no choice.”

This time he flew at Gamora, using a repulsor beam to make her leap back and to the side.

Steve gathered himself, climbed to his feet and grasped his shield close to his chest. He could break protocol and attempt to help Gamora bring Tony down or help the others who were rapidly getting closer to the alien invaders, who had barely moved a muscle and were casually throwing objects at the advancing Avengers, forcing them to duck and dive away from being hit.

“Steve!” Rhodey’s voice came over his earpiece. “We need you here!”

Retreating from Gamora’s altercation with Tony, Steve moved around them and headed for Rhodey’s position further up the street. War Machine and Wilson were both in the air, firing at the spindly alien, whilst Spider-Man was attempting to swing closer. The kid may be young but he was damn good at what he did.

He reached their position and raised his shield. “What’s the situation?” he yelled over the sound of gunshots.

“That tall spindly one has magic and the big, strong Hulk-looking one is... well... basically space-Hulk,” supplied Wilson, whilst firing repeating blasters at the two threats.

Steve glanced at Doctor Strange and his companion. They appeared to have conjured magic shields. “You have the stone, right? One of you?”

Strange nodded. “I do. They’re not taking it from me, however. If they kill me, they cannot remove it either. The only way they get it is if I willingly give it up and that will not happen in a million years.”

“Good.” Steve curled his fists. He wasn’t sure what he could do. “We need to get them to retreat.”

“Or better yet, get rid of them entirely,” said the other magician. “They’ll be a threat if they remain alive.”

Steve hated killing. He knew they would come back if they allowed them to escape. He felt he had to give them a chance.

“Your morals are outdated, Captain,” stated Strange. “This is a threat we cannot allow to escape. I’m not for killing either but I will if it is the only option.”

Steve closed his eyes briefly. Gamora had advised as much too.

“Steve! We need some –” Sam was cut off as the Hulk-type alien leaped at them, brandishing a large axe-type weapon, bringing it down as he aimed for their line of defence.

Strange’s companion stepped forward, twirling his right arm in a circular motion and a portal appeared in front of them.
The alien fell through, disappearing from the streets.

Steve peered through and saw the alien sprawled in snow, spitting it out. The alien twisted onto his back and then leapt for the hole but the portal closed, neatly cutting the arm off at the elbow. “Eww.” Steve stepped back from the foul-smelling limb that fell next to his feet.

“We try not to kill too,” said the man. “I’m Wong.”

“Steve,” he answered.

“We know who you are, Captain,” stated Wong. “But we do have bigger problems to counteract before we start chatting.” He returned his attention to the remaining alien.

“Right.” Steve glanced. They still had one alien to deal with before they could focus their attention on Tony. Raising his shield, Steve moved forward to face the alien.

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There hadn’t been many civilians to evacuate. Clint had scaled to the top of a building whilst Nat circled around to try to help the others. She had just joined the line in front of the two wizards when Steve moved forward.

Clint cast his gaze about. The green woman, Gamora, was off fighting the man in armour who had to be Tony. They were in the middle of quite a rough fight and it looked like Gamora was winning, though he could tell Tony was trying to go in for the kill at every chance he had.

He focused upon the fight below him. The alien wizard seemed to be good with magic as he was lifting things without touching them and throwing them at the rest of the Avengers, trying to dispose of them. He managed to fling several abandoned cars at them, breaking their ranks. Both Wilson and Rhodey flew into the air, and Steve and Nat jumped to the side, whilst the two wizards opened up a large portal between them. The cars went flying through.

And then the alien moved quickly, swiftly towards Strange, using a gust of wind to push the other sorcerer away. He was managing to counteract Strange’s own attacks. He could see Steve trying to rush towards the alien but failed when he bounced off a hastily erected shield.

Notching an arrow in his bow, Clint aimed for the spindly alien. He didn’t know if it would work but if it did, it would solve all their problems.

He fired.

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She retreated, nursing the wound Tony had managed to make in her arm. He was advancing, using his thrusters to keep pace with her backward steps. She’d been winning only moments before but a slight misstep and Tony had got in a strike which had disabled one of her arms. He’d torn through muscle and ligaments, effectively making the arm completely useless.

“Tony, listen to me, please!” she begged. If she could only get him to stand down…

The helmet shrunk back around his head, revealing his face. “Why should I when you have nothing of merit to say? The only thing I’m concerned about, regarding you, Gamora, is your dying words!” he hissed at her. His eyes flashed venomously.

Gamora swallowed. “We can protect her.” It was a simple statement that made Tony pause. “I know what Thanos will want you to do. I know he’s threatened her. Together we can protect her, stop him
from ever hurting her if you disobey. We can get the chip out of your head. We can help you if you just let us. If I didn’t get care about you, I wouldn’t be here now, Tony.”

Tony’s arm slowly raised, a gun forming around his wrist.

Gamora knew she couldn’t fight him off. Not with her arm hanging loosely at her side. She straightened her back. “Kill me. I know you want to so I’m going to let you.” She threw the blaster she was holding in her one remaining hand away.

There was indecision in his eyes. He wasn’t sure of himself. His body shaking.

“I’m not going to stop you.”

Tony stepped forward again.

Everything around them seemed to stop. She ignored the sounds of the battle behind Tony, keeping her eyes focused upon his face. The scars that covered the skin betrayed the look of a once handsome man. She wished dearly she could change things, to make it right for Tony.

He was close enough to her now that his blaster was resting against her throat, his eyes searching hers, as if he didn’t have the willpower to shoot her.

“I’m sorry.” She tried again, not sure if it was going to work. “I should never have saved you. All I can do now is attempt to fix it so you do not have to suffer again.”

“Why do I believe you?” he asked hesitantly.

“Because I know you love me,” answered Gamora. “And deep down, a part of you still hopes and trusts that I can save you and bring you home.”

“I should hate you.” His arm moved downwards, only fractionally. “I relied on you to come back for me.”

“I tried. Tony, I really tried.”

He stepped back, looking uncertain, conflicted.

“Help us. And we can help you. Please,” she pleaded. He was still wavering. He served to stop the pain he had been promised for failure, yet he was still susceptible to the promises she had once made to him. “I won’t fail you again.”

“I’m not sure I can believe you,” replied Tony.

“Why not?” she enquired.

“I can’t kill you. I want to. I really do. But something makes me stop. I did love you. I fell for you because of your kindness.” Tony shook his head.

“Come with us…” She held out her hand.

“I can’t…” Tony continued to step back. “He’ll kill me…”

The chip in his head, Gamora knew. Instant kill switch if Thanos so desired. “I can disable it.” She wanted to ask him if he did want to die or if he wanted the chance to live again. He still wavered. It’s 
a sign he will continue to fight.
But then a loud explosion occurred, distracting them.

Tony took off, activating his repulsors and flying off towards the smoke billowing from where Ebony Maw had been moments ago.

Running forward, reaching for her discarded weapons, Gamora reached the line of heroes, where Tony was hovering metres in front of them.

Emerging from the smoke came Ebony Maw, his robes charred and his eyes flashing angrily. The orbs turned to Tony. “Enforcer! Kill them!”

Tony turned in mid-air.

“You don’t have to do this, Tony!” shouted Steve.

“Yes… I do,” was the reply, so soft and small that it was barely audible.

But then the unexpected happened.

Ebony Maw let out a gurgled sound.

An arrow was lodged in his throat. It had passed through, wedged in, shredding arteries, muscle and skin with one lethal hit. His body crumpled to the floor.

All that remained of the team that had attacked Strange was Tony.

“Tony!” Gamora called up to him. “This is your chance! Please!”

Tony’s gaze swept over them all. “Like I said... He’ll kill me if I do not obey… but only once he’s killed Pepper. I can’t. To save her I have to serve.”

And he was gone, shooting up into the ship Ebony Maw and Cull Obsidian had used to invade the city. The ship began its ascent back into the sky.

“We can’t let him leave!” shouted Steve.

But Gamora reached out with her good arm and placed a hand on his. “Yes, we can. We’re getting through to him. Let us focus on that.” She turned eyes upon the wizard man who was the keeper of the Time Stone. “But first, we have to decide what to do about this.”

After all, they had prevented the stone from being taken for now, but there was no question about it. Thanos’s children or even the Mad Titan himself would return for it.

And they might not be so lucky next time.

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“You failed.”

Tony kept his head bowed before Thanos. He kept his breathing slow and collected, though he knew what awaited him.

“You failed to retrieve the Time Stone. You couldn’t even apprehend the Keeper. And you allowed Maw to die. Out of all of my children he is my second favoured one. And he’s now dead. Because of you.” Thanos’ voice was harsh and unforgiving.
Tony didn’t know what to say. What was there to articulate? There was no point in arguing. It would just end in more pain. The better option was to acquiesce and accept whatever punishment awaited him. Tony had long since learned the lesson of pain.

“You’ve been taught this lesson before. How many more times will it take before ‘failure is not an option’ sinks in? Do you enjoy the pain, Tony?”

“No, I don’t,” he answered. Thanos wanted an answer from him and so Tony had provided.

“Then start succeeding.”

Tony shivered at the menacing tone of his captor’s voice. “I will.”

“Will you?”

“Yes. I swear I will not fail you again.” It was a pledge Tony did not want to break.

“Look at me.”

Tony raised his head. His eyes focused upon Thanos.

“I will be lenient on you this one time, Tony.”

It scared Tony every time he heard Thanos say his name. It was terrifying.

“I am not just after the stones on Earth. You know that very well, don’t you?” Thanos cocked his head slightly to the side.

“I do,” replied Tony.

“Make sure your former world cannot utilise the Arc Reactor technology. I want proof of the formula brought back here. I must be the one to destroy all record of it,” commanded Thanos. “If you fail…”

Tony swallowed. He understood the hidden meaning behind the unfinished sentence.

He had to do this for Pepper.

Otherwise she’d die a most horrible and slow death.

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Thor, Rocket and Groot returned to the compound a few hours after the Avengers had returned from their jaunt to New York City. But he wasn’t alone.

There was a dark-skinned woman with him, wearing warrior garb with dark brown hair cascading down her back. She had a sword sheathed to her side and she cast her gaze around at the Avengers gathered around the table in the conference room. “These are your friends? They look a bit worse for wear.”

Thor hadn’t known about their mission, having departed before the alert had come through. “Have you been fighting?”

Steve shook his head, amused. “You could say that.”

“As I told you, brother, he is here.”
Steve’s head snapped up, his eyes narrowed as he recognised the voice. Walking behind Thor was the last person Steve wanted to see, especially after the damage he had caused the last time he was on Earth. “What are you doing here?”

Loki smiled, sweeping his cloak behind him. “Hello Avengers. Miss me?”

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Tony is a very conflicted individual. You will see a lot of this. He wants to die but a part of him still does want to fight back against what he's lived through so he keeps wavering. Tony's character arc is ongoing. He is a very broken person.

Gamora telling Tony she knows he loves her. This is a thread that has been brought up before. Tony developed feelings for Gamora because of what she did for him during his captivity. She was his one shining light in the darkness. However Pepper is equally as important to Tony too. Just because he has developed feelings for Gamora doesn't devalue Tony's feelings for Pepper.

Loki appearing with the Avengers when he's working with Thanos? You'll see more of why he's there very soon. A lot of threads are starting to come together now.

I hope to post the next chapter soon but I cannot say when. I hope it is in two weeks but it may not be. It could be longer. For that I do apologise but circumstance in real life are preventing me from writing as much as I'd like to. It probably doesn't help I've decided to start and post two other stories, but I needed to stretch my writing further and writing three stories at once is actually helping me to get back into it. Fateful Choices will remain my main story however so updates should be quite common.

Until next time...
Part 4: Chapter 3 - Taking Stark Industries

Chapter Summary

It's not an average day at Stark Industries...

Chapter Notes

So in this chapter we move to Pepper's POV which last occurred in Part 1. I also elaborate more on Pepper and Happy's relationship which is something I haven't covered at all so far, only mentioned it.

This chapter is shorter than normal but I had a great cliff-hanger opportunity and I just had to...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART FOUR
THE WAR ON EARTH

Chapter Three
Taking Stark Industries

Knee-deep in paperwork, Pepper Potts sat at her desk in her office, reading through final contracts whilst brokering deals with other companies or answering the phone. She was ever the multitasker. It was only the middle of the day and she still had to go to lunch. It was rare these days she got to go on time.

Inevitably, Happy would come and find her and they’d go to lunch together.

Thinking of Happy brought her a lot of joy. They’d grown close since Tony’s disappearance. They’d spent so much time together that they’d almost fallen into a relationship with one another.

Happy had been very hesitant at first, not wanting to take Pepper away from Tony, if he should ever return. It had become blindingly obvious that he never would. Slowly, they had come to accept his loss and attempt to move on with their lives. It had started with Happy driving Pepper home from work, offering to chauffer her after Tony’s sacrifice. She hadn’t felt much up to driving and the only cars she had access to were one’s registered to Tony.

In the first few months after New York she had considered leaving Stark Industries, not wanting to have anything to do with Tony anymore because of the memories, but when his Will was made public, Pepper had realised she couldn’t give up in her grief. She had remained strong and both Happy and Rhodey had helped her, ensuring she kept the business running.

Happy had been a constant factor in her life. They had started going to dinner as friends.

He had been ever the gentleman. He hadn’t pressured her, just let her slowly realise her feelings.
It had taken them three years to reach the point where they both openly admitted their feelings for one another. Happy had been first, telling Pepper after he had inadvertently kissed her on the lips when he had dropped her off after one of their dinners together.

He had retreated after that, feeling embarrassed.

Pepper had gone to his flat the next day. There they had spoken about their friendship and how it was evolving. Pepper had admitted then she had feelings and had taken the plunge to kiss him. That day had changed things for them. Three years later they were still together.

Happy had healed her hurt after Tony’s loss. He knew she still held feelings for Tony, always would. They’d been close for so long that to lose her feelings for Tony would be exceptionally difficult. She still loved him but it didn’t stop her from enjoying her life with Happy.

Tony would have wanted her to be happy. He wouldn’t have wanted her to wait for him.

But he was dead and not coming back.

“Hey!”

She looked up from the paperwork. Happy stood in front of her desk, his eyes shining brightly.

“Happy!” She couldn’t help smiling.

“Ready for lunch?”

She nodded. “I think so.” She placed the papers she was reading back in their respective files before placing them back in the respective cupboards. Though SI was mainly paperless there were still some things such as contracts that were printed for her to peruse. She found it easier to read them that way.

“It’s been a long morning.”

They slipped their hands together as they made their way through the building and down into the reception area. Colleagues greeted them as they passed and they returned their warm words with ease.

Stopping at the reception, Pepper spoke to the receptionist, Cassie, to confirm she was leaving the premise for lunch.

“I’ll be back in an hour.”

“I’m sure this place can function without you for sixty minutes!” responded Cassie lightly.

“We’ll see!” Pepper remarked. She always enjoyed the banter she had with her colleagues. It showed they were not afraid to be themselves around her. She wanted the atmosphere of trust where she wasn’t treated differently because she was the boss.

They walked out of the main foyer into bright sunlight and headed to her car. She drove them only a short distance to a café, close to the highway but it was small enough and nice enough that it was a regular spot for them to go for lunch. It had been here the rumours of her and Happy dating had begun.

In the years following Tony’s death, Pepper had been a prime candidate for the paparazzi, even more so when her and Happy’s relationship had been revealed. Thankfully, the café owner had succeeded in obtaining a permit from the courts to ensure no paparazzi were allowed on the premise or close to the café when Pepper and Happy were around. The café owner had become a good friend of theirs for his actions in helping them maintain a little bit of privacy. It was one of the reasons why they kept
going back, but also the food was fantastic.

They settled at their favourite table, ordered their food and sat back, relaxing in the comfy seats. Their booth was away from the windows so nobody knew they were there, though the STARK labelled number plate of her car did give it away that she and Happy were there.

But neither really cared.

“You’re deep in thought today,” noted Happy, watching her carefully.

Pepper blushed. “Sorry… We’ve been together a while now. It’s nice how people have supported us. How they haven’t judged us.” She glanced around. “I’ve wondered lately how Tony would feel about it, if he was still here.”

Happy grasped her hand. “I do not think we would have got together if he was. I know you still love him. Always will. No matter how much you love me and I you, your love for him is greater. We lost him in tragic circumstances. Love that you two had cannot be replaced easily. I don’t want to replace him in your heart. I just want to be enough for you.”

“You are,” she replied. “Not many men would be able to accept it. I’m grateful that you are.”

“I watched you two find one another. Who am I replace that?” smiled Happy.

“You’re the best.” She leaned forward and kissed him on the lips.

Their lunch arrived a few minutes later and they dug in, into their roasted sandwiches, with salad on the side. They discussed future projects and what they were planning to do at the weekend. Pepper suggested a day on the beach or around the pool which Happy was more than up for.

It was soon time to return to Stark Industries. Pepper drove them both back and in the foyer both went their separate ways, promising to meet there again when it was time to leave. Even if Pepper worked late and Happy’s shift had finished, he always waited for her.

She had a board meeting that afternoon with the heads of the departments to assess their progress on their individual projects. It was meant to last all afternoon and Pepper expected to be leaving work late. Meetings like that always ran late, even when Tony was CEO. It was the one meeting he was required to attend and stay for during his tenure, no matter how much he had despised it.

Pepper actually enjoyed them.

It gave her chances to see how well the company was advancing and what projects were close to becoming realised and how soon they could be announced to gauge the public interest. She had kept with the clean energy route Tony had been taking the company on but had also become involved with the Avengers. Though they still had a contract with the military to supply items and equipment that could be used for medical and defence, a lot of new defensive equipment was created for the Avengers to use.

They had made modifications to the Avengers armour and weapons though that little detail wasn’t widely known. Pepper was sure if Tony was still alive, he would have done the same, so felt secure in her decision to help the Avengers. It was common knowledge she owned the Avengers facility.

“What you’re saying, Laura, is our progress in renovation healing techniques, especially on cellular regeneration is coming along exponentially faster than we initially predicted?” clarified Pepper.

They had yet to provide any major technological advancement to health care but research and
development was coming along nicely, especially with renovation of the cellular cells which could help hugely in the fight against cancer. It would open up the way for longer life and abolition of the disease.

“Our current predictions state testing could begin within the next year,” stated Laura confidently. She wore glasses, had brown hair, cut and tripped close to the bottom of her ear lobes but her fringe cascaded nearly over one eye. She had only graduated university a few years ago but Pepper had followed her work and had sought her out. She was now a major player within Stark Industries and was one of the few who had access to Tony’s research notes regarding the Arc Reactor. She had progressed far up the ladder quickly and Laura was an asset to the company and would go far in her career.

“And distribution?”

“That is a lot harder to determine. It all depends on the results we receive.” Honesty was such a good answer.

“Please do keep me informed,” smiled Pepper. She was glad she could trust everyone here. They hadn’t just been picked because they were loyal to her but that they were damn good at their jobs. Anybody could see it.

She was just bringing the meeting to a close when a loud explosion went off, shaking the floor, spilling cups and pens and papers fell on to the floor.

Pepper gripped the table, steadying herself. “What was that?”

“Erm… Miss Potts?” Laura spoke quietly, her voice shaken. She was looking out the window to the boardroom they were in.

Swallowing, Pepper followed her gaze. She gasped, a hand flying to her mouth, horrified at the sight she was seeing.

Hovering just metres above the ground, just above the company car park was a large donut-shaped ring. It was swirling in mid-air but what caught her eye was the smoke piling forth from the entrance of the building and three figures marched in, accompanied by a row of strange looking warriors who carried spear-like guns.

“Are those… those… aliens?”

Pepper’s legs felt wobbly and she had to grab the chair to stay upright. It’s happening again!

“I don’t know…” she muttered. Fumbling in her pocket for her phone, she quickly dialled Happy, hoping he would answer.

But he didn’t and she dialled off on the eighth ring. Pushing away her concern, Pepper moved forward. She couldn’t afford to worry now, not when she had employees to look out for.

“We need to evacuate as many staff as possible. Do not attempt to fight them.” Despite her strong words and resolve to stay focused, her mind kept straying to Happy not answering his phone. Pepper knew she had to be strong. This was an unprecedented event.

“Why are they here?” asked Michael, one of her senior department heads in engineering. He was ashen-faced and shaking.

“I don’t know…”
Laura had reached the door, opened it slightly to peer outside but screamed, trying to slam it shut but it was forced open and alien hands pushed it open, grabbing Laura by the collar and thrusting her into the waiting arms of the rest of its compatriots.

Pepper screamed, unable to contain her horror at the creatures in front of her.

Mauled hands reached for her, and despite scrabbling back, Pepper was grabbed by the wrist and wrenched forward, alongside everyone else in the meeting room. Manhandled and shuddering in fear they were forced out of the room and down the stairs and out into the main foyer, where they seemed to be gathering everyone in the building.

Three figures stood in the centre of the foyer.

Two were clearly alien though humanoid in nature. One was definitely female by Pepper’s reckoning. She looked cruel with dark blue hair and pale green/blue skin, her eyes shining orange. She wore armour that covered her body and she held a double bladed spear with two pointed prongs at either end. The other was more alien with grey, white skin, black eyes and he held a spear in one hand.

Next to them was another armoured figure, their face covered by a helmet. The armour was black, with very thin red and gold strikes decorating the gauntlets on its wrists and ankles. The armour seemed vaguely familiar, as if based on…

No…

*Are these the same aliens that attacked before? That I lost Tony to?*

Pepper tried not to hyperventilate. There was no denying the familiarity she had with the armour. Had they taken and studied the armour from Tony’s dead body? Had they butchered his technology and made use of it for themselves? Is that why there were here? For his technology?

*They’re not having it. I won’t let them.*

They were herded into the group of people, positioned around the walls. She could see Happy across the room, looking a bit beaten, but otherwise alive. Relief swept through her but worry soon settled in as the two aliens circled the room, pointing their weapons at different people.

The female spoke, her voice harsh and cruel as she addressed them. “We are here for one thing only. The technology you harbour. Give it to us freely and you will not be harmed.”

Pepper didn’t believe their words meant anything. She could step forward and speak but she caught Happy’s eyes and he shook his head from across the foyer. She stayed silent, waiting for the inevitable to happen.

“Fine. Then we’ll do it the hard way instead,” the female hissed. “Corvas, find the youngest.”

The taller, masculine one stepped forward, casting his gaze about. His dark eyes fell upon a group of young girls who had just started an apprenticeship with Stark Industries. He lunged forward and grasped the wrist of one, pulling her out and throwing her to the floor in front of the female.

“Tell us how to get the information we require or this one dies! She won’t be the last,” the one called Corvas said.

The young girl shook in fear and Corvas grasped her head, lifting her head up to expose her neck.
Pepper stepped through the crowd she was a part of and out into the open to face the two aliens as they swivelled to look at her. She ignored Happy’s frustrated look. “None of us have access to the information you require, especially if it is about the arc reactor. That’s what you’re interested in, isn’t it? It’s the only technology you would have encountered, isn’t it?” She felt scared, terrified, but her voice held strong.

Every eye was watching her carefully.

“Who are you?” hissed the female.

Pepper steeled herself. The one who had yet to speak, in the armour so like Tony’s, was watching her. “Pepper Potts. CEO of Stark Industries.”

“Potts? You’re the Pepper he used to talk about?” the female screeched, her mouth stretching out into a hideous grin.

“What?” Pepper stepped back. “You know me?”

The female laughed cruelly. “Of course we know of you. Stark wouldn’t shut up about you.” The female walked forward, reached out and grabbed Pepper’s chin. “There’s nothing special about you. He used to cry your name.”

Trying to pull away was fruitless. The grip was too tight.

Comprehension began to dawn on her.

Tony hadn’t died.

And then her eyes moved to the figure next to the two aliens, the one in the armour. The one who wore very familiar looking Iron Man armour.

It couldn’t be.

“We know exactly how to get the information we require,” the female hissed, dragging Pepper closer and whispering into her ear. “Tony told us. We just wanted to find you.” A cruel smile crossed Corvas’ face as he leaned down to Pepper. “Perhaps it is time you two should meet again.”

And that was when the other figure in armour stepped forward, its face still obscured.

“Enforcer, why not obtain the information we require?” suggested Corvas.

The Enforcer moved towards a panel on the wall by a door in the corner of the room.

Pepper’s breath hitched in her throat. Only a few people had access to that corridor: herself and a few others who were allowed to know the secrets of Tony’s Arc Reactor formula.

The armour retracted around the right hand as they approached the panel.

“You can’t get through there!” she shouted out in desperation, wrenching free from the grip of the female. *Please no…*

She didn’t want to believe.

“Really?” the female smirked.
Every eye in the room was upon the figure standing in front of the panel at the end. They turned to face them all.

And then the helmet started to retract around the face.

Pepper couldn’t breathe and there were gasps of horror around her from the other employees.

His face had changed, scarred but it was still unmistakeably *him*.

The Enforcer turned back to the panel and placed his palm on the reader.

Mere seconds passed and she held her breath in anticipation, hoping against hope that this was all a nightmare she would soon wake up from.

Then the electronic voice from the panel said out-loud:

“ID CONFIRMED. ACCESS GRANTED TO ANTHONY EDWARD STARK.”

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Pepper finally knows Tony is alive! :D

Though it isn't in the best of circumstances.

Next chapter will be in Tony's POV... and will hopefully be posted soon.
The attack on Stark Industries continues...

My apologies for the delay in posting this chapter. We've been having an intense heatwave here in the south-east of the UK. In fact, the whole country has been and its simply been way too hot to be able to be on the computer and do any writing. I managed to finish this chapter on a day road-trip to Wales and back.

Hopefully it is worth the wait...

PART FOUR
THE WAR ON EARTH

Chapter Four
Revelations

Tony hated this.

He loathed watching people loyal to Pepper be herded like cattle into the foyer, forced to stand or sit by the walls as the Chitauri squad rounded them all up. They were not kind to them. They were forceful and struck those down that tried to fight back.

No one had been killed yet.

Tony knew why that was.

They were looking for Pepper. They wanted to identify her, ensure they knew who to use against him if he attempted to turn on them. He couldn’t stop them, no matter how much he wanted to. He hated being here, watching it. Tony knew his role and what he had to do. His face was hidden behind the mask. A part of him wondered if anyone would recognise the suit as being familiar to an Iron Man one. If they did…

The suit he had designed to wear himself was familiar to the Iron Man technology but with notable differences. The Arc Reactor was hidden from sight as Tony hadn’t wanted a valuable part of him on display.

Off to the side he sees Happy being dragged into place. He had bruises on his face and his hair was a mess. He looked thinner then Tony remembered him to be but there was still the determination there that he wasn’t done fighting. God, he hoped Happy wasn’t going to do anything stupid.
Minutes passed and Tony eventually saw Pepper being dragged into the foyer. His breathing halted as he saw her fully for the first time in years. She looked just as he remembered her to be. Still beautiful with her hair tied back in a pony-tail and dressed in a cream suit. Her hair was slightly askew but her face… her beautiful face…

He wanted to run to her, to hug her, to hold her in his arms and never let her go.

He didn’t.

He didn’t want them to find out who she was. He had hoped she wouldn’t be here for their attack. That she might have been somewhere else. Alas, his luck had run out. He didn’t want her to see him like this. See what he had become. See what he had to do to keep her safe.

He knew his heart was breaking.

Tony saw Proxima Midnight step forward, her cruel voice issuing an ultimatum to the crowd. Proxima lied. Tony knew, even if someone stepped forward with the information they wanted, they wouldn’t spare them. They’d kill half. But only after they had identified Pepper.

He watched, anticipation in his stomach, as Corvas grabbed the youngest looking intern and proceeded to throw her out onto the floor in front of Proxima. Corvas grasped her head, exposing her throat.

Tony wanted to intervene, to tell them to stop, to let him just get the information they wanted. He had the power to do so.

But no, that wasn’t the plan.

He had a role to play.

The loathing burned within him.

And then Pepper stepped forward.

Tony inwardly groaned. He had hoped Pepper wouldn’t but he already knew she wouldn’t allow anyone to suffer if she had the power to stop it.

“None of us have access to the information you require, especially if it is about the arc reactor. That’s what you’re interested in, isn’t it? It’s the only technology you would have encountered, isn’t it?” Her voice was strong and Tony felt proud of how brave she was being.

Proxima hissed out a response. “Who are you?”

Tony watched as Pepper revealed her identity and he knew Proxima would be pleased her tactic to lure Pepper out had worked. He nearly physically shuddered at her reaction.

“Potts? You’re the Pepper he used to talk about?” she screeched, her mouth stretching out into a hideous grin.

Pepper stepped back. “What? You know me?”

Tony shuddered at Proxima’s cruel laugh.

“Of course we know of you. Stark wouldn’t shut up about you.”

Tony clenched his fists. Pepper had been a source of comfort to him during his torture though it had
hurt to remember her. It had helped him survive. But now she was here and they were using his pain to hurt her. He’d never had much dealings with Gamora’s other siblings but they had been responsible for training him after he had broken. When he had failed and been tortured, Pepper had often come up when the pain had become too much. He wished they didn’t know of her or who much she meant to him.

Pepper was marked by his captors as a way of controlling him, of ensuring his obedience.

Proxima had grabbed Pepper’s chin. “There’s nothing special about you. He used to cry your name.”

He could see in her eyes as realisation struck her. Pepper’s eyes moved to Tony and he knew she realised it was him in the armour, no matter how much she wanted to deny it and hope it wasn’t.

Soon the time would come for him to reveal himself.

He felt sick. He didn’t want to do this. He couldn’t hear what Proxima whispered to Pepper next but it was Corvas’ cruel words that alerted him to what was going to happen next.

“Perhaps it is time you two should meet again.”

Tony stepped forward. This was his cue. He had no choice. He had to do this.

“Enforcer, why not obtain the information we require?” Corvus suggested. His voice was gleeful, as if he was looking forward to what would come next.

Reluctant, knowing what the consequences would be if he did not acquiesce, Tony moved towards a panel on the wall by a door in the corner of the room.

A part of Tony hoped this wouldn’t work, that his DNA had been wiped from the system. But he knew Pepper would never have done so, just in case Tony had returned miraculously one day. There were other areas within Stark Industries that required hand DNA to open too but they were few and far in between. This particular area Tony was about to go into had been installed after his loss, an area he had sanctioned to be built only after his death so his company could continue benefitting from Arc Reactor technology.

He heard a hitch in Pepper’s voice. He knew what she would be thinking.

The armour retracted around his right hand and he raised it towards the palm reader.

“You can’t get through there!”

His heart twisted at Pepper’s voice telling him he couldn’t.

Proxima answered for him. “Really?”

This was it.

The moment he would reveal his identity to the masses of people here.

I have no choice. I have to do this.

God, he really did not want to.

But he feared the promise of pain and what they would do to Pepper.

The helmet began to retract around his face.
Gasps of horror echoed all around the room and Pepper just stared in horror at his face, her features uncomprehending what she was seeing in front of her.

He turned away and pressed his palm on the reader.

Seconds passed and Tony knew what the outcome would be. The horror on her face told him that much.

Then, the words he had been dreading echoed forth: “ID CONFIRMED. ACCESS GRANTED TO ANTHONY EDWARD STARK.”

The door slid open.

Tony closed his eyes.

“Well, Enforcer?” Proxima goaded. “Go forth and complete your mission!”

Tony took a step forward but her voice stopped him.

“Tony?”

He didn’t turn around.

“If you are still in there, please don’t do this. Do not let them win. I know you’ve been gone a long time… Tony… Please do not throw everything away…”

Tony turned back to face Pepper. He could see Proxima and Corvas watching with interest. In fact, the whole foyer was.

She was so beautiful. All he wanted to do was hold her in his arms again, sweep her up and protect her and never let her go. I can’t…

“You will never be able to understand what I’ve been through,” he answered quietly. I'm not who you remember me to be.

“Those that love you can!” It was a plead that would, ultimately, prove to be hopeless.

Tony’s lips twitched upwards slightly. “I trusted love before. It failed me.”

“Tony…” Pepper moved forward, reaching for him.

He stepped back. “No.”

She paused, shocked by his reaction.

All I want to do is hold her.

It hurt Tony to push her away. To pretend their history meant nothing to him. Perhaps it would save her in the end?

He stepped back through the door that had opened for him. His eyes never left Pepper’s as he moved, before he finally turned and walked further down the corridor to another room where another palm reader was situated.

The others could no longer see him and he placed his hand upon the reader. Once again recognising him, the door slid open and he stepped inside.
The room itself was small. It fit the purpose of what it served for.

This was where the databanks of the Stark Industries servers had been moved. Originally Tony had stored them at home but upon his death, Pepper had ensured a transfer had happened to allow more people to benefit from his work and ideas. It had always been something Tony had told Pepper to do if he died.

His company needed to benefit, to continue to remain top of the game. The servers being moved meant easy access to information regarding the Arc Rector technology and Tony knew Pepper would have trusted only a small amount of people.

His suit retracted over a pocket on his jumpsuit and he removed a small portable device which he placed on the screen. It was a hacking device that would be able to access the information he required. It could be downloaded and then deleted from the system, ensuring Earth did not have any way of using Tony’s technology against Thanos.

He pressed a button on the side of the device.

The screen lit up, immediately hacking into the system remotely. Even JARVIS wouldn’t be able to stop the attack. An alien virus and technology wasn’t something the AI would be able to easily counteract. He would, however, learn from it, ready to defeat it the next time.

Tony traced his fingers on the device’s screen, inspecting the files that came up, selecting which ones he needed and ones that were surplus to requirements. Once he had the information he required, Tony detached the device from the mainframe and pocketed it, sealing it safely inside his suit.

Retreating back to the foyer, he avoided eye contact with Pepper but stood straight when he addressed Proxima and Corvas. “It’s done.”

“All erased?”

Tony didn’t hesitate. “Yes.”

“Good.” Proxima turned away from him. “Now, as per father’s wishes, half will be spared, the other not.”

Tony’s face paled. He hadn’t known this. They were just supposed to retrieve the data Thanos required and leave. There had been nothing about killing. Tony knew Thanos wanted to balance the universe.

“Oh, don’t worry, Tony, we have orders to spare your lover.” Proxima caressed Pepper’s cheek. “She is far too useful to be part of the half that die…”

The Chitauri squad began to separate people up, forcing terrified employees to different sides of the room. Pepper was kept in the middle, her arm held in a fierce grip by Proxima.

Tony didn’t want to have any part of this. He didn’t want anyone to die. He saw Happy being shepherded across the room, his eyes never leaving Pepper’s. Terror reflected within them.

Finally, when all the employees were fairly halved, Proxima dragged Pepper along with her, raising her voice and explaining the glorious role the sacrificed would have in bettering the universe.

Tony tuned out, not wanting to listen, not wanting to be part of another slaughter. He’d been here before and he loathed it. Fists clenched at his side, Tony vowed not to watch. He didn’t know what side Proxima would pick to be sacrificed but he was going to have to no part of it.
But Proxima broke any illusions Tony had on the matter.

“You are loyal to us, Tony,” she said, “and you’ve done this before. Give the order.”

He swallowed.

Each Chitauri warrior already knew what task it had, which side was the sacrifice side and which was not. Corvas and Proxima also knew but Tony did not. He was never granted with that knowledge.

Casting his gaze around the foyer he saw employees looking at him fearfully, their eyes worried, hugging one another close. He’d issued the killing order before yet always hated doing so. He couldn’t do it.

“Tony…” Pepper's voice broke into his inner monologue. “Don’t…”

“Shush, human!” Proxima hissed, squeezing Pepper by the throat, silencing her protests.

Tony raised his arm. Eyes closed. He couldn’t watch. He couldn’t…

He opened his eyes and saw Happy looking at him sadly, his eyes conveying a message only Tony could see.

_Don’t do it._

This was his chance to prove he was loyal or take a risk and begin to fight back. The fear of pain always stopped him. He didn’t want to suffer punishment for his failure to co-operate. He didn’t want to the pain.

But he couldn’t give the order. To order the deaths of those he had once known was completely different to ordering the deaths of those he had never known.

He lowered his arm, turning back towards Corvas and Proxima.

“No.” He was surprised by how strong his voice sounded.

“What do you mean no?” Proxima glared, squeezing Pepper’s throat just a little bit tighter.

A slight smile pulled at the tips of his lips. He felt better already, knowing he had made the right choice, regardless of what his fate would be. “No means no. I won’t do it.”

She snarled at him. “Then you will experience pain more so than ever before!”

A blaster formed around Tony’s wrist. “I don’t think so!” He twisted his arm and shot Corvas who flew back to the ground, a smoking hole in his shoulder, as the alien had jerked at the last minute, saving himself from death.

He turned the blaster on Proxima who moved Pepper in front of her body.

“Try it and she dies!”

Snarling Tony didn’t lower the blaster but he didn’t fire, not wanting to hurt Pepper.

“Issue the order and your insubordination may be forgiven,” hissed Proxima darkly.

The promise of pain was there. His resolve wavered as his eyes moved to Pepper, struggling to
breathe in the grip of her captor.

“I’ll still be tortured though,” swallowed Tony. “Thanos doesn’t need to kill all these people! If he gets the stones, half will die anyway! You’ll be reducing a population more than it should be, upsetting the balance!” It was a risk worth taking, trying to argue back against his captors. He had never thought he would be in this position where he would want to fight back but seeing Pepper again, seeing her struggle had given him the fight that had left him when Nebula had raped him all those years ago.

“You know the punishment of failure very well, Tony. It’s a shame Nebula betrayed us too,” said Proxima.

Tony stilled. No…

“I think you know what I am insinuating… She may be gone but others can still do the same to you…” leered Proxima.

The threat of rape was enough to make him freeze with terror and Corvas took advantage of it, despite the injury Tony had caused to his shoulder.

Corvas was fast and he and Tony fell to the floor, but there was something in Corvas’ hand which he pressed to the front of Tony’s armour. Electricity crackled around Tony’s armour, instantly disabling it. He jerked and the armour retracted leaving Tony in just his under-suit, trembling from the pain and whimpering as jolts of electricity ran up and down his body.

“Awww, a pity you tried to fight back,” smiled Proxima. “I think the Chitauri will enjoy their reward tonight.” She squeezed Pepper’s throat harder. “Perhaps we will even get Pepper here to watch it happen… but then again… it could be her who suffers instead of you.”

Tony closed his eyes, still laying on the floor as bolts of electricity continued to run up and down his body. Tears welled in his eyes. He’d tried and failed.

It was over.

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The grip on Pepper’s throat loosened and then relaxed and she fell to the floor as the female alien finally released her. She fell to her knees, catching herself with her hands, taking in deep breaths to replace the air she had lost. She glanced over at Tony’s trembling form.

She couldn’t believe he was here, what he had tried to do. He had tried to rebel against his captors. What had they done to him to make him obey?

The female alien was tending to the male one, pulling him to his feet. The other aliens still had their weapons levelled at the other employees.

Carefully, Pepper started to slide across the floor towards Tony.

She couldn’t believe he was here. The scars decorated his face showed the horror of what he had lived through. He had survived for so long. Whatever he had suffered through, a part of him still wanted to fight back.

“Despite our setback, we have come here for a noble cause. Be happy that you all serve in making the universe great again. Those that have been chosen to die will be honoured in death and those chosen to live have been given the opportunity to serve the universe in a greater capacity by
surviving into the new era of peace and prosperity!” praised Proxima.

Pepper found Happy in the crowd. The ominous feeling crept up on her. She had the feeling he was about to die. But there wasn’t anything she could do. She mouthed, ‘I love you’ to him across the hall. He smiled sadly at her, as if he was accepting his fate, realising he had no choice but to let his life be torn from him. He didn’t need to reply to validate his love for her. She already knew.

The female raised her arm and then brought her arm down fast.

One half of the room lit up in a burst of blaster fire. Bodies fell to the floor, smoking and blood pouring from the wounds. The half that survived screamed in terror as they watched their colleagues die.

Pepper blinked the tears down her cheeks.

As the smoke cleared, she could see Happy’s blood covered body amongst the dead. Sitting there beside Tony’s numb and tortured body, Pepper cried.

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The rescue came too late.

Half of the employees were dead, their blood staining the white floor. Those that had been chosen to live were left alone to cry and huddle together in shock and horror.

Pepper was restrained with her hands tied behind her back, ready for transportation back to their ship.

Tony had been stripped of his suit, sitting in the foyer wearing just his under-suit, with his hands tied behind his back. His body was shuddering and she knew he would suffer for his disobedience, if his punishment wasn’t placed upon her.

She didn’t know what to do. Happy was dead. Her eyes kept drifting to where his body lay, and the tears kept threatening to spill, despite the crying she had done earlier. She didn’t know what to say or how to feel. The shock of learning Tony was alive had overridden all her other feelings.

But Happy was dead.

Taken from her in the cruellest of circumstances.

It was when they were in the midst of preparing to leave, when Tony was being personally escorted back to their ship by Corvas and had already been taken away, that the attack happened.

The shield of Captain America flew through the window, smashing it into hundreds of shards, followed by the other Avengers as he threw his shield again at the invaders.

He was joined by Rhodey, Sam, Spider-Man, Thor, Natasha and Clint.

Most of the Chitauri had already left, leaving only a small band left.

Natasha was by Pepper’s side before the Chitauri could grab her, and pulled her away from her captors as Proxima commanded her remaining Chitauri to attack them.

“It’s okay,” soothed Natasha, “we’re here now.”

Pepper shook her head. “No! Happy’s dead and Tony’s alive!”
Natasha paled as she slit the binds on Pepper’s wrists.

“Nothing is okay!”

Natasha dragged Pepper down as a blaster shot came careening towards them. “Look, we’ll talk about it later…. But… right… now… we have…. this… problem!” The Widow twisted, pulled out two guns and shot two Chitauri warriors right through the skull, dropping them.

Pepper moved back against the wall, closer to her remaining employees and the attack was over in seconds.

Proxima retreated, taking the remains of her Chitauri warrior with her, warning that this was not over.

Even with the foyer now cleared of enemies most people stayed still, shocked and sickened by what they had just witnessed. Pepper was one of only a few to move out into the field of dead.

Happy’s body laid on his front. There were two wounds through his abdomen, and one which had grazed an arm, still slowly pumping out blood.

Hold on…

It was then that she noticed his hand trembling, ever so slightly.

“HAPPY!” she cried out.

Rushing over to him she found Happy was still breathing. Barely alive but not dead just yet. He was seriously wounded but alive. The horror and the relief of what had happened combusted insider her and her tears finally flowed free as she held Happy’s trembling hand as she waited for medical to arrive.

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Happy was taken to hospital. A few other employees had survived the slaughter too, all of whom had been airlifted to hospital, leaving the rest of the survivors to be tended to by medics and therapists from the government. A public statement had already been released, though neglecting to mention Tony’s survival, to placate the newscasters that the Avengers were trying to stop this imminent threat.

Rhodey was in the process of speaking to the government and though Pepper had wanted to go to the hospital with Happy, she had ultimately decided not to. She needed to be here for the survivors and Happy wouldn’t have wanted her to abandon her company in favour of him,

She was doing the right thing. She could feel it. Knowing Happy still had a fighting chance was enough for her to keep strong and keep going, but her thoughts kept turning to Tony who had been alive all this time and… and… god knew what they were doing to him up there for his defiance.

She saw Steve and decided she needed to speak to him. She would have spoken to Rhodey but he was busy dealing with the political ramifications of this. So she approached Steve cautiously. They knew Tony had been here and their facial reactions showed they had already known he was still alive.

“Pepper,” he acknowledged, looking a bit wary as he noted her approach.

“How long have you known?”
“About Tony?” he replied quietly. “Not long. A few days.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“We thought it best not to get your hopes up. Thor told us Tony was hostile… We know all the facts about what happened to him. He’s not what you remember him to be,” explained Steve.

“That shouldn’t matter,” pointed out Pepper. “Tony and I… we were together! I deserved to know the truth! By not telling me you put me in danger and my co-workers! People are dead because of this!”

“They acted faster at attacking here than we thought they would. Time was not on our side but we believed it was.”

“You knew this was going to happen?” Pepper stared at him.

“We had suspicions…” admitted Steve. “But then Loki came with Thor and things just got complicated.”

“Loki? Thor’s brother, Loki, who attacked New York? He’s here?” Pepper shouted. “Why is he here? Because of him I lost Tony!” She didn’t care she was shouting, drawing attention to herself.

“I can’t really talk about it here. Look, Pepper, we screwed up. We should have told you. Come by the compound when you can. I know Happy is important to you. Go and see him,” he suggested.

Pepper shook her head. “I can’t. Those monsters wanted me. They were going to take me with them. To hurt Tony… He’s terrified of the consequences of what they will do him whenever he fails. I need to stay protected in case they come back for me. I’m not going to be the fall of Tony.”

Steve swallowed. “Okay. We’ll be here for a few more hours. We’re helping with recovery and restoration work. When we leave, we’ll take you with us.”

“Thank you.” She knew her life was in danger. But she wasn’t going to allow them to use her against Tony, even if it meant leaving Happy to recover on his own.

“Once Happy is stable, we’ll move him to the compound.”

“I was going to suggest that,” replied Pepper. She started to turn away, still feeling numb from the events which had occurred when Steve grabbed her wrist, turning her back to face him.

“Pepper… I just want you to know, we will do everything we can to rescue Tony. To bring him home. It may be difficult and there may be bumps in the road but I won’t stop until we bring him home. I promise you.”

And Pepper believed him. Considering the guilt Steve carried with him, she knew he wouldn’t stop until he made sure the promise was brought to fruition. The only thing that would stop him was death.

But she hoped no one would die to bring him back safely.

Tony would need them all if he was to ever recover from this. And if it meant spending the rest of her life helping him, she would. She and Happy had not forgotten him, they would not abandon him when he needed them most either.

It was a sobering thought. One, she intended to cling to, to help her through this.
Tony is still very conflicted. He acted out because of Pepper. And Happy was meant to survive the culling but that doesn't mean he isn't out of the woods yet... And the Avengers just missed Tony... If they had arrived just minutes earlier they may have been able to rescue him too...

I hope to post the next chapter soon, hopefully before the 18th August. I fly out the country that day for a family holiday. Before that, I have a family wedding and also working too. I will try my best to update before my holiday but if I do not, I will be getting a chapter up as soon as I get back.
Part 4: Chapter 5 - The Armour

Chapter Summary

Tony is punished for his betrayal and Loki reveals all to the Avengers...

Chapter Notes

**WARNING** There is an incidence of rape in this chapter. It's not described in detail, unlike the Nebula chapter earlier on in the fic. It is barely described. If you do wish to skip, read the first scene, skip the second scene and the first five paragraphs of scene three. You'll be fine after that.

I will discuss my reasoning for including this in my notes at the bottom of this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**PART FOUR**
**THE WAR ON EARTH**

**Chapter Five**
**The Armour**

The fact Tony had both succeeded and failed in his mission was a conundrum to Thanos. He had retrieved the data the Titan had ordered him to and had deleted it from the Stark Industries server. However he had also failed to issue the killing command to the Chitauri kill squad.

And the failure to issue the command was a much bigger issue for Thanos, especially since Tony had issued the command before in the intervening years without hesitation.

Tony knelt in the centre of the room, his hands bound in front of him, his head bowed with his chin resting on his chest.

Proxima stood in front of Thanos, detailing Tony’s exact actions during the attack. Thanos was also incensed they had failed to bring Pepper Potts to him. He wanted her as a hostage to ensure Tony’s continuing compliance. Unfortunately, the Avengers had rescued her after Tony had been returned to Thanos’ custody by Corvas.

He was glad about that. He hadn’t wanted Pepper to suffer the indignity of what he was about to go through himself. The threat of the Chitauri having him still terrified him. Proxima had suggested it as punishment for Tony’s betrayal, for daring to hurt Corvas, for turning on them, after everything they had done for them.

Tony had yelled, had shouted out in defiance that they had never done anything for him.

Proxima had punched him in the face to silence him, her anger showing through as she left a large, bloody welt on the side of his face, the blood still dripping down his cheek.
Footsteps came closer and Tony looked up.

Thanos had risen from his throne and was now standing in front of Tony.

The Titan’s fingers messed in his hair.

Fear coursed up Tony’s spine. It was never a good thing when the Titan touched him on the head.

“It is a great shame you decided to betray me, to turn against us. You know full well what the consequences of your actions will be. Pain. Pain that you have never experienced before.”

Tony breathed in deep. “I’m ready,” he hissed in defiance.

“You think so, Stark?” chuckled Thanos. “I believe my daughter, Proxima, promised you something down on Earth.”

Tony stilled. No… God no… Please…

“Now you see. You will have another chance to please me but first, I think the Chitauri deserve a reward for their many years of dedicated service. Do you not agree, Stark?” the Titan caressed his head tenderly.

Panic set in and he attempted to pull away but Thanos tightened his grip on Tony’s head. He could hardly breathe. This was not happening. It was not…

“Please…” whimpered Tony. “I can’t…”

“You should have considered the punishment before acting out,” stated Thanos. “I will reward you for success but for failure…” He didn’t need to finish the sentence.

Proxima took Tony by the throat as Thanos released him and dragged him away. “Let’s get you prepared, shall we?”

Horror welled up inside Tony. He couldn’t believe this was happening. He felt numb and in shock. His limbs did not work and he felt sick to the stomach.

“It’s a shame Pepper is not here to see this. Maybe if she was here, she’d be the one on the receiving end of this…” Proxima said darkly. “But then, Corvas, may have wanted to use her too… Humans are such fun to play with…” she trailed off.

Pepper. They had intended for Pepper to be the victim here. If there was anything that strengthened Tony’s resolve it was the fact that it was better he received the punishment than it being Pepper. He would never be able to forgive himself if he had to endure the pain of watching Pepper be tortured or worse… raped.

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Tony hadn’t known the Chitauri were capable of sexual relations. They were genetically engineered and didn’t reproduce the way most creatures of the universe did. But they obviously had the parts. He tried to keep a brave face. Tried to think that it would soon be over but they all knew what he feared most of all.

The indignity of rape was something they had always hung over his head. He had never really earned another bout of it, though the Chitauri had touched him intimately before. He was stripped naked and his hands were kept tied at the front and pulled out in front of him.
He was placed in a cell, forced to bend over a slab, with his legs spread wide open. He fought them constantly, earning himself several punches to the head to stun him enough so they could secure him.

Proxima was there, watching. She stepped forward, leaning down to Tony, whispering in his ear. “For everything my traitorous sister did to you, the one thing she did not do was this. Considering how sick she was, it’s surprising. Still, this is more fun for the Chitauri this way, isn’t it?”

She moved to stand in front of him so he could see her as he lay there, waiting for the inevitable to happen. The door was already open and the only warning he got was cold hands touching his buttocks before something hard and firm was pushed inside.

He screamed.

Tony didn’t know how long the rape went on for, only that there were multiple Chitauri warriors who came to take him. Proxima watched it all happen, her grin getting wider and wider as Tony continued to scream and sob before finally falling silent, only flinching with each penetration.

Finally, he lay, exhausted, his hole burning with pain and fluid leaking out and onto the floor. Proxima moved forward slowly, pacing herself as she took on the sight of Tony’s battered body.

Her hands brushed his buttocks and she pulled one cheek aside to inspect the area.

Tony was done. Completely done.

“You’ve been thoroughly used now,” she mused. “Now, Tony, each time you attempt to betray us this will be your punishment. The more times you turn on us, the longer the punishment will last. I’m sure you do not wish to experience that again, do you?”

Numbly, he shook his head.

“And, when we reacquire your lover, she will be the one bent over this slab on the receiving end of this whilst you watch… I think that will give you an incentive to not betray us again.” She moved around him, slapping him on his cheek and then taking his chin. “Isn’t that right, Tony?”

“Yes,” he answered. It was the only response they would accept.

“Good.”

He was returned to his quarters and left alone. They’d dumped him on the bed, leaving him curled up in a ball, clutching his knees to his chest.

It had nearly been Pepper. The thought that Pepper may have had to suffer the indignity of what he had just gone through… Don’t think of it.

Trying not to dwell on his punishment was difficult. He could still feel their hands on his hips, the rocking of his body…

God, he was so messed up.

His hand strayed to the arc reactor in his chest. If it could only be so easy for him to end it all, he would. But they always knew. He never dared, not anymore.
“It would probably help if someone could cover the alarms proclaiming your life is in danger.”

The smooth, mocking voice jolted Tony from his thoughts.

“What are you doing here?” he demanded, glaring angrily at the Trickster god in front of him.

“Annoying you, obviously,” replied Loki.

Tony continued to glare. “Spit it out.” He wasn’t in the mood for games, not after what he’d just suffered. Loki had terrible timing. “Besides, aren’t you meant to be betraying Thor?”

Loki chuckled. “As far as Thanos is aware, yes.”

Narrowing his eyes, Tony searched the god’s face. “You’re working with Thor… Playing the dangerous game.”

“I know it is likely to kill me in the end but Thanos cannot get those stones, Stark. And I know about your little rebellion on Earth. They may have broken you but you are slowly fighting back,” mused Loki. “Even now, after your punishment, you are still simmering with rage, wanting to get revenge on those that have tormented you for so long.”

Tony gritted his teeth. “You know nothing.”

“Do I have to tell you in easy words before you understand I know what you’ve been working on?” sighed Loki. “But they don’t know. But now you took your first step of rebellion, they may just start looking deeper into what you are making here.”

Tony clenched his fists. “What am I doing?”

“You want me to say it?” Loki raised an eyebrow.

“I’m asking you,” retorted Tony.

“They’ll hear.”

Tony smirked.

Loki stepped forward, moving closer to him, leaning forward so his lips were by Tony’s ear. “You are creating a suit that is invincible against the Infinity Stones and capable of wielding them.”

Tony moved back, shocked. How the hell had Loki found out?

“Remember, I looked into your head, Stark. I saw everything in there. I don’t want Thanos to win either which is why I haven’t betrayed you.”

“You’re protecting me?” Tony asked uncertainly.

“As much as I can. It’s nearly finished, isn’t it?”

He’d been working on this suit for years, cleverly disguising it as abandoned projects that had failed, but bit by bit he was putting it together. It was more advanced than the suit he wore on missions. But this suit should be capable of harnessing the power of the Infinity Stones and of defending against them. He wouldn’t know until he was in battle but it was the best he was capable of giving. He was sure he was going to die in the coming days but it would be worth it and he’d finally be at peace.

“Yes,” he admitted.
“Stark, I can get you out of here, if you let me,” offered the Trickster.

It was such a tempting offer to take. “We’ll be caught before we even make it out the door,” he whispered in reply.

“Not right now. You want out. I can deliver you your freedom.”

Tony looked down at his feet. “The only freedom I will ever have is death.”

“I see there is no reasoning with you,” stated Loki. “Very well. Just know, Stark, that I am willing to help you if you chose to take me up on the offer.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t be.” As much as the offer was tempting, Tony knew he had to stay. He still had work to do.

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Loki returned to the Avenger’s Compound after checking in with Thanos. He’d been ordered to the ship that was currently circling above Earth’s atmosphere, out of range of detection by their satellites. Thanos had demanded an update on the location of the Mind Stone which was on Earth, held by Heimdell. His mission was to retrieve it but he’d also been ordered to infiltrate the Avengers and sabotage them, something he hadn’t been very successful at, considering they’d prevented Thanos’ children from acquiring Pepper Potts.

Of course, Loki wasn’t really trying to let Thanos win. He needed some victories to ensure his cover remained intact. He was playing a dangerous game.

They were sitting in a secured command room waiting for Loki to begin his report. Everyone was there. Every member of the Avengers and other allies had arrived. Gamora from the Guardians was also sitting around the table. Stark’s former girlfriend was as well though Loki didn’t see why she had to be there but he wasn’t going to argue about the semantics of it.

“Thanos has three Infinity Stones,” he confirmed. He’d noticed the third stone in the Gauntlet as he reported to Thanos.

“The Reality Stone?” Gamora paled. “He retrieved it from Knowhere?”

Loki shrugged. “I’m not sure where he got it from, only that he has it. He is halfway to achieving his goal. Two stones remain here, where is the third?”

“No one knows,” answered Gamora. “The Soul Stone has been kept hidden for years. There is no way possible for him to retrieve it.”

Loki watched her carefully. He could tell she knew something more than she was letting on, but he would allow it to pass for now. He didn’t need to know the specifics of what she was hiding from them, unless it became a danger to the survival of the universe and he doubted she knew where the last Stone was.

“What’s Thanos’ plan now?” asked Rogers.

The man was unbearable to be around. He didn’t trust Loki but was willing to work with him because of Thor. It still grated that Loki had changed, and was no longer the person they had encountered years ago. Thanos had been responsible for Loki’s state of mind then. He was risking life and limb to ensure the Titan failed in his holy quest. And yet he was still treated like he was a
villain rather than a precursor of information.

“He knows we are protecting the Time Stone here,” explained Loki. “He is aware the Asgardians in Norway are protecting the Mind Stone. Heimdell is keeping it safe until we can decide what to do with it. He will come for one of the two stones. I would guess the Mind Stone will be next. He will send Stark.”

“Are you sure on that?” asked Steve quietly.

“Yes. Stark has been involved in obtaining every Infinity Stone so far. He’ll be sent against the Asgardians, I’m sure of it.”

“Did they hurt him?” asked Pepper.

Loki turned his gaze on her. “Yes. He defied the will of Thanos. The punishment was severe.”

Pepper clutched her arms to her chest.

“But, his will to fight back is only stronger. Seeing you again, Miss Potts, seems to have invigorated him. I think if we were able to capture Stark, we might be able to bring him back into the fold,” explained Loki. “I even offered to help him escape when I saw him not that long ago. He refused.”

“What? Why?” Steve queried. “Surely he’d want to be away from them…”

“That’s what I thought,” noted Loki. He had been surprised but once he had been sure of what Stark was up to, his refusal had made sense. “It seems he has spent the last few years designing a suit which is capable of harnessing the Infinity Stones. Thanos is unaware of this otherwise I am sure the remnants of the armour would not exist within Stark’s quarters.”

“Tony’s doing what?” muttered Bruce, surprise echoing in his voice.

There was a small smile on Gamora’s face. “He’s fighting back.”

“He has been for years, mostly in little ways. I don’t think he really knows he has been doing it,” noted Loki, “but he’s become more aware of what he’s been creating. He stayed because he needs to make the finishing touches to the suit.” He placed his hands upon the table. “Unfortunately, it’s the matter of getting Stark to take that final step. I do not think he will push himself to do so.”

“But he did when I was in danger,” said Pepper. “Tony and I…” She looked at Gamora. “Did he really talk about me a lot?”

“He did. He found some comfort in doing so,” she replied, “however because you were his faith, they know acquiring you will be a way to keep him in line, and ensure his compliance.”

Loki watched the conversation with interest. “The best option is to liberate him from his captors once the suit is finished but that will prove difficult.”

“Then let’s set a trap for him,” suggested Barton.

He’d been against receiving aid from Loki but had ultimately been under voted. Thor’s support of his brother had urged the others to at least give Loki a chance, though Roger’s continual glares at him only proved he only agreed to listen out of necessity.

“A trap he may easily overcome,” noted Loki.

“That maybe so, but there are ways to disable him so he cannot escape,” said Rogers. “It’s harsh and
unfair but we need him back. There is always the risk, if he’s still on the other side, we’ll end up killing him if he isn’t safe with us.”

Natasha glanced around the table. “Then we need to start making a plan. One that works and is effective in achieving our goals.”

“Then plan away,” offered Loki, waving his hand in front of him. “I can only inform you when Thanos will next launch his attack. That is if I am summoned before him prior to it. We may have to act quickly without notification.”

“We can take all of these variables into account,” said Bruce.

They were about to begin discussing a plan to bring Tony in when one of Gamora’s alien friends burst in through the door. The Racoon was holding some sort of device in his hand that resembled a communicator.

Loki wasn’t too familiar with their part of space, having spent most of his years amongst the Nine Realms, but he had heard tales of a group of Guardians who had saved Xandar from destruction. He knew Gamora was one of them.

“Rocket?” she asked, standing up and moving towards him. “What is it?”

The Racoon held up the communicator. “I got a message from Quill. He’s on his way to Terra.”

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It was of some relief to Gamora that the Guardian’s ship made planet-fall in the early hours of the morning, three days after the attack on Stark Industries. Both Drax and Mantis were sporting injuries though they were hardly significant enough to take them out of action. Quill did not leave the ship, prompting Gamora to leave Drax and Mantis to Rocket and Groot who had come to greet them.

It had been thanks to James Rhodes and the support of the Avengers that Quill had been allowed to land, especially after the spate of attacks the planet had suffered in recent days. Though Gamora had been present at one of the attacks to aid the Avengers, she hadn’t really been focused upon. Her presence on Earth had remained a secret up until now when the Avengers announced they were working alongside a team of intergalactic heroes.

Gamora wouldn’t say they were heroes; they were just people trying to right the wrongs in the universe and do right by themselves.

She found Quill just a little way into the ship. His face was covered in cuts and his right arm was bandaged.

“The bastard broke it,” he said as soon as he saw her. “He already had the stone when we got there. The Collector is dead.”

Gamora lowered her eyes. “I know. I should have been there.”

Quill shook his head. “No. You shouldn’t have.” He stepped forward and grasped Gamora’s arm with his one good one. “He wanted you. If you’d been there, he’d have got you.”

Gamora lowered her gaze. “Does he know where I am?”

“He does now. He guessed. He said you’d be where Stark is.”
“Damn,” she sighed, pulling away from him. Her knowledge of where the soul stone was, was what Thanos would be after, but she had told him she’d never found it. In reality she had. She knew where it was located. She would never divulge the location of it. And as far as she was aware, Thanos didn’t know she had lied. He had believed her when she’d informed him she’d failed. Now though, there was a possibility he suspected she must have lied…

“Gamora, what does he want you for?” Quill asked quietly. “I need to know if I can help you.”

She shook her head sadly. “You can’t help me. Not in the way you think. At some point, Thanos and I will come face to face. He could open up a portal and grab me before I have a chance to do anything about it. When the time comes, we’ll deal with Thanos then. Right now, we’re focusing upon rescuing Tony. If we can liberate him, we may score a victory we sorely need. And it may prevent Thanos from obtaining another Infinity Stone.”

“You really want to help save him, don’t you?” asked Quill quietly.

“I do,” she admitted. She’d failed Tony before, and she wasn’t going to do that again. “What happened to him is my fault. I feel responsible for what he suffered.” She looked at him then, noting the sadness and worry in his eyes. “No matter what my feelings for Tony are, it doesn’t make you any less important to me. I would never be able to forgive myself if I didn’t try… Tony deserves a life and a chance to be who he once was.”

“Gamora,” Quill said quietly, “after everything he’s been through, I don’t think it is even possible.”

Gamora nodded. “Maybe. But I have to try. If I can save just one life, it will be worth it.” Pulling Quill into a hug, Gamora rested her head against his shoulder. “I’m glad you’re safe.”

“Me too,” he replied.

But she knew neither of them would be safe for long.

Thanos was coming to Earth.

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Tony knelt in front of Thanos, head bowed low as he waited for his next set of orders. He had been left alone for a few days after his punishment, though they had restricted his food and water, leaving him to ration what he already had.

It was just him and the Titan.

A rare occurrence.

“Stark.”

Tony swallowed. Thanos rarely used his surname.

“My Lord,” he uttered in response, keeping his head low.

“The Mind Stone resides on Earth with the Asgardian refugees. Bring it to me.”

Fear struck him as the order rushed through Tony’s brain, comprehending what he was being asked to do.

Thanos was setting him up to fail.
There was no way possible he’d be able to retrieve the Infinity Stone from the Asgardians. It was beyond his capabilities.

Only one answer would be acceptable to the Titan.

“I will endeavour to bring the Mind Stone to you,” replied Tony. He couldn’t refuse. The punishment they’d subject him to would be… Dwelling on it wasn’t the best idea.

“No, Stark, you will bring me the Mind Stone. You will not endeavour to anyone. My patience has worn out.” The Titan loomed over Tony.

Tony swallowed. He didn’t like the promise of torture that was reflected in his captor’s eyes.

“If you succeed, you will be rewarded. You know it well, Stark, don’t you?”

It was a question he had to answer. “Yes.”

“And, if you encounter my daughter, Gamora, bring her back with you. She and I are overdue a very long talk.”

Tony nodded. “I swear I will not fail you.” He would fail.

“Good. Remember the life of your lover is at stake. I know who she is. I could find her easily and bring her back here, bypassing all security that keeps her safe. Remember it is only your compliance and successes which keep her safe for now, Tony.”

How could he forget the obvious threat that hung over Pepper’s shoulders?

“Go.” The order was firm and demanding.

Tony backed away from the Titan, slipping out through the doors of the throne room. Even as he retreated towards his quarters, an ominous feeling arose in his stomach, as if he could sense what would happen next. He wasn’t certain if he was sobered or terrified by the idea, and yet it was still a peaceful thought.

*I’m not coming back here, am I?*

**To be continued...**

Chapter End Notes

So, I never intended for Tony to be raped again. But when I was writing the previous chapter and it became clear Tony was going to defy his captors, I realised the punishment he would receive would be horrible. If you remember in the original rape chapter with Nebula, she intimated he’d be raped by Chitauri next if he kept resisting her. Tony, terrified by that prospect, relented his resistance. It was also heavily implied by Proxima in the last chapter that this is what Tony’s punishment would be. Or rather Pepper’s if they had managed to keep a hold of her...

I didn’t want to write it graphically so I went for the simplest of sentences. I can now promise this will be the last instance of rape in this story. There will be no more of it.
Tony is resisting and continues to do so. He has been for years, though unconsciously.

I hope to have the next chapter posted later this week. I have a wedding to attend on Thursday and then Friday I am packing for holiday. Saturday we fly out the UK to somewhere hot. I will not have internet connection during this time but I will be taking my laptop with me so I can write whilst relaxing next to the swimming pool! I want to get the next chapter finished before I go as it is the end of Part 4 and I feel it will be a good way to round this part of the story off before I leave for holiday. Part 5 will have roughly 10 chapters within it and as long as I have the last chapter of Part 4 finished before I go away, the first chapter of Part 5 will be posted around the 26th/27th August.

Look for an update later this week!
Part 4: Chapter 6 - The Trap

Chapter Summary

The Avengers set a trap for Tony...

Chapter Notes

Well, I managed to update a few hours before I am due to go on holiday! I think this is the shortest time it's taken me to update in a long while... I may still revise this chapter later on, maybe make a few more edits, but for now I am happy with this chapter.

PART FOUR
THE WAR ON EARTH

Chapter Six
The Trap

“The trap has been set.”

Loki walked broadly into the common room where the Avengers were resting before their next callout. They’d laid out a plan to capture Tony, and Loki and Thor had returned to the Asgardian camp where they had set out the trap. Thor had remained behind whilst Loki had gone to inform the other team members that everything was ready.

They just had to wait for Tony to arrive.

Rogers nodded. He seemed less distrustful but maybe that was because he was hoping they could rescue their lost friend.

Loki did have his doubts but he hoped they’d succeed. The Avengers needed Stark away from the influence of Thanos if they had any chance of beating him. Thanos was powerful but not unbeatable.

Not if Stark’s armour worked the way it should.

Trouble was, they needed all six Infinity Stones, and they had no idea where to begin searching for Soul.

The Doctor, who carried Time, had remained with the Avengers, choosing to work with them whilst this situation was resolved. He was, however, refusing to go out into the battlefield as losing the Time Stone would be a disaster for them all. Either way, Thanos would come himself, but it was better to keep the Infinity Stone protected for as long as possible.

“How much time do we have?” queried Rogers.
“Not sure. Thanos has issued the order for Stark to bring him the Mind Stone. He also requires him to bring you to him,” replied Loki, looking to Gamora as he spoke the last sentence. “Stark has been given a deadline. He’s likely preparing himself for the attack. I think Stark knows this will end in failure for him.”

“That’s good though,” said Rogers. “It would be easier to rescue him if he doesn’t believe he can take the stone from Thor’s people.”

Loki folded his arms across his chest. “I do not believe you see what the other problem could be if we liberate Stark from Thanos’ imprisonment.”

Gamora was the first to speak up. “Pepper.”

Stark’s woman wasn’t there. She was currently at the hospital with her other lover, with an armed guard for protection, so she could visit her dying lover. Loki simply did not care enough to learn his name.

“Thanos is after her. He wants to use her against Stark. He suspects Stark is swaying and could put up more of a fight. That’s why they used the punishment he feared before to make him get back in line,” stated Loki, casting his eyes across the room. “Once we rescue Stark, Thanos will make his move. He will not allow us to keep him.”

“There is also the issue of the implant in his head,” said Steve.

“An implant?” said Barton. He’d just walked back into the room. He’d been one of the few escorting Pepper to the hospital, meaning they had returned. “You never said there was one there.”

Loki frowned. “I didn’t know.” Because he hadn’t. He knew some things but not everything.

Gamora rose to her feet. “Thanos likes to ensure total compliance on his captives. They’ve not allowed Tony to die which is something he wants to do. They’ve always stopped Tony from killing himself before so he doesn’t attempt it now. Tony’s only hope of death is if he is killed in battle or Thanos activates the chip in his brain which will detonate and kill him instantly. I won’t lie and say it will be pretty. It won’t be. The type of chip Thanos uses is one that could destroy a whole section of this building. He would kill all of us in an instant, eliminating the opposition. That’s the risk we face in freeing Tony.”

“Is there a way to deactivate the chip?” asked Romanoff.

Gamora frowned and Loki watched her closely. “It can be removed. Our issue is ensuring Thanos cannot activate it.”

“Jammers,” stated Rhodey, walking into the common room. “Tony developed a lot of technology over the years. If we could utilise them, it may just interfere with the signal between the control and the puppet. We might have to tune it to the correct frequency…”

“Peter and I can do that,” stated Gamora. “But we’d have to be quick at this. There is no telling how quickly Thanos could activate it once he loses Tony.”

“Then I suggest you deactivate it before you bring Stark back here.” Loki cast his eyes across the room. “Doing this will not prevent Thanos from simply teleporting here with the space stone and taking what he needs. It’s well within his power.”

Roger’s eyes darkened. “It may buy us some time though.”
Loki could only agree with that.

“How is he?” Steve leaned against the rail as Pepper looked out of the window. Her hands clutched the railing tightly.

“It’s bad, Steve,” she whispered. “Happy hasn’t woken since the attack. They think he may not make it. One of the shots hit him close to his heart. Surgery is an option but it is very risky. I have to make the decision whether they should take the risk or not.”

“Pepper…” Steve pulled her into a hug. “I’m sorry.”

“First this and now Tony…” he swallowed, the guilt wallowing within him. “We should have told you about Tony when we first knew. We wanted to protect you from the truth…”

Pepper blinked tears away. “It doesn’t matter now. I just want Happy back. And Tony too.”

He didn’t want to tell her they would soon have Tony in their grasp but she already knew what they were planning on doing. “I said this to you before, but we will bring Tony home.”

“He’s not the same though…” she whispered quietly, rubbing her eyes again. “What if he doesn’t want to live?”

Steve bit his lower lip. “Then we’ll help him.”

He didn’t want Tony to die. He deserved to live his life. But if Tony wanted to die, would they feel good about it if they denied him that and forced him to live?

Pepper clung to him for a long while, letting her tears flow, despite the times she had attempted to stop it. Finally, she pulled away, once again wiping her now red-stained eyes.

“You know, Happy was there for me when Tony left us. He was always there to support me and help me. He once told me he always fancied me but never asked me out because he saw how Tony felt about me. Happy always knew Tony had feelings for me and would never step forward to prevent it from happening. He knew I loved Tony too. It just took years for both of us to realise,” explained Pepper. “He was such a gentleman. He waited for me to feel ready. Happy, like Tony, is the love of my life. How can I choose?”

“Pepper, I never knew Tony as well as I would have liked to. I sorely misjudged him. And I never got to know Happy either but…” He halted, unsure of whether to continue or not.

“Go on,” she urged, “please.”

“I don’t think Tony would care if he knew you had moved on,” said Steve. “His priority is different now. From what Gamora has implied he still loves you but can your relationship be the same now you are with Happy? Tony taking you away from Happy would break both of you. Tony’s different now. I think he’d understand.” At least he hoped Tony would. “You have to do what’s right for you, Pepper. Happy needs you just as much as Tony does.”

“You believe I should take the risk with Happy? To let them operate and pray he doesn’t die on the operating table?” she asked fearfully.

Steve disliked saying this. “Could you live with yourself if you didn’t?”

Pepper shook her head. “No.”
“Then you have your answer.”

They didn’t have much warning.

Only a garbled message from Loki, who had been ordered to return to Thanos’ ship, had given the Avengers the opportunity to leave the compound and head to Norway.

They all had their individual tasks to complete.

With any luck, they’d be returning to the compound with Tony in tow.

Tony had suspected as much.

He stood in the middle of the Asgardian encampment, in full armour, in front of Heimdell, who was flanked by Thor and Valkyrie. He had known this mission wouldn’t be easy. In fact he had been certain before embarking upon the assignment that he was going to fail.

He’d had to come alone. Thanos had decreed it. He didn’t want to waste any more resources. The only person who he had been allowed with him on this assignment was Loki who, as soon as they reached Earth, had disappeared, leaving Tony in the midst of an Asgardian encampment, surrounded by warriors.

He had expected the betrayal. Had thought Loki would try this. Realisation had dawned the moment Loki had teleported away. Still, by setting a trap for Tony, the God of Mischief had ensured his own death at the hands of Thanos.

There was one thing about this situation that did make Tony feel happy about, even for a few seconds.

Death.

He could die here and he’d be free.

Finally free from the pain and anguish he’d become accustomed to.

He could rest… The feeling was almost soporific.

But then his illusions shattered.

“We’re not going to kill you, Tony Stark,” the one called Heimdell stated.

He was the guardian of the Mind Stone, the one Tony needed to defeat to gain it from.

“We want to rescue you,” said Thor.

“Let us help you,” said Valkyrie.

Loki had told him who she was before they arrived at the encampment. He knew they would be waiting for him but he’d had no choice but to come.

“No one can help me.” Tony’s armour rippled around him.
“Why not?” stated Thor. “Stark, we are your friends.”

“We’re not friends,” replied Tony. Why did they believe they had ever been? “We were forced together in a situation where we had to work together. We barely tolerated one another. To believe we are friends is fallacy.” He raised his right arm and a blaster formed around his wrist, and a sword on his left side. From his feet extended sharp spikes and on his knees, the armour moved, revealing another set of spikes.

If he’d bought his armour he’d been working on for years... But he hadn’t.

“I don’t want to fight you,” continued Thor. “We want you back.”

“Maybe I don’t want to be back. Maybe I want to be dead,” retorted Tony, because that was what he wanted most of all. He really did.

“The people who love you do not want you to die.” Valkyrie, again.

“I don’t even know you, why are you even here?” Tony barked back. “Nothing you say will change my mind!” He took a step forward. “We can do this the hard way or the easy way. Your choice!”

All he wanted was to get the stone and present it to Thanos. Have a successful mission for once.

The three of them exchanged a long look with one another.

Then they stepped forward; Thor with lightning crackling on his hands, Valkyrie with a sword and Heimdell with a longer and sharper sword than the female.

Tony gritted his teeth. They had to choose the hard way, didn’t they?

Activating his thrusters, Tony propelled himself into the air, twisting and firing at Thor while altering his direction. He moved his feet in front of him, and shot forward, the plants of his feet hitting the woman on the chest before she could get her sword up in time. He was fast. Already twisting out the way as Heimdell bought his sword down, the intention to remove a limb was clear.

They didn’t want to save him if they were going to cut off his limbs to stop him.

Thor reached to grab him, yet Tony twisted, swinging his leg in a arc, scraping Thor’s chest with the spikes in his feet, producing thin droplets of blood. Pity his aim hadn’t been higher. He could have killed him.

“Stark! We don’t want to hurt you!” bellowed Thor.

Tony pulled a face. He hadn’t bothered to activate his helmet yet. “You’re using swords against me. Removing my limbs would be hurting me.”

“It’s for defence, Stark! You are the one attacking us!” Valkyrie shouted.

Tony gritted his teeth. “I need that stone! Give it to me!”

Thor shook his head. “We cannot allow Thanos to gather all the stones.”

“Once he does, I will be able to die!” shouted Tony. A part of him was still certain Thanos would never allow him to die, would ensure he lived to extend his suffering.

There was a sound behind him, the landing of boots and Tony risked a glance. His lips pursed thinly.
Gamora and Steve stood behind him.

His eyes cast around at his surroundings as noises erupted all around him.

There was Clint and Natasha off to the side, holding their weapons loosely in their hands. And then there was Bruce, piloting a QuinJet. But it wasn’t just the Avengers surrounding Tony, it was other people he didn’t know.

People the Avengers must have recruited after his loss…

Rhodey was hovering in the air above Thor, having flown in just then.

A man with wings stood on the top of the hovering QuinJet.

Then on one of the wings stood a man with a metal arm, and dark brown hair flying in the wind.

Then, standing on top of a housing structure were two masked people in full skin-tight suits. One wore complete black, and Tony spied claws from the fingers, whilst the other wore a red and black suit which made him look like an insect.

And another ship moved in, hovering above Tony, pointing its guns down on him. He could see into the cockpit and saw Gamora’s little band of heroes.

They were all here to face him, to fight him, to die.

The tragedy of his situation was that Tony had been sent here by himself without any backup from any of Thanos’ other children or the remaining Chitauri warriors or any the Outriders Thanos had been breeding. He was utterly alone in this situation.

Steve’s voice rocked out behind him. “Tony, we can do this the hard way or the easy way.”

Tony snarled. As much as he wanted to be rescued, to be freed, he knew he couldn’t go down without fighting. Thanos would be displeased and would find a way to punish him from afar, perhaps even target Pepper and take her this time.

“Give me the stone and this will all end with nobody getting hurt!” demanded Tony. He felt desperate, unwilling to accept he was going to lose if he fought them. The only thing on his mind was not failing. Pepper was at stake. He couldn’t fail for her sake.

“You had to pick the hard way…” sighed Steve.

“It’s the only way,” muttered Tony.

“Tony!” Natasha was calling him. “It isn’t the only way! Pepper is safe with us!”

Tony bit his lip. That was the crux of it, but he knew more than the Avengers knew. “How can she be safe with you, if all of you are here?”

“We’re not all here,” responded Gamora. “Tony, I know how much Pepper means to you. She is under our full protection. No one can reach her. We can help you to, if you let us.” She reached out a hand towards him, willing Tony to take it.

“He has the space stone, Gamora. How can Pepper be safe when he could just appear at her side and grab her? I know what he’s capable of with those stones. You don’t!” he answered back, willing for her to understand why he couldn’t just walk away or come with them.
Gamora sighed. “I think I know my father better then you do, Tony.” She took a step towards him. “He may want to use her against you but Thanos knows it’s a risk to do so.”

Tony paused. How was it a risk? He didn’t understand why she believed it was possible.

“Trust us, please!” Gamora was reaching out for him. “Tony, do you really believe Thanos will allow you to die once he has all the stones?”

Swallowing, Tony paused again. He did wonder if Thanos would keep to his word.

“He never rewards failures. He never allowed Nebula to die and look what he’s done to her!” she pleaded.

Anger clouded through Tony at the mention of her name. “Don’t you dare talk to me about her after what she did to me!” he hissed, his eyes flashing angrily.

Gamora stepped back at the venom in his voice.

Why did she think it was okay to even mention her name to him? Gamora was not stupid. She had known her sister’s sexual desires for him. The moment she’d turned her back on him, Nebula had pounced, taking him in the most gruesome and sadistic way possible. Never again would he be able to enjoy sex. Not with her face looming up in his mind’s eye each time he closed his eyes.

Nebula’s rape of him had scarred him for life.

Even if he did survive this, he’d never be able to give Pepper what she wanted.

“I’m sorry! I shouldn’t have mentioned her,” apologised Gamora. “I just wanted you to understand how he treats people who are failures!”

Tony gritted his teeth. He wasn’t a failure. Not as such anyway. He did fail but he wasn’t like her. He internally shuddered, trying to forget the memory that was clouding his memories again.

“You don’t think I already know that?” Tony growled. “I’m lucky I haven’t lost any limbs yet! Thanos needs my hands and that’s the first thing he always takes! I know if he wins he may take everything away from me, but if it means I finally get the sanctity of death, then so be it!” Guns started to form on his arms and the others raised their weapons.

Tony smirked. If he was going to go down, he’d rather do it fighting. At least Thanos wouldn’t be too displeased at his loss, not if Tony took a few of them with him.

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“He’s going to fight us,” whispered Gamora.

“I know,” sighed Steve. “Don’t rough him up too bad.”

“I won’t.” Gamora gripped the sword she held in her left hand. She didn’t want to use it on Tony but since he was getting ready to attack them, it seemed likely she would have to. “He’ll come for me.”

Her anticipation of his actions proved wrong seconds later when Tony fired his thrusters and flew into the sky, his armour covering his whole body now, and he grabbed Rhodey by the legs and swung him around before firing his blasters at him. The energy of the blasts shot off some of the armour and Rhoddy fell, his suit half destroyed in an instant. The Arc Reactor still glowed in the chest, signalling power but Tony had done enough damage that
it didn’t matter now.

He moved on to Nat and Clint, firing missiles as he flew by, causing them to duck and roll away. Tony twisted in mid-air, kicking out at Clint and Natasha. He struck one on the chin, knocking Natasha out cold.

Two Avengers down…

Now the QuinJet and Quill’s ship were firing at him.

He twisted, snarling and firing at both ships simultaneously as bigger blasters erupted from his shoulders. The Quin-Jet was struck and a wing blew off.

He didn’t bother to watch Bruce struggle to maintain control, instead he focused his attention on Gamora, who had made a running leap at him and was reaching for him.

Tony almost allowed her to grab him but moved quickly out the way, but he underestimated his retreat and she managed to grab his ankle with her left hand.

Spikes protruded from his foot, narrowly missing her fingers and palm. He snarled. He wanted to get her. He had to. He had been ordered to bring her back to Thanos and whilst she was hanging on, he may just be able to do so.

“Tony!” she shouted up to him.

Even Quill had stopped aiming for him, mindful of Gamora in harm’s way.

“I’m sorry!” she continued.

“For what?” he hissed, looking briefly down at her.

His eyes widened as her right arm came up and something was placed onto his leg.

“What?” Tony tried to shake her off. “Get that off!”

Gamora smiled sadly up at him. “No. Tony, this is the only way.”

And then an electrical current went up his leg, short-circuiting the suit before it reached his body and blackness descended upon him. The last thing he was aware of was falling to the ground before he slammed into it.

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He woke a short while later, noting he was lying on the dirt, his suit having been retracted forcibly whilst he’d been unconscious. His hands were bound behind his back. He’d failed. It almost felt like a relief when Gamora approached him, crouching down to him and gently moved his hair out of his face.

“Tony,” she smiled sadly at him. “None of us wanted to fight you. All we want is to help you.”

“Don’t-”

She reached out and showed him something in her palm.

It was a small metallic disc.
“This will stop the chip. Block it. He can’t hurt you,” she explained softly. “And he won’t get Pepper. I promise you.”

Tony flinched as Gamora pressed the disc to his forehead.

There was a whirring sound, a static burst of electricity, followed by roaring pain in his brain before he blacked out, losing his consciousness from the waking world once again.

**To be continued...**

**End of Part Four**

Chapter End Notes

So, because I am going away on holiday for a week I will be offline until I get back. I am taking my mini laptop with me where I intend to do a lot of writing! I hope to make significant progress with Part 5 of this fic. If I do I will be able to post weekly again! I am aiming to get a few chapters done over my holiday.

The next part is entitled: THE REVENGE OF TONY STARK

But who will he be having revenge against?

The next chapter should be posted on either Monday 27th August or Wednesday 29th August.

Until then! :)

the-writer1988
Part 5: Chapter 1 - Reunion

Chapter Summary

Tony is given a choice by the Avengers.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! Here, marks the beginning of Part 5: The Revenge of Tony Stark. I have returned from my lovely, relaxing holiday... I managed to write 2 and a half chapters which I'm happy with! Part 5 is going to be quite epic. Lots of stuff going on within it... It will be about 9 or 10 chapters, and after this Part, we will have just one Part left of this story to go.

We are in the endgame now.

PART FIVE
THE REVENGE OF TONY STARK

Chapter One
Reunion

He felt strange upon waking.

He felt comfortable, something he had not experienced in years…

Tony’s eyes slowly opened, focusing upon the white ceiling above him. It was smooth with four small lights built into the ceiling, giving a sense of peace to the room. No place on Thanos’ ship had ever been like this. It never would be. Thanos preferred cold and dreary colours. It showed how he attempted to keep his children in line by suppressing their imaginations.

There was only one place Tony could be.

The Avenger’s Facility.

Gamora had put something on his head, sending a shock through him, knocking him out-cold. They must have captured him and he was now a prisoner of the Avengers.

Tony moved a hand to his head, feeling around for any sort of device but found nothing. Whatever it was that Gamora had used on him had been removed.

“The effects are still in place,” the voice said, startling Tony from his thoughts.

“Loki!” Tony shouted, jumping up and scrabbling back. “How long have you been there?” He hadn’t noticed the God at all.
“I’ve been keeping watch ever since you were brought here,” the God admitted. “You are safe now. Thanos cannot hurt you.”

Did they know about the chip? Thanos could activate it and kill everyone here. The part of Tony that wanted to die hoped that would happen, yet the part of him he had rediscovered during the siege of Stark Industries, hoped it would not. He still wanted to live though the need for death was stronger than his need to live again.

“The chip is disabled, Stark. Or, rather, we have blocked the signal to your brain. Thanos cannot detonate the chip inside unless we remove the block,” explained Loki.

Tony’s eyes narrowed. “Remove the block.” The irrational side of his brain was in control at the moment.

“And allow Thanos to kill you and everyone here? Earth’s best defenders? I think not, Stark,” scoffed Loki.

Glaring, Tony pursed his lips. “He’ll come for you regardless.”

“Yes, he will. You’ve always known I was working alongside Thor. Thanos believed I was his when I’ve always been Thor’s. I’ve changed Stark. I’m amazed I was able to survive for as long as I have. I know it is only a matter of time before my luck finally runs out.” Loki folded his arms across his chest. “Until that moment comes, I will do my very best to keep you alive.”

“Why is it necessary for me to be alive?” demanded Tony. “Besides, I’m not on that ship now. I could easily end my life without those alarms going off and stopping me!”

Loki sighed. “Stark, it is not my place to say why you have to live. I just know you need to be. Whether you kill yourself after you’ve had your use is not my problem. I care not if you kill yourself later but, for now, we need you alive. So, do us all a favour and keep your hands away from that arc reactor in your chest.”

Tony’s hand started to move up his tunic towards the reactor, like he had decided he could defy the God.

Loki rolled his eyes. “Your use will be explained to you shortly. At least allow us the courtesy of talking to you before you end your life.”

Tony’s hand remained on the arc reactor but he made no move to remove it. Nor did he make any motion to take hold of it. “I’m listening.”

“The others will be here shortly. They are in debrief now,” explained Loki.

Tony lowered his hand. “Am I prisoner here?”

“That is up to you. You are locked up for now but your freedom depends on what happens next. You have the choice. The others would prefer not to hold you prisoner against your will,” the God continued, moving away from the door. “You are locked in for safety but only for now. That could change.”

He wasn’t sure what to think. Did he really want to listen to what the Avengers had to say?

As if Loki could read this mind, the God spoke up: “There is no harm in hearing what they have to say. It may be beneficial to you.”
Tony couldn’t argue with that logic though he doubted the idea anything they had to say would be beneficial for him. It was more likely they wanted him to live because he could help them.

Everything fell silent between the two leaving Tony alone with his conflicted thoughts.

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It was a surprise to Tony when Loki walked out of the room as Pepper opened the door and stepped inside, before closing it behind her.

“Tony,” she said simply.

Tony stared. Despite seeing her a few days before, he had not had a chance to really look at her properly. She wore no make-up and her eyes were rimmed with redness, suggesting she had been crying recently, and her hair was mussed up in a bun. The attack on her business had really hurt her. He couldn’t speak. He wasn’t sure what he could even say. He had never thought he would ever be in the position again where he would be able to talk to Pepper again.

“Pepper…” he finally breathed.

And then, without even thinking about it, without even considering that he hated being touched, Tony rose from the bed and pulled her into a hug, burying his head into her shoulder, smelling the fruity smell of her shampoo in her hair. He couldn’t believe he was touching her, holding her in his arms after all this time…

“Happy’s dying.”

Those two simple words caused him to step back and look at her carefully in the eyes, searching them for something. “You love him,” he stated simply.

She nodded.

He didn’t blame her for finding love again.

Like everyone else, she had believed him dead and had moved on with her life, which was what he had hoped Pepper would have done in his absence. He hadn’t wanted her to be miserable. He was just surprised it had been Happy of all people she had found a new life with.

“Tony…” she sniffed. “Happy was in the half that was supposed to die.”

He’d never even realised Happy had been one of the victims. He’d been caught up in memories at the time, especially since it had been after his attempted betrayal. The threat of rape had disabled any resistance that had brewed within him.

Tony wasn’t sure what to say. He’d spent so long repressing his emotions that finding them again was proving difficult. His love for Pepper was still prominent.

She seemed to be waiting for him to speak and when he didn’t, she shook her head, almost disappointed.

“I’m not sure what you want me to say other than I’m sorry?” he asked, still unsure. “I’m not the same, Pepper. I have to do what they want me to do.”

She moved to sit on the bed beside him. “I’m here for a reason. You’re not our prisoner.”

“You’re keeping me locked up,” he pointed out.
Pepper shrugged. “Your freedom depends on what you decide now.”

“I’ve never been allowed decisions in the last six years. Why should I start now?” he asked.
“Prisoners never get choices. They get orders or punished if they disobey.”

“Your captors taught you that, Tony. But here we want you to decide,” she explained. “I’d rather be with Happy than explaining this to you but we believed it was better it was me than anyone else of the Avengers or the Guardians. Every Avenger still cares about you.” Pepper rested a hand on his arm. “We want to help you, Tony, but it all depends on whether you want to accept it or not.”

“Can you help me die?”

She flinched. “I already had to lay you to rest once. I do not wish to do so again.” Her eyes met his. “I’m already losing Happy. The doctors cannot do anything for him and they’ve tried. He’s in a coma. Unlikely to wake up from it. He’ll die as soon as he’s taken off life support. I could lose both of you in the space of one day.”

Was she trying to make him feel guilty about wanting to die? He didn’t think that was fair. Sure, she had suffered because Happy was dying but to not consider what he had gone through… He couldn’t live with the memories. He was barely functioning now and he only did so because of Thanos. Thanos would never allow him to die so he’d had no choice but to carry on living. But now he was finally away from him, he had his chance.

“I know it may feel like I’m not taking what happened to you into consideration, Tony. But we can help you if you let us heal you.”

Tony’s eyes narrowed. None of them understood what he’d suffered, what he’d continued to suffer. “None of you have any idea what I’ve been through. Maybe the only way to heal me is through death. If that was what helped me in the end, would you go through with it?”

He was not surprised when Pepper failed to answer him.

“You’d allow me to suffer, to keep on remembering.” His tone was dark and he felt disappointed. “If you loved me as you once did, you wouldn’t let me carry on living. You’d help me.”

Pepper was silent.

He knew there was an ulterior reason she had to come here. “Why are you really here?”

“To make you an offer,” she answered sadly. “One that could make you happy if you chose it.”

He stilled, seeing the posture she held. She was dreading telling him. And he had the feeling he knew why she had been attempting to gauge his reaction to her losing the two people she loved most in the world.

“There is the belief you could hold the key to defeating Thanos,” she began.

Tony wasn’t exactly sure how they could have come to that conclusion.

“But we’re not going to force you to fight him either,” she continued. “Both Gamora and Loki have verified with us that you wish to die. It is something we can offer you. I know nothing is stopping you from simply pulling out your Arc Reactor. And none of us are cruel enough to force you to live if you do not wish to, no matter our personal opinion on it.”

Tony watched her carefully.
“This is where you have two choices. Potentially three choices.”

“Right…”

“The first you choose to fight with us. We can remove the chip from your brain meaning Thanos cannot kill you when he wishes to and eliminate the opposition at the same time. At the end of that, you can chose to end your life. Or,” she hesitated, looking worried, “we can remove the signal affecting the chip and detonate it ourselves. You’d die but we’d make sure it was within a secure containment where others wouldn’t be hurt. I do not believe you would want to die that way… Or you can remove the arc reactor and allow the shrapnel to do their work. Those are the options we can offer you.” She placed her hands in her lap and looked at Tony.

“Those are my options?” Would they really allow him to die so easily? “You’d let me choose to die regardless of your own feelings on the matter?”

“I’d have no choice,” she replied. “We’ve voted as a group. It is illegal, Tony, and you know that. The attack on Stark Industries has revealed your survival. We haven’t confirmed the rumours yet.”

Tony nodded. They wanted to know what his answer here would be first. “Assisted dying… I wouldn’t want you to get in trouble.”

Pepper almost looked hopeful.

“Why do you believe I’m the only one who can defeat Thanos?” he asked. He folded his arms across his chest. “You want me to make a decision based on all the facts. Why not explain why I’m the one who stands the most chance of defeating him?”

Pepper sighed. “Gamora can explain this to you…”

His face hardened. “And you trust her?”

“Everything she has done has been to help us and you,” explained Pepper. “Let her talk to you and you’ll obtain all the facts.”

Tony knew he wouldn’t find out if he didn’t. “Fine. Send her in.” He didn’t have to listen to her if he didn’t want to. And if she angered him… well he could always hit her. He knew she’d let him. She felt so guilty about him after all.

Pepper stood up from the bed and opened the door to his cell. Gamora had clearly been waiting outside as she came in straight away, with Pepper closing it behind her and moving to lean against the wall whilst Gamora approached him. She looked sad but nodded her thanks to Tony for allowing her to talk to him.

“Tony… it’s been a while since we’ve had a proper talk.”

“A few years at least,” he quipped. All their other interactions had been on the battlefield. “So, tell me, daughter of Thanos, why do you believe I can defeat him?”

Gamora traded a glance with Pepper and then her eyes lowered to his Arc Reactor, sitting, shining in his chest.

Tony received the message. “This?”

“It’s the only piece of technology that has successfully defended against an Infinity Stone,” she revealed. “Loki tried to control you at the Battle of New York and failed because the Mind Stone
met a device that has been created from the same energy all the stones are made with. All of them are connected and as a result, though the stones are supposed to be used together, they can also counteract one another and prevent them from being used against people who wield one. Your Arc Reactor technology was created by your father which you then refined. The calculations he made years ago, you were then able to act upon and alter to create the perfect weapon against Thanos. We know you are building a suit that is designed to hold the Infinity Stones. Why build it if you do not intend to fight him?”

Tony had to admit Gamora had a point. “It was a suit I never intended on using. It was a way out. To escape the captivity I was in, if only for a few minutes. It gave me the chance to believe I was back in my workshop, rather imprisoned upon a ship and commandeered by one of the fiercest warlords in the galaxy.”

“And yet it potentially holds the power to wield the Infinity Stones,” she pointed out again. “You may expect us to believe it was a way for you to escape for a few hours mentally as you built it, but you still designed it to hold significant power. Why?”

Tony shrugged. He didn’t know why.

“You always sought to improve the suits with each one you built,” noted Pepper quietly. “This is just your way of improving what you have now.”

They were right but he didn’t want to admit it.

“You want to kill him, don’t you?” suggested Gamora.

“As much as I want to kill you, yes,” he replied. “I’m only holding back to hear what you have to say.”

“Tony… I know I failed you.”

“You did. You should have left me floating in space. It would have been kinder than ensuring I survived. My suffering is on your decision to convince your father to save me,” he responded, his anger clearly showing through in his voice.

“It was a mistake but I really do believe you are our only chance of stopping Thanos for good. Your Arc Reactor is the key to everything. I know it is. And your suit as well. If you helped us, if you stayed, then I think we can all be free of his influence.”

“You don’t need me for the Arc Reactor technology,” he said quietly.

“You erased it from the systems,” interrupted Pepper. “Only you have the knowledge of how to use the element.”

Tony chuckled. “You didn’t even check, did you?”

Her eyebrows crinkled in confusion.

“You never erased the data!” gasped Gamora.

Tony shook his head slowly. “No, I never did. I took what I needed to. I erased it from the SI servers but I also instructed JARVIS to keep a back-up on his own servers. The chip I inserted didn’t erase everything. It had instructions on it for JARVIS to follow. Everything should be back at my old house. Any person who has any interest in renewable energy should be able to grasp the basics of Arc Reactor technology and be able to replicate any source of energy. You do not need me for this.”
“Thanos is moving now, Tony. He’s got half of the Infinity Stones. If we have to leave someone else to learn and understand Arc Reactor technology in such a short space of time, we will fall. It has to be you,” urged Gamora.

“Only if I decide to help you,” he ended.

“Yes,” she admitted. “We’d like you to. Even if we fail, you’ll still get your wish. If you want to die after that, we can give it to you. You may even die fighting Thanos. Any death is better than being blown to pieces or feel the pain of shrapnel tearing your heart apart.”

Gamora did have a point. He didn’t want to die a painful death or take others out with him. He just wanted to go peacefully, to a place where he could finally rest after his labours.

“We’ll leave you to decide what to do,” said Gamora quietly. “Whatever you decide, we’ll support you.”

Tony was silent, watching Gamora and Pepper begin to leave the room he was being held in. Once Pepper had exited, Tony reached out and grabbed Gamora by the wrist.

She didn’t fight his grip, only allowed him to pull her back.

“Do you really think I have the will to wield the stones?”

Gamora met his eyes, a sadness reflecting within her orbs. “I think you have the will to do whatever you desire, whether it is to kill yourself or help us. Only you truly know why you began to build that suit. No matter how much you deny it, Tony, I know you want to fight him. I may have brought you to him, but Thanos was the one who orchestrated your suffering. In the end, it all comes down to him.”

It was in that moment that Tony knew what he was going to decide.

He wanted to die but he didn’t want to leave the universe to deal with Thanos on its own.

He had yet to let go of Gamora’s arm.

“I think you already know what my answer will be,” he noted.

She nodded, the movement barely noticeable.

For the first time in a long while, Tony felt some semblance of peace. He had made a decision that not only impacted himself but others too, a luxury that had been stripped from him for years.

It felt good to be able to make those crucial decisions once again.

He would fight.

**To be continued...**

Chapter End Notes

Tony still desires to die, but he isn't so selfish that he will take the easy option. I felt Pepper was the best one to talk to Tony about his choices. They have quite a shared
history, something that the other Avengers lack. They also know Tony may reciprocate more with Pepper than either of them. She would prefer to be with Happy but she does understand why its important for Tony to be with them.

The next update will either be Wednesday 5th September or Monday 10th September. It all depends on how much I get written this weekend as to whether I update again next week.

Until then,

the-writer1988
Part 5: Chapter 2 - The Surgery

Chapter Summary

Tony has surgery to remove the chip in his brain...

Chapter Notes

I decided to update today even though the next chapter isn't finished yet so there may be a slight delay in updating, unless I manage to get it finished in the next few days. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART FIVE
THE REVENGE OF TONY STARK

Chapter Two
The Surgery

“Are you sure you wish to do this, Stark?” the Wizard pierced him with a strong gaze. “It is dangerous surgery. There are many risks involved, especially since the chip has been inserted into your frontal lobe.” The schematics of Tony’s brain was revolving in the air between them. A little red dot signified where the detonator chip had been placed.

It was within his frontal lobe, deep enough to be a problem removing and potentially causing a lot of damage if removal wasn’t carried out with precision. Despite being a former neurosurgeon, Doctor Strange wasn’t too comfortable with fiddling with an alien device that had been inserted inside a human’s brain.

And Tony had been enhanced. Who knew what other surprises lay in store?

“It would be much simpler if the chip remained in place and the signal continued to jam it.”

Tony folded his arms across his chest. “We cannot take the risk. He could subvert the signal and use it against us. He has the Reality Stone. He could twist Reality and make the chip detonate at any time. I’ve agreed to help the Avengers. Keeping me alive is apparently important. So, we need to take the risk.”

“I could kill you.” Strange was adamant for Tony to understand the risks.

Trouble was, he already knew them. “I survived the original surgery. I was awake when they forced the chip inside my brain. I knew exactly what it was before they sliced my skin open, sawed my skull and pushed it into my frontal lobe. I saw everything and I prayed they’d mess up and kill me in the process. They didn’t.”

“If I fail at removing the chip, you will lose everything. Emotion, problem solving, memory, language, judgement, sexuality, your personality… your ability to communicate… Everything that
makes you, you will be gone. Taken from you in a single small movement that I could make. I
cannot have that on my conscience, Stark.” Strange continued to look at him, attempting to make him
feel uncomfortable, despite Tony’s continual insistence for him to carry out the surgery. “I cannot be
responsible for undoing you.”

“I never thought you would be one to turn down a challenge. Best neurosurgeon on the planet? Your
reputation speaks very highly of you,” scoured Tony.

“I used to hold that title until I had an accident which prevented my hands from ever carrying out any
form of surgery again. It was luck I discovered a new path,” replied Strange, sounding annoyed and
frustrated.

Tony took a deep breath. “Look, I know what the risks are. I know the chances of surviving this type
of surgery is less than ten percent but we need to try. I cannot be a ticking time bomb nor be
responsible for the deaths of other people if Thanos decides to push the button! I know we could
triger the chip in the surgery and I’d still be blown to pieces… but whilst it is in my head, Thanos
has a way to control me. And I know I’d turn back to his side if he threatened to use it against me.
We need to try to remove it. Not for my sake but for everyone else.”

Strange fixed Tony with a glare. “Alright Stark, we’ll try it your way. But I will require assistance
from elsewhere to be able to achieve your desire.”

Tony had already realised that. “Fine. Just as long as I have this chip out. That is all I am concerned
about right now.”

Whilst Doctor Strange dealt with the finer points for Tony’s surgery, Tony decided to visit Happy.
Tony was no longer constrained to his cell, not now he’d decided to help the Avengers. They’d
bought him back to the Avenger’s compound where he could attempt to re-familiarise himself with
the world though Tony didn’t really want to survive so he saw no reason why he should try to
integrate himself back into the human world.

He’d seen too much in the years he had been gone.

Happy had been transferred back to the facility, especially once it had become clear there was
nothing the doctors could do for him. Pepper had wanted to say goodbye to him but since Tony’s
capture, it had been deemed too dangerous for her to leave the facility, so Happy had been brought to
her. Pepper has given permission for surgery to be attempted, however when they had delved in to
Happy’s chest cavity they had found the damage to severe to attempt any sort of repair.

It also didn’t help that rumours that Tony was alive and well were circulating throughout the media.
At the moment the Avengers were not issuing a statement though Tony wondered if it might be wise
to. But he wasn’t in charge and didn’t feel it was his place to make any suggestions.

Pepper was sitting beside Happy’s bed, her head resting by his arm and both her arms clutching his
left hand. She had been crying however raised her head when Tony entered.

“Hi…” he said, feeling a bit awkward. Happy was in this position because of him. “I’m not sure if I
should really be here…”

“Happy would want you to be,” she replied quietly.

“If it wasn’t…”
She stopped him before he could finish his sentence. “Don’t you dare say this is your fault. Everything that has happened to you has not been your fault.”

“I made the choice to take the nuke through the wormhole,” he pointed out.

“You were the only one who could,” she replied. “But they should have waited for you to fall back through… A few seconds more and you would have come home to me.”

“You and Happy would never have…”

“Tony… I love Happy, I really do. He’s made me very happy in the years you were gone. I will not forget him. There is nothing they can do for him. I’m going to lose him.” Tears fell from Pepper’s eyes.

Tony moved his gaze to his friend, laying still on the bed, unaware of what was happening around him. He never thought the first time he’d see one of his friends again would be on their deathbed. “How long?”

Pepper glanced at the machinery Happy was connected to. “When I’m ready. I don’t think I will be able to… make that choice,” she said quietly.

“Have you spoken to Wakanda?” he asked. He knew Strange was discussing Tony’s surgery with that secretive country, though it had started to make contact with the rest of the world, surprising everyone with how advance it was and how far there technology had come in the intervening years. That country was Tony’s only option of surviving the surgery he required.

Pepper shook her head. “No… Why?”

“Don’t turn off Happy’s ventilator just yet. I think Wakanda may be able to help where our doctors cannot,” explained Tony. He didn’t know much about the country, only what Strange had informed him of. “They’ve apparently agreed to help me… With their advanced technology, they should be able to help Happy.”

“I’ll give it a go… I’ll speak to T’Challa. Will he be returning with you to Wakanda?” she asked softly.

Tony shrugged. He really did not know. “I think so? I’m not really sure…” He wanted to reach for her hand. “Pepper… I don’t want you to lose him like you’ve lost me.”

She cocked her head to the side. “I haven’t lost you.”

Tony wanted to rectify her opinion on the matter, but with Happy dying he didn’t have the heart to inform her that she had lost him the moment he went through the wormhole. There was no return to the Tony Stark that Pepper had fallen in love with all those years ago.

That Tony had died.

A new one had taken his place.

In time Pepper would understand this.

But for now, he’d let her believe she had never lost him.

- - - - -

Tony, along with Doctor Strange, T’Challa and Gamora travelled to Wakanda the following day.
Happy was to be transferred as well, as T’Challa had negotiated with his father and permission had been granted for both Tony and Happy to enter the country. Happy needed a specialised jet which Wakanda were sending. Both he and Pepper would arrive a few hours after Tony’s surgery had already begun.

Pepper hadn’t wanted him to go. It was more that she was afraid this would be the last time she saw Tony alive. But they needed the chip out and so the surgery had to happen, regardless of the consequences.

Tony had left instructions if he was brain damaged from the surgery, then they had to end his life. He didn’t want to live like a zombie, relying on other people for their help for even just the simplest of tasks. He hoped they would follow his wishes.

Gamora had reassured Tony that she wouldn’t allow him to die before he could take out Thanos. Tony wasn’t sure how relieved he should feel by that notion. She was coming along to Wakanda because she had the knowledge of how to remove the implant without causing severe damage to the brain. She would work alongside the Wakandan surgeons to ensure Tony’s survival from such a risky surgery.

Despite Tony’s resolve to fight with the Avengers, he didn’t feel it would be a total loss if the surgery wasn’t successful. Either way he’d achieve his dream of death. He’d be at peace and that was what he craved most of all.

When they arrived in the secretive country, Tony, Dr Strange and Gamora were escorted to the laboratory of Shuri, T’Challa’s younger sister. It had been decided, that because of Gamora’s alien status, and Tony’s status as an unknown, neither of them would be introduced to T’Challa’s father, who was the current ruler, though he had been passing on duties to his son, in preparation for him to take over the throne.

Shuri’s laboratory reminded Tony of his workshop, only hers was far more advanced. Holographic designs were in place everywhere and there were other designers working on various projects throughout the lab.

Shuri came bounding up to greet them, a big smile on her face and her eyes shining brightly. Her hair was tied back in a bun and she wore loose-fitting trousers and a tank-top. It wasn’t exactly attire fit for a princess. She didn’t seem the type to care either way.

“Tony Stark,” she smiled, reaching out to shake his hand. “I never thought I would ever have the chance to meet you. I’ve followed your work for years.”

He supposed she meant up until he had gone through the wormhole.

“Your Arc Reactor technology is revolutionary.” She was still holding out her hand for him to shake.

He stepped back. “Not to be rude or anything, but I don’t like being touched.” He never had done before his imprisonment but now it was two-fold. He detested anyone touching him without his permission. “But, thanks for the compliment. Based on the advancements that I see here, you are in no need of my Arc Reactor tech.”

She shook her head. “No, Mr Stark, we have our own source of power which has helped our nation advance beyond what it should be. Wakanda was very lucky.”

Tony nodded his head. Wakanda was only just opening up its borders. A lot of its secrets were still to be unveiled and they were doing so in stages so as not to shock the world in one go. They felt it
would better to bring things out slowly instead all at once. “And you believe your surgeons are
capable of removing this chip from my head without killing everyone?”

Shuri exchanged a glance with her brother. “It’s tricky, Mr Stark, however with our 3D and 4D
imaging techniques, it should be possible to remove it without any significant harm to yourself or
anyone else.”

“It can be triggered and you’d be dead within seconds,” stated Gamora, her voice hard and firm.
“We may have employed a jammer to block the detonation signal but it will not stop you from setting
it off if your surgeons make one wrong move.”

“Our surgeons are the best in the world. They benefit from advanced technology,” defended Shuri.
She wasn’t fazed about meeting an alien woman. Granted, T’Challa had warned them they were
bringing an alien female with them.

Gamora’s arms folded across her chest. “We’ll see.”

“As long as we all co-operate together, Stark should be free of the chip by the end of the day,”
interrupted Strange. “Time is short. I suggest we get this over with.”

If there was anything Tony liked about Doctor Strange, it was the fact he was honest and didn’t play
around. He never sought to disguise the truth.

Shuri nodded. “Very well. Mr Stark, this way if you please.”

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Tony lay on an operating table. Both Doctor Strange and Gamora were inside the operating theatre,
wearing protective equipment. Both of them would be supervising the removal of the chip. Two of
Wakanda’s top surgeons had scrubbed up and were ready to begin the operation. Everyone knew the
risks.

Those in the theatre had already prepared themselves if they were to die, if one wrong move set off
the chip. It was courageous of the surgeons still to agree to operate considering the high risk of death
was involved, not just for Tony but for them as well. However they all remained positive that it
wouldn’t come to that.

Their only saving grace would be Doctor Strange who could summon an energy shield to hopefully
protect everyone in the room if the chip was set off. But that depended on how quickly Strange could
conjure it. He could have the shield up now however doing so would limit everyone’s movement
within the theatre and prevent Strange from following the procedure accurately enough to help.

They were going to put Tony to sleep for the surgery. If he was to die, at least he wouldn’t know
about it. At least he wouldn’t have any chance to feel guilty if it came to it, seconds before it
happened.

“Mr Stark,” the anaesthetist said, leaning down over him. “We’re putting you to sleep now.”

He nodded.

These could very well be his last waking moments.

He wanted his last thought to be of Pepper.

Her face swam into view.
And he felt the drug pull him into oblivion.

Steve sat at the head of the table, casting his gaze around at everyone there. It wasn’t just the Avengers, it was their honorary members as well, as one member of the Guardians of the Galaxy.

Steve had wanted to go with Tony. He hadn’t really had the chance to speak to him since they’d freed him. He still had so much he wanted to say to Tony, yet he had not been given the chance to do so.

The idea of the surgery had happened so fast Steve had been busy elsewhere. Likewise with Rhodey, who had been involved with the government and the military and hadn’t even seen Tony since his capture either and Steve knew the other wanted to. Rhodey and Tony had been friends for years. Tony had been adamant about getting the chip removed before he was in the room with the full continent of Avengers. Nothing Steve could say to Gamora or Doctor Strange could dissuade them otherwise.

It was now a waiting game to learn of Tony’s fate.

Happy and Pepper were on their way to Wakanda as well, accompanied by a full continent of Wakandan guards, as well as by Drax, Mantis, Rocket and Groot. This left Quill to be the sole negotiator for the Guardians. They’d only agreed to escort and protect Pepper because Gamora had put her foot down, otherwise they would not have done so.

“Do we even have a plan as to what we are going to be doing next?” asked Sam Wilson. Sam was a friend of Steve’s and they were quite close, having gone on several missions together and proved quite a successful combination.

“Gamora says Thanos will continue to hassle the Asgardians. I do not think it will be long before he comes to Terra himself,” said Quill, rather pompously.

Terra was going to be difficult getting used to. It was strange that the planet to them was known as Earth and yet to others across the universe it was referred to as Terra. Steve would just have to remember he meant Earth.

“Gamora also said he may come for her too,” said Natasha. “She wasn’t very forthcoming about it.”

Quill went stiff. “She is his adopted daughter. I think he just wants her back.”

“Or she knows where the Soul Stone is,” interrupted Loki, who sat with Thor at the other side of the table.

“I will not confirm anything,” stated Quill.

Steve felt like strangling the man.

“I know she’s hiding something,” continued Loki. “At first I thought it was something to do with Stark, but now I believe it is something more to do with the stones. Do not confirm if you cannot. Thanos will come for me as well. He knows I’ve betrayed him. By giving you Stark, it has shown my hand and my true loyalties. I am expecting him to come for me. I can buy you time but not much. Thanos is likely to attack the Asgardian encampment at first. It’s less defended and—”

“Our people are well defended!”
“Brother, let me finish.” Loki rolled his eyes at Thor’s interruption. “Thanos has three Infinity Stones in his possession. If he so wishes, he could quite easily obtain the two Earth-bound ones with ease. I suspect after my betrayal, he will come himself. He was using Stark but now he’s lost him. He may also wish to reacquire Stark.”

“And it is important to protect him if he really is the key to all of this,” mused Steve. “We cannot allow Tony to fall into enemy hands again.”

“No,” agreed Loki. “But Stark will easily return to Thanos’ side if those he loves are endangered. Keep his woman safe and you’ll keep him on your side. The moment she is in danger, he will switch.” He cast his gaze around the room. “I could return to Thanos’ side myself. I suspect he will not be so lenient with me this time.”

Steve watched as Thor touched his brother’s arm.

“You’ve done more than your fair share. Do not risk your life.”

Clint rolled his eyes. The archer hadn’t forgiven the God for mind-controlling him years ago.

Natasha leaned across the table. “What will be our next step?”

Steve hated having to do this. “Loki, what shall we do?”

The God smirked. “Protect the Mind Stone in the Asgardian encampment. Thanos will come for that one next. I’m certain of it.”

---

When Tony woke, the first thing he became aware of was intense pain in his head. “Ow.” He could barely keep his eyes open, let alone lift his head to be able to see where he was.

“Shh, just rest, Mr Stark. Your surgery was successful,” the surprising youthful voice soothed him.

“Happy?” he slurred.

“He’s currently in surgery, Mr Stark. Sleep and when you next wake, you’ll have your answers.”

The sensation of something cold rushed up his arm. He knew they were drugging him again but he didn’t fight it. He was falling, returning to the cool blackness of sleep, succumbing to a place where he could feel no pain or worry about the future.

He slept.

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Tony survived the surgery! Hooray! Well, that was a given...

Regarding T’Challa and Wakanda. Civil War didn’t happen so his father is still alive and still King of Wakanda in this story. T’Challa still dons the suit though.

Pepper really doesn't want to lose Tony or Happy at all...
I hope to update again next week. If I do it will be Tuesday 11th September though it is more likely to be the following week as I'd like to have a few chapters to post again.

Until next time...

the-writer1988
Chapter Summary

A loss is suffered...

Chapter Notes

**WARNING:** Character death in this chapter.

I had hoped to update last week but it wasn't to be. Apologies for that!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**PART FIVE**
**THE REVENGE OF TONY STARK**

**Chapter Three**
**The Departure**

When he next came to, Gamora was sitting beside his bed.

“Guess I survived then…” he managed, his throat sore from lack of fluids.

“You did,” she smiled at him.

“Happy? Pepper?” he asked. Even in his foggy brain, he remembered Happy had been transferred to Wakanda as well for pioneering surgery which would hopefully save his life.

Gamora was hesitant to speak at first. “It’s not looking good.”

Tony closed his eyes. His head ached and it felt like his brain had been sliced open (it had). “He has to live…” he whispered quietly.

She squeezed his hand. “They are doing everything they can.”

Unconsciousness claimed him once again.

---

Pepper was waiting with Shuri, anxiety present in her stomach. She couldn’t eat or drink, despite Shiri continuing to pester her. Happy’s surgery was a lot more complex than Tony’s had been.

The chip in Tony’s head hadn’t been that deep in his brain. In fact, it hadn’t even been put in his brain. It had been placed on top of it, making removal a lot easier than intended. The scans had given the impression it had been inserted into his frontal lobe but it hadn’t. Tony was now drifting in and out of consciousness as his body fought to wake up from the anaesthetic. As they had anticipated the operation to be longer than it had been, they’d given him a lot of anaesthetic to knock him out for
over half a day, and despite Tony’s enhancements, his body was struggling to counteract against the powerful drug and bring him back to the waking world.

Happy had been in surgery for six hours already.

“He’s not going to make it,” whispered Pepper, tears welling in her eyes. She didn’t want to have finally been reunited with Tony, only to lose Happy. It wouldn’t be fair.

“Pepper…” calmed Shuri, “they haven’t given up yet. Do not lose hope.”

Pepper swallowed. She was finding it difficult to keep up faith. The longer Happy was in surgery and the less she knew… It only increased her fear she was about to lose him. “Tony may have survived, but he doesn’t want to be a part of this world. I can’t lose them both. I don’t want to lose either.”

“How long have you known Happy?” asked Shuri, quietly.

Pepper sniffed. “Years. Ever since I started working for Tony.” She could still remember her first meeting with Tony and how she had inadvertently gained a promotion. “I pepper-sprayed him.”

Shuri raised her eyebrows. “You did what?”

“I pepper-sprayed Happy. It’s how I got my nickname,” replied Pepper. She could still remember that day with clarity.

She’d been denied by her line manager to report the mathematical error to their superior. Apparently Tony Stark was never wrong.

Well, Pepper knew he was and if the error wasn’t corrected, the company would stand to lose millions. Pretending to need to use the ladies, Pepper grabbed the aforementioned paperwork and marched out of the office, down the corridor, out into the foyer, crossed through it and up the broad stairs.

She then marched along the corridor, which looked out onto the various production factories which adjoined to the main building, heading towards the senior offices. She turned right at an intersection towards the CEO’s office where she was met by a young girl with short blonde hair, a small nose and thin lips. Her eyes were bright blue. She stood up as Pepper approached, showing she wore a very short skirt and a thin, revealing shirt.

Pepper felt disgusted at the audacity of the CEO’s personal assistant, but then, everyone knew Tony Stark’s reputation. He had slept with every one of his PA’s so far. Each time he did, it was a nightmare for human resources who always had to relocate the PA to another part of the company or let them go, whilst finding a suitable replacement. Any PA of Stark’s barely lasted six months.

It was a job Pepper would never want.

“How may I help you?”

“I need to see Mr Stark,” stated Pepper.

“Have you got an appointment?” the girl asked, checking the diary on her desk.

“No.”

“Then you will need to make an appointment to see him. Mr Stark is a very busy man. His next
Pepper rolled her eyes. This wouldn’t take long. “By next Tuesday the company will have lost millions of dollars if Mr Stark doesn’t see this today!”

The girl laughed. “I’m sorry, but are you questioning Mr Stark’s mathematics? He doesn’t make any mistakes. To question him, is to question the company itself.”

Pepper resisted the urge to shout. “I work in the finance department. I know a mathematical error when I see one. It is urgent I rectify this.”

“And I told you there is no appointment available,” the girl retorted.

Pepper grounded her teeth together. “Then I won’t leave until I see him.” She was going to stand her ground, no matter what.

The girl sighed. Her hand moved underneath her desk and Pepper knew she had called for security. It barely took thirty seconds for two security men to arrive.

“Please step away from the desk, ma’am,” the shorter of the two asked. He had brown hair and soft brown eyes. He was a bigger build then the other security guard who was tall and broad. The badge on the man’s lapel introduced him as ‘Happy Hogan – Personal Security’. The taller guard had a badge identifying himself as ‘Neil Wallace – Head of Security’.

“I just need to see Mr Stark for a few minutes,” explained Pepper. “It won’t take long.”

The girl stepped out from her desk. “I explained to Miss Potts,” she eyed her name badge, “that Mr Stark has no availability today and to come back on Tuesday when she has an appointment. She refused and decided to stay here. She wasn’t going to leave.”

“If I do not see Mr Stark then the company will lose money. By the time I have my appointment, it will be too late!”

The taller of the security guards stepped forward. “Look, rules are rules. We cannot allow you in to see Mr Stark. He is a very busy man.”

“Then I’ll wait for him out here. I am not taking the blame for the company losing money. I’m not stupid! I know what happens if this type of loss was identified after it happens. It wouldn’t be your job on the line,” she pointed at the PA and the two security guards, “it would be mine! I’m not prepared to risk my job because Mr Stark does not make mistakes. He is human, like everyone else. He may be brilliant but he is not infallible to mistakes.”

The one named Happy stepped forward, reaching for her. “Ma’am, we cannot allow you in or to see Mr Stark.”

“Fine.” Pepper gritted her teeth. If they wouldn’t let her in, she’d have to force her way in. She was angry about this enough that she was willing to put her job on the line to ensure the huge amount of money they could lose did not happen. If it did, as one of the last people to rubber-stamp the document, she’d be the most likely to get fired.

As he reached out for her, Pepper pushed past him, making a move for the door, when one of the guards grabbed her arm and pulled her back. “Get off me!” She reached into her pocket, pulled out a spray bottle and pressed down on the top. A mist ejected from the top, spraying right into the eyes of Happy Hogan, who leapt back, coughing and spluttering.
She made her move and reached the door to the office, yanked it open –

Only to be pulled back by the other guard who immobilised her spraying hand and physically dragged her away from the door.

“Let go of me!” she shouted angrily.

“What is going on here?” a smooth, rather amused voice said.

Pepper stopped her struggles and saw Tony Stark standing in the doorway of his office, watching the commotion.

His PA ran forwards. “My apologies, Mr Stark, she wouldn’t take no for an answer.”

“I always have time for lovely ladies.” His eyes ran up Pepper’s body. “You should have let her in.”

Oh, he really was a playboy.

“Let her go, Mr Wallace,” said Tony. He turned his attention to Happy. “What she get you with?”

“Pepper spray.” Happy’s eyes were red.

“Now why would you be carrying that around with you?”

Pepper pursed her lips. “For protection.”

“You’re feisty. I like that.” grinned Stark. “Now, why don’t you enter my office and we’ll see what this is all about.”

“Sir, are you sure that is wise? She assaulted one of us,” said Wallace.

Tony chuckled. “Very sure. This could have been avoided if you’d just let her in, in the first place.”

He glanced at his PA. “You know if it is something important to allow admittance to people. Not everyone has to have an appointment.”

The girl blushed in embarrassment.

Feeling a bit unsure, Pepper followed Tony into the office. It was quite large with an alcohol bar on one side and filing cabinets in the other. His desk was situated close to the window, with his back to the outside world.

Tony sat on his chair. “So, Pepper, tell me what brings you here today.”

“Virginia,” she corrected.

“I’m sorry?”

“Virginia, that’s my name,” she clarified.

“ Nope, it’s Pepper. You look like a Pepper, therefore you shall be Pepper.”

She didn’t feel like arguing with him on this. At least she was able to present his mistake to him in person, though it was likely since she had attacked one of his guards, that she would lose her job anyway.
“You’ve made a mathematical error,” she explained. “The numbers do not work out. The company could lose millions.” She passed him the folder.

It didn’t take long for Tony to spot his mistake. “I will edit this and get a new copy sent out. I think you’re the first to question me.”

Pepper blushed. “I knew if I let the mistake pass, as a lot of other people wanted me to do, then I would have been the one to take the fall for it. I could have lost my job over this. In fact…” She moved her eyes to the door. She’d just assaulted someone.

“Happy won’t press charges.”

“How do you know?” she questioned.

“I’m his boss. This whole thing could have been averted if Miss –” He couldn’t seem to remember his PA’s name. “- Richardson hadn’t decided you couldn’t enter without an appointment.”

Pepper nodded, feeling stunned at her good fortune. “Thank you, Mr Stark.”

“You’re welcome, Miss Potts,” he replied, almost sounding genuine but she detected the flirty tone in his voice.

She walked out of his office, spotting Happy on the way out. She moved over to him. “Sorry about that.”

He was still dabbing his eyes with a handkerchief. “No, that’s fine. Don’t worry about it.”

“Are you sure?” She was surprised.

“Look, you’ve done something for Mr Stark. He won’t want me pressing charges. And if it is something urgent you need to speak to Mr Stark about, Miss Ritch should have let you pass,” he explained.

She was taken back.

“You won’t be fired. Trust me.” Happy smiled.

Pepper nodded her thanks and left.

“And then the very next day I got a call from human resources,” continued Pepper. “I was informed they needed to see me. I went to the meeting and I was offered the position of Tony Stark’s PA. He’d asked for me personally. Turns out, his current PA had made quite a few misjudgements in her time there and he let her go, or had her moved to another department.”

“And it was a job you didn’t want to do?” queried Shuri.

“Knowing Tony’s reputation, becoming his PA would be a daily battle. But, oddly, Tony never made any advances towards me. Well, he did try once or twice but he soon stopped when I made sure I wouldn’t be a pushover. Happy and I’s friendship grew. We were a good team together, all three of us, and Rhodey when he was around, he slotted in nicely. Then when Tony went missing after New York, he became a constant companion for me. Without Happy, I don’t think I would have ever recovered from that.” Pepper smiled sadly. “Happy always had a little crush on me but kept it quiet. He knew Tony liked me and was very supportive of us when we got together. A lesser man would have walked away but Happy stuck around.”
Shuri nodded slowly. “He really cared for you then.”

“He did. Happy was just as upset as I was about Tony… He always seemed the stronger of us two… He helped me keep the company running, helped steer me in the right direction. I could easily have fallen into depression.” She had never told anyone this before. “I nearly did.” She paused, glancing at Shuri. “I could fight this Thanos too, if I really wanted to.”

“How?”

“Extremis,” replied Pepper. She knew the chemical was banned and the knowledge of it was classified but Wakanda was extremely advanced. It was likely they knew of its existence.

“I’ve heard of it,” admitted Shuri. “It made people into bombs.”

“In a way. That only happened if the host body didn’t accept it,” clarified Pepper. “I had it forced on me… I survived. I’m not going to explode… but… I had Extremis deactivated. It’s still in me but I cannot benefit from the advantages it gave me. I could have it activated again and use it to fight alongside the Avengers.”

Shuri raised her eyebrows. “Do you want to?”

“I’m not sure. I think I’ll know once I know about Happy. If he can’t survive and Tony does not want to live, why shouldn’t I go out fighting too?” It wasn’t a serious thought but it was something worth considering. Her whole life had been torn apart in the space of a few days. She didn’t know what to do. She had Extremis. It would be easy to reactivate it, ensure she could still access the powers she had.

The biggest question of all was: could she really sit back and wait, knowing she had the capacity and the abilities to help out?

---

When Tony woke again, Gamora was still there, sitting by his bedside, waiting for him to wake.

“Hi,” she said, as he fought through the pull.

“Is it… gone?” he asked.

“Yes. The chip is gone. Destroyed. Thanos cannot use you against us now,” she replied quietly.

Mild disappointment flooded through him. He wouldn’t have been disappointed if he had died. But he was still here.

His head wasn’t hurting as much as it had been. It wasn’t fogged over either. Carefully he raised his head as Gamora brought a glass of water over to him. Taking the glass, he sipped carefully, enjoying the soothe sensation of water coursing down his throat.

“Better?” she asked.

He shrugged. “A bit.” Moving his hand up to his forehead he felt for the scar tissue. He seemed surprised when he didn’t feel any new incision there.

“They opened the original scar. Wakanda has a lot of marvellous technology. They were able to avoid scarring you more.”

“It wouldn’t have mattered,” he answered. “I have too many scars… What does one more mean?”
Gamora’s mouth twitches. The fact his body was littered with scars was her fault.

“Happy?” he asked suddenly.

Gamora bit her lip.

Tony knew the answer just by the expression on her face and her hesitation to answer.

“I’m sorry.”

Anger coursed through him like never before. Wrenching the sheets off of him, he leapt out of bed, ignoring the sudden stabbing pains in his head. “I want to see him. I need to see his body.” He didn’t want to believe he was dead.

“Tony… Happy is still alive.”

He turned towards her, mouth opening in protest, to demand why she had sought to deceive him.

“Then why did you insinuate he was dead?”

“I was going to continue,” she replied quietly. “The surgeons tried their best to repair the damage in his chest… But the work is too complicated. Even their advanced technology cannot save his life. He’s on life support. Pepper is with him.”

Tony swallowed, his throat dry.

“She’s waiting for you.”

Tony followed her.

---

Pepper’s eyes were red. She’d been crying. She sat beside her lover.

Tony paused in the doorway to Happy’s room. His friend lay on the bed, unconscious and kept alive by life support.

Pepper turned her head slowly. “Tony…”

He moved forward, unsure of how to proceed. “Pepper…” He reached out but drew back, feeling uncomfortable with the physical touch. “I’m sorry.”

She sniffed. “Not your fault.”

It was. Pepper just didn’t know how it could be.

“Is there anything…?”

She shook her head, “No. I’ve tried everything. Not even Wakandan technology can help him. The damage in his chest is too extensive. He was shot in the stomach. The acid spilled out and started to eat away his insides… And the other shot ricocheted up close to his heart. Because of where he was struck, the heart is now compressed as he has bleeding around his heart and it is restricting his beats, slowly killing him. The damage is too severe to heal.”

Tony felt sick. What a horrible way to die.

“Happy hasn’t woken since the injury. At least he doesn’t know, it’s the only consolation I have,”
sniffed Pepper. “But… now I have to make a choice. He can either stay on life support until we can find something to help him, or switch it off…” Tears rolled down her cheeks. “I don’t know what to do! I can’t lose both of you!”

Stunned, Tony felt shame coursing through him. Pepper was going to lose both him and Happy in a short space of time. He couldn’t feel guilty about that, not after what he had been through.

“Pepper…” he said slowly.

“What should I do?”

He bit his lip. “Sometimes we have to learn how to live without the ones we love. It’s hard. And, god, these last six years has been so difficult. Not just for me, but for you too. I spent years with Happy as my driver and bodyguard, but you know him better than I ever could. You’ve shared something with him that I can never understand. What would he want?”

There was silence between them.

Tony watched the rise and fall of Happy’s chest. It wasn’t as deep as breaths should be; his injuries were too significant for him to be able to breathe properly, even with life support on. The machines were effectively breathing for him.

Pepper closed her eyes, bowing her head, clutching Happy’s hand tighter. “He would want me to live my life. He wouldn’t want to live like this. But I’m not sure I can say turn it off… I love him.”

“Pepper…” Tony didn’t know what to say, standing there, seeing the life of a friend drain away.

“I know I have to let him go,” she sniffed. “But could you make that choice? To end someone’s life?”

Pepper really didn’t know or understand what Tony had been doing the last few years. He had made the conscious choice to end people’s lives. He was an Enforcer of Thanos, tasked with bringing peace to the universe. He just hadn’t been able to carry out the orders on people he knew. But he couldn’t tell her that either.

He stayed silent, unable to comment.

“He wouldn’t want to suffer,” she said quietly. “He’d want me to make the right choice for him. The longer he is left like this, the more damage there will be. Even if there was a chance to heal him later on… It would be more difficult just by leaving him in this state. They drained the fluid around his heart but without something to heal it…”

“It will keep on returning,” finished Tony. He knew the stakes, knew what was happening to Happy’s body.

“I have to give them permission, don’t I?” Pepper asked, looking at him with tear-stained eyes

Tony bowed his head and very reluctantly, nodded.

There wasn’t anything they could do for Happy, unless they had a miracle which was unlikely to happen.

Pepper had run out of options.

All she had was the most difficult choice facing her.
And Tony didn’t envy her one bit.

---

Pepper asked him to stay.

So he did.

The doctors switched off the life support machine at 15:46.

Happy breathed his last, struggling breath at 15:49.

---

They returned to the United States a day later, with Happy’s body so he could receive a proper burial. Happy hadn’t had any other family to notify, having lost his parents years ago. Only Pepper’s parents had been notified of his death. They had wanted to come to the burial Pepper had planned to pay their respects to the man who had made their daughter happy after losing Tony, but she had asked them not to, well aware of the threat against her and not wishing to put her parents in harm’s way.

It still wasn’t common knowledge Tony was alive though rumours persisted on the news and the press. The Avengers were not sure how to handle the situation. Rhodey was still with the United States Government, organising a press release on what to release to the public. It was only top government officials that knew of Tony’s survival and the fact he had been obtained by the Avengers.

There was also the problem of the Guardian’s spaceship, sitting on the helipad of the Avenger’s facility, which had been photographed and videoed on the news. So far, the speculation was this was a new form of aircraft invented by the scientists of Stark Industries but the deception wouldn’t hold for long, especially with two alien attacks in the space of a few days.

Something had to give.

Eventually it did.

---

WHITE HOUSE ANNOUNCEMENT
RE: The Avengers Statement
in conjunction with the CIA and World Security Council

There have been multiple attacks in recent days, the foremost being the attack on Stark Industries, in which multiple employees were murdered. The attack was carried out by an extra-terrestrial alien force, which is currently sitting up above the Earth’s orbit.

The Avengers have responded to both attacks, thereby preventing further injuries to the population. A third attack on the Asgardian refugees was also halted before it had begun.

The Avengers will continue to counteract the threat this force holds.

Rumours persist of a new spacecraft, created by Stark Industries technicians, sitting on the landing pad of the Avengers Facility. They wish to confirm Thor Odinson has brought allies with him to aid the Earth. They are not hostile life-forms and will work with the Avengers to
counteract this threat.

We would also like to respond to the rumours within the media regarding Anthony Edward Stark, formally CEO of Stark Industries, prior to missing in action during the Battle of New York in May 2012. He is currently detained in a secure location, having become a prisoner of war, following his loss after the battle. He was captured by the Avengers when the Asgardian Encampment was attacked a few days ago.

Mr Stark has spent the last six years under duress with the advancing force. The Avengers wish to make it known Mr Stark is not responsible for his actions during the attack on Stark Industries and will work with the relevant authorities once this crisis has passed, to ensure Mr Stark is granted access to the medical treatment and help he deserves.

Tony would have preferred his name to have been left out of the statement.

Unfortunately, his appearance at Stark Industries prevented him from being protected. He wouldn’t need the Avengers or Governments help either. He was going to die after all. But no one really needed to know that.

As a result of the press release, the outskirts of the Avengers Compound were now subject to a group of paparazzi, desperate for a sight of Tony or any of the off-world visitors. Thankfully the Avengers were not in a giving mood, not with everything else going on.

They laid Happy to rest in the gardens of the compound, holding a small service for him which all the Avengers attended.

Afterward, Pepper retreated to her room, asking to be left alone so she could process her grief in peace.

Tony and the others banded together, sitting at a large oval table in the communal area, where they could discuss their next course of action. Now that Tony was recovered from his surgery, it was becoming imperative that they act against Thanos sooner rather than later.

The problem was reaching the Titan.

“He will be coming here,” said Gamora. “He prefers for his children to do his bidding, to bring him the stones. He will only enter the fray if he believes he needs to.”

Tony dreaded the day he would face Thanos on the battlefield. He knew what he was capable of. “He sent me to retrieve the Mind Stone from the Asgardian Encampment. He expected me to fail…”

Thor, who had sent Loki back to his people to help protect the stone, spoke up. “There are two stones on Earth. He’ll go for one or the other first.”

“Time is too well protected here,” said Gamora, glancing at Strange, who was reluctantly remaining with the Avengers. “Thanos knows he could easily defeat us but he will be far more prepared if he has possession of the Mind Stone.”

“We need to fortify the compound. Unless we decide to meet Thanos in a place that is more secure,” said Steve.

“There is nowhere on Earth which is safe,” said Tony. “He’ll come and cause maximum destruction.
he can, just to get that stone. No matter where we go he will chase us. We could draw him away and take the Time Stone away from here. We have the means and the facility to do so."

“I cannot leave this planet,” interrupted Dr Strange. “I have other duties here.”

“Then give us the stone,” said Tony. “You can stay and we can take it from here.”

“I will be breaking my oath if I allowed the Time Stone to be taken from this planet. We have protected the stone for years. I will not part with it.” The Doctor’s tone was clear. Clearly, he had already made up his mind.

“Then you are subjecting this planet to war and destruction,” stated Gamora harshly, standing from her chair and leaning across the table towards the wizard. “It could be avoided if you left, even for a short time, or surrendered the Time Stone. You’d get it back as soon as we’ve dealt with this.”

Strange stood slowly from his chair. “I said ‘no’. I’m only here because it is too risky for me to return home. I have vowed to help you, but not leave this planet undefended.”

“Despite the fact you are putting it in danger by remaining here. Not a very good defender, are you?” snapped Tony angrily.

Strange’s lips thinned.

“Enough!” shouted Steve. “This is not helping things! We need to form a cohesive plan of attack and we cannot do that if we argue about semantics all the time!”

“And I thought we were bad at discussing plans,” piped up Rocket, sitting beside Quill, watching the argument unfold, a smirk crossing his feline features.

“Neither of us can agree with one another,” added Natasha. “How are we supposed to save the world if we are not allowed to do it?”

Strange looked ready to argue but then there was a flash of light and Loki appeared, falling right onto the table, coughing and spluttering up blood.

“BROTHER!” Thor shouted.

Tony stared at the god’s battered form. A horrible feeling rose in his stomach.

Loki sat up on the table, shaking the long locks of hair out of his face. His face was black and blue. He’d clearly taken a beating.

“Brother? What are you -? Is everyone safe?” Thor pulled Loki into an awkward hug.

Loki grasped Thor’s arms. “They came. Thanos came, brother.”

Silence echoed around the room.

Tony swallowed. He knew what was coming.

“He took it…” Loki said. “Brother… Heimdell is dead. Thanos has the Mind Stone.”

To be continued...
Yeah, Happy died. I'm sorry? (As did Heimdell but that was off-screen.)

There had to be some consequences in this story. Not everyone can make it out alive. I'm going to warn you in advance that there are more deaths to come.

Happy's death will have a lasting effect on both Tony and Pepper and it will be further explored in following chapters.

Pepper and Extremis - this was explained in an earlier chapter of the fic. Part 1: Chapter 4 - The Years Between. Pepper still has Extremis, if she wants to use it...

I plan to update again in two weeks! :)

Until then,

the-writer1988
Part 5: Chapter 4 - The Sacrifice

Chapter Summary

The Avengers attempt to stop Thanos from gaining another Infinity Stone...

Chapter Notes

First of all, my apologies for not updating a month ago. This chapter took me a long while to write. I’ve also been busy with work and I’ve been ill the last two weeks, of which I am still recovering from it, so a lot of things have been going on which has prevented me from concentrating on writing. I hope this will change soon as I’d like to finish Part 5 before Christmas. We’re in the home stretch...

WARNING: Character death in this chapter. And you may see a similarity to some Infinity War scenes in this chapter too...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

PART FIVE
THE REVENGE OF TONY STARK

Chapter Four
The Sacrifice

“And everyone else?” Thor asked Loki, his voice filled with concerned.

“They live,” replied Loki. “He only killed Heimdell for the stone. He would have killed me but wanted to use me to send you a message.”

“What did he say?” asked Gamora quietly.

“He didn’t say who the message was for,” hesitated Loki. His eyes moved to focus upon Tony. “But I think I know who he intended it to.”

Tony shifted uneasily.

“Thanos’ words were explicit and to the point. He said, ‘I will have what is mine’.” Loki confirmed. “I think he means you, Stark.”

He didn’t respond. He didn’t need to. He was a weapon Thanos had spent years perfecting, turning into his perfect soldier. Tony had been obedient, resourceful, and a risk all at once. Now Thanos was learning he shouldn’t have assumed Tony was as loyal as he believed him to be. He’d had a strong hand on Tony for years – it was only forcing him to harm those he loved had pushed Tony to attempt to fight back.

“It could be a double meaning,” replied Gamora. “Tony may not just be what Thanos requires. There
are other things he seeks which he cannot retrieve through Tony alone.”

“The Infinity Stones?” Thor asked.

Gamora nodded. “He may have used Tony in the past but there is at least one stone he cannot know the location of. The map to it was burnt years ago.”

“So that’s what you know,” stated Loki. “I always thought you knew more than you were letting on.”

“I don’t know where it is though. Burning the map didn’t give me the location.” Gamora snapped back.

“Surely you looked at it?” pressed Steve, clearly looking for something they could use against Thanos.

Gamora pressed her lips together. “No. Thanos may believe I know where it is but I do not. He will never be able to get his hands upon all of the stones, no matter how long he tries to. He will always keep on coming until he dies. For the universe’s sake, we have to kill him to stop a greater threat from emerging.” She moved around the table. “What is pressing is ensuring Thanos does not recapture Tony. Even if he does want me, Thanos will not take kindly to us liberating Tony from his control.”

“I do have more news,” coughed Loki, interrupting Gamora. “He has tasked me, in ensuring I value my own life, in returning Stark to him.”

Clint shook his head. “Wait, if he’s tasked you with bringing in Tony, then his message of ‘I will have what is mine’ cannot be referring to Tony. Why give us the same message twice?”

“To unnerve us,” replied Natasha coldly. “Maniacs tend to mess with their enemies heads, to draw confusion and make us lose concentration.”

“Which he seems to be doing rather well,” added Quill. “As evidenced here.”

“There’s more, isn’t there?” asked Steve, seeing Loki’s expression.

“He has hostages.”

“How do we not know about this?” cried Rhodey. “JARVIS would be alerting us!”

“He has my people, doesn’t he?” Thor said quietly.

“Yes,” Loki confirmed quietly. “He’s using the power and reality stone to contain them. His message is he will begin executing them if his demands are not met. He said those that know shall act. He didn’t give me names.” He cast his eyes around. “He’s expecting Stark to surrender. And to get the Time Stone too. Now he has the Mind Stone, he will focus upon that.”

“I will not be surrendering the stone.” Strange repeated again.

“If we do not act to save the Asgardians, he will turn his attention to the people of Earth,” said Tony quietly. “I’m not going to let him do that.”

“You can’t surrender,” Gamora hastily replied.

“I didn’t say I was,” said Tony, meeting her eyes. “I do not intend to allow myself to become a prisoner again. We have to face him. If he kills all the Asgardians he will move onto the Earth’s
population. I am not willing to risk it. I say we look like we are going to do what he says. Pretend to hand me over; pretend to give him the Time Stone. Get him to believe he is that one bit closer to achieving his goal.”

“And how will that help us?” asked Clint. “He could outwit us.”

“And there is no guarantee he will not kill his hostages regardless,” pointed out Natasha wearily.

“Thanos keeps to his bargains. He may be a madman but he is an honourable one,” admitted Gamora, shuddering in distaste. “If he offers you a bargain he will keep to it. He would spare his greatest enemy if it meant acquiring what he desired most.”

Steve spoke up. “If we are going to do this, we need to co-ordinate a plan that works in our favour rather than his.”

Loki leaned forward, a grin on his face. “If you allow me, I have an idea.”

---

The plan was simple but should be effective if ran its course correctly.

Thanos and his children were waiting for them as they jumped out of the QuinJet which Clint and Natasha piloted.

Gamora had remained behind to help protect Pepper, alongside the other Guardians. It had been Quill’s insistence that she stayed rather than face her father.

The plan was to make Thanos believe he was going to obtain both Stark and the Time Stone. On the flight over to Norway, Strange had secluded himself away from the main team, and no one knew what he had been doing though once he did return to the team on the Jet he had made some small alterations to their plans.

The first being that Stark really should surrender himself to Thanos. Stark had only agreed after Strange had explained he had a plan that he felt would work better to their advantage.

And so Loki was pulling a bound Stark towards Thanos, who was flanked by Proxima Midnight and Corvus Glaive.

Despite being bound Stark was able to free himself when the signal was given. He would need to engage Thanos today as he’d be the closest to do some damage if needed to.

Strange was not with the others. He had his own plan in motion for when he should make his presence known.

“My daughter denies me a chance to speak with her?” boomed Thanos. “So unlike her and her team.”

“I bought you one of the things you wanted,” replied Loki. “It was beyond my control to bring your daughter here or the wizard with the Time Stone.”

“Our bargain was for the Stone as well,” replied Thanos darkly. “I’m surprised they are allowing you to return Stark to me.”

“He volunteered,” smirked Loki. “You know the hero in him can’t help but do what is right, even if it does mean returning to your care. They’re here to ensure you keep to your bargain,” he added,
referring to the Avengers.

Loki was playing a long game here, hoping Thanos wouldn’t see through the deception he had planned. But Thanos knew Loki had betrayed them. He’d only left him alive to deliver a message to the Avengers. He doubted Thanos would allow him to continue breathing much longer.

“We are against Tony surrendering,” Steve spoke up, “but we cannot stop him.”

All part of the plan.

Loki grabbed Stark by the bicep and pulled him forward.

Thanos stood on the grass, watching as the god and his prisoner drew closer.

“Do you believe me stupid, Stark?” remarked Thanos.

*Shit. He knows.*

Loki didn’t allow the fear to cross his face.

“Not at all,” replied Stark.

“He is yours to do with as you please,” said Loki, pushing Stark forward and then backing away towards the Avengers.

“Stop trying to deceive me,” stated Thanos, casting his eyes about before they fell upon Tony again. “Reveal yourself!”

It happened before Loki even had a chance to determine what was going to happen next.

Stark wrenched his arms free from the loose chains around his wrists, tapping his Arc Reactor twice as armour formed around his body. He was already flying towards Thanos, one arm pulled back in a fist and –

Thanos hit Stark across the face, sending him flying.

Stark had broken protocol. He was not following the plan.

Loki ducked as Proxima swung her spear at him. “I’m giving you what you want!” he shouted, twisting his hands and shifting away from her.

“You betrayed us… We know the truth. You shall die for your impertinence!” she screeched as she jumped up high and came down, aiming her spear for him again.

Loki moved to step away but then Thor was there, lightning crackling around his fists.

“You will not touch him!” And Thor was now fighting Proxima with the Hulk’s help.

Loki scrambled back, reaching for his knives and extracting them, holding them up to defend himself. The plan had gone wrong.

There was melee everywhere.

Nothing was going according to plan.

The Avengers were all engaged with Thanos’ minions but Stark was still facing off against the Titan
and he was failing. Stark was on the defensive, even as Loki’s eyes tracked him he saw the Titan lash out again, using all the Infinity Stones against Stark to try to disable him. Thanos wasn’t aiming to kill.

Seeing his opportunity, Loki raced towards the captive Asgardians. The least he could do was free his people who were gathered out of the way of the conflict, guarded by the last few remaining Chitauri warriors Thanos had at his disposal.

At least he could free Thanos of his leverage against them.

Perhaps Loki would make it out of this alive after all.

- - - - -

Tony wasn’t sure what made him act out and attack the Mad Titan. All his pain and rage had built up and now he had the opportunity to fight back against the Titan that had orchestrated his pain for years. It didn’t matter it was suicidal and he wasn’t following the plan: after all, he did want to die. If he could take down Thanos at the same time…

Bonus.

Tony gritted his teeth, forced his suit to modify around him, changing weapons at an alarming speed in an attempt to prevent Thanos from gaining the upper hand.

Unfortunately, the speed of which Thanos counteracted his attacks with the stones was preventing Tony from making any headway. His suit was being blasted off of him, piece by piece.

“You cannot beat me, Stark,” growled Thanos maliciously. “Cease and desist.”

“No!” he shouted back. “I am never going back there! You will never hurt me again!” Putting on a burst of speed, Tony changed his trajectory and pointed his legs right at Thanos’ face; two large blocks formed around his feet. Using the palm flight stabilisers, Tony flew back towards Thanos but the Titan was quick, dodged out of the way and grabbed one of Tony’s legs and flung him away.

Tony coughed as his body slammed into the ground, the suit ripping from his body, leaving him partially unprotected. He was going to die here, he could feel it. There was no way Thanos would let him leave here alive.

He tried to get to his feet in time but a purple glow enveloped his body and Thanos twisted his arms causing Tony’s arms to wrench back, nearly dislocating them from his shoulders.

The pull lessened and Tony took the opportunity to drag himself away as much as he could. His suit was still crumbling around him.

“You’re scared, Stark,” mused Thanos darkly, stalking towards him menacingly.

“So what?” retorted Tony, scrambling away from the Titan. His shoulders ached.

“Your technology is no match for me.”

Tony knew that. He needed his other suit, the one in his lab back on Thanos’ ship. He wondered if it would still be there or if the Titan had destroyed it. But then Tony had hidden it well. Thanos may not know of its existence. “Even so, at least I can fight you with it.”

“You’re failing,” smiled Thanos. “I do not think you need to return to my ship for punishment.
No…” He raised the Gauntlet-covered hand. “I will just kill you now. You will die knowing you failed to protect those that you love. Your woman will bring my minions great pleasure, I’m sure.”

Anger coursed through Tony. He was not threatening Pepper. He was not. Scrambling to his feet, he activated one of the blades in the suit of the arm and lunged for Thanos.

But the Titan was fast.

Way too fast.

Tony’s other arm was grabbed as he tried to stab the Titan and then the blade was being ripped from his suit.

It happened so quickly that Tony didn’t register any pain until he looked down and saw the blade had been pushed through his left abdominal area. The hilt was to his skin, and he knew it was poking out the other side.

“Ugh…” The sword twisted in his gut as Thanos moved him back until he was able to rest upon a wall of rocks.

Tony blinked, trying to stay awake as he saw Thanos standing in front of him. The sword remained embedded within his stomach. It was a wound that would surely kill him if not treated fast but he doubted he would even live to reach medical aid as Thanos raised the Gauntlet, with all four Infinity Stones lighting up within it.

Faced with the monster who had caused all of his suffering Tony could do nothing to fight back. He was injured and his suit was inoperative, having fallen to pieces by the brunt of the attacks the Titan had unleashed.

He couldn’t even scramble away, knowing it was fruitless, that Thanos was going to end his life here and now. He had nothing left to defend himself with and the others were too preoccupied with their own battles to come and help him.

And he felt scared.

Scared that he was going to die.

Scared that he would be unable to protect Pepper from Thanos and that he was killed before Thanos could be defeated himself.

“Despite everything, Stark, I truly do hope they remember you.”

Tony couldn’t look. He turned his gaze away from the Gauntlet, not wanting Thanos’ visage to be the last thing he saw.

_Pepper._

Squeezing his eyes shut he thought of her for one last time.

And then…

“STOP!”

Tony’s eyes wrenched open and he saw Strange floating towards Thanos, the Time Stone visible in his hands.
The Gauntlet remained trained upon Tony, all four of the Infinity Stones still lit as they waited for their power to be unleashed.

Every other fight around them seemed to have stopped as the combatants watched as Strange moved towards Thanos.

“Spare his life and I will give you the stone!” Strange said as he stopped out of Thanos’ reach.

“WHAT? YOU CAN’T BE SERIOUS?” Steve Roger’s voice sounded out from across the field, a look of pure shock across his face.

Strange didn’t answer, just continued to look at Thanos in the eyes.

Tony couldn’t believe it. The Wizard was going to give up the stone? Or was this a ploy? This wasn’t part of the plan Strange had told them about. In fact the plan Strange had, had not gone to plan at all. Tony had messed that up by breaking his orders.

“Don’t!” he croaked out, not wanting to be the reason why Thanos gained another stone.

Strange didn’t listen.

“No tricks,” stated Thanos as he turned the Gauntlet on Strange.

The Wizard shook his head.

“Strange! No!” Tony tried again but to no avail.

Strange didn’t listen. Instead of attacking Thanos, the Wizard revealed his necklace using both of his hands to unlock the mechanism keeping it safe from view.

The bright green glow of the stone caught Tony’s eyes.

The stone floated over to Thanos’ outstretched hand and he took it within two of his fingers of his right hand and set the stone into the Gauntlet. There was a flash of white and Thanos was shouting as power raged over and through his body as the Stone settled into the Gauntlet and enhanced him even further.

Tony kept on breathing, knowing it was becoming even more difficult to beat him, especially as he only had one Infinity Stone left to get.

Thanos smiled as he cast his gaze over the Gauntlet. “One to go…”

And then a portal appeared behind Thanos and he stepped back into it, disappearing from sight.

Tony sat there, eyes horrified, struggling to breathe as the others stared at one another before the Children of Thanos resumed their advance on the Avengers.

Tony frowned. Why hadn’t Thanos teleported them out too? He didn’t have time to think before he noticed Proxima break away from her fight with Thor and the Hulk and gunned straight for Tony, her spear raised close to her shoulder with the obvious intention of throwing it right at him.

There was an evil smile across her face.

And he knew that though Thanos had promised to spare his life in return for the Time Stone, it didn’t necessarily mean it applied to his children.
And she threw the spear.

And it flew right at him.

- - - - -

He’d freed his people but now Loki was keeping away from the main fight however his eyes were focused upon Proxima, watching her actions carefully. Thanos had gone but had left his children behind, which was unusual. He watched with narrow eyes as Proxima began to slip backward from her fight with Thor and the Hulk, skilfully avoiding their attacks upon her.

Loki stepped forward, aware that something was going to happen that he had to stop.

The way Proxima was holding her spear indicating she was about to do something rash. She turned then and ran straight for Stark, her eyes zeroing in on him.

They had the Time Stone now. Strange’s bargain for Stark’s life was… concerning. Why had he had a sudden change in tune? He’d been so adamant to prevent Thanos from acquiring the Time Stone that to give it up was folly.

Unless…

Stark.

Strange had bargained for Stark’s life. Had handed the Time Stone over to keep him alive. Thanos had abided by that bargain but his Children…

Shit!

No one else would reach Stark in time. He was immobile after being stabbed, unable to move out of harm’s way. And despite Loki’s own strength he doubted he’d be able to move Stark with the armour on.

Stark had no way to defend himself…

I’m going to regret this…

Loki teleported, using a power he rarely used, a secret he tended to keep from his enemies and his allies.

He manifested in front of Stark, arms spread out in a gesture of sacrifice, before something tore through his chest and everything went black.

- - - - -

Tony had seen the spear cascade towards him, had attempted to raise his arms in defence but well aware it would be useless. He’d just been attempting to avoid the inevitable. It didn’t matter that it was useless – it would be a horrible way to die – and Tony was not prepared to suffer such a violent end, not after Thanos had agreed to spare his life.

He closed his eyes, turned his head away and –

WHOOOSH!

There was a gurgle and a collapse of a body before he heard Proxima’s enraged howl and it was this that caused Tony to open his eyes again to see the body in front of him, lying drenched in coursing
blood, with a spear right through the chest, pierced in three different places.

Loki was dead.

Tony could only stare at the body of the God.

Had he really just done that?

This wasn’t a joke, was it? Loki hadn’t used a double? Was he…?

“LOKI!” Thor’s anguished reached his ears. “NO!”

Numbness spread through Tony’s body. He’d never even liked Loki and he’d…

*He sacrificed himself... For me.*

“You will pay for that!” Thor’s anger was evident and lightning crackled through his body as he rushed towards Proxima.

She had no time to move or even activate her own teleport in time before a dozen bolts of lightning struck her, lighting her body up in white and lifting her up high before flinging her, hard, back down to the ground where her head impacted against the ground and her neck bent at an odd angle as a sickening crunch echoed out around them.

Her limp body did not move.

In that instant everyone turned towards the final member of Thanos’ children who remained on the battlefield. He stood tall and threatening but before anyone could attack Corvas Glaive, he disappeared in a whoosh of light as he teleported away, leaving the Avengers and the Asgardian refugees alone.

Thor instantly made for Loki’s body, angry sobs coming from his mouth as he cradled his brother’s body against him.

Tony winced as pain flared in his side.

He was no stranger to pain. This wasn’t the worst pain he had experienced before. It was still a strong contender though.

Steve moved towards Tony. “You okay?” He winced as he noticed the bloody wound in Tony’s side.

“As much as I can be... considering,” wheezed Tony. He cast his eyes towards Strange who was moving slowly towards them. “Why’d you give up the Stone? I thought the plan was to make it look like we were, not actually give him another one!”

Surprisingly, Strange looked guilty. “I know things that you do not. I am trying to ensure we stay on the correct path.”

Tony frowned, clutching at his side. “You looked, didn’t you?”

“What do you mean?” asked Steve. He hadn’t caught on to what Strange was referring to.

Strange nodded slightly, “It was the only way.”

Biting his lower lip, Tony could only sigh in defeat.
Stopping Thanos was only going to be even more difficult, despite what Strange may have seen in the future. Giving the Titan another Infinity Stone had just made him even more invincible. He only had one left to obtain and if he did…

*We're doomed.*

It was not a comforting thought.

**To be continued...**

Chapter End Notes

And now Loki is dead too... Sorry?

I honestly think this was the main reason it took me so long to write this chapter because Loki was resisting this happening to him. Personally, I felt it had to happen, it was just getting the scene right. We haven't really seen Loki's teleport abilities in the MCU but he does have the ability in the comics...

I hope the next chapter does not take this long to write but I'm not going to make any promises... I do have a week off in a few weeks where I intend to relax and do a lot of writing so fingers crossed it all works out and updates can become regular again.

Until then,

the-writer1988
Chapter Summary

Tony gets angry.

Chapter Notes

Just as I'm uploading this chapter, I receive notification on my phone that Stan Lee has died. It was completely unexpected. I think a lot of people thought he could be immortal. Without Stan Lee's vision and his dedication to his work, none of us here would be reading fanfiction based on characters he created, or enjoying comics with his characters or watching fantastic films every few months.

Stan Lee was a legend and will remain so. He will be sadly missed.

I would like to dedicate this chapter to him in remembrance of his memory.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART FIVE
THE REVENGE OF TONY STARK

Chapter Five
The Suit

It was a few hours later after Tony’s wound had been healed by Wakandan technology that he decided to visit the mortuary.

Thor had brought Loki’s body back to the Compound where he intended to honour his brother in a dignified ceremony once they had dealt with Thanos.

Tony stood in the dim light, looking upon the body of the God that had tormented and teased him during his captivity but had also, ultimately, saved his life. Had Loki cared for him? He didn’t really believe he had. But Loki had kept his secret which the God had seen in his mind when he had forced his way into Tony’s head.

Loki had, had plenty of opportunities to inform Thanos of Tony’s secret suit, yet he hadn’t. It would have elevated Loki’s own position, perhaps even earned him forgiveness from the Titan for his failure of New York.

New York hadn’t been a total loss to Thanos.

He had failed to acquire an Infinity Stone and lost the only one he had there but he had acquired Tony. An asset he had used continuously for years. It had been only recently Tony had started to come out of his funk and start to fight back. Loki had been a key part of that, even though Tony had been secretly building the other suit for years, it hadn’t been a project he had really thought seriously
Loki had trusted him with the knowledge he’d only been with Thanos because Thor had needed him to be. Loki had been playing a double-ended game since he’d realigned himself with the Titan. Tony had, had the chance to betray Loki to Thanos but he hadn’t.

Loki’s body had a ceremonial drape over it, his face open to the world but his eyes were now closed.

Tony didn’t know what to think. Was he glad Loki was dead? Was he annoyed the God had saved him?

“Loki was a complicated individual.”

Tony turned and saw Gamora standing in the frame of the doorway.

“I never liked him,” he replied. “He hurt me…”

“How?” Gamora walked towards him slowly.

Tony sighed. Did he want to get into this? And with Gamora of all people?

“You are under no obligation to tell me,” she replied. “I know you came here for a reason.”

Tony lowered his gaze. “He forced his way into my mind… Made me relive memories I didn’t want to remember… And he still tried to help me, even though I rebuffed him so many times.” He winced. “I could have told Thanos Loki wasn’t his. I had multiple opportunities to do so but I didn’t. Why? Out of everything I’ve suffered, why did I choose to protect Loki when it’s his fault I’m where I am today?”

“I thought it was my fault…” answered Gamora quietly. “If not for me you would be dead now.”

“If Loki had never invaded then I’d probably be married to Pepper by now and have kids.” Tony shuddered. “Me? With kids? Can you imagine?” He shook his head. “That future was taken away from me the moment Loki invaded. This was always supposed to be my future.”

Gamora laid a hand on his shoulder. “Tony, I think you protected Loki, just like he protected you, because you both wanted to get out of the situation you were in. You claim you want to die, Tony, but yet you still fight to stop Thanos. You still have a will and a desire to live.”

“Only until that bastard is dead,” hissed Tony. “How can I live a normal life after everything he’s done to me?”

“I am.”

Tony looked at her. “You are his daughter. It’s easier for you. You were not tortured the way I was.”

“I was tortured. Every time I failed, Thanos would torture me. I soon learned I had to be the best. My life wasn’t easy. He took me from my home after killing half my people. To this day I have no idea if my mother is alive or not. I cannot bring myself to go back there. Thanos claims to have been a good father but he wasn’t. Torturing your own children isn’t love. Ripping them apart and rebuilding them as machines isn’t love. I was lucky I escaped that particular fate.”

Tony knew she was referring to Nebula there. Her own childhood didn’t make him have sympathy for her, not after what she had done to him.

“It doesn’t excuse her for what she did to you,” Gamora hastily added.
Tony perused his lips. “What about Loki? He still tortured me. Should I forgive him because he saved my life? I don’t know how to feel about this! He trusted me with the knowledge he was always working against Thanos, despite knowing I could easily inform Thanos. But I didn’t! Despite that, I still refused his help.”

Gamora cast her eyes over Loki’s body. “Loki was broken by Thanos. When he invaded Earth, Loki never intended to win. He wanted to be beaten. He wanted to be rescued from Thanos, so he allowed himself to be captured so he could escape. All of you, but you especially, Tony, helped him to escape. You freed him. He wanted to repay you.”

“I wasn’t even there!” doubted Tony, feeling angry by Gamora’s continuing insistence he had played a vital role in securing Loki’s freedom.

“Destroying Thanos’ army secured his freedom. Thanos had no army he could use to go after him. Nor when the portal shut either. Once the sceptre was taken they had no way of controlling him or reaching his mind. All of you contributed to freeing him,” answered Gamora, talking carefully. “But you were the first point where his freedom was secured. Losing his army set Thanos back. He couldn’t even proceed with his plan until he had rebuilt his army. Loki may never have said this but he owed you. He knows, just as much as I do, how important you are to the endgame.”

Tony huffed. “I’m not important.”

Gamora smiled slightly. “You are. Why else did Strange bargain for your life?”

Tony couldn’t answer.

---

It was later in the evening when Tony joined the others in the Conference Room. Steve had called a meeting, asking Tony to attend as they needed to discuss what to do now they had lost the Time Stone.

Tony arrived earlier than the scheduled time. Steve was already there.

Tony swallowed. They hadn’t had a proper conversation since Tony had been ‘captured’ by the Avengers. The last time they’d truly spoken was the moments before Tony had gone through the portal in New York six years ago, thereby setting off the chain of events that had led them to this moment in time.

He hadn’t wanted to speak to Rogers, knowing he had closed the Portal on him, preventing Tony from returning to New York. He had often wondered if it had remained open just a little longer if he had made it back, how different his life would be now? Would Tony be aware of Thanos? Would the Titan still have come to Earth in such a public way?

They were questions that would never be answered.

What had happened had happened and Tony would always suffer for it.

“Tony.” Steve looked at him, getting up from his chair and walking towards him.

Tony swallowed. His throat was dry. He couldn’t reply.

“I’ve wanted to talk to you properly since we rescued you.”

“Captured, not rescued,” Tony bit back, though he did recognise they had rescued him.
“The end result is still the same,” pointed out Steve. “You’re free from his influence. You can be your own person again.”

Tony couldn’t help it. Steve’s words punctured through his self-control. Did this arse-hole really believe he could be his own person again after everything he had suffered? Did he really believe Tony could just carry on with his life once this was over?

Tony snarled.

And Steve jumped up from the chair, sensing he’d said something wrong. “Tony –”

But it was too late.

Tony always had the armour to hand and a gauntlet formed around his fist and without any warning he shot Steve right in the chest, sending him back into the Conference Room wall.

The blast wouldn’t physically harm Steve; it would just wind him for a bit.

“You have no idea what I’ve lived through, do you?” Tony spat menacingly, advancing towards Steve.

The super-soldier pushed himself to his feet, rubbing his chest. “Tony–” He tried again, only for Tony to grab him by his shirt and push him roughly back up against the wall.

“Do you think I’ve had it easy for these past six years, Rogers? Everything I’ve lived through could have been avoided if you’d waited just a few more seconds before closing that portal! They tortured me! Kept me naked for two years before I couldn’t take it ANYMORE! Day in, day out I was brutally tortured! There was no give!” He shoved Steve against the wall again, not caring whether he hurt him or not. “They stripped me bare and forced him to do what they wanted! I’ve not slept peacefully in six years BECAUSE OF YOU!”

He released Rogers by the shirt but as Steve tried to regain his balance Tony’s hand shot out and grabbed Steve’s throat, restricting his airflow, pushing him back against the wall again.

“You left me to DIE!” Tony leaned in close, whilst Steve’s hands scrabbled with Tony’s arm to pull his hand away from his throat, but the strength Tony now had thanks to the enhancements Thanos had forced on him ensured Rogers would find it very difficult. “I should have died but I didn’t. If it weren’t for you none of this would have happened!” His eyes flashed. “I could kill you.” His fingers squeezed just a tiny bit further. “It wouldn’t make things better for me. It won’t stop the nightmares I suffer or the memories I will forever carry with me but it may just make me feel I’ve had my revenge on the person who stopped me returning HOME!”

“TONY! What are you doing?”

The foggy cloud covering his eyes relented and pulled back and Tony realised Steve couldn’t breathe and his skin was rapidly growing paler and paler but it was seeing Pepper, staring distraught at what he was doing that made him automatically release Rogers and step back.

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“You left me to DIE!” Tony breathed, feeling a bit shocked. He’d completely lost it.

Steve slumped to the floor, taking in deep breaths of air as he tried to regain his composure.

Tony stepped away. He felt horrified, mortified over that he had done, what he had tried to do. His anger at the Captain had clouded everything.
“Tony…” Steve breathed, “I understand why you blame me… I did what I thought was right…” He slowly got to his feet. “I stood there regretting my choice even as it closed… I had to think of the city, and of the poison from the bomb that could seep through the portal. I didn’t know how long we had. I’m sorry for what happened to you. If there was anything I could change in my life, it would be that…”

Blinking, Tony breathed out. Calm spread through him and he walked slowly forward towards Steve.

Pepper moved to intercept but Steve held up his hand, minutely shaking his head.

“I can’t say I forgive you…I don’t think I ever will,” Tony explained slowly. “But I can work with you without trying to kill you.” He still wasn’t sure if he could like Steve. Roger’s decision had abandoned him in space but it was Gamora who had ensured his survival. If he could work with her, could he not also work with Rogers?

Extending the hand of friendship to a man he had spent the past six years hating was an incredibly difficult motion to make, and yet Tony did so.

Tony swallowed, holding out his hand. “I think we need to work together to win this.”

Steve nodded. “We do.” He gratefully accepted Tony’s hand.

“Maybe after this is over, I can finally find peace.”

It didn’t escape Tony’s notice the concerned look Steve and Pepper shared at his words. They didn’t want him to die.

*It shouldn’t matter what they want. It’s what I want. And I can never be at peace alive so why should I survive?*

It was a thought that kept coming back to him.

------

Everyone was gathered in the Conference Room. The Guardians sat together whilst Tony, Pepper and Rhodey sat at the end of the table, whilst Steve and his core group of Avengers sat facing the Guardians. Doctor Strange, T’Challa, Bucky and Spider-Man sat at the other end of the table. Thor, still rather upset over his brother’s death, had chosen to sit between Tony and Steve’s respective groups.

Strange refused to explain why he had given up the Time Stone, only reiterating it was the only way. No one seemed to be too happy with the explanation but nothing could make Strange budge on explaining his actions.

“Loki told us you were building a suit of armour to harness the Infinity Stones,” began Gamora, watching Tony carefully.

He chewed on his bottom lip, musing on how to reply before he articulated his answer. “Sort of. It’s complicated.”

“How?” asked Clint. “You were building something, right?”

“Look…” Tony sighed, “I was allowed to tinker when I wasn’t being a failure. A lot of the time I was monitored. Creating something that could go up against Thanos wasn’t something I ever intended to do. Though, on reflection, it probably would have given him an excuse to kill me. Maybe
I should have let him find out about it…”

“Tony…” whispered Pepper.

Tony shrugged. “It’s the truth. You all know that. Why bother hiding it?” He knew it hurt her and Happy’s loss was forefront of her mind, but he couldn’t lie to himself just to avoid hurting Pepper. “I’m only here because apparently I have to be. Whatever happens I do not intend on coming back.”

Silence rocked the room.

Tony sighed. “Look, that suit is still on Thanos’ ship. I have no way of accessing it unless we somehow manage to infiltrate it. Considering the security, it will be impossible to do so unless we arrive as prisoners. Even then, we won’t be able to escape if we are. Any action we take will fail.”

“We have to try,” replied Steve. “We can still win this.”

“If I get my suit,” continued Tony, “it should be able to harness the Infinity Stones. My Arc Reactor is based on the Tesseract. My father’s original design came from his own studies, I just improved it. I used my own Arc Reactor to further my understanding of it. Getting the stones from Thanos will be a problem.”

“Simple,” said Quill, “we take it from him.”

“And how do you propose we do that?” asked T’Challa. “This Thanos is powerful, almost unstoppable. He has five of those stones.”

“If we get the drop on him we can… We just have to plan our moves very carefully,” explained Quill.

“But the last stone isn’t here, is it? Why would he come back to Earth?” enquired Peter Parker.

“You’re not going to be involved in this, kid. You’re too young.” Rhodey pierced him with a strong gaze.

“But – then why am I still here if you’re gonna send me home? I’ve been involved before! Why is this any different?” Peter argued, his face a mixture of disappointment and anger.

“We’d be going into space. I feel certain your Aunt would not be happy if we told her you were coming along. One of the conditions you have with the Avengers is that you are only with us if it is absolutely necessary.” Rhodey folded his arms across his chest. “I’m not taking you to space. We need someone to be the last line of defence if we fail. And, kid, that will be you.”

Peter swallowed.

“It’s a grim reality,” added Steve, “but not all of us can go on this mission. If we lose, we need someone on Earth to help counteract any other threats. But who will volunteer to stay?”

“Well, I’m not. I’m going,” Quill stated. “And so will the rest of my team.”

“Ehhh –” began the Raccoon, only to be silenced by Quill.

“Hush, Rocket, you’re coming, or we’ll leave you on Earth for good.”

Rocket looked like he wanted to bite back but Gamora’s glare silenced him.

“Considering my position in Wakanda, it would be wise if I stayed,” suggested T’Challa. “I cannot
leave my own country defenceless and I will better serve the world remaining here.”

“I’m going,” said Pepper.

“What? No, you are not!” Tony shouted, completely surprised by Pepper’s resolve.

“Yes, I am, Tony. I’ve already discussed this with Rhody.”

“But you don’t have any powers!”

“Neither did you,” she retorted angrily. “I’ve already lost Happy. I don’t want to lose you either but I’d rather fight beside you than wait here and not know what is going on. I know you designed me a suit years ago. JARVIS showed me. It’s been built. And I have practised. But what you do not know is that I have powers!”

Tony sat there, stunned. “What?” Pepper couldn’t go with them. She just couldn’t. “He’ll use you against me.”

“Something happened while you were gone with an experimental new drug. It was called Extremis. It was forced on me. I developed powers. Super strength and the ability to make fire when I wanted to. It makes me difficult to kill. The powers have been suppressed all these years but I stopped taking the pills a few days ago. The powers are starting to come back. I can use them against this Thanos. I can fight beside you, Tony, and if you do die, at least I’ll be there by your side.” Pepper’s voice was hard, her face determined.

“You cannot stop her, Tony,” said Rhodey. “I tried.”

He didn’t want Pepper to die. If she came…

Her hand touched his.

He flinched.

“I’m doing what I want to do, Tony. I cannot sit on the side-lines. Not this time.”

Tony nodded. He didn’t have to like it but he couldn’t really stop her. When Pepper made up her mind, she made it and kept to it.

There was a brief awkward silence before Steve spoke up, asking Doctor Strange if he intended to come with them.

“I cannot say.”

“Oh, come on!” Clint roared. “We have to know! You can’t just decide to go minutes before we leave!”

Tony eyed the Doctor carefully. “No, we don’t need to know.”

Clint turned to Tony. “We’re talking about saving the universe here. I think we need to know if someone is in or not!”

“Not if it ruins the winning path.” Tony had worked it out. He knew Strange had looked into the future with the Time Stone. He’d saved Tony’s life because Tony was there in the winning road. Strange couldn’t risk elaborating further because it could alter the course of the path.

“I’m confused,” said Clint, shaking his head.
“I’m not.”

“I think we can trust Tony on this,” said Steve. “If we do not need to know whether Doctor Strange is joining us or not, then it is not important for us to know. I trust Tony.”

Tony threw Steve a shrew look. “Are you just backing me up to get in my good books?”

Steve was startled by the accusation. “No!”

“Hmm.” Tony doubted it. He had, after all, tried to strangle the man not that long ago.

“Did something happen between you two?” Natasha queried quietly. She’d been observing the conversation since it started.

“No.” Both replied instantly.

“Stark, how do you propose you get your suit then?” Thor had remained unnaturally quiet.

“Unless we can find a way to get to my prison without being noticed then I really do not know…” Tony shrugged, frowning. He really didn’t know how they could. “Anyone got a teleporter? That might be helpful.”

“I don’t think Earth has developed the technology yet,” mused Natasha.

“SHIELD hasn’t?” Tony’s eyebrows rose. “I’m surprised.”

“SHIELD fell, Tony,” said Steve quietly. “It’s a hidden organisation now. Only a few people remain. Fury and Maria Hill are still around but they’re mostly under the radar.”

“Where is Fury anyway?” Tony cast his eyes around as if he was expecting him to suddenly appear.

“Good question, where has he gone, Steve?” Natasha turned to the super-solider.

“He said he’s trying to get something for us. I’m not sure what it is. He’s been gone a while.”

“This doesn’t answer the question of ‘what the hell are we gonna do?’” Rocket quipped, angrily.

“Thanos will come back here,” said Gamora quietly. “Don’t ask me why because I’m not going to say, but he will come back here, and next time, he will bring everything down upon us. If we stay in this Compound, he’ll come for all of us. We’re a threat to him, to his plans, and he’ll want to destroy us. We do not need to do anything.”

“Letting Thanos come here does not solve the problem of Tony not having his other suit,” pointed out Bruce, who had remained quiet for most of the discussion.

Gamora sighed. “Please, just trust me on this.”

- - - - -

In the end, they had no choice.

They decided to trust Gamora that Thanos would return. They had no way to get to his ship undetected, nor any time for them to invent/create something that would aid them. As per T’Challa’s words, he returned to Wakanda where he promised to ensure his scientists would enable better protection of the planet for further alien assaults. There was nothing the Wakandan people could do now.
All the Avengers could do was buy them some time.

Rhodey personally escorted Spider-Man back home to his Aunt. He wanted to make sure the kid did exactly what he had told him to.

Tony mostly kept to himself. He avoided everyone he could, even Pepper. He couldn’t believe she had powers now and JARVIS had told her about the suit and then built it for her. He didn’t want her to get hurt but he could understand why she wanted to fight. She’d lost Happy and was likely to lose Tony too. He felt guilty but he couldn’t put others happiness above his own.

The simple truth was, was that he did want to die. Nothing anyone could say about that could change his mind. They hadn’t seen what he had suffered and been forced to live through. No one could ever understand that. Life wasn’t fun anymore.

“Why did you do it?” Tony had decided to seek out Doctor Strange. He wanted to know the truth, wanted to know why the wizard had saved his life.

Strange had been meditating when he’d found him in the guest quarters. “Do what?”

“Look into the future,” stated Tony, as if the answer was obvious.

“I realised you had figured it out.”

“Doesn’t take a genius to know what one would do with the Time Stone if faced with a universal-ending threat,” smirked Tony.

“I did look into the future. I cannot tell you anything about it.”

“But you saved me because of what you saw.”

“If I confirm anything there is no guarantee the future I saw will play out, Stark,” commented Strange, getting to his feet.

“I know…” Tony scuffed his feet against the floor. “I wouldn’t be here now if you hadn’t seen me doing something important.” He held up a hand to stop the Doctor from interrupting him. “I know you cannot confirm anything, but it is highly suspicious. It makes sense, especially if my suit does work. I just hope, in whatever future you saw, I die after Thanos has been dealt with.” He waited for a reaction.

None came.

Strange stayed stony as ever, not moving or twitching a muscle.

“Fine. I’ve got the information I needed to know anyway.”

“I’ve not confirmed anything.”

Tony let out a sad laugh. “No, not really, but your silence means I’m onto something. And there is no point in saving my life if my suit doesn’t work.”

He didn’t wait for a reaction, merely turned and walked out of the wizard’s quarters.

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He was on his way back to his own temporary quarters when he paused after hearing his name. He didn’t want to pry but his curiosity had been piqued.
Silently, he stepped closer to the room. The door was slightly ajar and he settled himself beside it, leaning against the wall, listening in.

“-don’t know what to do…” sobbed the voice.

Tony’s heart clenched. It was Pepper. She was crying.

“I don’t want him to die… Why can’t… Why…” She couldn’t finish what she was saying.

“He still loves you, Pepper.”

Tony was surprised to hear Gamora’s voice. Pepper and Gamora talking together, that surprised him. 
I guess it makes sense. If anything Pepper knows me better than anyone else and Gamora knows what I suffered through.

“Then why can’t he live for me? If he still loves me, even though I did move on, why can’t he be with me? I can’t lose him!”

“He lived through so much, Pepper. It is not up to me to tell you what happened to him. Tony was treated horribly. I can understand why he wants to die, why he can no longer have the desire to live. He wants to be at peace. We cannot force life on him if someone doesn’t want it. It brings psychological damage. In our efforts to make him happy to be alive again… we risk hurting him more, by forcing him to live when he doesn’t want to be here,” explained Gamora quietly. “I’m Thanos’ daughter. He hurt me too. Made me into a weapon, an assassin he could use against so many others. I did what I had to do out of necessity, not because I wanted to. I was lucky I escaped.”

“Tony escaped too,” Pepper countered.

“Not without help. He didn’t get away on his own. We captured him, set him free. I think he still views himself as a prisoner.”

Tony did. He wasn’t free to do what he wanted to do. He had his own temporary quarters now and could wonder the compound freely but could he really decide his own fate? No, he couldn’t, not while Thanos was around.

There was silence for a while before Pepper’s soft voice cut through the quiet.

“Do you think he’ll ever change his mind?”

Tony’s first thought was to shout out ‘no’ but he didn’t want them to know he was listening in on a conversation that was supposed to be private.

It took a long while before Gamora answered. “I think anything is possible. I know he still loves you and he always will, but first and foremost he’s got to think of himself. In the end, Pepper, Tony may not be able to cope with an ordinary life. How is it fair to force him to live when he doesn’t want to? Is it fair you have to go through the burden of watching him fade away further? Of possibly, one day, coming home and finding he’s killed himself? Do you want to put yourself through that?”

Pepper sniffed. “No…”

“I hate to say this,” said Gamora quietly, “but you need to let him go. I want to save him too. I would like him to live, to have the life he missed out on. He still could if he let himself. He’s been denied the chance to make his own decisions for years. It’s time he should have the freedom to do so again, even if it means ending his own life. It’s not what we want, but what we want isn’t what Tony wants. He’s suffered too much, and I do not want him to suffer anymore. I’m sure you don’t either.”
“No, I don’t. It’s just… hard,” replied Pepper, her sniffs coming occasionally as she fought back the tears.

“Losing our loved ones is difficult. You’ve lost Happy. And now you are going to lose Tony. But you’re strong. He wants you to be happy and enjoy your life. If Tony dies, do not tarnish his memory by being sad. Celebrate him for who he is.” Gamora paused briefly. “At least you got to see him again. It’s not in the best of circumstances, but it’s something.”

Pepper sniffed again. “I… guess… so.”

She still sounded sad and upset.

It pulled at Tony’s heart. He loved her still. The thought of her had kept him fighting. The memory of her had been an anchor, something to fight for and retain his sanity, so he could return home and be with her.

But it had been too long now.

Too long since he’d been away.

His whole outlook on life had changed.

He didn’t want to upset Pepper.

Gamora was right that he deserved the freedom of choice.

_I don’t want to live._

But he wanted Pepper to be happy.

_Can she really be happy if I die?_

He couldn’t answer the question.

Slipping away from the wall, moving away from the occupants in the room, he walked away, his mind whirring with thoughts.

He had a lot to think about.

_To be continued…_

Chapter End Notes

I've found myself in the position of having too many characters and they are not getting enough screentime. Considering the Avengers are going to try to reach Thanos' ship, I think there would be defence left on Earth. Spider-Man and Black Panther will remain.

And I completely forgot about Ant-Man until I was writing this chapter so the in-universe explanation is, is that he never got involved with the Avengers in the first place. They are aware he exists but have no involvement with him, hence his lack of appearance in this story.

Tony is struggling and it was about time he had a confrontation with Steve. Pepper is
still struggling with Happy's death and Tony's desire to die, so she has figured she'd rather fight by his side than stay at home. Pepper's Extremis abilities were explained in Part 1: Chapter 4 if anyone would like an overview.

I hope to update again soon, hopefully next week!

Until then,

the-writer1988
She walked quickly through the hallways searching for Tony. She had to tell him. He, of all people, should know. Quill already knew her secret but she felt she owed it to Tony. He had to know what the real reason was for Thanos to personally attack the Compound. Thanos’ original plan to meet her again at Knowhere had been scuppered by the fact she had been on Earth, a development Thanos had not seen coming. He had expected her to be there, as per Quill’s report when they had arrived on Earth.

She sighed.

She had been expecting this.

_He doesn’t know I know where it is. If he gets me I have to make him believe I don’t know where it is. I can lie. I’ve done it before._

She found Tony in his quarters where he was tinkering with his suit.

He glanced up at her as she entered, then refocused on his suit, using a few welding devices to work on the Arc Reactor, which was out of his chest but was still connected through a wire. The magnet itself was still in range enough to prevent the pieces of shrapnel moving further into his heart. The Arc Reactor magnified the range of the magnets situated within it.
“What are you doing?”

“What are you doing?” he answered. “If Thanos is coming here then my suit needs to be more powerful than it is now. Though…” he grimaced, “it is difficult making the material inside it expand so I can create more stuff with it. The suit on his ship is far more advanced.”

“I know you are more than capable of achieving what you want to do,” she started but Tony interrupted her.

“Apart from kill myself, you mean?” he huffed pointedly.

She frowned. It was clearly a sore subject still.

“Forget it. I chose to fight. It was my choice. I could easily yank out this wire now and no one would be able to do anything about it,” continued Tony, indicating the wire leading into his chest from the Arc Reactor he held in his hands.

Gamora tilted her head to the side. “You still feel obliged to fight though. You claim it was your choice to delay your own passing… but…” she hesitated, “…in the end you feel you had no choice but to do so.” She could see the reaction on his face that she’d hit the nail on the head.

“Why do you know me so well?” he grated, looking slightly annoyed she’d managed to read his mind again.

Her lips tilted up in a smile. “I spent months with you and I know your mind-set. I once thought like you did. I know what it feels like to be denied death when you really want it. Thanos took me from my home, adopted me because I was quite a fighter. I don’t know if my mother lives or not or if she was a victim in Thanos’ mindless slaughter of half my people.”

Tony watched her with sad eyes. “I’m sorry,” he murmured.

“Tony… Thanos likes to break people, tear them apart and mould them in something better. He’s done this with all of his children.”

“I’m not a child of his, just a prisoner,” replied Tony darkly.

“I’m not saying you are,” she countered. “But he did enhance you. Maybe to use you against your friends, yes, but he still bestowed upon you strengths he never gives his other prisoners.”

“It wasn’t bestowing,” replied Tony quietly. “He’s cursed me. Made me into something I’m not. These enhancements… I don’t want them. I don’t want to be like you.”

“We can’t change the past, Tony, only accept it happened.”

Tony blinked. He didn’t want to accept this had happened to him. “If you hadn’t interfered, would Thanos have just left me floating out there?”

“I don’t know,” answered Gamora truthfully. “I think he would have saved you regardless of my interference. He would have wanted to know about the weapon which destroyed his army and set him back a few years.” She placed a hand on his shoulder, noting the slight flinch he gave at the touch. “You’re the first person to ever deal any damage to him. Even if you had made it back through the portal, Thanos would have sought you out. He would want to know your identity and he would want to personally kill you. Maybe you would have been better off making it back, but…” she hesitated, watching his reaction to her words, “…maybe you were always destined to meet him, regardless of how that pivotal moment ended. I think you two were always meant to be rivals, to
fight one another. I think the universe needs you, Tony, and we were just its tools to ensure your survival."

He was silent at her words, deep in thought.

Gamora watched. She knew Tony well enough to realise he would analyse everything she had said. She still needed to talk to him about what she knew. He surprised her when he looked up at her, his eyes dull and filled with pain.

“Why are you really here?”

“How do you know?” She wasn’t surprised he had realised she had come with an ulterior motive.

“Because I know you,” he retorted, “just like you know me.”

She sighed. “Should’ve expected that answer,” she smiled slightly.

He placed the Arc Reactor back in his chest, screwing it in tightly. “You should, considering we know one another well.”

This was going to be hard for her. She had only trusted one other person with this knowledge, but she had to tell Tony too. He was the only one able to act upon it if needed to.

“I know where the Soul Stone is hidden,” she admitted, bowing her head.

“What.” Tony was stunned. “Why haven’t you said? We could go and get it before Thanos finds it!”

“He needs me to tell him the location first. He doesn’t know where it is. This is why I know he will return to Earth. He will come for me. I told him years ago I never found it but I suspect he knows I lied to him. I would never give him the location of it willingly. I’m telling you because I think someone else needs to have the location. Peter is aware I know the location but he doesn’t know the location himself. I asked him… asked him to kill me if Thanos gets to me. I cannot let him get this final stone. The knowledge could die with me, yes, but if we are to stop him, I think we need to have all six stones together.” She paused and then raised her head, fixing Tony with a hard stare. “The stone is on Vormir. If something happens, use this knowledge.”

Tony stayed silent; his mind ticking over the information Gamora had trusted him with.

“If too many people know the location, Thanos will find it easy to take it from us. If the worst happens, please do not let him win. If Peter cannot kill me, you have to do it. You’ve hated me long enough to be able to do it. Promise me you will, please!”

Tony visibly swallowed. “And if I promise to kill you, will you promise to kill me if I survive?”

Gamora stepped back, shocked by his request, though it really shouldn’t have surprised her considering his main desire was to die and have the long rest he desired and wanted to have. It had been denied to him for long enough.

“You know I can’t promise that!”

“Then why should I promise you?” he countered. “It’s selfish, I know, but why should I promise the same thing to you if you cannot return it for me?”

Gamora bit her lower lip. “I do not believe I could kill you.” She didn’t want to see him suffer but to have to end his life herself would be torment for her.
“How do you know I could kill you?” he returned. “You’ve killed before.”

“You hate me.”

Tony laughed harshly. “I do hate you… but I also like you…”

“Then neither of us can promise one another,” she concluded. “I could never hate you. And I shouldn’t have asked this of you without being able to return the favour. It would be callous of me to say no to you.”

Tony turned away from her. “I promise to kill you if Thanos gets you.” His back was to her, his posture straight but she could tell he meant every word. “I loved you once. Maybe I still do. I still care for you. And he can’t get that stone. Even if you can’t kill me, I will still kill you if it needs to be done.”

She reached out for his hand, turning him around to face her, so they were close together. “Thank you, Tony.” She raised a hand and brushed it across his cheek.

He didn’t flinch.

And he did something she had not been expecting.

Before she could react, his lips were on hers.

His lips were soft as he kissed her gently. He opened his lips just a bit to continue but Gamora pulled away, stepping back, shocked at what had just happened. Her fingers strayed up to her lips touching them gently. “Tony…” she whispered. “We shouldn’t…”

Tony swallowed. “Sorry. I shouldn’t have done that. I just… Never thought I could again… I…” He stepped back. “I still… I think… I still… love you.”

She didn’t know what made her do it, knew it was the wrong thing to do, knew that she was taking advantage of a mentally ill man… But she’d grown fond of him too. For all the years she had cared for him, tried to help him, his strength in defying her father and his desire to return home, she’d found inspiring. She had seen him at his worst, had kept him comfortable as possible, had cleaned him to help him feel human again…

She pitied him.

She’d hated herself after she’d left him in Thanos’ clutches when she had been sent to Ronan. She had thought of him every day, and to see him so broken, so unsure of himself…

And to see he was in love with her…

It was a moment of stupidity, a lack of common sense on her part and a desire to see him happy that she reached for him, pulling him towards her and kissed him, pressing their bodies close together.

It wasn’t just one kiss; it was several in quick succession and their lips kept meeting in clashes, moving quickly as they savoured one another.

Her arms wrapped around him as their bodies pressed close to one another.

She was lost in the feel of his lips on hers, of his beard brushing against her face. It reminded her of something. Something she already had…

His hands moved down her back and it was only when he cupped her bottom, pushing her pelvis to
his that she came to her senses, quickly pushing away from him and stumbling back against the wall
that she realised what she’d done had been inherently wrong.

She was in a relationship with Peter. She loved Quill. She had to stop this before it went any further
before it gave Tony any hope.

“I’m sorry…” she breathed. Her lips were still tingling. “I love Peter. Me and him… we’re
something special. I’m sorry… I shouldn’t have kissed you back.” She could see the recognition of
sadness in his eyes. “This…” She couldn’t finish.

She had just taken advantage of a mentally ill man.

“It never happened,” he said quietly. “I just…” he shrugged, “wanted to know.”

“Know what?” she asked.

But he didn’t answer. He walked away and out of his room, leaving her there to lean against the wall
and wonder what he had meant.

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Tony didn’t have much time to think about what had happened between Gamora and himself. He
avoided her when he could in the ensuing days as they waited for Thanos to return. Why he was
taking so long to act against them was concerning. Tony had expected Thanos to have launched an
attack by now.

A part of him wondered if Thanos still needed Gamora for the Soul Stone or if he had learned of it
on his own and had perhaps gone to retrieve it. Two of his ships still sat in orbit above the planet, far
enough away that any missile fired at them wouldn’t reach them, but it was still a threat that hung
over their heads.

The Guardians had contemplated taking their ship up above Earth’s orbit and destroying the two
ships but had ultimately decided against it. The last thing they needed was to bring Thanos’ wrath
down upon them.

In the time he was not attacking them they were preparing themselves for the fight to come.

Tony spent a lot of his time with Rhodey and Pepper, watching as Pepper got used to using her
reactivated Extremis powers and combining them with the suit Tony had once designed for her.
Truthfully, he mused, Pepper didn’t need a suit. Extremis granted her powers which enabled her to
have high durability and strength. The suit would mask her true nature.

Still, if Thanos did manage to destroy the suit at least Pepper would be able to fight and have a better
chance of surviving.

Tony still didn’t want her involved but he couldn’t stop her. She’d made her decision. He wanted her
to be safe but if he wasn’t going to try his best to return home then she saw no reason to wait for him.
He knew his own choices were a deciding factor in Pepper’s own but it still hurt she wanted to fight.
If Thanos recognised her…

He shuddered. He couldn’t think of it. Couldn’t bring himself to consider the horror that could await
her if Thanos decided to use her against him. He could stop her. He had the power to do so but he
wasn’t going to take any choices away from other people. He’d lived for years without his own
choices. He refused to partake in the practice of doing it to anyone else.
The atmosphere inside the Compound was tense. Everyone was on tenterhooks, waiting for Thanos’ inevitable return.

They kept a guard up day and night and his continued silence only made everyone wary. They knew they had to rest and recuperate if they were to be at maximum strength to repel his attack.

Tony couldn’t sleep. He tried but his mind kept going over the conversation he had overheard from Gamora and Pepper a few days ago. He knew they both wanted him to live, to try and enjoy his life after everything that had happened to him but the doubts continued to gnaw away at his mind. Could he really face each day knowing what he had seen and suffered? Could he willingly have a relationship again after what Nebula had done to him?

He’d kissed Gamora and then she’d kissed him back. He hadn’t expected it to go further but he had responded, had wanted her… He groaned. He was in a sticky wicket. He had never thought he could ever have a sexual relationship again, not after Nebula, but his response to Gamora had proven otherwise.

It made his whole outlook on wanting to die come in to question. But did he really want to? I don’t want to live with the memories of my suffering. It was just too painful. Each time he closed his eyes he was back there, in the realm of memories where he had been held prisoner, where he had been brutally tortured. Could he live with that?

He bowed his head, leaning back against the wall. If he miraculously survived the coming confrontation he’d think about it then but for now he would just assume he would die.

He was on patrol outside the Compound, standing guard over a specific portion of the perimeter. Tony started to move away from the wall to begin his walkabout. He was supposed to check in with the others too.

“Stark to Wilson, perimeter-walk beginning,” he confirmed over the communicator in his ear.

“Acknowledged.”

Keeping his eyes alert and with the suit read to activate at any minute, Tony walked carefully around his designated area. He probably should have the suit covering him already but he didn’t think he would need it.

Thanos would make a show of arriving. He wouldn’t do stealth.

He regretted it when he was flung backward onto the grass and realised with utmost horror that his right shoulder had been pierced by a spear. Shakily, he pulled the spear from his shoulder. It hadn’t gone all the way through but blood still gushed from the wound. His arm was effectively numb and as he struggled to his feet, he attempted to activate his suit to cover the rest of him but Tony was grabbed from behind, stopping him.

He tried to bring his other hand up to activate the ear piece to alert the others but he was prevented when his hand was forced down by an invisible power.

“Let me go!” he yelled, struggling with all his might, despite the pain he was in. He knew who had hold of him, knew who was here and he’d been foolish to walk around without his suit on, believing he knew the Titan better.

Cull Obsedian, who he’d lost during New York in his failed attempt to capture the Time Stone, was holding him, crushing his body against the giant. Cull’s arm had been replaced, having had it cut off when he’d gone through an interdimensional portal courtesy of the Wizards.
Clearly Thanos had sought him out and brought him home and replaced his arm with an upgrade.

The Titan now loomed in front of him, the five stones he held fully activated and pointed at Tony.

“You’ve caused me enough trouble, Stark,” mused Thanos.

“Then kill me!” baited Tony. He tried to struggle again but Cull’s grip on him was too tight and his shoulder hurt like hell.

“Much as I would like to end the life in your pitiful body, I, unfortunately, need you alive for now,” replied Thanos darkly.

Tony gritted his teeth. He was not going to be a hostage for the others to surrender for.

“Release him.”

Confused by this turn of events, Tony found himself dropped to the floor. He had only seconds and his arm came up swiftly to his Arc Reactor. Just as his fingers reached it, the stones in the Gauntlet brightened again and Tony was thrown back, his arms and legs spread out and he was held against the earth.

Anger poured through him but the power of the Stones was impossible to counteract.

“ARGH!!!!” He hoped Sam would hear him and raise the alarm. Wilson would wonder why he hadn’t checked in at the end of his perimeter walk yet. God, he hoped he wouldn’t come and investigate without alerting someone else. Why hadn’t the sensors gone off yet anyway, unless Thanos had jammed the signal?

He didn’t have time to wonder because Corvas Glaive was there, grinning down at him, his long fingers reaching for his Arc Reactor.

Oh shit!

Tony could do nothing as Corvas’s fingers grasped the edges of the Arc Reactor, turned it and then lifted it out of Tony’s chest.

His heart-rate increased and a dull ache began in his chest.

“Swap it,” said Thanos, darkly.

Corvas tossed the Arc Reactor to Cull who promptly crushed it in his hand.

Tony’s eyes widened. What were they going to do? Over the years he’d upgraded the Arc Reactor to sit in line for the upgrades he continued to do to his suits but they’d just taken it from him… His heart-rate only increased.

Thanos needed him. He’d said so.

As he struggled to breathe, he saw Thanos approach him, holding something shiny in his non-Gauntlet hand. There was satisfaction in his face.

“You should never have betrayed me, Stark.” He held up the device so Tony could see it.

He gulped in air as much as he could.

“I’ve had others study your Arc Reactor. The Other took the design years ago when he first
experimented on you. He learned everything he could about it and I commissioned a special one to be made once I had the Mind Stone. Why do you think I’ve waited so long to attack? I needed you under my control. And whilst you have free will, you are a danger to me. This Arc Reactor will make you submissive to every order I give you.”

“No!” gasped Tony, “please, no! Whatever it is you want, I’ll do it! I can’t! Please!” He didn’t want to lose control, he couldn’t…

Thanos didn’t listen to him. He just knelt down to where Tony was being held against the ground, holding the round, blue-shining device in his hand, placing it in the air above the opening into Tony’s chest. “Once this goes in, the energies of the Mind Stone will take your mind and I can finally possess you. You will have lost your immunity against the Stones. Your friends will not harm you because they want to save you. You, Stark, will be their undoing.”

Oh god… no…

“I’ve watched this Compound for days, waiting for the right moment to take you. You are mine, Stark.”

“NO! NO!” Tony was yelling as loud as he could. “I WILL NOT BE YOUR TOOL! NO! NOT AGAIN!”

“You have no choice.” Thanos slipped the Arc Reactor in to place.

Tony’s mind fogged over.

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

First, this cliff-hanger. This was not in my plan at all for this story. Tony getting possessed via his Arc Reactor? I only had this idea when I was writing this section of the chapter. But it does work and apparently, I like to make Tony’s life even more difficult? Because of this new development, two chapters have been added to Part 5, meaning we will now have 11 chapters instead of 9. Hopefully, the rest of the story tries to stay on track with my plan, but I have a feeling it won’t.

Secondly, Tony/Gamora. As Tony reflected prior to his possession by Thanos, it was his way of trying to see if he was capable of romantic love. Tony, despite wanting to kill Gamora earlier on in the story and hating her, still loves her. He’s in a difficult position. His love is unrequited but Gamora acted back stupidly, more out of a desire to help him decide to live and to see him happy. She was thinking of him but she also liked the kiss and did want more, despite the fact she is in a relationship with Quill.

Honestly, this chapter didn’t go at all to plan, especially since the Tony/Gamora kiss wasn’t in my plan either. This chapter wrote itself. I just listened to the ideas as they came. Fingers crossed I do not deviate much further from my current plan…

Until next time, hopefully, next week on either the Monday or Wednesday, the next
chapter will be posted…

the-writer1988
Chapter Summary

Thanos attack the Avengers Compound with a mind-controlled Tony on their side...

Chapter Notes

Well, I thought this chapter would be a lot longer, but my brain, once again, decided to not follow the plan. As a result, you have another cliff-hanger... Sorry!

PART FIVE
THE REVENGE OF TONY STARK

Chapter Seven
The Compound Attack

Sam had seen everything. Stark had failed to check in within minutes of calling to Sam he was checking around his perimeter section. They all knew this Thanos was going to attack the Compound. Stark’s radio silence was worrying.

He shouldn’t leave his own post, he knew that. It would open the Compound to outside forces and if anyone got through it would be Sam’s fault. But he couldn’t ignore Stark’s radio silence.

Stark was stationed not too far from his own outpost. In fact, their perimeters overlapped. Extracting a small RedWing from his backpack, Sam set it to alert him to any hostile movement and to send a signal to JARVIS within the Compound if anything out of the ordinary was detected.

Moving swiftly, Sam climbed up onto the roof of the building next to him, jumping across onto the next level and slowly started to make his way around the side, hanging on precariously as he rounded the building. His right hand hung onto the pipes above him as he peered around the corner.

“Oh shit…”

Ahead of him, on the ground, he could see Stark being held invisibly down and he was surrounded by Thanos and two of his minions. Thanos was leaning over him, pushing something into Stark’s chest which Sam did not like at all.

He tapped his earpiece. “Steve, come in.”

There was no answer. No sound, nothing.

Damn, their communications had been jammed. Even if Tony had managed to get a signal out, no one would know. If their earpieces were jammed then RedWing would be as well. Sam bit his lip as he watched Tony get robotically to his feet.
From his position, he could see a device that resembled an Arc Reactor sat within Stark’s chest but it had more of a spacey-shape glow to it and Stark’s eyes were shining blue.

Sam didn’t wait around, he turned and ran away. Reaching one of the side-door exits from the Compound, he palmed his ID across the identification scanner, pulling the door open as he was allowed admittance, closing the door behind him. He didn’t have long. He had to find the others.

“STEVE! Nat! Rhodey!” Sam called out, running up and down corridors, peeking into rooms and offices looking for anyone who could help him raise the alarm. It was late but not too late for people to still be up. They did sleep in patterns so at least some of the team would be ready for any attack. They couldn’t have the whole team tired at the end of the day, only to find Thanos made his move and caught them off guard.

“Wilson?” Clint appeared, rubbing his eyes, peering out from a smaller common area, with his right hand clutching his bow. “Your yells woke me up.”

Sam didn’t even acknowledge Clint had been sleeping. “Purple guy is right outside!”

That caught his attention. “What? The alarms?”

“Jammed!” reported Sam as he continued running down the corridor. “We have to assemble!”

“Wait, wasn’t Stark on patrol too?” Clint hurriedly followed, now wide awake.

“He was.” Sam didn’t elaborate further.

They both ran down the corridor, round to the right, up the stairs to the third floor and out into the main common room area where, thankfully, they found everyone including the Guardians.

Steve was on his feet, noticing the concerned looks on their faces. “Sam? Clint?”

“Thanos,” breathed Sam, “he’s here.”

Everyone moved at once.

“The alarms –”

“How long?”

“Where’s Tony?” That last one came from Pepper.

“Tony checked in. He didn’t check back out,” verified Sam. “I was uneasy. I investigated. We do not have long. Thanos is outside right now and I expect he’ll –”

There was a loud explosion and the floor rumbled, dropping almost everyone to the floor. Sam caught himself on the back of the chair. They were out of time.

“Sirs, the wall on the left side of the building, close to the hanger is compromised!” JARVIS reported. “Four lifeforms are detected. One of them is Mr Stark.”

“JARVIS, why is Tony with them?” pressed Pepper, climbing to her feet supporting by Nat.

“He appears to be aiding them,” replied the AI.

Steve cast his gaze back to Sam. “What happened?”
Before Sam could answer, Gamora interjected:

“Thanos did,” she said quietly. “The Arc Reactor, right?”

Sam nodded. “He swapped it out I think. As soon as he put it in, Tony lost all sense of self. His eyes were shining blue!”

Gamora hissed under her breath. “Damn it.”

“What does that mean?” asked Pepper, fear reflected on her face.

Gamora sighed. “I was afraid this would happen. It means Tony is under Thanos’ complete control with no free will. He will be used as a weapon against us.”

Steve cursed. “Then we need to take the Arc Reactor out.”

Gamora shook her head. “Thanos will have destroyed the original. We take it out, we kill Tony.”

Steve sighed. “Damn it. Then we do our best to make sure we disable him. We’re not letting Tony remain a prisoner inside his own mind.”

Gamora stepped forward. “I don’t think you understand. Tony has lost his free-will. Even if we disable him, he’ll get straight back up because he will have specific orders. Knocking him out will not free him from control either because it is directly fused into his chest cavity. We can’t kill him but…”

“Tony always had spares,” piped up Rhodey. “Pepper, do you think? The house in Malibu?”

“I’m thinking the same,” she answered. “His workshop is still there. I never sold anything. I kept it ready for him…” Pepper went silent. Everyone knew what she had been about to say.

“I’ll go,” said Rhodey. “I know you may need me here but we need another Arc Reactor if we want to save Tony. I’ll be faster with War Machine.” He was already running for the door. “And since we’ve been chatting, they’re probably on their way to us right now so we better start fighting back otherwise we will not have a home to return to!”

Steve nodded. “Everyone, we come at them from different angles. Priority is to disable –”

“Kill,” interrupted Gamora. “We cannot disable Thanos. We have to go for the killing blow. He is the one being in the universe you do not try to give justice to. Too many authorities have already tried in the universe and where has it got them? Annihilation.”

“Fine. We split up into groups of five apart from the Guardians who remain together as a party of six,” directed Steve. “Nat, Sam, Bucky and Thor are with me. Clint, Valkyrie, Bruce, Pepper and Strange in the last group.” He cast his eyes around. “I presume you will fight without me having to ask if you will or not?”

No one raised a question and Steve nodded. “We come at them from three different directions. If we can get the Gauntlet from Thanos…” He didn’t need to continue, everyone knew what was at stake.

“I’ll focus on trying to distract Tony,” said Gamora. “Separating him from Thanos is key to our success. It will be easier to exchange the Arc Reactors once Rhodey returns if the two are nowhere near one another.”

“Agreed.” Steve motioned for his group to join him.
“Aside from Tony, they haven’t bought reinforcements,” clarified Sam. “We do outnumber them.”
He adjusted his flight pack on his back, ensuring the straps were tight enough to hold his weight.

“Good. We need some luck tonight,” muttered Steve as he left the common room at a run.

The others followed before splitting at an intersection to go their separate ways.

Rhodey made it to Malibu in record time. JARVIS had already lowered all security as he approached, allowing Rhodey to fly into the house in his armour and down to Tony’s workshop.

Pepper hadn’t touched it since Tony’s loss. She hadn’t even moved any of the cars or any of the work Tony had been working on. Pepper personally spring-cleaned the place every month, a chore Happy had helped with, and when he was able to, Rhodey as well, all three of the reminiscing about happier times when Tony was still with them.

The old Iron Man suits still stood within their designated places, powered down but charged to full power every so often in-case they were needed.

Rhodey moved towards a locker at the far end of the workshop, deactivating his suit so he could step out of it. He really needed an upgraded suit. Seeing the suits Tony wore now was something else. He had perfected his suits in captivity but that didn’t matter at the moment. What did was ensuring his friend survived.

Inputting the security code for the locker, it swung open and Rhodey reached inside for one of the Arc Reactors Tony had stored there. He hesitated, then reached in for a second, encasing them both into a pouch at his waist before closing the hatch and running back to his suit where he could re-join the others at the Compound.

Gamora ran behind Quill. They were heading towards the hanger where Thanos seemed to be staying. They were not advancing forward which surprised her but also it unnerved her because it showed Thanos had a plan and they were walking right into it. Quill remained in contact with Steve and Valkyrie who were leading the other two groups.

“We could try to get the Gauntlet off him,” said Mantis.

“Yeah and how do you propose to do that when he’s got two of his Children and Stark?” responded Quill.

“Whatsoever you do, just keep them distracted so I can get to Tony!” said Gamora. “He’s the most important piece here.” She was worried; concerned this was going to go wrong for them all. They didn’t really have a plan. They were just going to act and hope for the best. There were too many variables for them to counteract to plan efficiently anyway.

Gamora unsheathed her sword. She was after Tony but if she could get a strike on Thanos…

“We’re going to attack from the right! Be prepared, Guardians!” hissed Quill. “The door is coming up! The others are nearly at their positions too!”

Gamora couldn’t help but feel worried.

They stopped outside the hanger and Gamora kept her hand hovered over the entrance panel.
“Everyone ready?” she whispered.

“I’m ready for my vengeance,” replied Drax, holding his two swords in his hands. “Thanos will die today.”

Gamora shook her head.

“Steve’s in position too,” replied Quill. “Valkyrie and her team as well.”

“Rocket, you better not stay back,” said Gamora, noticing the Racoon was behind Drax which was unusual for him.

Quill threw him a look. “Admit it, you’re terrified!”

“I’m not!”

“Sure…” muttered Quill.

Rocket was about to snipe back.

“Don’t! This isn’t the time for petty struggles,” growled Gamora, looking back towards Quill, waiting for the signal. He minutely inclined his head. “We’re going in, in ten.”

The count began and Gamora leaned forward, ready to run forward as soon as she activated the door panel.

“ONE!” she yelled, pressed the door release and ran inside, running straight for Tony who was already in the midst of fighting Steve.

Their timing may have been slightly off as both groups were already knee-deep in battle.

Thanos was concentrating upon Thor and Valkyrie who were both attacking him simultaneously, as was the Hulk, whilst Doctor Strange was using his portals to teleport Bucky around, all vying for hits upon the Titan.

Nat, Sam, Clint and Pepper were fighting off the remaining two children of Thanos, Corvas Glaive and Cull Obsidian.

Drax, Groot and Rocket went to join the battle with the Children whilst Mantis, Quill and Gamora moved towards Tony. Though their groups had split up, the aim was to retreat within their groups in different directions so they could lure each one away from the other. Each person had a target to concentrate on.

Tony’s armour encased his body but not his face and they could clearly see his eyes were shining blue, the possessive colour of the Mind Stone. She saw the Arc Reactor shining in his chest, humming with energy.

“Tony! Stop this! Fight it!”

He looked up at her, tilting his head to the side. “Why should I, when my goal in life has been to kill all of you?” His voice was monotone with no emotion whatsoever within it.

“But we do not want to kill you,” replied Gamora, keeping her swords at her side. “We want to save you.”

Steve stepped back towards them. “He’s too encased in his control. I’ve tried this. He doesn’t care.”
“But he’s not attacking now, is he?” noted Gamora, her eyes focused upon Tony. She was not paying attention to the other battles around her. She didn’t need to. She trusted the others to do their jobs well and keep Thanos away from her and Tony.

Tony stood there, his face twitching ever so slightly.

Steve gasped. “Is he fighting it?”

“I think he’s trying to,” marvelled Gamora. “I knew he was strong… But it’s plugged into his chest… It should be impossible…”

“I think it would be a good idea to not stand around talking when we could have our chance to get him out of here,” interrupted Quill quickly. “Whatever is happening, he is losing the battle!”

Tony’s arm came up and a large blaster formed around his arm. “How quaint, you believe me saveable. I’m not.” His face turned nasty. “You will all die, apart from you, Gamora. Your father wishes to speak to you.”

“He won’t be speaking to me,” she promised.

“Oh, he will be,” Tony fired at them and Gamora and Steve leapt to the side and Quill activated his jet boots and flew upwards.

But Mantis had worked her way around behind Tony and leapt at him, grabbing the side of his head with her hands. “SLEEP!” she yelled, her antennae shining bright as she attempted to soothe his mind.

“What? No! Get –” Tony’s eyes rolled back and he fell to the floor, Mantis managing to keep her hands on his head.

Quill landed on his feet. “That was… surprisingly easy.”

Even Gamora felt uneasy. They hadn’t expected it to work as well as it had. “Come on; let’s get him out of here! Keep him asleep, Mantis!”

Though it was difficult, Steve managed to lift Tony into his arms so Mantis was still keeping him asleep. The last thing they needed was Tony to wake whilst he was encased within his armour and under Thanos’ control.

Gamora followed them out of the hanger, dread pooling in her gut. Something was wrong, very wrong here.

“Are you okay?” Quill noticed, seeing the uneasy expression on her face.

She shook her head. “No. This isn’t right… This is a trap, I’m sure of it.”

“Gamora…” Quill started but had to leap away as a huge explosion rocked the corridor.

Steve tripped, lost his grip on Tony and dropped him and Mantis went flying.

Before Gamora could even regain her feet, Tony was upon her, fully awake and his hands clutched around her throat. She tried to kick but failed due to the armour he wore pressing her down, forcing her to struggle to breathe. Steve grabbed Tony from behind but Tony only held tighter, choking Gamora further.

Tony’s eyes were blazed blue and his face a contour of emotions. He’d been robotic before but
fighting seemed to bring out his emotions, despite the mind control.

“Tony! Stop it!” Steve was yelling, scrabbling to grab Tony away from Gamora.

She couldn’t breathe. He wasn’t aiming to kill her, just render her unconscious. And he was succeeding.

“Knock him out!” Quill shouted.

“Mantis is out of it!” replied Steve, shouting back.

“Fine! I’m gonna shoot him!” responded Quill.

She heard the click of a blaster being levelled, knew Quill was aiming for Tony’s head.

“NO! DON’T!” Steve moved from trying to wrestle Tony off her. There was a bang and Quill cursed.

“Why’d you do that for?”

Before Steve could even muster a response, before Gamora became aware that the grip on her throat had loosened lightly, there was a purple surge of power which knocked them clean off their feet, including dislodging Tony from his death-grip on her neck.

Coughing and breathing in air, Gamora hoisted herself up only to find a thick, purple hand grasping her by the right shoulder.

“Daughter.”

Gamora swallowed. She tried to wrench herself free but the grip only tightened. She was still finding it difficult to get in enough air. Tony’s strangulation of her throat had taken a lot out of her, enough that fighting against Thanos would be too difficult.

“You and I need to have a little chat,” said Thanos. “First, I have to finish up here. There are some loose ends I need to take care off. Don’t you worry, your friends will survive. I only kill when it is necessary and no one needs to die here today.”

“What have you done?” she whispered.

“I could kill everyone here with a single hit. I chose to disable them all, knock them unconscious. We’ll be long gone before they return to the land of the living.” Thanos pulled Gamora with him leaving her team-mates behind.

“Let me go! I have nothing to say to you!” she hissed angrily, trying to wrench her arm free from his grip.

Thanos chuckled. “You have plenty to say to me. It all depends on you on what happens next.”

He didn’t elaborate but he’d obviously seen through her. He knew she had lied to him about the soul stone but she couldn’t give up the location. Nothing would make her do it.

Pulling her back into the main corridor, she saw the rest of the Avengers scattered around the room, all knocked out cold, apart from Pepper who was being held by Cull Obsidian in a tight grip.

“I made sure to keep those I wanted awake.”
Gamora didn’t like how Pepper was the only one left conscious. What was the Titan planning?

“I know you intend to take Stark back from my control. I know he has old backups stored away. Don’t forget I broke into his mind and saw what he was before he decimated my army. Even if he manages to break through the condition of the Arc Reactor, I will still be able to control him. She is his weakness. To save her, he will do anything. But he’s defied me far too many times now for me to leave her alone.” Thanos expression was cool and calculated.

“Don’t! Please!” Gamora could guess what her father was planning with Pepper, what he’d force Tony to do.

“Don’t tell him anything!” shouted Pepper. “I don’t care what this monster does to me!” She was still trying to pull away from the grip of her captor.

Thanos moved forwards, nodding his head towards Cull, who promptly released Pepper. “Really?” She staggered but kept her balance, raising her arm. Her armour shined and her helmet remained off, the blaster pointing straight at Thanos.

Gamora couldn’t move as something was holding her down and she knew it was Thanos using the Stones; he wanted her to witness this.

“Shooting me will achieve nothing.”

Pepper fired.

The blaster shot didn’t graze the hard skin of the Titan.

“Nothing can harm me. I am far too powerful for insignificant mortal weapons now.”

Pepper was breathing in heavily. Still free from her captor’s grip, she cast her eyes around, searching for anything that could help her.

“Pepper,” said Gamora quietly, “don’t fight him.” It was the only advice she could give her. Thanos intended to take Pepper otherwise he would have left by now. And if Pepper continued to fight, Thanos would hurt her more just to disable her.

“Oh, daughter, her fighting me isn’t going to change her fate.” The stones in the Gauntlet glowed and then Tony was flying in, using his boot thrusters. His helmet was still off, his eyes still glowing blue. Thanos must have woken him up as he’d remained unconscious before.

He landed in front of Pepper, raising a Gauntlet at her, powering it up n front of her.

Pepper stiffened. “Tony?”

Thanos moved back towards Gamora, stifling her view. He motioned to Cull Obsidian and Corvus Glaive who both moved to his side. “Take her back to Sanctuary II. I will return shortly.”

“What? No!” Gamora tried to make a run for it but Cull grabbed her, crushing her against his body before she was enveloped in blue light and felt her body moving up. Sagging in her captor’s grip, Gamora could do nothing for either Tony or Pepper.

She could only concentrate on ensuring Thanos did not acquire the Soul Stone.
Pepper could see Tony’s shining, blue eyes stare blankly at her as he levelled a gauntlet at her face. She’d been fighting with Nat, Sam and Clint against the two Children of Thanos when a dark purple wave of light hit them all throughout the room which had immediately disabled everyone, save for herself and the aliens she had been attempting to fight.

Thanos moved slowly towards her, his eyes focused upon her face. “Pepper… Potts.”

She didn’t like it when he said her name. Fear trickled up her spine. Attempting to put on a brave voice wouldn’t be easy. “What’s it to you?” She could attempt to shoot him, try to rid the universe of this disease but it would be foolhardy. She could think about it but the execution wouldn’t be successful.

The alien chuckled. “Bravery. I admire it. I can see why Stark loves you.” He stomped forward ever closer. “The very mention of your name, even a single thought gave him the strength to carry on fighting. He was a chore to break but in the end, when he did, he proved to be a worthy follower, until he met you again and he found the resistance to fight back.”

Pepper gritted her teeth. She was scared but she wouldn’t show it. “Kill me then.”

The Titan reached forward and brushed a hand through her hair.

She jerked away, not liking the feelings associated with the Titan’s hand in her hair.

“I won’t kill you,” stated Thanos. He moved back. “But he will.” His head inclined towards Tony.

Pepper’s breath caught in her throat. No…

“Stark. Kill her.”

The order was clear and Tony stepped forward, the Gauntlet continuing to level at Pepper’s head. His face showed no emotion, his eyes still shining blue.

“Tony…” she whispered desperately. “Don’t. Please, don’t.”

Thanos smirked. “He is completely under my control. He lacks the cognitive ability to think, to feel any emotion at all.”

Pepper’s breath caught in her throat. The light in Tony’s Gauntlet hands was starting to shine. This would be the last thing she would see. Tony was an immovable force. He had no control and when – if – he learned he had killed her… She swallowed. It would break him.

Her lips parted. “Tony… I never stopped loving you.”

She closed her eyes and waited for her life to end.

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

So, Tony has been ordered to kill Pepper, Gamora has been taken to Thanos' ship...
What will happen next? There may have been a hint as to what may occur in the next chapter in this one...

Originally this chapter was supposed to be more action orientated, lots of different POV's and then as I was writing this chapter I realised, once Thanos knew where Gamora was, he’d come and get her. He wouldn't bother fighting the others. He'd just disable them, which is what he did in Infinity War when he was trying to get the last stone from Vision. Thanos just decided to disable everyone in the building so he could capture Gamora easily, which made this chapter a lot shorter.

This development has changed the rest of my plan as originally all the Avengers were going to be captured and taken aboard Thanos’ ship. Now they won’t be... We will see what happens next, and hopefully my brain will try to veer this story back to where I want it to head!

I hope to update again next week! Hopefully Tuesday!

the-writer1988
Part 5: Chapter 8 - A Prisoner Once Again

Chapter Summary

Things just go from bad to worse....

Chapter Notes

First of all, I’d like to say a MASSIVE THANK YOU to Chaed, whose feedback really helped me write a section of this chapter. Without it, this chapter still wouldn’t be finished. It’s taken me a bit longer to write than I intended because I hit a bit of a problem with it. Chaed is an excellent author, who co-writes with spacelaska. Please, if you haven’t already, read their fantastic AU of Tony being lost in space after the first Avengers. It is very different fic from mine and has such great characterisation and plot and it is WELL WORTH THE READ! Please give their stories a go: Beyond the Walls of Sleep and Until Human Voices Wake Us – you will not regret it!

WARNING
Secondly, I do want to apologise for the instance of rape in this chapter. My change in direction for this story meant I had to decide whether I included it. In the end, for the context of the plot and where the characters are, it had to be done. You’ll see why. But this will be the last instance of rape in this story. And this is a definite this time! There is also some rather crude language spoken by some of the characters in this chapter too!

And, finally, this is a long chapter. Just over 7500 words...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART FIVE
THE REVENGE OF TONY STARK

Chapter Eight
A Prisoner Once Again

“Stark. Kill her.”

“Tony, don’t. Please, don’t.”

He knew the order to kill Pepper was wrong. He could feel it in the very fabric of his brain, of his bones… His mind was foggy, blue light scattering over his eyes, making him hazy, more susceptible to control. He didn’t want to kill Pepper. He couldn’t kill her.

Pain erupted across his eyes into his brain. He knew he had been battling the others, had been trying his hardest to kill Steve and then to disable Gamora. He’d had no qualms about that despite wanting
to stop strangling Gamora. He hadn’t felt strong enough to succeed.

But Pepper…

Her voice echoed into his head again. “Tony… I never stopped loving you.”

The fog briefly lifted and he saw her face, her stricken, fearful face with her eyes closed, her lips taught and her body standing in front of him, waiting for the shot that would end her life. His gauntlet as raised to her head. It would be so easy to fire it and stop the burning pain pushing through his skull, yelling at him to fire, to kill her… To put a hole in her head and see her body drop to the floor as the blood trailed out from her brain…

His body was shaking.

She still loved him. He still loved her.

DO IT! SHOOT HER!

“NO! I WON’T!”

Tony stumbled backward; the fog clearing from his eyes, retreating back down to his chest and to the Arc Reactor Thanos had forced inside to take control of him. He could feel the tendrils trying to inch their way back to his brain but he refused. They had no power over him, not whilst Pepper was threatened.

“What did you say, Stark?”

Tony blinked, struggling to breathe, trying to ignore the pain in his chest. He turned to face Thanos. The Titan’s face was murderous, anger in his eyes.

“I said no! I will not kill her! I will not be your slave!”

He was aware Pepper was watching now, her eyes wide and silent tears falling down her cheeks. But Tony would not kill her, would not be made to do so. He couldn’t.

Thanos stepped forward. “How is it possible you could fight off the Mind Stone?”

“Because I have a stronger will than you’ve ever given me credit for,” replied Tony. “Even now, I’m still fighting it off. I will always protect those I love. Pepper comes first. I will never submit to you.”

His chest hurt so much. He would not submit.

Raising his arm towards Thanos, he moved back towards Pepper. “If you want to kill her, you’ll have to go through me!”

Thanos cocked his head to the side as if he was contemplating them. “How amusing you are, Stark. I do not need to go through you to kill her.”

Tony swallowed. Thanos was right. He had five Infinity Stones. He could easily move Tony aside.

“To kill her now would be a waste.”

Tony didn’t like the sound of that.

“If you will not kill her, then I shall have her broken to destroy you. I could kill you both now but where is the fun in that? You’ve betrayed me far too many times, Stark.”
“No! Don’t you dare touch her!” snarled Tony. His jet-boots activated and he threw himself forward, a blaster forming around his arm and he fired. Thanos stepped to the side and as Tony flew past, he reached out and grabbed him by the throat, slamming him down to the ground, pinning him there with his boot once he’d removed his hand from Tony’s throat. “Get off me!” Tony tried to move his arms and found to his annoyance Thanos had effectively disabled him with the Gauntlet.

“No, for you.” Thanos turned his attention back to Pepper.

She snarled angrily at him. “I may not be as strong as Tony. I won’t make it easy for you.” Her voice was filled with conviction and Tony could easily believe she would fight every step of the way, no matter what Thanos intended to do to her.

Clenching his fist, he pulled Pepper towards him, grabbing her with his Gauntlet-free hand. She hung in his grip, grabbing his wrists to support herself as he held her loosely by her neck. “I wonder how long you will last before you break?” He glanced at Tony. “There is no point in begging me for mercy for her, Stark. You’ve lost your chance. You shall watch as she screams and her blood pools at your feet. Perhaps you shall realise resistance is useless.”

Tony glared at angrily at the Titan. He couldn’t say a thing. His chest hurt so much. Whatever was in the Arc Reactor was still trying to take his mind again. He couldn’t let that happen.

“Pity,” smirked Thanos. “And there I hoped you would beg.” The Space Stone in the Gauntlet shone bright and a portal enveloped them as Thanos whisked them both away.

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Being woken by vicious shaking startled Steve into a battle-ready stance. He nearly knocked over Rhodey who was leaning over him, concern filling his features.

“Rhodey?” gasped Steve. “You’re back?”

Steve swallowed, noting that the rest of the team were still drowsy behind Rhodey but rapidly returning to consciousness. His head felt fuzzy. He couldn’t work out what had happened. They’d been fighting and then… darkness. Thanos had done something which had disabled them all. “We need a head count…”

“We don’t need one, Steve,” answered Rhodey. “We’re missing three people.”

Steve glanced around noting that all but one of the Guardians of the Galaxy was present and…

“Where’s Pepper?”

“I arrived just as he left with Pepper and Tony. He didn’t see me otherwise I’m sure he would have killed me. But Tony wasn’t mind-controlled. His eyes looked normal. Whatever happened while I was gone Tony must have fought the possession off somehow.” He lifted up the Arc Reactors out of his pouch. “I bought two, just in case.”

Steve shakily got to his feet, dusting himself down. “That was…” He shook his head. “I can’t really explain it. Thanos… But, if we’ve lost Tony for good, what can we do from here?”

“I’ll tell you what we’re gonna do,” muttered Quill, coming up behind Steve. “That bastard took my girl. We’re gonna rescue her.”

“I’m not sure if you missed the previous conversation,” started Natasha, “but didn’t we agree we wouldn’t be able to succeed in attacking his ship? And none of us have workable technology that would fly us there.”
“We do. We’ll need your support. Our ship can get you there,” explained Rocket. “And shorty here is determined to go. He’ll go all on his own if we let him.”

“Shorty?” Quill rounded on the Raccoon.

Steve shook his head. That must have been some hit if he was still being affected by it. He noted the others appeared to be the same as well. “Look, let’s not argue the point. Everything went wrong. But how can we track his ship? Do you have tracers on one another?”

“There’s one in Pepper if you do not have one on Gamora,” interrupted Rhodey.

“We do not have tracers on one another,” replied Quill, “however if we can trace your Pepper with our scanners we will achieve the same thing.” He began to pace. “Why does she have a tracer in her? That is what you said, right?”

Rhodey grimaced. “Pepper was kidnapped a few years ago. She was experimented on and it was on Bruce’s suggestion that a tracer was placed within her skin. It’s implanted in her wrist, just a small thing, but unnoticeable enough that we can track her whereabouts. Whether it works over lightyears I guess we’ll find out.”

Steve glanced at the others. “Everyone alright?”

“Bit dizzy.” Clint rose from the floor. “Wasn’t expecting that.”

“Who was?” coughed Bruce. He moved his hands up and down his chest. “That blast… it turned me back. I guess that is one way of putting the Hulk to sleep.”

“Strange?” Steve moved towards the Wizard, helping him to his feet.

“That… hurt. At least we are all in one piece.”

“Apart from Tony, Pepper and Gamora,” replied Steve.

Strange frowned. “We could do nothing to change the outcome of the battle. This was always going to happen.”

“Are you saying we were supposed to lose?” shouted Quill. “Thanos taking Gamora was not an option!”

Strange condescendingly looked at the younger man. “It is if you want to win.”

“What do you mean?” Bruce stumbled forward, still recovering from the side-effects of Thanos’s attack on them. “Wait, Tony knew, didn’t he? The future… You used the Time Stone to view the future, right?”

Strange didn’t answer but continued to stare at Bruce.

“This was meant to happen,” continued Bruce. He glanced around at everyone. “We might still win this.”

“There are many paths one could take but only one leads to victory. I have tried to steer all of you on the correct path. I can do no more than I already have done,” explained Strange. “To influence too much could cause the wrong, pivotal decisions to be made.”

Steve frowned. He wasn’t sure he understood the Wizard’s logic. “But if you told us what to do…”
Strange threw him a withering look. “You do not think I already tried that specific scenario? I saw over fourteen million paths.”

Steve winced. “Sorry.”

“All I can do is steer you towards the correct decisions. It’s up to all of you if you make the right one from here.” Strange walked around, casting his glance around at them all. “The next twenty-four hours are critical. If we make one wrong move than we will lose.”

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Pepper felt scared, more so than she had ever felt in her life. She was chained to a post in the centre of a dark and dreary room. The suit she had worn had been torn from her, leaving her in just an under-suit. Her hands were chained above her head and she’d tried to melt them by activating Extremis, however, the chains had not melted. Whatever metal they used to make them was immune to her powers.

Worry filled her gut as she waited to see what would happen now. Thanos had taken her for a reason. She hadn’t seen Tony since they had been torn apart after arriving here. Attempting to tug at the chains again was pointless. It was impossible to get free.

The door to her prison opened and one of Thanos’ minions walked in, a twisted smile on his ugly face. He’d been there at the Compound. She couldn’t remember the name but he stalked towards her like a predator savouring his prey.

She twisted her face away as a clawed hand reached up and grasped her jaw, tugging her head forward at an uncomfortable angle.

“You are a pretty specimen…” He sniffed her, his breath brushing against her ears.

Pepper flinched. “Urgh.”

“I’m sure Stark won’t mind if we have some fun…”

“Get off me!” Burning erupted through her body and past her skin at her fear of the unknown and the creature let go, hissing in pain as he was scalded for touching her. The heat within her was dying down but it stayed bubbling at the top, waiting to explode once again.

“Interesting defence mechanism. Pity,” His dark eyes bored into hers. “It doesn’t stop our fun, just changes the game a little.”

She felt sick and movement behind the creature caught her eye.

Pepper watched as Tony was dragged in by six creatures. He was naked. His hands were chained in front of him. The Arc Reactor that had been forced upon him still sat within his chest and she could see a light blue colour reflecting underneath his skin, spreading out from it. The power within the modified Arc Reactor was still attempting to take him over.

It was only Tony’s will pushing it back.

She couldn’t help but admire the strength he had despite the years he’d spent with them.

She didn’t like the fact he’d been stripped. What were they planning? Why bring him in here?

She watched as he was chained to the wall facing her, with the four creatures leaving the cell once
Tony was secure.

“If I cannot touch you… I can still touch him.” The alien smiled at her with a nasty gleam in his eyes.

“Just as long as you don’t touch her, Glaive! I can take whatever you throw at me!” snarled Tony, pulling at the chains restraining him.

Glaive’s lips thinned menacingly. “Really?” He turned back towards Pepper. “What you just did, you can control. You have two choices. You can stop defending yourself so we can hurt you or we’ll do what he fears most to him and you can watch him scream. Perhaps it will ensure he will become compliant once again…”

“Let them do it to me, Pepper…” Tony caught her eyes.

“You’ll willingly take it, Stark?” Glaive said as he caught Tony’s chin and squeezed hard.

Pepper saw a flash of fear reflect across Tony’s face.

“Just don’t hurt her…”

She struggled to speak. She didn’t want Tony to suffer anymore. He’d been through too much. She had a chance to spare him pain, to take punishment meant for him. How could she just let them hurt him? And he was naked… A nasty feeling settled in her stomach. Had they ever… touched him? She didn’t want to believe Tony had been violated in such a way. They wouldn’t have… surely?

Was that what they wanted to do to her?

“What shall it be?” Glaive leaned into her again, his breath making her gag. “You or him?”

She could control Extremis, prevent it from protecting her, allow her captors to do whatever they wanted to her.

The words and the way the alien leered at her caused an unsettling feeling in her stomach. She shivered in her chains, her eyes focused upon Tony’s naked body. In the dim light she could see the scars that littered his body. How could she watch them mar him further?

“Pepper, don’t!” Tony could see the decision she was about to make. He was struggling in his chains.

She steeled herself. “You’ll leave him alone? Let him go?”

“Not let him go, no. He will watch…”

Tony was shaking his head, imploring her not to give in for his sake. “I know what they’ll do to you… Don’t make me watch, Pepper.”

She could see the agony in his eyes.

“Please?” He was almost begging.

His words confirmed her fears. They were going to touch her, do things to her body she didn’t want done. The thought terrified her. How could she do this to him? Make him watch as they hurt her? To scar him further would be torture to both of them.

“Choose,” her captor urged.

She couldn’t do it to him but she couldn’t watch them hurt him either…
“I’m used to it…” said Tony quietly.

Oh god… He really has been raped…

“I’m getting impatient human,” Glaive hissed. He dared not touch her, just looked deep into her eyes. She could see his hand on his crotch. “My wife is dead. I would rather have you as my prize, squirming beneath me. My wife liked it rough… It would give me great pleasure to have you. To see him devastated by this would be… exquisite. He fears being abused again… You can save him if you consent… But I have no qualms with sticking my cock inside him. His hole has already been abused many times… Once more won’t make a difference…”

Pepper felt sick. Those monsters… What they did to him… No wonder he wants to die…

“I can take it…” hissed Tony though his face was pale and his eyes shone with fear but also determined to go through with it if he had to. “Anything to stop you… hurting Pepper.”

Pepper bowed her head. She couldn’t allow them to hurt him again. Whatever choice she made she would be hurting him. How could she make it?

I know what I have to do.

Lifting her chin, she stared into the eyes of her captor, steeled for the inevitable. “I will not lower my defences!”

Glaive snarled in her face. “Then you shall witness this instead!”

The chains were too secure. Unable to pull free, Pepper could do nothing but watch as Glaive strode towards Tony.

“She’s made her choice, Stark.” Glaive strode towards him. “A shame… I was looking forward to tearing her to pieces in front of you. I prefer females… Their bodies are far more rewarding then a male.” His hand was rubbing himself over his crotch. “Still, you’ve been loosened up enough before. How many Chitauri had you? My wife told me about that… She said it was the most beautiful sight she had ever seen.”

Tony was trembling in his chains, trying to ignore Glaive’s approach.

“It’s a shame Proxima is dead. She would have enjoyed this.” Glaive turned to face Pepper. “This will not stop until you give me what I want. We have legions of Chitauri waiting for him. And you will watch every second of it.”

Pepper flinched. Her throat was dry and she couldn’t keep her eyes off from Tony’s scared face. He had turned his head to the side.

But Glaive, instead of doing what Pepper had assumed him to be doing, released Tony from the chains and threw him bodily to the floor in front of Pepper.

Caught off guard, Tony gulped in air, trying to get in as much breath as possible.

“Tony!” Pepper tried to warn as Glaive launched himself at Tony’s back.

There was an opening in Glaive’s trousers and something…

Pepper wanted to forget she’d seen it but couldn’t as Glaive pressed himself against Tony’s back, one hand in his hair, pulling his head back so Tony was forced to look at Pepper, and with a change of position of his hips, Tony screamed in utter agony as he was penetrated.

Tears welled in his eyes and Pepper couldn’t stop her own tears from flowing. She couldn’t watch but her eyes wouldn’t close at the cruel scene in front of her. Tony’s eyes were locked on hers but he
wasn’t there. It was as if he had tried to find a way to escape the horror of what was being done to his body. His eyes were blank, his mind disconnected from his surroundings. His body moving on the floor with each thrust.

Glaive was cruel, thrusting his hips in and out as fast as possible, grunting in pleasure. He only increased his pace. Tiny noises escaped Tony’s throat, the only indication he was somewhat aware of what was happening to him.

“How STOP IT!” Pepper yelled, desperate to save Tony. She could see blood slightly dripping between the two bodies, knew Glaive was injuring Tony and still he only pumped his hips faster.

And then the door swung open and –

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Gamora waited for Thanos to return. She knew from past experiences attempting to escape his ship was practically impossible. Now he had five of the Infinity Stones, he could easily haul her back to where he wanted her. She would wait. Perhaps she could bluff her way out of this, and perhaps save Tony and Pepper. She’d watched as Thanos had dragged them both away.

Soft footsteps made their way over to her and Gamora turned her head to look at Thanos as he moved towards her. He was holding a bowl of food in his hands.

“I have bought you something to eat. You need it to keep your strength up,” he explained as he passed her the bowl.

Gamora looked down at the lumpy liquid and then threw it in the opposite direction. “I do not need your food!”

“There was a time when you would be glad for the food I provided,” he replied, moving to sit on the stairs behind her instead of his usual seat.

“I had no choice. You took me from my home! Everything I hate about myself is because of you and what you did to me. You were no father to your children. You claim you saved us but you torture and you kill!” she shouted back.

“I made you better,” Thanos responded calmly.

Gamora shook her head vehemently. “No, you didn’t. You destroyed my life! How can you believe that you made me better?”

“You have a home and plenty of food and water, something your planet did not have the luxury of. Do you know what has happened to your home since I purged half the population? Only growth and beauty. The planet has become sustainable. Every child has plenty to eat and drink. Every resource is used effectively. It has become a paradise! Culling half of a world is the solution to stabilising the universe.”

Gamora shook her head. “No. Nothing is worth killing half a population. Everyone you killed deserved a life. To this day, I have no idea if my mother survived or not. And I wish I did! I wish I could go back there and find her! You took me from her! Just like you did with every other child of yours.”

“I am not sorry for what I did. I’m the only one with the strength and the will to carry this out. I am prepared to lose everything to save everyone.” Thanos moved from his perch on the stairs. “This throne – my chair – was meant to be yours one day. It still could be.”
“No. I hated that chair. I’m glad I escaped you.”

“You were the best of my children. No one could surpass you.” He walked towards her. “Do not assume you escaped me. I allowed it. I could have taken you back anytime I wanted but I allowed you to do what you wanted.” His hand came to rest upon her shoulder.

“I never failed you,” she said. “I did what I had to do to survive.”

“But you did fail me.” Thanos turned her gently to face him.

Gamora stiffened. “I never did. I promise you.”

“You never found the Soul Stone.”

“I didn’t,” she clarified. He was playing a dangerous game with her.

“But you did,” he continued. “You lied to me. That has disappointed me.”

“I didn’t!” Turning, she grabbed one of his wrists with both of her hands. “I swear to you I never found the Soul Stone!”

Thanos didn’t pull away from her hold of his arm. “I taught you everything you know. But I never taught you to lie. That’s why you are so bad at it.”

Gamora swallowed. She didn’t reply.

Thanos began to walk away. “Follow me. I have something I wish to show you, daughter.”

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He led her to the cells where the bars slid back into their slots to allow them entry. There were two Chitauri warriors on guard but in the centre of the room, suspended in the centre of the room, with her parts almost pulled apart from her, was Nebula. She was gasping for breath, her body shaking slightly in the suspension field.

One arm was pulled out in front her and the other was pulled behind her. Her legs were dragged out as well. Every part of her was on display, every organic and mechanical body part was visible to the naked eye.

Gamora knew Nebula only retained a few of her biological organs and processes, enough for her to be classed as a living creature. Her brain, heart, digestive and reproductive organs were all intact. She had one surviving lower arm and hand, the rest of her was pure machine.

“Nebula…” she whispered, moving towards her and brushing her face with her right hand.

“I caught your sister sneaking aboard my ship. She tried to kill me, very nearly succeeded. She’s been here since then.” Thanos approached Nebula. “I could have killed her, ended her life, but I knew she would come in useful one day.” He raised his fist and clenched it tight, all five Infinity Stone lighting up.

Nebula’s entire body stretched outwards and she screamed, her eyes clenching shut.

Gamora stood there shocked at the horror of watching her sister be tortured. She swirled around, grabbing Thanos’ arm. “Stop it!”

He released his fist. Nebula’s body slumped back together and she panted for breath.
“I swear to you I never found the Soul Stone!”

“Oh daughter…” Thanos sounded disappointed. “You still lie. Show her.”

The Chitauri warrior at the console turned a few knobs and pressed a few buttons and a hologram erupted from Nebula’s eye.

Gamora saw herself. A message she had sent Nebula ages ago when Nebula had warned her Thanos was going for the stones. She had insisted to Nebula that Thanos would never find the Soul Stone that she had found the map and burnt it to ash. The game was over and she knew it. Thanos knew she had lied. He had concrete evidence of her deception.

“You’re strong… but you care too much…” Thanos’ voice was dark.

His fist clenched tightly and Nebula screamed again as her body parts were pulled further apart than ever before.

Gamora bit her lip, trying to ignore her sister’s screams. Thanos spoke over them, eliciting fear into her body.

“If this does not work, I can always bring someone else you care about in here… How about Stark? Perhaps I will force you to watch as I replace every limb in his body? He’s been lucky his failures have not resulted in his limbs being taken… But he’s failed me too many times now to avoid that fate.”

Fear for Tony and for Nebula screamed through her body and mind.

Nebula’s yells continued to rock her ears and she twisted her head away, trying to ignore the screams. But she couldn’t. The wails were piercing her ears, hurting her eardrums. She could stop this. Nebula wouldn’t want her to but it wasn’t fair on Nebula either to suffer when she had suffered her whole life.

And Tony…

How could she subject him to this?

Thanos would keep his word. He’d kill Nebula and move to Tony…

I can’t… I’m sorry…

“Vormir!” The location seeped from her lips and she hung her head in defeat.

The screams immediately stopped.

“Tell me again.”

“Vormir. It’s on Vormir…” she replied, hating herself each time she said the location.

She didn’t want to look up and see his satisfied smile. “Show me.”

She nodded numbly. “Please let Nebula go. I did what you wanted.”

“Why should I when I can use her against you further if I need to?” he answered. It was a solid reason for keeping Nebula a prisoner for sure.

“You have Tony. I care about him just as much as I do about Nebula. I know you will never release
him. If you ever loved me like a daughter then you’ll at least allow Nebula to leave this place alive and live the life you took from her.” She raised her head and sought Thanos’ eyes. “Please.”

A small nod was all she received in return and she knew Thanos would honour her request.

“Take me to the Soul Stone.”

Crossing the room, Gamora stood beside her father, but turned her head to look back at Nebula once more. She was looking at her. Not using her voice but moving her lips, Gamora communicated with her sister. “I’m sorry. I had to. Please save Tony and Pepper.”

She didn’t know if Nebula would but she was their last hope.

All she received in return to her voiceless words was a small inclination of Nebula’s chin.

And then Thanos grabbed her by the shoulder and pulled her with him to Vormir.

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As soon as they released her from the suspension field after putting her back together, Nebula attacked the two Chitauri guarding her. It was easy to dispose of them. They hadn’t been expecting her to fight back. Their orders had been clear to release her and escort her off the ship.

She had no intention of doing so.

Gamora wanted her to help Tony. Despite the history she shared with him, she knew her presence wouldn’t be welcomed and he wouldn’t trust her but Gamora had placed herself in great danger. Once Tony was free, Nebula would go to Vormir. She had to stop Thanos before it was too late.

She’d been trapped in that cell for months, her weapons stored away in a locker behind the control panel. It was easy to break into. Her sword was there, a favoured weapon of hers which had served her well, which had nearly decapitated Thanos when she’d attacked him before her capture. She also retrieved two batons which she attached to her belt on either side of her body.

Leaving the dead bodies of the Chitauri in the cell, Nebula palmed the door open.

“How where would Stark be?” she muttered to herself.

Thanos’ ship was large. It could take her hours to find him. Taking a calculated risk and guessing where he would be held could be catastrophic, especially if she ended up on the opposite side of the ship to where he actually was.

“Wait… Gamora mentioned someone called Pepper too. Stark’s woman is here too. They’d be together…” She knew Thanos had lost two of his children recently and there were certain sections of the ship she could pass over and wouldn’t need to stop and check.

*Cull and Glaive remain of Thanos’ children. Cull would have no interest. He deals in destruction.*

The logical area of her brain was narrowing down options she could discount.

Glaive’s area would be the first place she should check. Each of Thanos’ children had a designated area on the ship that belonged to them. Glaive had a few cells in his area where he held prisoners of Thanos’ and then tortured them. His wife, Proxima, had been a regular visitor to his section to help him break persons of interest. If Stark was going to be anywhere on the ship, he would be there.

Moving quickly she ran out into the corridor and then out into the main throne room. Glancing to the
right, Nebula headed for a door on the left, clenching her fist tightly and slamming it against the access panel. Her access to anything on this ship had been revoked months ago. Brute force was the only way she could go forward.

The corridors were dimly lit as she made her way through Glaive’s designated section, straining her hearing to listen for any signs of life.

*Grunt.*

She paused.

*Grunt.*

She ran, following the grunting noises. A sickness feeling settled in her stomach. If Glaive was doing what she thought he was doing…

Stopping outside a cell halfway down the darkly-lit hall, Nebula readied her batons and pushed open the door.

---

Tony tried to forget Pepper was watching this, tried to lock himself away in his mind, to avoid the torture of knowing she could see Glaive doing this to him. He could still feel the jolting of his body, the pain in his ass with each thrust. Glaive was big, very big and he could feel a slight trickle of wetness coming down his legs.

Glaive was too big, was tearing him inside, ruining him completely. The jolts became rougher and Glaive’s grunts grew louder.

He was glad this wasn’t Pepper. Glad he could take this for her. He’d do anything for her.

And then Glaive was torn from him, and Tony’s body slumped to the ground.

“GET OFF HIM!”

Tony winced, slowly coming back to himself and he saw to his horror Nebula standing there with two batons in both of her hands. *Oh god, she’s back for more!* Fear rushed through him, his body trembling at the thought of even more abuse, that he did something so stupid that he had no thought for anyone else’s safety other than to protect Pepper.

Despite the immense pain he was in, he got to his feet and rushed Nebula. He didn’t hear Pepper’s ensuring shout telling him not to attack, he only sought to defend himself from further violation.

Tony reached for one of the batons, missed as Nebula twisted away and stumbled past her, collapsing onto the floor. Turning face-up, he shook his head, feeling a bit dazed, scrambled to his feet again only for Pepper to yell at him again.

“Tony! Don’t attack!” Pepper still hung in her chains.

“She… She!” he tried to speak but couldn’t. Glancing back he saw Nebula drew forth a sword, the batons now abandoned on the floor behind her and launch herself at Glaive who was swinging his scythe at her.

Pepper’s soothing voice broke through again. “She got him off of you.”

He didn’t want to believe Nebula had aided him, had helped him. She had hurt him so badly. He
hadn’t seen her since she had fled from Thanos four years ago. Nebula had left him with deep scars. Fear was a common denominator here.

“How did you escape your cell?” Glaive spat at Nebula.

“I was released!” she replied, attempting to hack down at her older adoptive sibling. “I will not allow you to harm these two further!”

Glaive’s cruel smile crossed his face. “A shame you will fail then. Once I’m done with you I will just continue with him until he’s torn to pieces and his woman lowers her defences.”

Tony felt sick. This would go on. He wasn’t sure he could take much more abuse. Whatever Nebula was up to she was helping them. Why, he didn’t understand but he’d take it for now, no matter how much he wanted to curl up into a ball and stop her ever touching him again.

His former rapist was attacking Glaive with force, slashing up and down in an attempt to render him injured, or perhaps even dead.

Taking his chance Tony reached for one of Nebula’s dropped batons. Launching himself forwards, twisting himself so his back faced Glaive, he swung the baton in an arc, ducking underneath Nebula’s sword to come up and hit Glaive right on the kneecap from behind.

The alien’s leg buckled and Nebula’s sword pierced flesh by his throat.

Blood spurted from the wound, coating Tony in droplets of blue blood. He moved, and then tackled Glaive to the ground, forcing him to fall onto his chest. Nebula was upon Glaive in an instant, swishing her sword and removing Glaive of an arm.

Pushing Nebula away before she could finish the job, Tony raised the batons, standing over Glaive’s form as he tried to struggle away and regain some foot in the fight. Tony never gave him the chance.

Both batons came down hard on Glaive’s skull.

It stunned him enough that Glaive did not move.

Tony simply did not care.

This thing had wanted to rape Pepper, had raped him instead… He’d made Tony relieve his fears again.

And he bought the batons down hard again.

And again.

And again.

He didn’t even hear the cracking of the skull, barely recognised the blood pooling from Glaive’s head.

He kept doing it, not fully aware of what he was doing; just wanting to let out his anger at the situation he had been in for years.

As he raised the baton again someone grabbed him by the arms and tried to pull them down. He whirled, raising the baton to strike them but stopped when he saw Pepper there, a slight bit of fear in her eyes as she saw the madness and insanity in his eyes.
“Tony… please stop. He’s dead.”

Tony swallowed, dropping the baton. He cast his eyes to the side and saw Glaive’s rather dead form on the floor. His skull had been smashed to pieces and the floor was pooled with his blood.

He shivered, aware of the cold on his naked body. He hurt and ached. Now he was more aware of his surroundings he realised his buttocks hurt. He didn’t want to know of what damage had been done.

“Are you hurt?” asked Pepper.

Tony wanted to bite back but stopped himself. “Yes.”

She turned him around gently and without touching he knew she was looking at the area. “You’re not bleeding much, just little trickles.” Then she pulled him into a hug. He stiffened. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?” he asked, surprised.

“For making you live through that,” she replied, not lowering her gaze.

“I’m used to it,” he answered.

Pepper nodded and then moved away from him towards Nebula who was now leaning against the wall, arms crossed over her chest, with her sword once again sheathed and the two batons attached to her belt. “Thank you for saving us.”

Nebula shrugged. “I did what I was asked to do.”

Tony felt uneasy. He didn’t like being naked in front of her. He needed to get some clothes.

“Gamora asked me to help you. I couldn’t say no.” Nebula glanced at Tony. “And I owe you, Stark. What I did to you years ago… I don’t expect forgiveness on your part, but I regret what I did to you. And I understand if you do not want to trust me but we are all on the same side here. Thanos has taken Gamora to Vormir to gain the last Infinity Stone. We need to stop him.”

“You’re right,” he answered slowly. “I don’t trust you at all and I will never forgive you for what you did to me. Nothing you do will ever make me forgive or even accept what you did to me.” He pulled Pepper behind him. “You may have saved Pepper but I do not want you near her!”

“Tony!” Pepper grabbed his arm. “She saved us!”

“SHE RAPED ME REPEATEDLY!”

Pepper jumped back. Her eyes focused upon Nebula. “Is this true? Did you really?”

“Yes.” Just a one-word response. Nebula did not look away.

Pepper grabbed his hand. “Tony?”

“I’m not going to talk about it,” he replied harshly.

“I hurt him badly,” said Nebula. “I enjoyed it. I wanted him so I had him. He was not a disappointment. But it doesn’t change the fact that I do regret it. If I could change anything it would be that but I can’t. Gamora never told me why she tried to help you whilst you were in our care. She only did four years ago when we reconciled ourselves. I know she disproves, perhaps even hates me for what I did to you, but at the time it was the right thing to do in the circumstances I was in!”
“It doesn’t justify what you did to me,” whispered Tony. “Because of what you did to me, I can never be physical with anyone again! No one would want to be with someone like me with all these issues brought to the table! You single-handedly destroyed any semblance of hope that I ever had by raping me! You took any sort of future from me! How could anyone want to be with me?”

A hand rested on his shoulder. “Tony?” Pepper’s small voice said. “I would.”

Tony sighed and turned to face her. “But you and Happy…”

“He’s dead, Tony. He would have wanted us both to be happy. I never stopped loving you and when I lost Happy, I thought we might be able to reconnect. I’ve been a part of your life for so long that to be without you would be devastating. The years you were gone were incomplete. Happy could only fill one part of it. You were my first proper love. I wished things had been different for us.” She grabbed his hands. “I want to help you but only if you want it.”

Tony hung his head. “I don’t know what I want.” He shuffled on his feet. “And this isn’t the time to discuss this.” Casting his eyes to Nebula, he huffed out a deep breath. “I may not like it, but I have to work with you. You’re the only one who could get us off this ship and to Vormir where Thanos is. I have no idea where the planet is. If we want to stop this, we have to work together, regardless of our past history. But do not go near Pepper or I will kill you.”

He doubted she would be afraid of a naked man with no weapons making threats against her but he had to say his piece.

“Acknowledged, Stark,” nodded Nebula. “Now, shall we get you some clothes, Stark?”

He growled, but chose to ignore her words, instead turning to Pepper. “I need to get to my quarters and get my suit. The one I’ve been working on… if it’s still here. I’m going to need it.”

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Tony emerged from his quarters with Pepper. He hadn’t wanted to leave her in the corridor with Nebula whilst he collected his stuff. He had put on a new tunic and sweatpants, then connected the Arc Reactor currently in his chest to the new housing unit. It wasn’t ideal to use an Arc Reactor infused with Infinity Stone energy with his suit. He had no choice in the matter since he had no spare Reactors in his quarters. He had not dared to create a new Arc Reactor, for fear of giving Thanos the secret of how to make one.

Clearly, the Titan had figured it out on his own.

The suit was encased in the new attachment he had situated on top of the Arc Reactor. He hadn’t even shown Pepper what it could do. He’d tested it plenty of times and knew all of its capabilities. He had no weapons however the suit, once activated, more than made up for it.

“I’m not even gonna ask what you’re hiding, Stark,” said Nebula as she glanced him once over.

“Good ‘cos I’m not going to tell you anyway!” he shot back. “Stay behind me, Pepper.”

Nebula led them to the hanger where she promptly broke into a three-carrier ship. Nebula took the controls, starting the engines and pulling away from the docking port.

“To Vormir?” she queried.

Tony reluctantly nodded. He didn’t want to take Pepper with him to this place. Trying to change her mind had been impossible and he had tried. She’d refused, despite her own lack of suit and weapons.
He wasn’t going to argue with her.

If his last moments were only hours away, he’d rather not fight with her, just be beside her and enjoy her presence.


Tony turned his head and sure enough, just outside the viewing screen, to the right of them was the Guardians ship with Drax stood atop the ship with a space-helmet on, waving at them.

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The two ships docked and Tony, Pepper and Nebula crossed over into the Guardians ship.

Quill was not surprised when he was informed Gamora had been taken to Vormir by Thanos, though he was disappointed he had not been able to rescue her on time. It seemed Gamora had told him the secret location of the Soul Stone too.

Rhodey presented Tony with a different Arc Reactor which he promptly used to replace the cursed Reactor with. Rhodey had even bought another suit for Pepper so she would be able to fight if she wished to, which Tony was still against, but nothing he could say could stop her.

Not every Avenger had come with the Guardians.

Steve had ordered Sam and Bucky to remain on Earth and form the New Avengers if they never returned. He hadn’t wanted to leave the planet undefended and though T’Challa and Peter Parker had both bowed out a few days ago they couldn’t leave the Earth’s defence to a Prince of his country or a teenager.

Clint had also elected to stay behind as a seasoned Avenger but also because he had a family to care for. He had wanted to go with them on this mission but the risks had been too high for him. Not being able to see his wife and children again was something that had prevented him from agreeing to come. The risks, for Clint, were too high.

Thor had left Valkyrie in charge of his people on Earth despite her desire to fight as well. He had overruled her as their King.

That just left, apart from the Guardians of the Galaxy, Steve, Nat, Bruce, Thor, Rhodey and Doctor Strange to help stop Thanos.

It wasn’t a large group, not by any means.

It probably wasn’t enough to contain Thanos.

They would just have to try their best to prevent Thanos from achieving his goals, even if it meant death.

Tony stood in the cockpit of the Guardians ship gazing out at the stars.

He didn’t know what to expect on Vormir but he knew one vital thing: I’m ready for whatever that bastard throws at me. Even death.

To be continued...
Please let me know what you think!

Tony's great fear is being sexually assaulted again. For it to happen to him in front of Pepper, while she is forced to watch is horrible for him. Tony has been through a lot and to be subjected to it again... Well...

Tony and Nebula reunite but not in the best circumstances. I always planned to bring Nebula back into the story close to the end.

I hope to have another chapter up next week but that will be the last one before Christmas. Trust me, you do not want me to leave you with Part 5: Chapter 10 cliffhanger before Christmas so that will be posted hopefully before New Year. Part 5 Chapter 9 is going to be quite short so there should be an update next week since I have already started writing it :)

Until next time,
the-writer1988
Part 5: Chapter 9 - A Prisoner No More

Chapter Summary

Thanos considers his next options...

Chapter Notes

Hello all!

I know I said I would update before Christmas but something bad happened a few days after I posted the last chapter and I just couldn't get my creativity back. Our Christmas celebrations couldn't go as planned either. I'm not going to say what happened so please do not ask me.

This chapter is shorter than normal but its written in Thanos's POV which was an interesting experience...

I hope you all enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART FIVE
THE REVENGE OF TONY STARK

Chapter Nine
A Prisoner No More

Her body lay broken at the bottom of the ravine.

He had sacrificed the one thing in the universe that he had loved most of all.

Heaviness weighed in his heart.

His Gamora…

Gone.

His visions of her taking his throne were shattered, now just a distant wish that could never come true. He had killed her for the Soul Stone. How it hurt to have had to throw her willingly to her death.

Her last word to him as she fell, a screeching ‘FATHER’, would forever pierce his memory. He would not forget the look of horror and fear on her face as she fell. Her body crunching upon the earth and her skull splitting, her spine shattering in several pieces as she impacted the hard ground.

Gamora was gone.
And he’d killed her.

The Soul Stone was in his hand as he floated in the water.

How he had got here he didn’t know. He remembered white light and then waking up here, the stone clenched tightly in his fist.

He had been proven worthy to bear its power.

His love for his daughter had been genuine, had been strong enough to meet the requirements of the Soul Stone. It hurt. He’d murdered her. In doing so he was saving the universe. With this last stone, now sitting in his hand, he could complete his goal.

No one could stop him now.

Focusing upon the Soul Stone, he placed it in the last spot in the Gauntlet. He could feel pain erupt up his arm, sparks travelled up, filling him with the full power and the will to wield the Gauntlet. He could see everything now. He was at full power.

All it would take was a snap of his fingers and his goal would be achieved. Everything he had worked for...

And that was when he saw it: the Guardians ship, coming down towards him at a fast pace.

He could end this right now. It didn’t matter they had come to stop him. Just one snap and perhaps they would all disappear.

Yet something stopped him.

If any survive they will try to reverse it. I cannot have that.

He couldn’t take the chance that they would all survive. They would have to die. He could easily do it now, but no, killing them whilst they were on the ship was the coward’s way out. He wanted to see them die, to ensure their lives were depleted before he fulfilled his quest. If there was any chance they would find a way to reverse what he did, he had to make sure it was eliminated.

He decided to teleport to higher land where he would have a better advantage against them.

The ship changed direction.

Thanos didn’t move as the ship landed, merely watched as it descended from the sky.

He was not surprised to see Stark walk out first, accompanied by a few of his friends from Earth. He had expected Nebula to rescue him. Then the Guardians trooped out, lastly followed by the wizard who had held the Time Stone and finally Nebula brought up the rear.

“Where is Gamora?” Quill shouted. “I know she’s here!”

Just the mere mention of her made him feel guilty. He tried to keep his composure. He wasn’t sure if he had succeeded.

“WHERE IS SHE?” Quill yelled again, clearly getting agitated.

It would be a shame to kill the boy. If Gamora hadn’t needed to be killed, he would have been perfectly happy with his daughter marrying him one day.
Nebula stepped forward. “She gave him the location of the Soul Stone. She did it. He…”

“You killed her for the Stone,” Stark finished, his eyes piercing straight through Thanos.

“A sacrifice was necessary,” he explained. Perhaps he could convince them this was the only way. “I had to lose someone I love to obtain it.”

“Love? Killing your own daughter is love?”

Thanos regarded the one whom the humans revered as Captain America. “You would not understand if you have never lost someone dear to you.”

“I have lost people I love. I lost seventy years of it. I will never get that time back. I can never be with the woman I love because of my choices.”

He saw Quill being restrained by Thor and the Hulk. The human was desperate to attack him. He was sorely tempted to let him.

But he kept his attention on Captain America. Perhaps he didn’t have to kill this one. He could offer him a deal. “I could make it so you return to the time you originally came from. I could send you back to be with her. All you have to do is not fight me and you can be with her again…”

The man visibly swallowed. “No. People’s lives are at risk. I will not let you convince me to go back into the past! I could have had that life but everyone’s lives here are more important!”

“Pity.” He knew this would come to a fight. He could just wipe them out easily. Casting his gaze, he focused upon Stark. “Gamora always believed you to be important. However, you are just a broken prisoner, one I used continuously. Do you really believe you can fight me and win? You are not their salvation. Not by a long shot.”

Stark’s eyes lowered and a fierce expression came across his face. “Do not underestimate me. I know of your plan and what you intend to do.”

“You cannot stop me. I have all the stones at hand. A simple snap of my fingers and I win.”

“Then do it!” snarled Stark. “If you have them all just do it!”

Thanos smirked. “I contemplated that. I decided not to.”

“You’ve spent all these years preparing for this and now you have them all, you hold back, why?” Thor asked.

“I know if any of you survive you will try to reverse it, to restore the universe to what it once was. I cannot have you interfering with this. I am trying to save the universe.” Perhaps they could come to an understanding, yet he doubted it.

“You plan to kill us,” stated Stark’s woman.

“Yes. However, I may just leave you and Stark alive. He does not deserve death.” Oh, he did want Stark dead, but he also wanted him to suffer. Stark wanted to die but Thanos didn’t want to give it to him so easily. He would make it slow for him; perhaps ensure he lived for many more years before he finally granted Stark the sanctity of death.

Stark’s eyes wavered, his expression flickering to fear for just an instant. “I’ll kill myself before I let you imprison me again! I will not be your prisoner anymore!”
Oh, it would be so easy to disable Stark.

Thanos smirked.

No, he would allow Stark to fight him, believe that he had the chance to kill himself if he lost. He would ensure Stark survived and died only when he saw fit.

But it was Nebula, the daughter he was disappointed in most, who stepped forward, her black eyes glittering hatred at him.

“Gamora was always one step ahead of you. You murdered her for the Soul Stone. But she ensured the survival of Stark for all these years. Our salvation or not, you will regret listening to her for that!” Nebula snarled, removing her batons from her belt and getting into a stance to attack.

“Stark can do nothing to me. His suits are useless against me.” He raised a fist. “Enough of these games! Fight me or I’ll kill you all where you stand!”

“I’ll get you for killing Gamora!” Quill was now standing with his blaster out and pointing straight at Thanos’ head.

“Really?” Out of respect for Gamora’s love for Quill and the other members of her riff-raff group, he clenched his fist, and sent the so-called Guardians of the Galaxy through a portal, effectively stranding them on the other side of the planet. If they came for him again they would die. It was the others who remained he had to kill.

His failed daughter included, though he may just let her live. Simply because it would be a waste of his time to kill her.

First, he would take out the weaker Avengers. The woman in a black, skin-tight suit, who didn’t appear to have any sort of abilities that could harm him, was circling Thanos like a predator stalking its prey. One clench of his fist and her heart would stop.

“No!” Stark was there, still standing in his under-suit with no armour on. “Don’t hurt them!”

He paused in his action. “Why?”

Stark swallowed. “Your ultimate goal has been to let the universe decide who lives and dies. Why take that choice from it? If you kill any of us you will be upsetting the balance you seek from the universe!”

That was true. He only killed when he had to. He didn’t need to fight the Avengers. He could just snap his fingers and let the universe decide.

“But you know we will always fight you, that is why you want to kill us. You said as much.”

Did they really have to go over this again?

“You’re stalling. Keep on stalling and I’ll kill your woman.” He pointed the Gauntlet at Pepper Potts. She wasn’t fazed by the threat. The shining new armour she wore gleamed in the dim light of Vormir.

“Fight me. Just me,” offered Stark. “Leave the others. Let the universe decide their fate.”

“Tony… No… Don’t!” Stark’s woman protested.

“I’ll always fight you, no matter what you do. The only way to stop me fighting you is to kill me.”
Stark’s eyes flashed angrily.

“Or I imprison you.”

“That won’t stop me fighting you. I’ll find other ways.”

“Not if you are screaming you won’t,” smiled Thanos. “I can make you suffer constantly, ensuring you do not die, keeping you alive for more than your mortal years if I wish to. I could make you suffer for eternity. Would you still fight me after you have been tortured for an eternity?”

There was a slight wavering to Stark’s voice as he responded. “Yes.”

Thanos tipped his head to the side, studying Stark. He doubted it. “We’ll see.”

“Tony, you must be mad if you think we’re going to let you fight him alone!”

Thanos didn’t know the one who had spoken. He wore a heavier suit than Stark did, with a lot more weapons and more of a military design to it. Stark was a formidable designer; if only Stark could have been moulded to serve him. His designs could wreak havoc across the known universe. Stark would have been a formidable ally… but also an enemy. He’d once had Stark as his own, serving him compliantly, until he’d returned to Earth and found the motivation to turn against him.

His eyes moved to Pepper Potts. Her memory, her mere continued existence had caused Stark to waiver and betray him.

Out of them all, she was the one who needed to die most of all.

However, the notion of fighting Stark one-on-one without interference from the others was promising. “Can you guarantee they will not assist you?”

Before Stark could respond, the God of Thunder stepped forward, his hands crackling with electricity. “If Stark desires to fight you without our assistance, we shall step aside.”

Thanos saw the other Avengers trade glances at Thor’s words. They were not happy with the proclamation.

“But if you defeat him then we shall defend him before you get the chance to take his life or—”

“—before I have him tortured for eternity?” finished Thanos, smirking at his enemies.

“What do you say Thanos?” Stark demanded, standing in front of him in his under-suit, a new Reactor planted in his chest, free from the machinations of the Mind Stone. “Do we have a deal?”

There would be no harm in fighting Stark. He’d won anyway. He could delay balancing the universe for just a little bit longer, especially if it meant defeating the human. Even if he was one of the few who disappeared, Thanos would still have the satisfaction of beating him. If Stark survived then he would continue to suffer.

“We do.”

Stark glanced over his shoulder to the other Avengers. “Don’t help me, no matter what happens.”

“Tony…” Stark’s woman stepped forward.

“Don’t!” Stark raised a hand. “This is between me and him. It has to be me. I’m prepared for this.”
Thanos couldn’t help but laugh darkly. “You are hardly prepared, Stark!”

The slight pull of Stark’s lips upwards caused Thanos to pause.

Stark stepped forward, and then the armour started to appear over his body; one Thanos had not been aware of before.

*What has he been building underneath my nose? It made him weary as he took in the armour.*

Stark had suddenly become a far more dangerous enemy then he had ever considered him to be before.

Raising both arms up to point the gauntlet hands at Thanos, Stark spoke softly. “I spent years as your prisoner. No matter what happens now,” Stark’s voice rose, “I WILL NOT BE YOUR PRISONER AGAIN!”

And then Stark attacked.

*To be continued...*

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**Chapter End Notes**

So, yes, Thanos has all the stones. He is delaying the snap so he can deal with the Avengers. He doesn't want to put at risk his plan by allowing them to live. Tony's bargain to fight Thanos alone may have temporarily saved them, but has it? Everything in this story so far has been building up to these next few chapters.

Gamora is dead. The Guardians have been sent across to the other side of Vormir, apart from Nebula, leaving just the Avengers to deal with Thanos.

The next chapter I am aiming to post next week, possibly on New Years Day, if not it will be the 3rd January 2019.

And, just a little hint... the next chapter is titled 'The Final Battle'...

Until next time (next year!!),

the-writer1988
PART FIVE
THE REVENGE OF TONY STARK

Chapter Ten
The Final Battle

He’d spent years designing this suit, slowly making alterations when he dared, studying materials of the Infinity Stones when he was able to do so covertly, bringing his knowledge of their properties back to his quarters and inserting their concepts into his suit when he knew he wasn’t being watched. He’d spent years designing and making it on the sly, knowing full well death would have been swiftly brought down upon him if he had been discovered.

The suit covered the entirety of Tony’s body.

The mask was see-through. Tony had wanted Thanos to see his face and he’d designed the mask to give him as little information as possible, but enough to accurately control the suit to its full capabilities. He’d utilised the own enhancements Thanos had forced on him to enable better control of the suit.

The suit was bulky, with a lot more weapons added to the base suit. He could easily create more weapons with his mind if he had to. His initial concept for the suit had been like Rhodey’s, only improving it to be far superior.

One key difference between the two suits was the gauntlet over his right hand. He’d designed a Gauntlet capable of harnessing the Infinity Stones. He just needed to get them and place them in their respective places for him to be able to use them. Doing so would kill him but if he could stop Thanos…

*It’s worth it.*

“You think you stand a chance in taking the Stones from me?”

Tony didn’t let the taunt deter him. It was now or never. He had one chance to not screw this up.
He’d been waiting for this day for years. He knew the others had his back, would come to his aid, breaking the deal of the terms he had made with Thanos, but he hoped they would stay away for as long as they could.

Gamora had saved his life for a reason.

*She believed I am the key to all of this. I was spared for a reason. Given a chance to survive in space when no other human could.*

For a long time, he hadn’t wanted to believe he’d been spared for a greater purpose. He’d suffered for years. It had all come down to this.

He didn’t respond to the Titan’s taunt, only smirked.

He knew the new element his father had discovered had been concocted from his intensive research into the Tesseract, which had been the casing for the Space Stone. Tony had been able to synthesise the element, something his father had not been able to do at the time due to the limited technology. It had protected Tony from being controlled by Loki during the Battle of New York. The Mind Stone had failed to work on Tony.

He didn’t know if the Mind Stone would have worked if it had touched his skin instead of hitting the Arc Reactor but the consequences there didn’t matter. Tony had figured out a way around it.

His Arc Reactor had allowed him to study the properties of an Infinity Stone, learn about the singularity which was so powerful that combined with the other five could cause a devastating loss of life. His Arc Reactor had used the same properties of an Infinity Stone and was capable of negating the effects of them.

Much like Thanos had created an Arc Reactor fused with the Mind Stone to take control of Tony’s mind once and for all, Tony had been creating a suit which could harness all the stones at once, if he was able to extract them from Thanos’ Gauntlet. What Thanos didn’t know was that Tony had fused each nanonite particle he had created with an infusion of Arc Reactor energy, effectively making his suit (hopefully) immune to the effects of the Infinity Stones.

Thanos’ main weapon would be useless against him, not that the Titan knew it. He would soon find out.

The power stone glowed in the Gauntlet and purple light shot towards Tony.

He had his arms raised, his weapons ready and he could easily step aside but he didn’t.

Tony took the full hit.

It didn’t budge him an inch.

His suit absorbed the power of the stone, deconstructing the energy and using it to strengthen his own suit.

Thanos lowered his Gauntlet, staring at Tony in surprise.

“Are you sure you want to fight me?” taunted Tony, his lips moving up in a smirk.

Thanos snarled. “You may be invincible against one stone but not all six!”

This time when the Titan shot a colourful beam of light at him, Tony ordered the nanonites to create
a shield. He was sure the suit would have absorbed all of the energy of the stones without the need to waste his effort in creating a shield, but he wanted Thanos to understand Tony was threatened by him and was defending himself.

He could feel the power of the stones circulating through his suit, further strengthening the particles, increasing their power and durability.

The suit worked.

Tony had become invincible against the power of the Stones. He was untouchable. “You should never have let me invent or experiment as your prisoner. I didn’t know it at first what I was creating – and I wanted to deny that I was – but I realised this suit could become the most powerful defence this universe has. I’ve spent years designing this suit. I never considered I’d have to use it. It was just a dream. But here I am now: the universe’s last defence.”

“I do not have to stick to my bargain. If I cannot touch you than I shall simply end this.” Thanos raised his Gauntlet-hand. “Whether you fall in the half that live doesn’t matter. I will ensure you die as soon as you leave the confines of the suit.”

“You’re supposed to be honourable, Thanos,” stated Tony. He knew the Titan kept to bargains he had made. Tony had seen him make plenty and keep to them, even if the other side did not perform well. “You’ve never broken a bargain.”

“I’ve never been deceived either.”

Tony had expected this.

Knew as soon as he had revealed the capabilities of the suit that Thanos would decide to renegade on the bargain they had made.

The Titan knew Tony could beat him.

“You have an unfair advantage. Why should I continue this fight when I cannot harm you?” stated Thanos, still holding his Gauntlet hand up, ready to snap his fingers.

Tony’s eyes kept a watch on the hand, knowing he didn’t have much time to act to convince Thanos to stay his hand once again. “Yet if I remove this suit, you have an advantage.” He wondered if the Titan would take this bargain. “How about this: we brawl. We fight one another. You as you are, me in my suit. The difference is that you do not use the stones against me. Just use your strength as you are. My suit is a defence against the stones, nothing more.” Which was true. The suit itself had been designed to combat the effects of the Infinity Stones, not physical combat. “You’ve been waiting to beat me into a pulp yourself for a long time. Why not take the chance to now?”

Thanos’ fist clenched. “You are only delaying the inevitable. Your defeat at my hands will be quick and painful.”

Tony swallowed. “We’ll see.” He could manipulate the nanonites to create whatever he wanted. Thanos knew this suit was capable of this just as his other suits had been. The only difference had been the infusion of the Arc Reactor properties into the nanonite particles themselves. This was what made the suit truly special. It had multiple defences and attacks.

Thanos attacked first, lunging for Tony’s helmet, trying to wrench it from his face.

Anticipating the move, Tony ducked, swivelled, kicked out and a heavy boot manifested itself at his command and he hit the Titan right in the gut. The force of the hit didn’t do much but Tony’s move
gave Thanos the advantage to grab Tony’s leg and throw him across the land.

Tony landed, rolled and climbed to his feet, coughing. He snarled in anger. He could see the others watching from the side-lines, aware they wanted to help but dare not risk the deal he had made with Thanos. They would come to his aid if Thanos changed the rules, that much was obvious.

“Predictable, Stark.” Thanos walked towards him menacingly.

Tony’s eyes focused upon the Gauntlet. If he could find some way to remove it off the Titan… Or extract the Stones somehow…

The nanonites were linked to his brain, just like an earlier version of the suit had been. A simple thought and he could create anything.

A cannon, that’s what he needed right now.

The particles travelled from the Arc Reactor in his chest down to his hand, forming a large cannon on his left arm. He aimed. “Take this.”

Thanos stepped to the side, laughing at Tony’s pitiful attempt to injure him as the repulsor blast swooped overhead. “This is not much of a fight!” Thanos rushed Tony then, causing the armoured Avenger to activate his flight boots and fly up high to avoid being slammed to the ground.

Swooping down, Tony formed two giant hammers in his hands, bringing them together and down. Thanos tried to duck and side-step the blow but one hammer caught the Titan underneath the chin. Boosted by the successful attack, Tony used the same attack again, this time bringing one hammer down on Thanos’ head.

The Titan shouted in fury, throwing a punch wildly to try to catch Tony off guard. Anticipating it, Tony flew backwards, now ensuring his better defence was to attack from the air. He was far weaker when launching attacks from the ground.

But he still needed to find a way to extract the Gauntlet. Trouble was, he needed the others.

He needed to goad Thanos into using the Gauntlet against him, thereby breaking their deal so Tony could bring the others in. But how to trick him into using it?

An idea formed in his head. One that was risky but might just work.

“STARK! GET DOWN HERE AND FIGHT ME!” Thanos’ temper was rising.

Just what I need…

“You didn’t say I couldn’t fly!” he retorted. “You wanted a brawl! I’m giving you one!” He shot downwards, commanding the nanonites to form a grabber. To strengthen it he left his back unprotected and as he shot downwards, he reached out and the grabber latched onto Thanos’ Gauntlet hand.

And he pulled, activating his boot thrusters to try and pull the Gauntlet off.

Thanos’ lips pulled back and he snarled, using his enhanced strength to drag Tony towards him.

He reached out and grasped Tony by the head, shattering the precarious grip Tony had held on the Gauntlet for those few seconds.

Shit!
He scrabbled at Thanos’ grip. His helmet was still intact but he could feel the fingers tightening, threatening to squash his head in a mere second.

But he still had his hands free and Thanos was holding him, leaving him dangling in mid-air, feet barely touching the ground.

And that was when Tony took the most reckless chance he could.

He ordered the nanonites to retract from around his skull and he dropped to the floor as Thanos’ grip on him vanished. The Titan was not quick enough to tighten his hold on Tony’s head as the helmet vanished.

Surprised by the tactic, Tony took the advantage he had by reactivating his boosters, swinging up and kicking out at Thanos’ head, grabbing onto the Gauntlet with both hands as he swung up and over.

With one hand Thanos attempted to grasp Tony’s legs but the boost thrusters activated right into the Titan’s face.

“ARGH!” His face blackened by the ferocious blast from the thrusters, Thanos attempted to dislodge Tony’s grip on his arm but couldn’t.

Reaching out, Tony reached for one Infinity Stone sitting in the Gauntlet. It was risky but if he could get just one…

And then Thanos did what Tony had hoped he would.

The Titan activated all six Infinity Stones and Tony was blasted off of Thanos’ arm. Despite his suit being invincible the force of the blast was still volatile enough that Tony was unable to maintain his grip and he landed heavily upon the ground.

“TONY!” Pepper shouted out to him but he ignored her voice.

He raised his head and smirked. “You broke your word. No use of the stones.”

“You forced my hand, Stark,” snarled Thanos in return.

He was treading dangerous territory here. Thanos could easily snap his fingers.

“This fight wasn’t going to be fair anyway,” stated Tony, organising the nanonites to cover his entire body again and to form a new helmet. “You use the stones, my friends help.”

“I can take all of you anyway. It doesn’t matter. The outcome will remain the same. I will balance the universe,” stated Thanos. “I have it within my power to do so now. But I shall honour our bargain. I will defeat all of you before I complete my mission.”

Tony gritted his teeth. He’d managed to nearly take an Infinity Stone from Thanos. Unfortunately, he needed the whole set.

The others inched forward, readying their weapons. Even Pepper did and the simple movement was enough to worry Tony. He wanted her out of the fight.

Thanos bared his teeth. “Come on!” He was ready, bursting with desire to fight them all at once.

It was Thor who attacked first. Despite having no weapon, or the Thanos-killing weapon he could have had made if events on Earth hadn’t spiralled out of control so fast, Thor was still a powerful
fighter. His whole body was lit up in lightning, coursing through his whole body as he landed, launching a jet of lightning that breached the sky above. Thunder rumbled.

The God smashed into the Titan, sending waves of lightning down upon him, determined to injure the Titan.

However, Thanos moved quickly and blocked Thor’s attack using the space stone. A portal opened up and the Titan stepped through, reappearing behind the Avengers.

They all twisted on their feet but he’d already attacked them.

Natasha was knocked away with a bash of Thanos’ left hand. Her head cracked upon a juxtaposed rock, sticking up from the ground. Her blood mingled with the dust. She didn’t move.

There was a great roar and Hulk ran forward, his fists flying towards the Titan’s face. Thanos abandoned use of the Infinity Stones in favour of brawling with the Hulk.

Tony stepped back. He raised his hand to prevent the others from joining the fight. “Don’t. We go in, we’ll get smashed too.” He moved closer to Pepper.

The two seemed evenly matched. The Hulk’s strength was more than enough to counter-act Thanos’. The Titan could easily use the stones to augment his strength but had elected not to do so. The Hulk was fast in his punches, swinging back and forth with his fists as he sought to land any blow he could upon the Titan.

Thanos, on the other hand, was quick to dodge and anticipate his attacker’s moves. He was able to land hits on the Hulk’s abdomen and kicked out at his legs in an effort to weaken his opponent.

“This could be our chance to get the Gauntlet,” muttered Steve to Tony’s right. “Or Nat.”

Tony’s eyes moved over to Natasha’s unmoving body. His sensors in his suit told him she was still alive but her head injury was a problem that needed to be solved quickly. She needed medical treatment, which they had access to on the Guardian’s ship. But how to get to her when she lay behind the brawl going on between Hulk and Thanos?

Shifting his gaze back to the fight, Tony had to groan as he saw Thanos ferociously attacking the Hulk, and the Hulk was losing.

And that was when Thanos activated the Power stone. He used it to augment his own strength and he managed to get his free hand around the Hulk’s head, and with the strength gifted to him by the Stones, flipped the Hulk over and slammed his head against the ground.

Dizzy from the impact, the Hulk was unable to defend himself from further attacks.

Thanos kicked out.

The Hulk’s head snapped back.

Another swift punch and –

CRASH.

The Hulk landed.

Thanos smirked and then pointed the Gauntlet at the Hulk’s body.
Tony leapt forward. “No! Don’t!”

But he was too late.

The Hulk’s body was encased in orange light and began to shrink.

The glow vanished and Thanos stepped aside so the others could see what he had done.

In the Hulk’s place, was a bruised and beaten Bruce Banner. Alive but badly injured.

“What have you done?” snarled Tony, raising his fist and ordering the nanonites to construct a canon on his right arm.

“I have merely returned him to his rightful body. The Hulk shall not bother us anymore.” Thanos moved towards them. “Who’s next? Two down, seven to go.”

“We fight together, not apart,” ordered Tony. “If we keep going one-on-one with him than we shall lose.”

Thanos waited. “I can stand here all day whilst you discuss tactics but I’m on a timescale. If none of you attack me in the next minute, I shall end this where we are.”

Tony hated being manipulated. One minute was more than enough time to execute a plan. “Pepper, stay out of this.”

“I’m fighting,” she stated.

Tony wanted to argue but he bit his tongue instead. His time was short. “You know what we discussed before coming here?” They’d had a plan to implement. It hadn’t gone as expected yet there was still a chance they may be able to salvage it.

“Gauntlet. We have to get it.” Tony glanced towards Nebula, the only member of the Guardians who had not been swept away earlier. Not wanting to pair himself with Nebula was a problem Tony had to ignore. “Slight change of plan. Myself and Nebula will attack Thanos directly. The rest of you… wait for the right moment to get that Gauntlet!”

“Why is she fighting with you?” asked Pepper.

“Because she’s not going to sit still helping you get the Gauntlet, when she could be trying to kill her father instead,” stated Tony.

“Correct,” replied Nebula. “He is mine.”

They turned.

Thanos still waited, though his Gauntlet hand was up in the air, finger poised to snap. “Time’s up.”

Tony attacked immediately, throwing nanonite bombs at the Titan which exploded at his feet, knocking him off balance.

Swords. I need swords.

Tony’s thoughts manifested themselves in two large blades that grew from the top of his hands. Sharp at the end, he also ensured he had two smaller particle guns underneath his wrists. Multiple attacks were needed.
Tony flew at Thanos, diving to the left, slicing out towards the Titan’s legs whilst Nebula went to the right, hitting him with her batons.

Tony paid no attention to his comrades behind him as they moved into position in an attempt to gain the Gauntlet.

His own task was simple: keep the Titan distracted. He flew into the air, poised to defend himself against any attacks that came his way but, surprisingly, Thanos was concentrating more on Nebula than himself.

“You are just a waste of parts!” raged Thanos. “Always a failure! You even messed up breaking Stark! You barely made a dent in his defiance. He hid it well for a long time. As always, though, your failures will always hound you for the rest of your pitiful life!”

Nebula screeched and launched herself at Thanos.

The Space Stone glowed. A portal opened in front of Thanos and Nebula went through.

“She can join her sister.”

The portal closed.

“Shit,” muttered Tony. He’d briefly seen Nebula’s destination. He doubted she had survived the fall. If she did… Tony didn’t care anyway. Nebula had ruined his life. If she was now gone… It didn’t matter.

“Now, for you,” smiled Thanos, dragging Tony’s attention back to the present.

Lowering himself to the battleground, Tony kept his swords active, having a few more nanonites pour into the weapons to strengthen their durability.

And that was when it happened.

Thor landed with a crash behind the Titan, succeeding in burning Thanos with his lightning. Strange appeared to the left of him, using magical ropes to latch onto the Titan’s right arm.

Rhodey swooped in and dropped two big bombs at Thanos’ feet. A burst of light seconds later revealed the bombs had been casings for energy binders, a little trick Tony had been additionally working on since he had first started his designs for the new suit he now wore.

The energy binders wrapped around Thanos’ legs, and then the casings buried themselves underneath the earth, keep the Titan in place.

The only thing free was his Gauntlet arm and his fist was struggling to close as Strange’s cloak was wrapped around the digits, preventing full closure of his fist. He was unable to use any of the Stones powers whilst the cloak got in the way.

It was the opening they needed.

Steve was there before Tony, grabbing onto the Gauntlet and starting to pull.

“Oh no, you –”

Tony surged forward, joining Steve and grasping the other side of the Gauntlet as they both tried to pull it off.
Steve was sweating. “It won’t budge!”

Tony tried again, putting as much of his strength into it as possible. His eyes found the Infinity Stones. Glancing at his own constructed Gauntlet with the suit, he knew what he had to do.

Thanos was simply too powerful with the Stones.

It wouldn’t be long before the Titan managed to break free from their hold of him.

“Tony?” shouted Steve. “What are you doing?”

For Tony had reached out and grasped one of the Infinity Stones sitting within the Gauntlet. Constructing a miniature claw with nanonites from two of his fingers, Tony pulled on the Power Stone. It budged slightly.

Thanos fought harder.

Thor came down from the sky again, hitting the Titan with lightning again being precise as to where to hit so he would not harm his comrades. Strange conjured more ropes and wrapped them around Thanos’ midsection, directly tightening his hold on him.

Tony made one last pull and the Power Stone came loose.

The Power Stone fell into Tony’s open palm.

Immense pain spread through his body, made him crumple to his knees, tears welling in his eyes as he fought against it, to grab the Stone again with his left hand. He was screaming as the power wracked through his body, his suit glowing purple. The suit could combat the effects of the Stones easily but to wield them…. Just one was killing him.

He slammed the stone into his Gauntlet. He’d designed the Gauntlet to be more powerful than the rest of the suit. The pain dulled but his body and his brain still burned.

Ordering the nanonites away from his head, he sent them to the Gauntlet to boost its defences, hoping to survive long enough to beat Thanos.

“Tony?” Steve looked concerned, as he tried to maintain his grip upon Thanos.

Tony didn’t answer, only forced himself to reach for the next one.

Space was just as painful as the first, only this time Tony felt himself being pulled in all directions. He could see all of space, and how small his place within it was. Stars and galaxies formed at one end of the universe and the other they died, ending their billion years of existence.

The imagery of the universe didn’t end when he placed the stone in his Gauntlet.

Reality came next. And for the brief moment he saw a reality he could have had if things had been different.

He saw himself fighting alongside the Avengers on Earth; saw Pepper in a beautiful white wedding dress as she walked down the aisle towards him; saw a child with brown hair but with the features of his mother running towards him.

It was a future taken from him by Gamora when she had beseeched her father to save him. It didn’t matter she had saved his life now, had technically been the cause of his suffering. She had helped
him when she could and he had fallen for her. He still loved her.

The reality twisted so Pepper was replaced by Gamora. They lay in bed together after a night of passion, and then there was a green-skinned boy with brown hair sitting between them laughing at his parents as they sat within the confines of the Guardian’s ship.

And Tony placed the Reality stone into his Gauntlet and the images vanished. Still the dull pain was there.

Next came Soul, its orange glow reflecting strangely in his eyes. This one didn’t hurt but he could sense every single soul that remained on Vormir. He hadn’t sacrificed anything to get this stone. Should he even be able to wield it?

You have sacrificed much. You are worthy.

He didn’t know where the voice had come from but the words reverberated through his brain.

Time came next. He saw the beginning and the end of the universe before he managed to place it within the Gauntlet. His arm hurt like hell and he was sure his skin was flaking and his whole body was shaking with too much power.

The suit was not offering him the protection he had hoped it would in this situation.

And, finally, there was one left to extract.

His vision blurred with tears of agony, Tony stretched out one last time.

They were just barely managing to hold onto Thanos as Tony grasped the last Infinity Stone.

He could see every mind he could take control of, every being in the universe could be at his command if he so wished. The Mind Stone settled into the centre of the Gauntlet and Tony felt the power run through his body.

He hurt so much. His suit was crumbling.

Thanos was now laughing. He’d escaped the hold of the others. “You cannot wield the Stones, Stark! I’ll have them from you as soon as your body crumbles to dust! It’s already happening!”

“ARGH!” Tony screamed, blood pouring from his mouth.

The only part of his suit that now remained was the Gauntlet. The power of six Infinity Stones coursed through his body. His skin was wasting away.

“TONY!”

Pepper.

Tony could barely move his body. His flesh was ripping, blood pouring from his skin. He wondered what he looked like. He could barely hear her over the roaring in his ears.

“You cannot hold the power, Stark! A feeble mortal like you are incapable of harnessing the true power of the Infinity Stones!” Thanos only watched as Tony struggled to maintain a grip on reality.

“TONY!” Pepper, again. “I know you can do this! Don’t let it consume you!”

Tony closed his eyes. I can do this! He opened them again.
For a moment he had no pain. Thanos was there in front of him but his laughter had stopped and his eyes were round with shock. Tony couldn’t recall ever seeing Thanos shocked before.

Tony’s skin glowed a magnitude of colours.

“How?” Thanos’ eyes moved to the Arc Reactor in Tony’s chest.

His skin wasn’t healing. The damage already done to his body was enough to kill him and yet he hung onto life.

“The Arc Reactor… created from studying the Tesseract. Its power is equivalent to an Infinity Stone…” rasped Tony. “I can feel it… trying to harness the power in me… Trying to protect me…”

Thanos stepped back. He was afraid.

Tony stepped forward. His voice was different as he spoke, a more ethereal sound. “I’m dying but its helping me harness the power I have…” He raised his hand. “I can do anything I want…” He titled his head to the side. “I could end you, Thanos!”

The Reality stone glowed brighter than the other five.

In Tony’s hand, an axe appeared. “Reality can be anything I want it to be.”

Tony’s body glowed ever more as he rose from the ground, his thrusters in his boots propelling him forward. He ignored the yells of his friends, of Pepper to the side, being held back by Rhodey as they watched him float majestically towards Thanos. The axe was still held loosely in his hands. “You will die today for everything you have done to the universe! You will not bring balance!”

And then he surged towards the Titan with speed. His body hummed with energy and the Infinity Stones only grew brighter. He raised the axe and brought it forth with down upon Thanos.

The Titan attempted to defend himself, raising his arms in a desperate attempt to avoid the sharp edge of the axe.

Tony did not stop.

The axe sliced through Thanos’ wrists, and the limbs fell to the ground, but the axe kept moving, piercing through Thanos’ throat.

Tony didn’t stop until the Titan’s head fell from his severed neck, the light leaving the Titan’s eyes forever.

But Tony was not done.

He pointed the Gauntlet at Thanos’ decapitated body. His anger poured forth. He wanted the Titan’s body gone, his body to turn to dust, to melt into the ground.

The stones took over and all six glowed bright at the same time.

Thanos’ body began to decompose quickly, before turning to fire and burning to ash, until only particles remained of the once great Titan.

Tony could feel tears falling down his cheeks. The power was too much to hold. He was dying. His body was failing him. “I can’t…!” He’d killed Thanos. He could let go…

No! Gamora!
He could feel her in the Soul Stone. Could feel her soul joined to his, telling him how proud she was of him. And he knew he could bring her back.

If he was going to die here today, there was one last thing he could do.

Please reverse everything Thanos has ever done! Please bring her back! Gamora!

The Soul Stone glowed the brightest in his Gauntlet and then vanished, as if his last request had been granted. And the other five stones flashed once before going completely dark.

Tony swayed on his feet.

His knees collapsed underneath him.

Pepper ran towards him, catching hold of his body as he keeled forwards. “Tony!” She pulled him back, her fingers meshed with his blood, setting him down so his head lay in her lap. “Please... don’t die!” Tears were falling down her face, marring her beauty. “I love you!”

Despite the Stones no longer functioning, the damage was already done. His body was crumbling, falling apart as his organs slowed from the damage caused by the use of the Infinity Stones. His skin was still peeling and his muscles had already started to waste away.

His throat felt raw and blood filled it.

So much pain rocked through his body, perhaps some of the worst he had ever experienced in his life.

His eyes began to close and he could see a white light ahead of him, pulling him towards it. His heart was slowing.

But then an orange glow appeared within the white light, and he opened his eyes to see Pepper again, her skin glowing orange.

Confusion wrought his mind. He couldn’t function or figure out why she was glowing...

Her hands found his face.

Despite his crumbling skin, his body falling apart, she pulled him towards her.

The pain seemed to melt away as her very presence soothed him in the moment of his death.

“Tony...” she whispered, tears still leaking from her eyes, her pupils flashing orange.

He couldn’t speak, his throat ruined by the destructive power of all six Infinity Stones having coursed through him.

She leaned in closer to him. “I love you.” Pepper pressed her lips to his own.

Intense pain spread up his arm from the Gauntlet, interrupting their last kiss.

He jerked, screamed, despite the injury to his throat.

And then fell completely still as he felt the life leave his body, finally giving him the sanctity of death he had so long craved.

*To be continued...*
Chapter End Notes

I'm saying nothing...

'Cept, please don't let the end of this chapter stop you from reading the rest of the story!

The next chapter is nearly finished so there will be an update next Monday 14th January or Thursday 17th January.

Until next time,

the-writer1988
Part 5: Chapter 11 - Pepper's Choice

Chapter Summary

Pepper makes a choice...

Chapter Notes

All I am going to say is at the end of this chapter please read the author's note. Thank you! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART FIVE
THE REVENGE OF TONY STARK

Chapter Eleven
Pepper's Choice

“TONY! NO! PLEASE!” Pepper’s tears mingled on her face, and her throat caught as Tony’s body went limp in her arms. She was caked in his blood, her clothes covered in it. She’d retracted the suit she had worn back onto the portable Arc Reactor she had hung around her neck. She didn’t care what Tony looked like now. Didn’t care that his skin had peeled mostly from his body, that his muscles were wasting and some of his bones were showing through. “NO!”

She shook him, desperate to keep him alive.

His chest moved slightly, his ribs showing through the burnt clothing and the Arc Reactor had sunk further into his chest.

“You can’t do this… Please, Tony…” she sobbed, tears cascading down her face. “I can’t do this alone…”

She felt someone move closer to her, kneel down beside her.

“Pepper…” said Rhodey quietly. “There’s nothing we can do. Tony… He’s fading. We can’t save him.”

Tears still dripping down her cheeks, Pepper wiped her nose with the back of her hand and looked more closely at Tony’s face.

His eyes were closed.

His chest barely rose.

“No.” She shook her head, desperately.

“It’s what he wants,” he whispered to her. “Tony knew what he was doing when he came here to
fight Thanos. Let him go.”

“No,” she said again. “I refuse to believe it. I can’t believe you would allow him to die!”

“We can’t help him. To try to save him would be folly and go against what he wants.”

“Pepper…” Steve was crouching in front of her now. “He can’t survive… I don’t want him to die either. Look at him. There is no coming back from this. It’s a mercy he’s unconscious.”

But Pepper looked up at him. “Yes, he can.” Neither of them understood. She’d lost Happy and could now lose Tony. She’d wished she’d thought of this solution before Happy had died. She could have saved him too. She had thought Tony might be badly injured and had brought something with her, hidden away where no one would suspect she’d keep anything.

“How?” Rhodey leaned forward. Then his eyes moved down to Pepper’s hands which were faintly orange. “Extremis? But it is all back on Earth…”

Pepper gently moved Tony onto the ground, laying his bleeding and broken body out, before getting to her feet and removing one of her shoes. She lifted up the shoe pad and wedged between the two materials was a small glass bottle. Picking it out, she showed it to the others. “It was a back-up. I’ve always carried it with me. Just in case I ever needed to reactivate my own abilities suddenly and the tablets were not available. We developed it in injection form too.” Pepper looked down at Tony. His chest was still moving but his heart rate was slowing as his breaths were coming further and further apart. “It’s the same basic formula… and Tony is already enhanced.” She held the glass bottle up and pulled the stopper up. There was a little needle now protruding from the top, and at the bottom of the glass was a little depressurisation button.

“He’ll hate you.” Rhodey was blunt but truthful.

“I don’t care. He’ll be alive. That’s what matters,” she responded, now kneeling back down to Tony’s body.

“Pepper…” started Steve but he stopped when she threw him a glare.

“Are you going to stop me?” she asked. “Are you going to stand there and watch him breathe his last when there is a way to save him?” A part of her knew this was wrong, that trying to save Tony’s life would backfire in her face. He may have expressed his desire to die so many times but there was a part of her that realised it was a call for attention. He wanted them to know so when it came to it, they wouldn’t let him die. There was still so much life he could enjoy if he was able to come back from this.

Steve and Rhodey exchanged a glance. They both shook their heads. Behind them, neither Thor nor Doctor Strange voiced their doubts. Both Nat and Bruce were still out-cold and Doctor Strange turned away to move towards them.

Pepper primed the needle and searched for a vein on Tony’s ruined arm.

She placed the needle in the vein and injected the Extremis solution, watching as the fluid went into Tony’s veins. She extracted the needle, sat back and waited.

“There is no going back from this now. I made my choice to try to save his life,” she said quietly. “All I can do now is wait.”

Tony’s body began to glow orange as the Extremis solution began to course through his veins. She could feel his body temperature rising. Lingering doubt settled within her and she moved back,
almost afraid he would succumb to the more volatile effects of Extremis.

“Pepper…” hissed Rhodey, moving to grasp her hand.

Tony’s body began to glow even brighter.

“I think…” Steve trailed off. He shielded his eyes as Tony’s body began to vibrate.

“Oh god…” Pepper’s hand went to her mouth in shock. “Oh god… He’s not taking it!”

There was a flash –

And Tony’s body stopped vibrating and then his body just glowed orange.

Pepper pointed. “Look… his skin!”

She inched forward, pulling away from Rhodey and Steve, moving closer to Tony’s softly glowing body. She knelt down, her eyes shining as she saw Tony’s body beginning to heal. “It’s working… Extremis is healing him!”

And as she watched, Tony’s chest began to rise higher as his breathing became easier as Extremis healed his chest. Then, the Arc Reactor popped out of his chest, pushed out by Extremis trying to heal him entirely.

“What?” breathed Rhodey from behind her. “Pepper, the shrapnel?”

Casting her eyes over Tony’s chest, she caught the glimpse of small fragments of metal. “Extremis has ejected them!”

“It’s healing him completely…” whispered Steve. “The scars on his face… Look!”

Pepper moved her gaze to Tony’s face and she could see smooth skin re-growing there over the muscles and flesh that had been exposed due to Tony’s wielding of the Infinity Stones. They had destroyed his body, yet Extremis was able to counteract the effects and was healing Tony of every injury he had ever sustained as a captive of Thanos.

Tears leaked down her face. “This is the right decision. He won’t have to live with the scars anymore.”

“Now that Stark is safe and healing, I think it is time I gave you an update on your other friends,” interrupted Strange, who had now joined them after looking over Bruce and Nat.

Pepper couldn’t stop watching Tony; however she did listen to what Strange had to report.

“Both of them do have serious injuries. Romanoff is more critically injured. I suspect she has a bad head injury. I have used what magic I can to stabilise her before the bleed becomes untreatable. She’ll be kept stabilised until we find adequate medical facilities.”

“And Banner?” asked Thor.

“Several broken bones but he’ll live. His injuries are not as bad as I initially expected them to be,” explained Strange. “Banner is stabilised as well, ready for treatment when we reach an adequate facility.”

Pepper zoned out of the conversation, focusing her eyes once again upon Tony. His body was still faintly glowing orange, still working to heal all the damage his body had ever seen.
“What do we do now?” asked Rhodey. “We have the Guardian’s ship, but they’re not here… I wouldn’t have a clue how to fly it.”

Folding his arms across his chest, Strange glanced around the group. “I can bring them back. Give me a few minutes and they’ll be here. I wouldn’t recommend moving Stark until the Extremis process has finished.”

It looked like to Pepper that the Extremis process was nearly finished. Tony’s body was mostly clear from any injury, apart from a few cuts and bruises that were slowly changing colour and fading. He would be ready to move shortly. She felt sure of that.

She didn’t notice Strange conjure a portal with his hands and step through it, but she did notice when he returned minutes later with the Guardians of the Galaxy.

Pepper’s eyes roamed across the Guardians that had joined them. Her mouth dropped open when she saw Gamora standing amongst them, alive, alongside a blue-skinned woman who Pepper was sure was Nebula but couldn’t be certain.

*Gamora is dead. How is she here?*

Before she could ask the question that was on everyone’s minds, Gamora answered.

“Tony,” she said simply. “He could feel me in the Soul Stone. Brought me back. Reversed what Thanos had done to me.” She turned to the blue-skinned woman beside her. “Nebula fell to her death when Thanos sent her out of the fight. She survived the fall but was dying when Tony used the Stones to reverse everything Thanos has ever done.”

“Oh my god…” breathed Pepper. She realised what Tony had unexpectedly done.

“As part of his desire to reverse everything Thanos had ever done, Tony also reversed what Thanos had done to Nebula. She was a victim of Thanos, just like Tony was. Every organic part that was taken from her has been returned. She is completely organic for the first time in years. She doesn’t have to live with the constant pain she has been in.”

“But I still have the memories,” said Nebula. “I expect Stark didn’t mean to save me. He’d be happy I was dead, I’m sure.”

Pepper swallowed. And a thought crossed her mind. “Does that mean Happy is alive?”

Gamora shook her head. “No. Thanos was not present at that time. He may have ordered his children to do his work for him but Thanos, himself, had to be there for the effects to be reversed. In the Soul Stone, I heard Tony’s plea. He wanted everything Thanos, himself, had ever been involved in to be undone. The collective nature of the Infinity Stones could only work to those specific set of instructions. If he’d thought Thanos and his children then, yes, Happy would be alive.” She tilted her head down. “I’m sorry. I know you and Happy were together…”

Pepper nodded, accepting the truth Happy would stay dead, despite what Tony had done. She glanced at Tony’s body. Extremis was no longer functioning, instead his skin was clear of any blemishes and his chest was moving up and down in a normal breathing pattern.

Gamora’s eyes swung to Tony. “He should be dead.” She walked forwards until she was standing over him, and then knelted down beside him. “He shouldn’t have been able to survive using all the Stones…”

“I saved him,” said Pepper. “Extremis. I used it on him. His body accepted it and started to heal.”
She felt she was being judged by the expression on Gamora’s face. “You wanted him to die!” she accused.

“No, I didn’t. But saving his life when all he wanted was to die… Pepper…”

“What would you have done?” stated Pepper, her voice rising.

Gamora sighed. “I would have let him die because he deserved to have his wishes respected. You’ve taken death from him. Pepper, Tony may not forgive you.”

“He will.” Her voice nearly wavered but she managed to cover it. “He’ll see that living a normal life is possible. I’ll help him, even if I have to spend the rest of my life helping him, I will. I will not give up on him!”

“Fine.” Gamora rose from the ground. “I just…”

“What?” Pepper snapped. A part of her knew what she’d done for Tony had been wrong. She had hoped he could live again. He had after Afghanistan.

“Never mind.” She stepped back beside her sister. “We’ll give you a lift back to Earth. Then we will depart.”

As they made their way to the Guardian’s ship, with Strange using magic to float Nat, Bruce and Tony aboard, Pepper couldn’t help but have the niggling doubt that what she hoped would happen between her and Tony would not happen at all.

*I will fight for him. I will not give up on him.*

It was a vow she fully intended to keep.

**To be continued**

Chapter End Notes

We have finally reached the final Part of the story, which is subtitled: Part 6 - The Recovery of Tony Stark.

I can honestly say I have no idea how long Part 6 will be and there is still no guarantee Tony won’t die. Tony has wanted to die for years and now Pepper has taken it away from him in the worst way possible - by healing him of everything, including his scars. Tony may be free from Thanos but he isn't free from his demons or his memories and he still desires to die.

Gamora will play a large role in Part 6, as will Pepper, Rhodey and Steve. At the moment I am estimating about another, at least, 10-15 chapters.

Those that have asked for flashbacks to Tony’s time as an Enforcer… Yes, this is where you will be seeing them. Tony has a lot of recovery to do, if he does ever recover…

Pairings... Though this story is billed as Tony/Pepper, the subplot of Tony/Gamora is going to play a major role in Part 6, in fact, it came into my head for Part 5 when I wasn't expecting it, first by the kiss they had in Chapter 6 of Part 5 and then Tony's
visions he had of himself in relationships with Pepper or Gamora in the previous chapter. As a result, I cannot even tell what the final pairing will be. Just wondered what everyone's thoughts are on this?

Next update will probably be a few weeks as I need to figure out where Part 6 is going so expect an update on Monday 26th January :)

Until then,

the-writer1988
Part 6: Chapter 1 - Consequences

Chapter Summary

Tony wakes...

Chapter Notes

My apologies everyone, I forgot to update on Monday, instead I updated a different story. But here we finally are, the start of Part 6!

I would just like to thank you to those that expressed their opinion regarding Tony/Gamora. I have a path which I will follow so there will be elements of Tony/Gamora throughout Part 6 but I do hope to steer it toward Tony/Pepper. But we'll see where my muse goes.

Thank you for all the continuing support so far! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

PART SIX
THE RECOVERY OF TONY STARK

Chapter One
Consequences

He felt fuzzy, and a bit sick when he opened his eyes.

He was in a bed, with the sheets tucked up tightly around him, covering his body in warmth. The lights were dimmed and he didn’t recognise where he was. The walls were painted a soft peach colour and as he cast his gaze around the room he found himself with a drip in his arm and a blood pressure cuff wrapped around his upper left arm.

He could feel his heart beating in his chest.

What? I shouldn’t be here. It shouldn’t be beating.

Lifting a hand to his face, Tony examined the area, surprised at the lack of injuries. “What?” He didn’t understand. He had been dying. He had felt his body being torn apart. He had felt himself fall into blackness, had felt himself dying...

How could he possibly be here? Nothing could have saved him.

He had wielded the Infinity Stones. There was no possible way he could have survived such power. He shifted on the bed and tried to sit up. He felt weak, as if all the strength had been sapped out of him. Moving his arms carefully, he succeeded in pushing himself up.
The clock in front of him read 03:53, suggesting it was still the early hours of the morning.

It was then he noticed the figure sitting in the chair in the far corner of the room, her head bobbed down on one of her arms as she snoozed. Pepper hadn’t stirred from his movements but he recognised the contented smile on her face.

Pepper was here…

He swallowed.

She continued to sleep soundly.

_I need to know…_

Carefully and quietly, Tony pulled the bed covers from himself and dragged his legs out of bed. His skin was healthy and there were no marks upon them. The drip stand beside his bed was mobile, allowing him to easily drag it with him when he got to his feet.

Placing his toes on the floor, slight warmth ran into his feet and he steadied himself as he stood to his fall height, wobbling only slightly on weak legs.

Swallowing, he took a step forward, dragging the drip-stand with him.

There was a sink and a mirror to the left. He only wanted to see. He had to see.

Reaching out, Tony gripped the sides of the sink and supported himself as he raised his head to look at his face in the mirror.

His scars were _gone._

“What?” he whispered, shock running through his system. “How?” He prodded the skin with his fingers, testing to see if the mirror was not lying to him. It wasn’t. The scars that had decorated his cheeks for years were gone, faded as if they had never been there.

He looked down at his chest then and realised he had no Arc Reactor.

Eyes widening he struggled to pull off the shirt he wore, nearly ripping the cannula out in his desperation to see his chest. He nearly fell, hitting his side against the bed. “Ouch!” he cursed, then ripped the shirt off, exposing his chest and he saw, just like his cheeks, smooth and untarnished skin.

There was no remnant of what had once been there.

Nothing remained that marked his time as a prisoner.

“Tony?”

The soft voice reached him and he turned around and saw Pepper standing behind him, looking unsure. She had one arm reached out towards him, as if hesitant to lay it upon his shoulder.

“Pepper…” he breathed. He turned to face her, slightly stumbling as his legs wobbled. “Why? Why am I alive?”

Her face paled. “Please, come back to bed. You haven’t been here long.”

But Tony didn’t move, just assessed her with his eyes. “Tell me what happened! I should be dead but I’m not! Where are all my scars? Where’s my Arc Reactor?” His voice was getting louder and
louder as he spoke. He looked down at the needle in his arm.

“Tony…?” Pepper stepped forward. “I can’t…”

Tony’s eyes sought hers. “I deserve to know.”

“You’re still healing, still recovering,” she tried. “Please, at least get back in bed.”

He contemplated it, only for a few short seconds before deciding he didn’t want to. He shook his head. “No. Not until you tell me why I’m still alive?”

The feeling of death had been a welcome relief for Tony and to have it taken away from him… He clenched his fists, angry that death had been stripped from him. He’d fallen unconscious, he knew that. It had felt like dying and he’d welcomed it with open arms, the sensation of relief flooding his body as he made his way to the end of his life.

“I can’t tell you,” repeated Pepper. “I’m not the best person to.”

Tony’s eyes narrowed. “Why not?” His anger was building. He deserved to know why he was still alive.

Pepper lowered her head. “I’m sorry.”

The way she said the words made him pause. An ominous feeling pushed its way into his stomach. And he realised.

“What did you do to me?” he asked quietly.

She looked at him then, her eyes watery. Her lips wobbled but she could speak no words.

“Pepper… I know you did something. I can see it in your eyes.” He was starting to feel angry. Pepper had known his wishes. She hadn’t liked them but would she have taken the choice away from him? The fact that she probably had made him feel sick.

“Pepper. You have to tell him.”

Tony turned his head and saw Rhodey standing in the doorway, his clothes hanging loosely around his body and a sad expression on his face. Rhodey moved into the room and closed the door behind him, looking at Pepper expectantly.

Tony’s eyes moved from one to the other. “If she can’t tell me, you can.” He could feel his body temperature rising as his anger increased. Why was that?

Pepper’s lips trembled as she bowed her head. Finally, her shoulders loosened and she looked up at Tony’s face. “Extremis,” she admitted.

She stepped forward. “I always carried it with me. It was mainly for me, just in case, I needed to activate my suppressed Extremis in an emergency. It was a contingency that I had with me when we were on Titan. You were dying… fading before my eyes. I couldn’t lose you…”

Tony stepped back in horror of what Pepper had done.

“I told Pepper you would hate her for this,” said Rhodey quietly.

“But you didn’t stop me from giving it to him, did you?” snapped Pepper.
“You… injected me with Extremis?” Tony swallowed. “And it healed me?”

She nodded. “Everything. Every part of you. It ejected the shrapnel and the Arc Reactor.”

Tony’s skin paled. He felt sick and angry all at the same time. He could feel his body heating up, could feel the effects of Extremis running through his bloodstream. “You took away everything that I was?”

“Yes.” Pepper couldn’t look at him.

“You took away my freedom. You’ve taken away what I suffered! What I’ve become!” he yelled. He reached for the cannula and yanked it out, not caring if he ripped the skin and made himself bleed.

“Wait! Tony!” Pepper moved forward but Tony stepped away, pushing past Rhodey to reach for the door.

He didn’t care he was half naked. He needed to get out and away from here. He grabbed the handle and pulled the door open, running out and into the corridor. He didn’t think of where he was going. He just needed to get out and away from Pepper.

Away from what she had done to him.

With his enhanced hearing he could just make out Rhodey’s quiet words, muttered under his breath, as Tony ran around the corner and away from the room.

“I told you he wouldn’t like it.”

---

Tony didn’t leave the building.

He sequestered himself away in a small cupboard which consisted of just a few brooms, a hoover and two buckets and mops. He squeezed himself down between the brooms, leaning his back against the wall, allowing the cool metal wall pierce his warm flesh.

He left one hand hanging loosely on his chest, where his Arc Reactor had once sat. There was no physical evidence he had once had it, the Extremis having ejected all the shrapnel and healed his whole body back to its once healthy state it had been in prior to Afghanistan, notwithstanding the amount of alcohol and drugs that had passed through his system in his youth.

He didn’t know how long he was in the cupboard for. He didn’t care if he starved. He stomach rumbled in the ensuring darkness of the cupboard he had stowed away in.

*I’m alive when I shouldn’t be. Pepper did this to me. How could she?*

He couldn’t understand Pepper’s reasoning for allowing him to continue to suffer. He couldn’t live. He couldn’t forget. What was worse was that she had given him something that increased his chances of surviving impossible odds.

Pepper had betrayed him.

He could hear the shuffling of feet outside the cupboard and shrunk down further, not wanting to be found but knew eventually it would be inevitable.

The footsteps stopped outside the cupboard.
He hunched down further.

The door opened and the last person he expected to see poked their head through and found him hiding as best he could in the small space.

“Tony?”

His mouth fell open as he stared at her. “Gamora?” He couldn’t process it. She was dead. She had been… He remembered though, asking the Stones to bring her back. “It worked?” he stammered, surprised his desire to save her had been fulfilled.

She smiled at him. “You did. You bought me back and saved a lot of other people in the process.”

He swallowed. “I should be dead.”

Her expression turned sad. “I’m sorry. It wasn’t my decision to make.”

“It wasn’t Pepper’s decision either,” he said, anger tinting into his voice. “She made me live, made me harder to kill unless I stab myself in the heart…” His eyes seemed to alight at that thought.

Gamora’s breathing sharpened. “No. Don’t you dare think like that, Tony Stark!”

“Why not?” he retorted. “Only way I will get what I want is if I kill myself! And I know Extremis makes me harder to kill! Even if I used Pepper’s pill they devised to make it non-active within me, it’s still there! I had no choice in this! Pepper took away my right to choose! And I’m not coming out!”

Gamora sighed and then seated herself in front of the cupboard, leaving the door open. “Tony, Pepper knows what she did was wrong. But if it was you in her place, what would you have done?”

“I’d let her die if that was what she wanted,” he responded.

Gamora shook her head. “You may think you would now but if placed in the same situation she was in, faced with seeing you die and knowing you had the chance to save her, can you really see yourself letting her die?”

Tony didn’t answer because he knew the truth. He wouldn’t be able to sit back and watch her die if there was a way to save her. He’d take the choice out of her hands too, like she had with him.

For the first time in hours, Tony stretched out his legs, releasing himself from the ball he had curled himself into. “I can’t trust her. I can’t be in the same room as her. Those are the consequences of her actions,” he explained. “She betrayed me in the worst possible way with the best of intentions.”

“You love her,” prompted Gamora.

Tony swallowed. He wasn’t sure anymore.

“You spent years using her memory as a way to keep your sanity,” continued Gamora quietly. “She was the one thing keeping you going. You wanted to return to her.” She reached out and took his hand in hers.

Tony turned his head away. “That was before… I’ve done things she cannot understand. I’m not the man she fell in love with. I have different wants now. Life isn’t something I am interested in. I can’t be… normal.”

“Were you ever normal in the first place?” quipped Gamora, trying to make him smile.
It didn’t work. He didn’t respond, nor did his facial expression change.

“Do you want me to leave?” she asked.

“No.”

“Will you let me help you?”

He didn’t answer.

“You can’t stay there forever.”

“I know, but it is quiet and… peaceful.” He looked at her then. “I feel safe here, like I’m protected from all the bad things that could happen. I know it is stupid… It’s a broom cupboard!”

“You need safe places, Tony. Find them. Use them,” she advised. She scuttled closer and reached for his hand. “I know this isn’t what you want, and you have the strong desire to die, but… try… Try to live your life. Take this as a sign you were always supposed to survive. There is still so much you can give the world.”

Tony stayed silent for a long while mulling over her words. He didn’t want to be here. He hadn’t thought he’d be in this position. He’d survived because of Pepper’s love for him. He knew she had acted out of love but at the moment he couldn’t see the past the disappointment and possible hate he had for her.

He’d been dying and she had cruelly stripped it from him without his consent, taking away the one thing he had always craved.

And yet, sitting in the cupboard with Gamora holding hands, he had the first feelings of hope that he could live again as long as she was by his side.

“I know you’ve got places to be, people to save with your little crew but…” he hesitated but swallowed the reluctance to ask his question. “Will you stay on Earth and help me?”

Gamora’s eyes bored into his. Squeezing his hand gently, she smiled at him. “Yes, Tony, I will.”

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Gamora will be hanging around on Earth for a while whilst Tony tries to recover. Pepper has really screwed up by saving Tony's life and it may take a while for Tony to regain his trust in her if he ever does.

I'm not sure when the next chapter will be posted but I'm hoping to at some point in the next two weeks.

Until next time...

the-writer1988
Part 6: Chapter 2 - First Steps

Chapter Summary

Tony begins the long road to recovery... (if he does)

Chapter Notes

My apologies for the month-long wait. I've had trouble writing during most of February and have only just found my inspiration again! I'm hoping I can try to update weekly if not, it will be two-weekly, but we shall see.

In this chapter, Tony begins the road to recovery...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART SIX
THE RECOVERY OF TONY STARK

Chapter Two
First Steps

Gamora found Quill in the Milano making a few minor repairs to the ship. He’d put them off long enough so to see him actually working on them was heartening. She was not looking forward to the conversation she was about to have with him.

After she’d found Tony and promised to stay with him, Gamora had eventually managed to coax him out of the cupboard he had hidden himself in and back to his bed, where she promptly, with his permission, gave him an injection to help him sleep. He needed his rest. She had been pleased to see Pepper was no longer at Tony’s side.

She didn’t know what to think of Pepper. She disagreed with the action the woman had taken to save Tony’s life. It was done now, there was no reversing it. She knew Tony still loved Pepper and his disappointment in her was only paramount now since her actions were still fresh in his mind. She hoped they could find a balance.

Tony needed Pepper just as much as Pepper needed him.

“You ready to go?” asked Quill, interrupting Gamora from her thoughts.

She pulled back from thoughts of them and frowned at Quill.

Quill’s clothes were covered in oil and his face was flushed with sweat. The smile on his face vanished when he saw Gamora’s guilty face. “Gamora, what is it?”

“I’m staying on Earth for a while,” she replied.
“What?” Quill moved forward and grasped her by her arms. “What? Why? We can’t stay here. We’ve got to leave, we’ve got the galaxy to explore and find new interesting stuff!”

“Peter,” she said quietly. “This is something I have to do. I promised Tony years ago I would get him back home.”

“You’ve done it. Earth is his home,” pointed out Quill, looking confused over her assertion she hadn’t kept her promise. “You’ve fulfilled the promise you made.”

She smiled sadly at him. “He’s not… home, home. He’s not… himself. I need to be there with him, to help him.”

Quill stepped back. “You haven’t really seen him in years. You do not need to do this, Gamora!” He was denying her the opportunity to do what she knew she had to do.

“It doesn’t matter if we only just reconnected. What matters is that I always promised to help him get back home when he was prisoner. I promised him he would enjoy his life again, that he could still live despite what was done to him. But he can’t enjoy his life. He’s been forced to live on and I know if I leave he may try something drastic. If I’m here, with him, I can help him,” she beseeched Quill, hoping he might understand.

“But… if he wants to die, then why stop him?” asked Quill.

“Because I will regret not trying to help him if he tries it!” she retorted. “I know what it is like to be tortured by Thanos and to be forced to do his bidding, to carry out his grand plan in the bid of trying to save the universe. I was lucky I found a way out. Thanos loved me in his own twisted way, but Tony? He was a prisoner, someone who prevented Thanos from taking Earth years ago. Tony was tortured in the most horrific ways I have ever seen. No one here on Earth can help him deal with that reality.” She reached forward for Peter’s hands. “But I can!”

Quill was silent; his eyes inspecting Gamora’s face but his hands remained in hers as she waited for his answer. “I can’t stay here. Helping him is going to take up a lot of your time.”

“I know. I could be here weeks, months or even more than a year,” she admitted. “But Tony needs someone who understands what he went through. No one here on Earth could.”

“He could come with us,” suggested Quill. “There’s room on the Milano for him for sure.”

Gamora shook her head. “Nebula is on-board. I think she intends to stay with us.” She bit her lower lip. “After what she did to Tony years ago… Being on the same ship as one another wouldn’t work out well. I don’t think Tony even knows he helped reverse all the damage Thanos ever did to myself or my sister. Nebula is organic again, thanks to the man she raped.” She lowered her eyes. “No, Peter, Tony can’t come with us. It would cause a huge amount of issues I do not want to deal with. Tony needs to be at home.”

“A year is a long time, Gamora,” replied Quill. “Things can change in that time.”

Gamora narrowed her eyes. Was Quill indicating what she thought he meant? “Are you insinuating that I might not want to return with you at all?” She felt angry, annoyed at the assertion her partner had made. “That I would rather stay here?”

Quill’s mouth twitched. “Possibly.”

“You’re jealous?” She couldn’t believe it.
Quill didn’t reply but his face said it all.

“You think something might happen between Tony and I?” She folded her arms across her chest, anger filling her at the slight Quill was making against her, even though guilt settled in her stomach as she remembered the passionate kiss she had shared with Tony; something which she intended on keeping from Peter. If he was already panicking over her staying on Earth for a long period of time, it wouldn’t help if he actually knew something had happened.

He didn’t respond right away but his hard features fell. “No. I shouldn’t have considered it. I don’t want to lose you. And if you stay here…” he trailed off, though she understood his meaning.

“Peter, I love you. I can’t willingly leave this planet when someone I care about needs help. I have to stay. No matter what you say or believe, I will remain loyal to you. You were one of the first good things to happen in my life. I cannot forget that and I wouldn’t throw it away.” She reached up and stroked his cheek. “Tony and I would never work. We could be close but never lovers.” Though she couldn’t deny that the kiss they had shared had been breath-taking. The attraction was certainly there. “I’ll stay in touch. I’ll need you to come and pick me up when I’m ready,” she smiled, leaning in to give him a kiss on the lips.

His lips twitched. “Ok.”

She stepped back, watching him closely. “I do not expect you to stay. I know the others wouldn’t either but I’d like you to do me a favour.”

“What is it?”

“We need to know what else Tony did when he used the Gauntlet. How many other planets have been affected? Has everything Thanos ever done been reversed? Who lives now when they were dead? We need answers and I trust you to find out,” explained Gamora warmly.

Quill pulled her into a hug. “Will do.” He kissed the top of her head. “See you soon, yeah?”

Gamora nodded. “Yeah.” She stepped back. “I’d better say goodbye to the others. Stay in touch. I’ll call often.”

“I look forward to those calls,” replied Quill. He watched sadly as she moved further into the craft to bid farewell to the others.

When she was done, Gamora stepped back to the edge of the field where the ship had been parked since their arrival on Earth, and watched as Quill and the rest of the Guardians left the Earth. She looked to the left as the ship shot off into the atmosphere. “Are you sure you want to stay here with me?”

The one surprise that had come to her was Nebula who had proclaimed that she was staying on Earth with Gamora.

“Got no choice now, have I?” Nebula raised an eyebrow at her. “Quill’s gone.”

“I can call him back,” replied Gamora. She felt a bit uneasy over Nebula wanting to remain on Earth, especially since Tony still didn’t know he had helped Nebula when he’d been wielding all the stones. She had hoped to keep it from him but with Nebula staying…

“I know you’re worried what Stark will think if he sees me. I need to be here. I haven’t been organic in so long. I have my own arms, my own legs… my kneecaps… I’m whole again because of him. I still have the memories of Thanos and what he did to me but... I could live a normal life without
people fearing me. I barely remember my life before Thanos but I know I was happier despite the conditions I lived in.”

Gamora swallowed. “Then why not go back home?”

“I don’t belong there anymore. My people were not very well travelled. If I return there, they’ll know who I am. They’ll know what I’ve done. I need to be with…” Nebula stopped, hesitated, but then added, “family.”

Gamora understood. Though they were not biologically sisters, they had been raised by Thanos to view each other as such.

“I want us to be sisters. I know I have a lot to make up for, especially when it comes to Stark… If I don’t try, I will not be able to move on,” she admitted.

“Tony doesn’t know you survived yet. He probably thinks you are dead,” said Gamora quietly. “I worry you being here would be a hindrance to his recovery.”

“That’s why I’m going to try to stay out of his way as much as possible. Spending time with Quill isn’t something I want to do and dropping me off at any old planet isn’t a good idea. I’d rather be with you and learn to live again.”

Gamora sighed. She couldn’t stop Nebula from staying but it would complicate matters. But, in a way, she was glad Nebula was with her. She wouldn’t be alone either.

After all, they both needed healing.

- - - - -

“Pepper?” Steve approached her, noting her curled up form on the sofa in the main living area of the Compound. “Are you okay?”

She sniffed. “No.”

“It’s Tony, isn’t it?” Steve asked quietly.

She sat up; tear streaks still present on her cheeks. “He knows what I did to save him. He hates me.”

Steve sat beside her, pulling her into a hug. “Pepper, you did the right thing. You saved his life. He’s home now.”

Her watery eyes looked into his. “You really believe I did the right thing?” she swallowed.

“I do,” he insisted. “Tony may not know it but he does want to live. Death wouldn’t put him at peace. Allowing someone to die when they could be saved is unethical. We couldn’t knowingly let him die if there was a way to ensure his survival. It goes against our principles.”

She sniffed, rubbing her eyes with the back of her hand. “But Tony wanted to die! And I went against what he wanted! I was selfish!”

“No,” replied Steve, shaking his head. “You did it for him too.”

“He doesn’t want to talk to me,” she mumbled. “Tony’s out of Medical now. But he refuses to talk to me or even be in the same room! If he walks in and I’m there, he turns and walks out! If I arrive and he’s already there, he makes a point in leaving!”
Steve frowned. He hadn’t considered Tony would be so cruel to hurt Pepper like this. She’d helped him. “He shouldn’t be doing that,” he said quietly.

But Pepper looked at him and asked rather softly: “Would you want to be in the presence of someone who saved your life when all you wanted to do would be to die?”

Steve didn’t think about the question before answering. “It doesn’t matter. Tony dying wasn’t an option. If there is a way to save someone, regardless of their own thoughts and feelings, we should always take it. Every life is important. Why should we allow people to die?”

“Doesn’t Tony deserve the choice too?” Rhodey stepped into the room, frowning as he glanced between the two of them.

“Well of course he does,” answered Steve. “He deserves life, not death.”

“He wanted death,” replied Rhodey. “Pepper took it from him. You talk about choices, Steve, but you fail to take into account Tony’s own choice of wanting to die. You’ve taken that choice from him by refusing what he desired. But you are still maintaining he wants to live and that Pepper has done the right thing. She hasn’t, not according to Tony. He has every right to ignore her and not want to be with her. Pepper knew he wanted to die but she still went against his wishes!”

Steve stood up, feeling angry at Rhodey’s words. “She did the right thing!”

Rhodey shook his head. “Maybe to us she has, but to Tony? No.” He stepped closer and reached for Steve’s shoulders. “We all want Tony to live and be with us again. But look at what he has suffered! He feels closer to Gamora than to any of us. He’s barely talking to me because I didn’t stop Pepper from bringing him back!”

Steve swallowed. “How are you okay about that?”

“Because I respect his right to choose,” replied Rhodey, his voice hard. “When he wants to talk to me I will be there. If he wants to kill himself I will try to stop him but if he is really serious about ending his life, none of us will be able to prevent it from happening.”

“Tony shouldn’t have to die,” said Steve. “He doesn’t understand…”

Rhodey folded his arms across his chest. “Understand what, Steve? Do any of us truly know what Tony went through for the years he was not on Earth? No, we don’t! None of us has the right to decide where to push Tony to. Only Tony has the right to decide. Tony is my best friend but I will respect his choice, no matter how much it will hurt me if I lose him!”

“Boys, please!” shouted Pepper, now standing up, her body still shaking, but the tear streaks on her cheeks had now faded. “No matter what you feel is right, Steve, I did take away Tony’s choice. I saved him when I shouldn’t have done. I have to live with that. I want to help Tony but he won’t let me in! Please do not make things worse by telling him he is wrong!”

Steve stepped back. “How did you know?”

“How did I know you were going to talk to him?” asked Pepper quietly. “Because I know that’s what you would do. He’s already attacked you once. And he’ll have no problem doing it again if you tell him I was right to do what I did.”

Steve bit his lip. Tony had attacked him. He remembered. How could he have forgotten? Tony blamed him for allowing Thanos to capture him originally. His words had angered Tony instead of helping him. “It’s not fair he feels the way he does…” he murmured.
“No, it isn’t,” said Rhodey, “but we need to be his friends, not his enemies, nor his judge. He needs our support. And, just maybe, one day he may feel he can live again, but the only thing keeping him around, keeping him alive is Gamora’s influence. She’s staying here. Tony asked her to. The other Guardians have left but they’ll keep in contact with her and return when she needs them to. We need to be his friends. And that is what I am going to do.” He turned and walked away, pausing only to look over his shoulder. “What about you?”

Steve sighed. He knew what he had to do.

- - - - -

Despite his conversation with Pepper and Rhodey and his belief she had done the right thing in saving Tony’s life, Steve still decided to seek out Tony a few hours later. They hadn’t spoken properly in years, save for a few brief conversations since Tony had been rescued from Thanos.

Now that it was all over, Steve hoped he and Tony could come to some understanding. They needed it after all. Steve walked down the corridor, turned to the left and moved down a set of stairs before turning to the right and through another door before he came to the hallway that had been sealed off for Tony’s personal use.

Steve stopped.

Was he doing the right thing? He just wanted Tony to know that they all wanted to help him.

“Trouble is will he accept it?” muttered Steve.

“Will I accept what?”

Steve turned.

Tony stood behind him with a cup of coffee in one hand, with the other hanging loosely at his side. Gamora stood beside him.

Steve swallowed. “Tony. It’s good to see you,” he smiled.

“Hmm.” Tony didn’t return the smile, just took a sip from his coffee. “Are you sure about that, Rogers?”

Steve bristled. “You can call me Steve.”

“Rogers,” Tony replied, his eyes narrowing.

“What is your problem?” asked Steve, feeling angry that he’d let himself get angry.

Tony turned his head briefly to Gamora. “Please hold this,” he asked gently.

Gamora took the cup. “Tony…”

But Tony ignored her.

Steve felt like he’d overstepped his mark, especially with the way Tony was walking slowly towards him. He needed to remember Tony had been enhanced by Thanos. He was capable of a lot more heavier damage than one would assume despite his small frame. Tony’s face was set with vicious intentions; Steve could see it by the way his eyes looked.

“If you think you have any right to be in this section after what you said…”
“Tony-” Steve started, realising someone had already told Tony about Steve’s views on Pepper’s decision to save him. He was cut off when Tony’s hand wrapped around his throat and pushed him back against the wall. “Hey-!”

“You have no right to talk to me!” hissed Tony, clenching his fingers tight around Steve’s throat. “I told you before that everything that has happened to me was because of you! You decided to close that portal before I had a chance to fall through! You only had to wait a few more seconds! But did you?”

Steve struggled to respond but couldn’t get the words out as Tony’s fingers tightened on his windpipe.

“No!” Tony’s eyes blazed. And then he pulled away, stepping back and releasing Steve from the harsh grip he’d had on his throat. But when he spoke again his voice was soft. “What’s worse than leaving me stranded in space? It’s agreeing that saving me was the right decision. You’ve come to speak to me to knock some sense into me, right?”

Massaging his throat, Steve fought to maintain his composure. He was shocked at Tony’s attack on him, but considering it had happened before, it shouldn’t have surprised him. “Tony… I…” He couldn’t lie. He hung his head. “I don’t want you to die without seeing first if you can live your life again…”

“After everything I’ve lived through, do you really believe I can have a normal life?” responded Tony, his voice harsh. “And don’t say you’ve been able to after your ‘trauma’. You weren’t tortured or ripped apart and put back together and forced to do things you never wanted to do. I have memories I want to forget. I have memories that haunt me whenever I close my eyes! A normal life isn’t possible for me. My trauma…. It’s… so much more than you could ever believe it was…”

Steve moved his gaze over to Gamora who was watching silently from behind Tony.

“Gamora’s time with Thanos is still traumatising for her,” clarified Tony, “but she is capable of moving on. Her species are more durable than humans. She was lucky she escaped on her own accord and planning. I didn’t. I was a prisoner. There is a big difference between the two of us.”

“He doesn’t want to suffer anymore.” Gamora stepped forward, placing a hand on Tony’s shoulder. “By saving his life, he’s only being tortured more.”

Steve didn’t know what to say. He’d come here to talk to Tony but had instead had everything thrown back in his face.

“I know what I want,” said Tony. “Nothing you say is going to change that.”

“So you’re going to kill yourself?” Steve blurted out.

Tony tilted his head to the side, studying Steve. “At this moment? No. Doesn’t mean I won’t do it in the future though. Just, Steve…” Tony hesitated when he used Steve’s first name, “…just leave me be.”

“And Pepper?” he asked. “Will you talk to her?”

“I don’t know,” replied Tony quietly before turning and walking away.

Gamora remained standing there until Tony had disappeared behind her. “I’m helping him,” she said. “Respect his choices, please. He hasn’t had the option of his own choices for years. This is the first time he’s been given the options to choose. Don’t take it away from him again.”
Inclining his head, Steve nodded. “I won’t.”

“He’s trying, that’s all you can ask for,” she added, and then she too, turned and walked away leaving Steve to stand in the corridor with his own thoughts plaguing him.

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“I want to go out somewhere people can’t recognise me or hassle me,” said Tony as Gamora joined him back in his quarters. “I don’t know what has been revealed to the public about me yet…”

“Nothing much,” answered Gamora. “Only that you have returned to Earth and are in the care of the Avengers.”

Tony raised an eyebrow. “Care of the Avengers? Hmm. Anyone calling for my head after what I did at Stark Industries?”

“No.” She shook her head. “The people who survived that attack have already given statements you were coerced into helping and you did refuse. You’ve been given clemency. People are asking for more information. A group of reporters are constantly on watch outside the Facility.”

“Great.” Tony rolled his eyes. “I can’t exactly slip out unnoticed.”

A sly smile tugged at the sides of Gamora’s lips. “We can actually.”

“How?” His curiosity had been piqued.

Gamora reached into her pocket and pulled out a small device. It was circular with a small blue button and one red button. “This is a holo-projector. This is something we’ve used in the past when we’ve had to disguise ourselves. It’s quick and efficient.”

“It changes our appearance?” he asked, reaching out for hers.

She passed it to him. “Mine is set to a female disguise. I have one for you too. I took it before Peter left with the others. I thought you might want to get out of this place for a while. It will give you the anonymity you crave.”

“I’d like that,” he said as a slight smile crossed his face.

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Tony lay on his bed on top of the covers, his arms folded behind his head, looking up at the ceiling.

He and Gamora had ventured out that afternoon, sneaking out through the back entrance to the Compound, wearing holographic devices which obscured their identity, allowing Tony and Gamora to look around town without being mugged by endless streams of reporters or curious members of the public.

He had been surprised he had enjoyed the time out among the throng of people living their everyday lives.

She had kept close to him, talking to him occasionally as he cast his eyes around, just watching as people walked past in their everyday lives.

They had eventually made their way to a park where they found a bench facing a lake. It was secluded, surrounding by bushes and offered them privacy. They hadn’t talked in the time they sat looking at the lake.
Tony had closed his eyes, breathing slowly as he sought to find calm and peace in himself. He had enjoyed himself which surprised him. Just sitting there quietly in the fresh air, disguised so that no one would recognise him, had helped.

He hadn’t felt so peaceful in a long while.

Reflecting back on it, Tony knew there was a part of him that wanted to keep on trying to find things he enjoyed doing. Another part of him wanted to just lay down the fight and curl up and die.

But it was moments like these, after he’d experienced a good day and wasn’t feeling a heavy weight crushing his chest all the time, that he realised learning to live again was worth fighting for.

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

Erm, yes, Nebula is on Earth too, mainly because she wants to be with Gamora, but also she does want to make it up to Tony after everything she did to him. As of the end of this chapter, Tony has no idea he bought Nebula back and that she is staying in the same building he is in.

Steve decides he knows what is best for Tony, which isn't good because Tony puts a lot of blame on Steve's shoulders for closing the portal.

The next chapter is already written. I am hoping to post it next week but it all depends on how much I've written of the next chapter. :)

Until next time,

the-writer1988
Part 6: Chapter 3 - Nightmares

Chapter Summary

Tony takes a step back in his recovery....

Chapter Notes

Hello! Here we are, another update! Thank you for the continued support of this story!

Those that have been interested in what Tony has been up to during the years after he broke but before he returned to Earth, will get to see what type of things Tony was forced to do in Thanos's name. You may not like what he does...

Also, a warning: Tony has a flashback of his rape by Nebula.

PART SIX
THE RECOVERY OF TONY STARK

Chapter Three
Nightmares

Tony had never visited Gamora in her own quarters. Since Nebula had decided to stay on Earth she had taken to bunking with her sister, spending most of her time sneaking out of the Compound wearing a holographic device, enabling her to blend in, much like Gamora and Tony continued to do on a regular basis. Their visits to the park had become an almost daily activity but if it helped Tony recover then Gamora was all for it.

Her one concern was Tony discovering Nebula was staying in quarters not far from his. The rest of the Avengers had been told, as had Pepper. All of them were not happy the former cybernetic daughter of Thanos had remained behind, especially since they were aware there was history between Tony and Nebula, and Gamora had asked them not to tell Tony.

She felt it needed to come from her.

The problem she faced was finding the right time to tell Tony.

Though he was faring much better, he was still not mingling with the rest of the Avengers and he still refused to talk to Pepper, though he had begun to remain in her presence if she was already in the room when he arrived or if she stepped in when he was with the Avengers during the brief times he felt he could be around them.

But if she tried to talk to him he kept quiet.

His attitude towards her was harsh but Gamora could understand it. She hoped he might be able to
speak to her one day but at the moment, broaching the subject with him would cause him to quiet or leave the room to go to a lab located not far from his quarters. Tony’s solace was escaping from the real world.

“When are you going to tell him?” asked Nebula, leaning against the wall.

Gamora flung a glance at her sister. “How do you tell the person you want to help that their rapist is living a few doors down from them? I couldn’t stop you staying but…”

“You wish I hadn’t?” finished Nebula, meeting her sister’s gaze.

“It makes a lot of things more complicated…” Gamora folded her arms across her chest. “You’ve got a body back now. Tony fixed you.”

“By accident I’m sure,” replied Nebula. “Why have I got my physical body back and yet you still have your enhancements?”

Gamora nodded. She was sure Tony’s revival of Nebula had been an accident. “You still have yours too. The physical strength, the higher durability we both have… When my consciousness was within the Soul Stone, just as he wished for me to be brought back, Tony had the desire to undo all the suffering Thanos had ever inflicted upon anyone but only if they were directly affected by him, like we were.”

“That means anyone I killed is still dead.”

“Yes, they are.”

“But anyone he killed is alive?”

“Quite possibly,” replied Gamora. “Peter and the others will be investigating. I’ll keep in contact with them. Tony’s actions will have repercussions for the entire universe.”

Nebula bit her lower lip. “It is strange being organic again with no pain. I’m not used to it. I know he didn’t mean to do it but I do want to thank him. He needs to know I’m here. The longer he is kept in the dark, the harder he will find to accept it. And you may find he will hate you for keeping it from him.”

Gamora sighed. “I know. I need to tell him.”

“Go and tell him. If he’s going to go crazy, it is better to get it out of the way first,” advised Nebula.

“Fine,” replied Gamora. “But if this goes wrong, I’m blaming it entirely upon you for staying.”

She found Tony within the small lab he had commandeered upon his release from the medical wing. He was tinkering with a small device, one she couldn’t identify as she approached him from behind. He knew she was there for he had granted access to the lab to her. This was one of Tony’s safe places. He could retreat here and no one he didn’t want could enter.

So far, Gamora was the only one who had access, and that was only when Tony wanted her to be there. She hoped in time that Tony would come to trust others and allow them back into his life.

“What are you designing?” she started as a way to open the conversation.

Tony glanced over his shoulder. “It’s just a little upgrade that I could have made to my suit. The
Stones all but destroyed it. I can remake it but it’ll take time.”

This was the first time Tony had openly acknowledged the Stones since he had used them. She didn’t want to push him further. How could she start the conversation she didn’t want to have?

“You’re dreading something,” he noted.

“How’d you guess?” she asked.

“Your heart rate. One of the enhancements Thanos forced on me, but not by his own hands, was the ability to pick up on the heart rate of any living soul. It’s a constant irritant that if I could I’d get rid of it.” He turned away from his project and caught her eyes. “When I was being consumed by the Infinity Stones I remember asking it to reverse everything Thanos had ever done. I guess because he never gave me these enhancements himself, rather left it to his minions, I’m still doomed to be a walking enhanced human. I hate it.”

“Tony, I need to tell you something. It’s about what happened when you wielded the Gauntlet.” Her voice was soft and she knew he would hate her for what she said next. But this seemed to be as good a time as any. She had, after all, come here with the specific purpose in mind to inform Tony of his accidental resurrection of Nebula, though technically she hadn’t actually died. She’d only lived because of Tony’s interference.

“What did I do?” He sounded almost fearful and a flicker of fear spread across his face.

This was going to crush him, she knew it. But he had to know. He would find out regardless.

“You saved Nebula.”

There. It was out.

Done.

Tony’s eyes widened. “What?”

“She got thrown through a portal by Thanos during the fight. He sent her to where my body was. She fell further than I did but her non-organic body enabled her to survive the fall though she was severely injured and she was dying. But you used the Gauntlet. You saved me with it and…”

Tony interrupted her as his face paled. “I remember. I wanted everything Thanos had ever done to be reversed… Unwittingly I saved… saved…” His voice broke. “Saved… my… rapist…”

Gamora didn’t know what to say. He was horrified and she could tell he was remembering the memories that he so desperately wanted to forget.

“She’s here, isn’t she?” he asked quietly. “She’s in your room…”

Gamora nodded slowly. It was the only thing she could do. “Yes, she is.”

Tony’s face fell. “Why is she still on Earth? Why didn’t she leave?”

This was the complicated part, trying to explain to Tony how she and Nebula were still family, and that despite what Nebula had done, they wanted to move past it. She couldn’t forgive her sister for what she had done to Tony, just like Gamora could never forgive herself for leaving him in the situation he had been in.

“I can’t forgive her for what she did to you. Raping you is unforgiveable. Despite that, she’s still my
sister. We were both innocent children when Thanos found us and took us in. His manipulations, what he did to us by putting us up against one another changed us both. We fought for our own survival every single day, even if it meant hurting others. I always won. And she suffered because of my success. When she realised you meant a lot to me, Nebula knew she could use you against me: to hurt me and to prove her worth to Thanos. She was always a failure to him. When I managed to escape, I knew she wanted to as well. We fought, but it wasn’t until a few years ago where we worked out our differences and realised we had both suffered. We parted on good terms and remained in contact.” She reached out for Tony’s hand but he pulled it away.

“Don’t touch me!” he snarled.

He felt betrayed. She didn’t blame him.

“Tony…” She slumped her shoulders. “She decided to stay here because she wants to be with family. I’m the last thing she has left, just as she is for me. We need to help each other. But she also wants to make it up to you.”

Tony stiffened. “She won’t ever be able to do that.” He pushed away from her. “The others knew she was here?”

“They did,” she answered. “I asked to be the one to tell you. I’m sorry. I should have said something sooner.”

Tony swallowed. “You should have.”

“You do not have to see her,” she said.

“Good. I don’t want to.”

There was silence between them.

Gamora bit her bottom lip. The uncomfortable tension between them doubled. “Do you want me to leave you alone?”

He didn’t verbally reply but a little nod of his head was all the confirmation she needed.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered again as she left his lab.

He needed time to process this new information and she would give it to him.

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Nebula was above him, moving her hips as she rode him, taking the time to savour his horror and pain.

He wanted it to stop.

He couldn’t stop it. She was obsessed with him. She wanted him continuously, rolling her hips, taking him deep within her before riding up and descending again. She stilled, her eyes rolling and Tony felt himself burst. She clenched her hips around him and moved forward, her lips close to his ear.

“I love it when you come…”

He couldn’t reply.
“Shall we go again?”

He wanted to say no but it wouldn’t matter. She did what she wanted. He had no true say in the matter.

He turned his head away.

“This will continue until I’ve had my fill of you…”

“No… no… no.. Please stop… Stop… Stop!”

“Tony?”

Tony launched himself out of bed and right at the person who was leaning down by his head. He reacted, twisting his hand and closing his fingers into a fist and hitting out at them, caught the side of their head as they tried to lean back.

They were not quick enough.

He stumbled forward, reaching out to them with his hands. His heart beat fast in fear of what he had been remembering. It had felt so real. Had been real. She had done that to him. She had held him down repeatedly and forced him to have sex with her.

“NO!” he yelled, anger coursing through him, magnifying his anger. “NO! I NEVER WILL AGAIN!”

“Tony! Stop it! It’s me! I’m trying to help you!”

The voice broke through the haze.

Tony blinked and breathed. “Gamora?” he asked.

Her features came into view and she leaned forward to grasp his hand in hers. “It’s okay. No one can hurt you here.”

Tony’s body shivered. He didn’t feel safe. “She’s next door…” he whispered, the fear manifesting itself in words. “She could do it again…”

“You nightmares?”

He nodded. “I haven’t… haven’t… had any dreams of that for a while…”

“I’m sorry Tony.”

She felt guilty, he realised. She’d told him about Nebula and how she was now on Earth. She felt responsible for Tony’s nightmares.

“I know she saved me when I was being raped before we fought Thanos… But what she did was worse… She took everything from me. No matter what she hopes, she can never make it up to me. She tore me apart… made me break…” Tears were swimming in his eyes. He didn’t think he could hold them in. “She enjoyed it…”

Tony shuffled away from Gamora, moving back to sit on the edge of his bed.

“I broke because of her. Because of what she did to my body. I know I would have broken eventually… but…” He sniffed, tears now trailing down his cheeks. He didn’t care he was crying.
He needed to.

“She took away everything you enjoyed,” finished Gamora sadly.

“And now she’s next door. She could do it again!”

“She won’t.”

“You don’t know that!” shouted Tony. How could Gamora believe Nebula wouldn’t do it to him again? “She enjoyed it so much last time!”

“She regrets it.”

“And you believe her?” he shot back. “You’re meant to be helping me! Not sympathising with her!”

Gamora’s shoulders slumped. “I hate what she did to you. It is the one thing I can never forgive her for. But she is still my sister. We grew up in the most horrific of circumstances. I am not going to cut her out of my life. We both need healing too, just as much as you. We can find that together. But we can’t do so if we’re not even on the same planet!”

“And you expect me to want to live again with her around?” he spat.

“No, I expect you to want to die.”

Tony huffed, folding his arms across his chest. “You’re lucky I haven’t killed myself already.”

“Tony… Please tell me the truth. Deep down you want to be alive, don’t you?”

Did he? Tony didn’t know. But the compulsion to die wasn’t as strong as it had been when he’d been serving Thanos. He had a chance now to build his own future if his memories of the past didn’t hinder him. It hurt Pepper had not let him die and he was hurting her for shunning her presence. He just couldn’t bring himself to speak to her.

“I don’t know.” He sat up on his bed, pressing his back against the wall, hugging the pillow case. “Now that I’m here… On Earth, back in my lab… I feel I could… But moments like these when my memories take over, the desire to live is non-existent. The temptation to grab a knife and end it all is so strong that if there was a knife in here, right now, I probably wouldn’t hesitate to grab it and slice my wrists open.”

“Can I give you a hug?” she asked.

Tony stiffened. She wasn’t going to hurt him. But she had hurt him by allowing Nebula to stay on Earth. How could he trust her? He wanted to but his trust issues were all up in the air.

“You do not have to, Tony. It’s no worry,” she smiled at him.

“No…” he murmured. “It’s fine.” He was strong. He could cope. Right? “Hug me.”

Slowly Gamora reached forward and wrapped her arms around him, pulling him gently forward and into a hug. She ran her fingers through his hair. “I’m sorry for leaving you there. I wanted to take you with me but I never had a chance. I hoped you wouldn’t suffer too much after I left but it was silly of me to believe you wouldn’t. I’m sorry for bringing Nebula back here. If you want her to move, I can arrange it so you do not have to know she sleeps near to you.”

Tony swallowed. This would be the hardest thing he would ever have to do. “No… Let… let her stay with you… No matter what she did to me, she did come through to save Pepper and I at the end.
I’ve gotta be grateful for that, no matter how much of a bitter taste it leaves in my mouth to be in any way grateful to her.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah… If I can’t trust you to keep me safe, I can’t trust anybody,” he admitted. He wanted to trust Gamora. She was the only one he could trust. “If I can’t trust you, who else can I trust when I won’t talk to anyone?”

He knew he had to take a leap.

And trusting Gamora was the first step towards moving forward in his life.

He reached for her hand, squeezing it gently. “Thank you.”

“For what?” she smiled.

“For coming to help me tonight.”

“It’s nothing,” she replied. “I’m here to help you. I wouldn’t have done so if I had no desire to.”

Tony continued to have nightmares for the rest of the week.

As a result of the nightmares he started to not sleep, instead staying up late in his lab, working for over forty hours straight with no break before Gamora came to find him.

“Tony, you need to rest!” she urged.

Tony ignored her and instead carried on working on a new design for his suit. He still intended to use it for his own personal use and protection but he would never be Iron Man again.

“You want me to look after and help you but you are not letting me do my job!”

“I don’t want to sleep,” he finally said.

“From the other night?” Gamora asked.

Tony switched off his design sheet and turn around to face her. “No… It’s not those memories bothering me now…” He hadn’t eaten anything either and only sipped a bit from his drink. His body had long become accustomed to dehydration and starvation so that when he imposed it upon himself he didn’t have such a harsh reaction.

If there was one good thing to come out of his torture, it was his body’s resilience and how far he could push it to the breaking point.

He had to keep busy otherwise his mind would think about his past and he didn’t want to remember it.

“What is it?” Gamora’s hand rested on his shoulder.

Should he tell her?

She was likely the only person who would be able to understand after all…
“It’s what happened to me… after…” he admitted. He couldn’t finish, already knowing Gamora had guessed what he wanted to say.

“After you broke?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” she asked.

Tony wasn’t sure. “I don’t know.”

She gently laid a hand on his shoulder. “I think you need to.”

He was silent, contemplating his thoughts. Gamora must have done what he’d been forced to do during her upbringing under Thanos’ rule.

“It’s awful,” he whispered quietly.

“Everything I’ve seen in my life and done, I doubt your servitude will phase me,” she answered. “Tony, you do not have to tell me now. Only promise to talk to me when you want to.”

He looked at her, his eyes scanning her face. He shook his head. “I can’t. Not today.”

And she understood.

- - - - -

They were terrified. Their bodies trembling in the midday sun as they were marched towards their execution.

Thanos sat on a make-shift throne, presiding down upon the trial.

Tony stood off to the side, his eyes focused upon the family whom were being escorted by the guards to stand in front of Thanos.

Tony knew the man. He had struck a deal with Thanos and then broken it, refusing to uphold his end of the bargain. He had attempted to flee with his young family yet had ultimately failed.

Thanos had come to collect and had found them easily, hiding away in a cliff-side cavern for the better part of six months, believing themselves to be free and having escaped the wrath of the Titan.

“We made a bargain, Cade, yet you chose to not uphold your end of it.”

“You never gave me a specific time-frame to –” Cade defended, holding his hands up in a desperate to plea to prevent what was about to happen. His antennae flicked upwards, and his thin eyes widened as Proxima Midnight stepped forward and grabbed the arm of the small girl, yanking away from her mother and father.

“Ma! Pa!” The girl screeched, her long, curly purple hair cascading down her back, whipping itself around her body as she was dragged forward.

She was the youngest of Cade’s children, only five years old. The other children were seven and twelve. All girls.

There would be no mercy for any of them.
Tony had been on plenty of assignments now. He had seen how they dealt with people who break bargains Thanos had made. He didn’t want to be a part of this.

“Your lack of honour appalls me. You have chosen to break away from the bargain we made. You failed to honour your end. I warned you what would happen if you did. Now you will see your children pay the price. Your wife shall be given to my children for their own pleasures. You will be tortured until you are nothing more than an insignificant speck. But first, your three girls…”

“Please, spare them… Let them live… They don’t deserve this…” begged Cade.

“They do not deserve you as a father either,” stated Thanos. “Ordinarily they would be turned into weapons and unleashed amongst the stars, spreading the truths of the universe, however your actions and deceit have changed their very fate.”

Cade fell to his knees. “Please!”

Tony closed his eyes. He could already guess what Thanos was planning. Those girls would die, horrifically, in front of their parents. He’d seen it happen too many times. Thankfully he had never been asked to participate. It was always Thanos’ other children who were selected for the gritty, messy jobs that Tony had no desire to take part in.

But if he was asked…

He knew he wouldn’t be able to say no.

“Stark.”

He stiffened but made to turn towards Thanos, bowing before him. “Yes, my Master.” The taste of those words were bitter in his mouth. “How may I serve you?” Those words had been taught to him, drilled into his brain so whenever he was addressed on missions like these, he would afford his captor the proper etiquette.

“Kill the children.”

Tony couldn’t say no. He knew and feared the punishment he would receive if he disobeyed. He’d known the day would come when the order would come to him to murder innocent children.

Clenching his fists at his side and hating every single moment, Tony stepped forward with all the eyes of his captors upon him. Ignoring the screams of the parents around him, he placed one foot in front of the other and walked forward, towards the little girl…

He didn’t want to do this. He had no choice…

He reached out…

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

Tony flung himself out of bed, shaking his head vigorously, trying to forget the memory. Trying to ignore it existed in a desperate hope of trying to save himself from the pain of what he had done that day.

He felt sick and he clutched his tummy.

“Oh god…”
He didn’t want to think. He couldn’t help it.

His mind kept replaying the images over and over again. He heaved.

He’d snapped all three girl’s necks, leaving their broken bodies rotting on the ground. The mother had been taken by Corvus. She’d died a week later from her numerous injuries and the mental pain she suffered now her children had been killed in front of her. Cade had lasted four months before he had died.

He couldn’t get their broken bodies out of his mind.

“I can’t… I can’t,” he sniffed, his eyes wet with moisture. “I can’t do this.”

He didn’t want to live.

The memories were just too much. The pain clutched his heart and squeezed. He didn’t want to remember anymore.

His eyes focused on a piece of cloth in his room that would be adequate enough to do the job. He wondered if it would work. He wouldn’t know unless he tried. Determination set in. “There is only one thing I can do…”

*I need to die.*

**To be continued...**

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

Sorry for the cliffhanger! The next chapter is already written and will be posted next week!

Some of the horrible things Tony did was kill children. What he suffered through in the years of his torture broke him completely. In fear of more pain, Tony did exactly what they asked of him, no matter how much he hated doing it. What he did during this time, is one of the main reasons why Tony wants to die... He doesn't want to have to live with the guilt.

Until next time!

the-writer1988
Part 6: Chapter 4 - Understanding

Chapter Summary

Tony tries to kill himself...

Chapter Notes

Hello! Sorry for the delay everyone! I just didn't get the writing done that I wanted to but next week there will be another chapter posted! :D

Anyone else booked their tickets for Avengers: Endgame? Got mine! I can't wait!! (Please don't kill Tony, please don't kill Tony...)

WARNING: In this chapter, Tony tries to commit suicide.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

PART SIX
THE RECOVERY OF TONY STARK

Chapter Four
Understanding

She wasn’t entirely sure why she felt uneasy, nor why a bad feeling echoed in her stomach. Gamora sat up, straining her hearing. Nebula was asleep on the couch in her living area so the vibes were not coming from her. She could only think of one person who could gauge that type of reaction from her.

Fear wound its way into her gut. The fear was paramount, rising with each passing second.

“Tony…” The word seeped from her lips.

Moving quickly and deadly silently, Gamora slipped out of her quarters, down the corridor and towards Tony’s room. There she stopped, one hand hovering over the palm reader, unsure of whether to proceed, but something in her gut tugged and she knew she had to check on him.

She swiped her hand over the palm reader.

It went red, not green as it was supposed to when granting entry. Placing her palm over it again, it still returned the same response.

“TONY!” She hit the door. “TONY! LET ME IN! TONY? ARE YOU THERE? LET ME IN RIGHT NOW!” Slamming her shoulder against the door, she cursed as the reinforced metal stopped her from bringing the door down.

Someone had locked her out of Tony’s room and it could have only been him who had done it. Her
worry for him increased and she cast her eyes around looking for anything that would aid her into getting into Tony’s quarters.

“Gamora! Use this!”

She turned and saw Nebula holding a small disc in the palm of her hand.

A disruptor! It would break the electronics between the door and the wall, sliding it open for a few minutes. She stepped back and Nebula pressed the disc against the centre of the door.

A few seconds and a crackle later the door slid open, protesting against the force of being opened.

Gamora sped in, casting her eyes around. Tony wasn’t in the living area.

“His room!” hissed Nebula from behind her. “Hurry!”

She moved quickly, wrenching the door open desperately. She looked up, and then froze, utterly shocked, staring with absolute horror at the sight in front of her. A feeling of pure, uncompromising freezing cold ice shot up through every single cell of her body, cracking through the fabric of her being and exploding and freezing her insides.

“Tony.”

He was standing on the edge of his bed, his back to her, with a noose made from a piece of cloth around his neck. The knot was tight and the other end was attached to the top of the rail holding the curtain. He was standing at the edge of his bed.

If he stepped off, the noose would tighten, and he would die.

“No, Tony, please don’t do this,” said Gamora desperately.

If Tony jumped, she wouldn’t be able to save him.

She moved until she was facing him. His body was tense, his eyes were closed and his lower lip was trembling. One hand was wrapped around the cloth, almost as if he was afraid to take his own life. She could see he was inwardly fighting with himself, trying to sum up the courage to do it.

“You’ve been doing so well lately,” she said. “You’ve been going outside, you’ve been calm and you’ve been facing your fears.”

“The memories are too much,” he whispered. His whole body was trembling.

“You’re afraid,” she noted, stepping up onto the bed, reaching out for the noose. “Anyone in your position would be.”

“I think of them all the time. I see my hands covered in blood….” Tony’s eyes opened, tear-stained and full of pain. “I killed them. The children…”

Gamora paused. “This is what you wouldn’t tell me,” she deduced. “It’s what Thanos forced you to do. You took lives.”

“I did,” he replied hoarsely. “Children most of the time, I was ordered to kill children more than adults.”

“They sought to break you further.” She stepped up next to him. “By forcing you to kill the innocent.”
“I see their faces, their fear in their eyes as I wrap my hands around their necks and snap them. It was the most humane way to do it. But every snap, every child I killed tore me apart. How... how can I live with that?” he asked, his voice breaking.

Her hands found his shoulders, despite one of his hands still on the noose around his neck. “I’ve killed. Not just children but women too. Do not forget I was tasked with the same things too. The difference between you and I is that I was tasked to it, whereas you were forced into it. Breaking you enabled them to control you. You couldn’t say no for fear of torture.”

“Of rape...” he whispered. “That’s what they threatened me with.” Tears shimmered in his eyes. “I had to kill... Otherwise...” He shivered. “They’d give me to the Chitauri.”

Gamora groaned. Of course, they would. “Tony, you cannot blame yourself for what you did whilst under threat of rape. You suffered through a brutal attack. The threat of another one like it would ensure obedience from anyone. You were protecting yourself. Those children’s deaths are not on you, Tony. Your hands may have taken them but it was Thanos who ultimately had them killed.”

Tony’s body shuddered and the tears fell from the droplets of his eyes, trailing down his cheeks. “But I still killed them...”

Gamora could understand. She really could. She faced the same dilemma on a daily basis.

“How do you cope?” he asked. “How can you live?”

“I know what I did was not out of choice, Tony,” she said quietly. “I did it out of a desire to survive and find a way to escape. I was lucky I found a way out when Quill came along. I always wanted to take you along with me, and I will always regret not finding a way to get you out, but when I was sent away to Ronan and I heard about the Infinity Stone... I had to stop Thanos from getting it. I hated myself for so long for leaving you in hell. Once I betrayed Thanos there was no way back.”

Tenderly she reached up and held his face, her thumbs stroking his cheeks. Once there had been two scars on either side, now completely healed due to the effects of Extremis. His eyes were broken.

“What do you want, Tony?”

Tony’s lips trembled. “I don’t know...” He stepped back from the edge of the bed and pulled the noose over his head, letting it swing free. “The one thing I want, I can’t have.”

The answer was obvious but she felt she had to ask. “What is that, Tony?”

Tony closed his eyes and he leaned back against the wall, sliding down it until he sat on the bed. He looked up at her. “You. But you’re with Quill and I can’t...” He turned his head away. “And Pepper... I can’t... I can’t be with her. I’m here because of her but... god... I still love her like I love you too!”

Gamora sat beside him. “You two need to talk. There is hope for you yet. You’ve done so well the last few weeks. Do not throw it away.” She hesitated briefly. “Is it because Pepper brought you back or something else?”

“Both...” he admitted. “A part of me is glad she did, another part is horrified. And... I worry I won’t ever be able... be able... I can’t say it.”

She knew what he meant. “Be physical with someone again?”

He nodded.
“I think you can.”

“No, I can’t. Sex is off the table.” He shook his head.

She smiled gently. “When we kissed before you wanted me.”

“That was a fluke.” He was determined to believe he couldn’t have sex again.

She shook her head. “No, it wasn’t, Tony.” Shifting on the bed a bit, she leaned with one shoulder against the wall. “Sex isn’t important. Relationships are not built on sex. You can still have relationships without it. Besides, you shouldn’t even be thinking about that aspect right now. Concentrate on living, on finding things you enjoy and want to carry on doing. Give yourself a chance to heal from the horrors of your past. I know if I can live, so can you.”

Tony remained silent for a while, fiddling with his hands. “You really believe I’ll get there?”

“I do,” answered Gamora. “You’re strong, Tony. You survived when others would not be able to. You’ve lived through horrors that many could only imagine. We don’t want to push you into things but we want to help you. All of us do, including Pepper.”

“I’m being too hard on her…” he said. “I know she meant well but I was so relieved when I thought I was dying. I felt free for the first time in years.”

Gamora smiled gently. “You are still free though. For the first time in years, you can make your own choice. Do what you want. You have no reason to fear anymore.”

Tony chewed his bottom lip. “No, I don’t.”

She wanted to say something more but couldn’t articulate the words without panicking Tony again.

It wasn’t long before Tony spoke again.

“I know Nebula is staying out of my way,” he shuddered. “I don’t want her here though I know you do. It is hard knowing she is so close to me.”

“But she doesn’t want to hurt you,” replied Gamora. “You made her organic when she has been mostly machine for so long. She is grateful to you and genuinely wants to help you but she knows you will not accept it. I know she was your abuser and she terrified you and I loathe what she did to you. In the end, she was on our side.”

“And she did save Pepper and I,” muttered Tony. “Did she ever tell you how she rescued us?”

“No, she didn’t.” Gamora had never asked, only knew Nebula had saved them. She could see the hurt in Tony’s eyes. “You do not have to tell me.”

Swallowing, the dark-haired man shook his head. “No. I have to. Glaive… he… he… raped me… in front of Pepper… Nebula stopped him.”

“I thought it might have been something like that.” Gamora sighed. At the time this had happened she’d directed Thanos to Vormir where he had sacrificed her for the Soul Stone.

“I’m still not talking to her,” he added.

“I’m not expecting you to,” replied Gamora quietly.

Leaning back, Tony rested his head against the wall. “I’m a mess.” He stretched his legs out. “But
“you’ve given me a bit of hope.”

“I have?” She was pleased. She wanted him to believe it.

A slight smile stretched at his lips. “Yeah, you did. I can’t ever be who I was before all this happened. That’s what I miss. I’ve got to learn to accept who I am now… and… come to terms with it. But the people I love still want to be a part of my life, no matter how far apart we’ve been.” He moved off the bed. “I think I know what I need to do. It’s just doing it…”

Joining him, Gamora pressed a hand to his shoulder. “You shouldn’t doubt yourself, Tony.”

He nodded, his fists clenching at his sides as if he was psyching himself up for something. “Maybe… I don’t know… possibly I can talk to Nebula one day…”

“It doesn’t matter if you can’t.” Gamora didn’t want Tony to believe he was under any obligation to talk to his rapist.

“Will she still leave if we do not?” Tony pointed out.

“Yes, she will. When you feel ready, when I can return to Peter, Nebula will accompany me. I will not leave her on Earth as a constant reminder of what you suffered. You deserve happiness, Tony, and a chance to have good memories rather than bad ones.”

It was quick and quite sudden but she found Tony pulling her into a hug. “Thank you, Gamora.”

“This is what I am here for, Tony,” she finished. She eyed him. “You’ll be okay now?

He smiled, perhaps one of the first true smiles she had seen him give her. “Sure.”

Feeling less alarmed and happier with Tony’s mental state, Gamora trooped back to her own suite and promptly fell asleep.

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Rhodey hadn’t been expecting Tony to be in the team kitchen when he arrived for breakfast that morning. He was always an early riser so he could get some fitness practice in before a healthy breakfast. He stopped in the doorway, his eyes focused upon the man who sat at the table, picking at a bowl of cereal.

Tony rarely ate with the team, mostly keeping to himself, but when he did spend time with the rest of the Avengers, he wasn’t himself. He preferred to watch and listen rather than interact with them.

It was still strange to know his friend had been alive all this time and they’d just left him in the hands of a madman. But they hadn’t known. If they had… what could they have done about it?

Nothing.

Earth did not have the technological advancement needed to make trips into deep space.

Wakanda possibly had the expertise to make it a reality sooner but the world at large? It wouldn’t be for years.

“Are you going to stand there all day or come in?” Tony’s voice broke through his thoughts.

Walking up to the table, he pulled out a chair and sat in front of Tony. “What brings you down here?”
Tony’s eyes moved from Rhodey to his bowl. “Food?”

“There’s something else…” Rhodey tipped his head slightly to the side. “I know you, Tony.”

Tony sighed. “I… I tried to kill myself last night.” The words come out at a whisper.

The feeling of shock didn’t run through him. Rhodey inclined his head. “We’ve been expecting something like that… You’ve been shutting us out more often than you let us in.” Sitting back in his chair, he asked: “What stopped you?” He thought he already knew the answer but he wanted clarification from Tony first.

“Gamora,” his friend answered. “It’s hard to want to be here with everything that’s happened to me. I’m not the billionaire, playboy, philanthropist I once was.”

“Do you want to be that person again?”

“No.” It was a quick answer.

“You are so much more than just a billionaire, Tones,” explained Rhodey. He wanted to help Tony see the value he had elsewhere. “So much more than a playboy and a philanthropist. You are a hero.”

Tony’s eyebrows rose. “You really believe that?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Why?”

Rhodey shook his head. Tony’s self-confidence had fallen to alarming levels. He didn’t believe he was worthy of anything. They didn’t know much about Tony’s life in the last few years, only that he had been physically and mentally tortured and forced to support Thanos’ cause. But no one could blame Tony for that. “Your sacrifice six years ago ensured Earth’s survival. We lost you but your life was remembered. Every year the world remembered your sacrifice. Every single year, Tony. You are a hero and still are.”

“Even after everything I’ve done? I attacked this planet! How can they possibly see me as a hero after that?” shouted Tony. “I do not deserve sympathy or clemency!”

“You need to experience it for yourself,” suggested Rhodey. “You see yourself differently to what everyone else does. You go outside disguised but I think if you made a public appearance you would be surprised.”

Tony pulled a face. “It’s not happening.”

Rhodey shrugged. “Then trust us when we say you are a hero.”

The spoon in Tony’s bowl stirred the remnants of his cereal. He pushed the bowl away. “My appetite isn’t what it once was. I’ve rarely eaten in years. They never gave me the luxury of a proper meal, just enough to ensure I survived. Even… even when I gave in, all I got was, was their version of rice, only the space variety. It was dull and grim. I was lucky if I got it every day.”

“I guess you’ve had enough rice to last you a lifetime,” said Rhodey.

“Several lifetimes in fact,” retorted Tony, leaning back in his chair. “Aren’t you going to eat too?”

“Sure, just deciding what I want.” Truthfully, Rhodey wanted Tony to stay. He didn’t want his
friend to walk away if he had heavy food. Tony’s appetite was lacklustre at best. He might walk away if Rhodey overdid it.

“I’m not going to walk away, regardless of what you eat,” noted Tony, watching Rhodey carefully.

“Damn, you’ve got good perception skills.” Rhodey frowned.

Tony shuddered. “It is part of the enhancements I have. I can read people better. Eat, it doesn’t matter. I’ll stay.”

He decided to put on toast, covering it with butter and marmite, and returned to the table. “Want a bit?”

Tony eyed it warily. “A small bit. Just a corner.”

Rhodey obligingly cut a small piece off and passed it to Tony, watching as he looked at it before putting it in his mouth and starting to chew slowly. It wasn’t long before he was reaching out for more toast. Pleased that he’d made an extra piece, Rhodey gradually passed small pieces to Tony to eat until finally he had consumed an entire slice.

“That was…. that was…. nice. What was that again?” Tony asked.

“Toast. Marmite toast with butter. Want more?” offered Rhodey. If it got Tony to eat and get his appetite back he would be happy to make more.

Tony shook his head. “No thanks. Don’t want to overdo it.” He started to fiddle with his fingers.

“You okay?” Rhodey noticed.

“Pepper,” said Tony. He didn’t stop playing with his fingers. “How is she?”

Rhodey sighed. He was wondering when Tony would broach the subject of Pepper with him. He had been surprised it hadn’t come up before. But Tony had been stoically refusing to be around her though had started to, but not on his own. “Pepper is complicated,” he admitted. “She is having trouble sleeping, eating and drinking. She’s taken a temporary leave of absence from Stark Industries but… she’s not coping well. She’s lost both Happy and you in a short space of time. It… hurts her a lot to be around you but not be able to be with you, even as friends.”

Tony winced.

“I don’t want you to feel guilty,” he added. “Pepper made her own choices and she took away your right to choose. I can understand why you wouldn’t want to be around her.”

“She was the reason I fought for so long,” muttered Tony quietly.

Rhodey leaned forward.

“It was always her. To get back to her. Her memory, our time together kept me going strong. It hurts me to avoid her.” Tony bowed his head, running his hands through his hair. “But there are other things too, that if she knew I did them, what would she think?”

“Whatever it is, I’m sure she would understand, as would all of us. You’ve been through hell, Tony.” Rhodey wanted his best friend to believe he could trust them. But was he going to let them in? “And… I don’t think you can heal unless Pepper is in your life. She’s so important to you…”

Tony raised his head. “Shall I talk to her? I mean, not just with others, but by myself?”
“You should.”

Tony needed to hear this.

“I think it will do you – and Pepper – a world of good. You need her in your life, Tony. Pushing her away isn’t the right thing to do, and you’re asking about her, which makes me believe you know it too.”

Tony didn’t reply after that, only nodded his head.

Rhodey wasn’t sure what to say next, but he did need to get on with his day. “I’m about to head to the gym. Do you want to come with me?” It was an offer he didn’t mind his friend not taking up.

“I think…” began Tony, his voice wavering. “I think… I think not. If I don’t talk to Pepper now, I’ll keep avoiding it.” He rose from the table, taking his plate and washing it before moving towards the lift. “Is she still in her room?”

“She should be unless she’s decided to end her leave of absence,” offered Rhodey.

“Thanks.” Tony inclined his head and left.

Left standing in the kitchen on his own, Rhodey leaned back against the wall, relief pooling through him. He thought he’d handled that well. He just hoped Tony and Pepper would be able to work things out.

_They need each other, no matter what they’ve done to hurt one another._

But he couldn’t help but have the lingering worry that something was going to go wrong.

_To be continued…_

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

Because Tony has Extremis and is enhanced he is limited as to how he can kill himself. He decided to go for the noose around the neck, thankfully Gamora talked him out of it! Tony’s concern is that he can’t be who he was before all this happened. Tony is devastated he won't be able to have/enjoy sex again - that was a big part of who he was before and that is why he dwells on it still. His sexual trauma was terrible and it is something that will be brought up again.

And Rhodey being the good friend he is, trying to convince Tony to go and see Pepper... And yes, the next chapter details that conversation...

The next chapter will be posted next week as it is already written! Not sure which day yet though as I have a busy late shift schedule for work next week but I’d probably say Wednesday is the day I will post next week! :)

Until then,

the-writer1988
Part 6: Chapter 5 - Light in the Darkness

Chapter Summary

Tony and Pepper have a long-awaited chat...

Chapter Notes

Hello all!

Posting a bit later than I usually do in the evening because of other things going on... but as promised, here is the next chapter! Tony and Pepper talk...

WARNING: Tony goes into detail over what happened to him during his captivity to Pepper, including details of how Nebula raped him.

PART SIX
THE RECOVERY OF TONY STARK

Chapter Five
Light in the Darkness

Feeling nervous wasn’t something he was accustomed towards experiencing. However, with each step he took, the butterflies in his stomach only grew worse. Tony wasn’t one hundred percent sure why he felt like this. This was Pepper, someone who he had known for years. Why should he feel like this?

Perhaps it was because he was going to speak to her willingly instead of treating her like a stranger he didn’t really want to know. There was so much history between them and yet distance had separated them for so long.

Tony stopped outside her quarters. He couldn’t bring himself to knock. It didn’t feel right to just go in unannounced. Chewing his bottom lip, Tony contemplated what to do.

He didn’t have to wait too long as the decision was made for him as the door slid open and Pepper stood there, surprise on her face as she looked at him, standing all awkwardly in front of her door.

“Tony?” she asked quietly, her voice barely a whisper.

“Hi…” he managed.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

Tony shuffled on his feet. “No.” Truthfully he wasn’t. How could he be?

“Do… do you want to come in?”
“I don’t know,” he answered. He was afraid too. Scared of what would happen if he did. Could they really be what they were once before?

“What do you want to talk about?” she asked quietly, her eyes never leaving his.

Tony kept on clenching and unclenching his fingers. “How… how are you?” he managed.

“Surviving,” she answered plainly. She wasn’t wearing any make-up. Her skin was pale and her hair a mess. It appeared she had not slept properly in days judging by the size of the bags underneath her eyes. “You?”

He could lie. A part of him really wanted to. Eventually, he mumbled: “No… not really.” He was still standing outside her room, a part of him not brave enough to make the next leap to go in and another part of his brain was yelling at his legs to move. He was torn, in crisis. “It’s difficult for me to be able to live again after what I went through.” She could not understand, especially not after she had brought him back.

“I know I messed up,” she said quietly. “I didn’t think of what you wanted; only what I wanted and needed. Tony… I’d just lost Happy and… and we’d spent years thinking you were gone…”

“You thought you’d lost everything,” he replied quietly. “But you haven’t. You still had your life, your future.”

“So do you…” Pepper replied.

“You wouldn’t say that if you knew what happened to me!” He stared at her then, angry at her assumption that she thought he still had a future to live. A part of him annoyed at himself for enjoying parts of his time back on Earth already, giving him that hope he could live normally. But was it really possible?

Pepper’s lips trembled. “Then tell me.”

“You wouldn’t understand! No one on Earth can!” he yelled back, frustration evident in his voice. He wanted to turn away, to run from here and forget about ever trying to talk to Pepper. But his legs wouldn’t move. He wanted to talk to her. He wanted to tell her.

But he was afraid.

Afraid of her reaction.

Tony swallowed and turned his head away, trying to prevent the tears from falling. He did not want her to see him cry. Not now. Not yet.

But she reached out and touched his arm. “Then help me understand. I want to know if you can talk to me… We can’t keep doing this, Tony. I know there is no hope in getting us back. Too many things have happened for us to ever be in a relationship again. I know that now. What I did to you scuppered it completely. I know you struggle with trust… and I know I made one mistake…”

“A big one.” He couldn’t help mutter his response. He was still bitter about it.

“Please give me a chance,” she whispered.

Tony sighed. He had come here to talk to her, to perhaps inform her of how life had been for him during his captivity.
“I saw you raped in front of me, Tony. I already know the kind of things they must have done to you for you to serve them. Whatever you did once you served them was on them and not you.”

He raised his eyes then and looked at her. “You really think so?”

“I do.” Her lips were pursed and her features intent. “They broke you in the most hideous way possible.”

It was obvious she would be able to understand if he told her. Her empathy and her stance at trying to shift blame from his shoulders proved it. Her own selfish needs had overridden his desires and he could see why she would stop him from dying. They had all suffered…

He held out a hand to her, decision made.

She looked down at it, surprised by the offer.

“Come with me,” he said.

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He led Pepper to a private garden situated at the back of the compound. It was one of his favourite places when he wasn’t out with Gamora using disguises to mingle with the general population. It was secluded with trees surrounding them completely, shielding them from view. There were several benches there and Tony sat on one and Pepper on the other.

The air was cool around them and Pepper shivered only slightly.

Chewing his bottom lip, Tony considered how to start. She didn’t push him, she just waited, knowing he needed this time to collect his thoughts together.

And that showed she cared and it heartened him she was willing to wait for him to speak until he was ready.

He didn’t raise his eyes when he could finally speak. He didn’t want to look at her, the admissions of what he was about to make terrified him. He was thinking back to the years of torture where they had systematically stripped him of his clothes, his food, his water… Taken him apart bit by bit…

“I took that missile through the portal… I knew the risks. I thought I’d die. I fell unconscious soon after the explosion. I never expected to survive. I fell thinking of you, of your face, of what we had… When I woke I was in a cell, almost naked, completely chained with no way to escape. I was taken to meet the Other.” He shuddered then, remembering the cruel torture he had to suffer at the creature’s hands. He was glad the Other was dead. “They had put something in my throat to make me breathe their air. It’s still there now…”

He felt up to his neck. He couldn’t feel it as it was so deeply embedded in the back of his throat that it had become a part of him.

“They wanted the information in my head. About the weapon I used, about other Earth defences… I refused. I kept on refusing. They tortured me…” His voice nearly broke. “They did such horrible things to me. They caused scars on my body, denied me food and water, kept me chained to a table. They liked their knives, making new patterns on my body. At that point, I was completely naked. They liked to touch places I didn’t want them to go near. No matter how much I didn’t want them to do something, they always did it more.”

Pepper’s breathing was increasing.
“They knew I was fighting them. I refused to even tell them my name so that’s what they concentrated on trying to get from me. The Other… he… he…” His hand trailed up to his chest where the Arc Reactor had once sat. The memory of the times he had removed it… “He…”

“What did he do?” asked Pepper quietly. She stepped across from her seat and moved to sit beside him, pulling him into a hug and taking his hands. It was the first proper hug they had really shared since his return and it felt nice…

“He started to take the Arc Reactor out. Pulling it out and putting it back in before Cardiac Arrest happened. It was horrible. He enjoyed it… He kept on doing it, barely giving me minutes to recover. He… He… touched my heart as it beat inside my chest… It was too much… I told him my name… He threatened to carry on taking the Arc Reactor out if I didn’t tell him why I needed it.” He really wanted to cry now. The images were flashing through his brain. He remembered lying there, horror filling him as the Arc Reactor was removed over and over again…

“So I told him… I hoped the pain would stop. But they found new ways to torture me. They released me from my chains and allowed me rest after I had told them that. But they left the cell door open…” He looked up then into her startling blue eyes. “I tried to escape,” he whispered. “I tried… but…”

“It didn’t work,” she finished for him.

He shook his head. “No. So the Other took me to a device where he forced me to relive memories of my life here. But… it warped the memory to see people I loved die. You died so many times… in horrible ways… Rhody, you… the Avengers… I don’t know how long it lasted for… but the Other wanted to come for you, Pepper… He wanted you with us so he could use you against me. He knew how much I loved you.”

“They wanted me to serve them. Torturing me constantly was always wearing me down. I told them information when he threatened to touch my heart again… The Other… He liked it. His fingers in my chest as he touched it…” He felt sick.

“Tony…” Pepper’s hand on his back.

But his mind was running loose. He was back there, on the table, as the Other kept on putting his hand inside Tony’s chest, stroking his heart with his fingers. Sickness grew in his stomach. Tony coughed, pulled away from Pepper and vomited at the base of one of the trees. He wiped his mouth, trying not to heave. He couldn’t… He couldn’t… He sunk to his knees, tears now flowing down his cheeks. He couldn’t stop the memories from coming. He’d unleashed a demon by trying to do this, but he couldn’t stop.

She knelt down beside him, ignoring the pile of sick, not caring if she kneeled in it herself. “Tony… you don’t need to do this…”

He blinked away tears. “No… I have to… If I don’t…”

“I don’t want to see you hurt…” she whispered. He could see tears in her eyes waiting to fall.

“You already did…” She’d seen his rape. Seen him brutally taken.

“I don’t want to see it happen again,” she continued, caressing the back of his hair, trying to comfort him with her presence.

And it helped.
His heartbeat returned to normal and he started to calm down. Tony leaned back against the tree, shifting away from the sick he had made, pulling her away from it so it didn’t ruin the clothes she wore.

“If I don’t continue now, I won’t ever be able to tell you,” he said.

“Take your time,” she whispered. “Don’t rush…”

He rested his chin against his chest. “They took me to Thanos, taking a longer journey than necessary as he wanted me broken by the time I got there. I wasn’t. They failed. When I met Thanos… it was also the first time I met Gamora and Nebula.” He shuddered. That encounter had changed his life. “I know Nebula is on Earth…”

“I wanted to tell you,” answered Pepper. “But…”

“Gamora wanted to tell me herself,” he nodded. “She had the right too.”

“Are you okay about her being here?”

Tony snorted. “No, not really… But… she helped save you… And… Nebula is apparently grateful to me. Somehow I made her organic again. And she won’t be here forever…” He shook his head, continuing his story. “I insulted Thanos, he invaded my brain for it.”

“What did you say?” asked Pepper.

“Called him a big mutant grape and mocked him for sitting in a chair,” smirked Tony. Despite the consequences he had suffered for his slight against Thanos, he didn’t regret it one bit.

“Oh, Tony…” Pepper shook her head. “Despite everything they had done to you, you still taunted him?”

He couldn’t help smiling. “I had nothing left to lose. No matter what I said I was still going to be tortured more.”

“What did Thanos do to you?”

“Invaded my mind, tore through it. I refused to bow to him, to become one of his minions. He tasked Gamora and Nebula to break me and get everything I knew about Earth from me.” He shuddered then, recalling his first encounter with Nebula. “They took me away. Nebula was obsessed with me from the start. She touched me all over, forcing herself on me… kissing me before I had even been brought to my cell. Gamora stopped her.”

Tony’s eyes misted. “Gamora was good like that. She helped me when she could, though tortured me when she had to. Nebula was the one who did the bulk of it. She enjoyed it. She… she…” he swallowed the lump that was forming in his throat. “She became sexually obsessed with me.”

Pepper paled. Though she had learned Nebula had raped Tony she had not known of the way she had tormented him with it for years.

“She liked torturing me, hearing me scream, liked licking me in places… In that time Gamora became my friend, my confidante. She risked everything to help me by healing me. She promised me she’d get me out when she made her own escape from the life she lived but it had to wait for the right time. I had to suffer but her being there, helping me gave me hope that I hadn’t had in a long time. I… I…” He didn’t know what to say next but he could see Pepper’s eyes open in recognition of what he was trying to admit.
“You fell for her. She was your rescuer, your light in the darkness. You have feelings for her still, don’t you?” Pepper reasoned.

How could Tony deny it? Pepper had realised.

“She wasn’t just the only light in the darkness I had. In the early days, it was you, the memories I had with you were like a candle burning persistently, refusing to budge, and that gave me the strength to keep on fighting. But Gamora was there with me and she understood what I suffered. I still like her, even now, but we can’t be together. She’s with Quill and I’m a broken human being with no hope of a future like that,” mumbled Tony.

“That’s not true!” returned Pepper. “You still have the capacity to love. Whether it is with me, Gamora or someone new, you can have it again! Don’t believe you are incapable of it. Sometimes things happen without us realising.”

Tony shrugged. He didn’t know what to believe. “I know…” He shifted, feeling slightly uncomfortable. “Gamora tried to delay Nebula raping me but my captors were getting impatient with their lack of progress.”

Pepper growled. “They should have just given up.”

“It was about two years after I’d gone through the portal that Gamora was dispatched on a mission. Nebula had me washed and cleaned by the Chitauri.” He didn’t want to think about that either. But Pepper needed to know, no matter how much he hated the idea of retelling it.

She touched his arm. “You do not need to tell me this if you do not want to.”

“No… you have to understand,” he replied. “The rape wasn’t just a simple one, Pepper. It was brutal. She didn’t just force me to have sex with her many times, she… she…” He struggled to continue, his mind assaulted by images of Nebula’s mouth around his cock, her fingers on his balls, him sucking her breasts and her forcing him to eat her out and then cumming all over his face.

Pepper stroked his face and that gave him the strength to continue.

“All the things we ever did when we were together? She forced it all on me. There were two things we never did which she forced on me.”

“What were they, Tony?” Pepper looked white, perhaps sick even.

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Yes.” Her resolve was there and Tony couldn’t deny her.

Tony bit his lower lips. “I… bit her breast when she forced me to suck them…” He was trembling. “She didn’t like that. She lifted my legs up and as punishment forced her fingers into me and then threatened she would give me to the Chitauri to have if I didn’t behave. I relented. The other thing… was… She sat on my face, made me lick her between her legs.”

Pepper looked green.

Tony barrelled on, despite feeling sick himself. “She… she came on my face, coating me in her… You and I… we never did that. I mean, yeah, we tasted one another but the end result wasn’t over our faces. It was only after that she raped me properly. I told her I’d break before she had me, told her I would give Thanos everything he wanted to know. I was desperate to avoid any further sexual experience with Nebula but she raped me anyway.” He wanted to be sick.
“Nebula fell asleep on top of me. I was still inside her. She couldn’t get enough of me…” Tony turned his head away, more tears leaking from his eyes. “I broke, Pepper. I couldn’t fight anymore.”

Pepper watched him carefully but Tony continued.

“She broke me too much. I couldn’t speak when I was brought before Thanos. He tore open my mind, took what he wanted anyway. He violated my mind, sifting through my memories. I’d had enough of the pain and torment. I agreed to serve him.” Tony stopped, then looked at Pepper. “How can you not hate me for that? I helped our enemy.”

“Tony… listen to me,” begged Pepper, turning on her knees to face him. “What you went through was horrific and terribly traumatic. I suspect there is more to this but I do not blame you for betraying the planet. No one is. You were put through the most horrific experience imaginable. Anyone in your position would have given in and helped them. And… and I can understand why you want to die, why it has been the one thing you have wanted for years…” She reached out and tipped his chin up. “And I denied it for you because I was selfish and I still love you.”

He could see it in her eyes, the love she harboured for him and continued to do so. Despite the fact she’d been with Happy, her love for Tony had never abated. He hated that Happy had died, that he wasn’t here with them.

“There’s more. I was enhanced, forced to train to become an Enforcer and act out Thanos’ will across the galaxy. I didn’t just attack people or assassinate people, Pepper, I did worse. A lot worse. Something I do not believe I can ever forgive myself for. I still see their faces.”

Pepper leaned into him. “Tell me.”

Tony’s breath abated. “I killed children. Murdered them. Snapped their necks. It was either do it or be raped again. They always held that threat over my head. I couldn’t let them do it to me… The fear was too real.”

What little colour that had remained was now stark white. “Children?” she breathed. “Tony…”

“I’m not worth knowing after I did that,” he whispered. He didn’t deserve family or friends.

“That’s a lie, Tony, and you know it!” she responded adamantly. “What you did was under duress! You had no choice! Think of the government here! You attacked people on this planet and yet they have chosen to not persecute you. Those children’s deaths are on Thanos, not you! You were just the weapon he used to do it.” She grabbed Tony by the shoulders. “Do not think you are not worth knowing or loving! People still love you. They always will! It doesn’t matter what you did, it matters how you feel about it. You, Tony Stark, are not guilty of any crime, only guilty of caring too much. And that isn’t a bad thing.”

He couldn’t believe she could still care for him, still want to be with him despite knowing the worst of what he had done.

“I’ve known you for a long time,” she continued, “and I know what you can be if you try. Afghanistan changed you and made you better, made you someone I could really love, and not just have a crush on. But you’ve earned the right to decide what you want to do for yourself. You deserve to have what you want. And I’m sorry for taking your choice away from you. If… if I could take it back I would.”

It was those words that made him forgive her. That she had seen her mistake and wanted to atone for it.
“I don’t care if we are never together again. I want to help you, anyway I can! Even if it is to die.”

Tony pulled Pepper close wrapping his arms around her. “I think… I think…” He couldn’t say it.

She looked up at him. “What is it?”

He took a deep breath. “I think I do want your help.”

“With what?” Pepper asked.

He looked down at her, at her own tear-stained cheeks and her mussed hair and the natural beauty shining through and he knew, despite whatever feelings he held for Gamora, he still loved Pepper and he wanted to make it work, somehow, even if they stayed friends for ages.

“To live again. I want you to help me be Tony Stark again.” He had to start somewhere. And he couldn’t be Tony Stark without a Pepper in his life. “Will you help me?”

She smiled up at him. “Yes. Yes, I will.”

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

Tony and Pepper needed to have this conversation. I hope I handled it well?

I’m not sure when the next chapter will be posted (it is not finished yet as I am struggling with it) but I hope to post it before Avengers Endgame!

Until next time,

the-writer1988
Part 6: Chapter 6 - Conflicted Feelings

Chapter Summary

Tony discusses his feelings...

Chapter Notes

Happy Avengers: Endgame week to everyone!

I'm seeing it this Thursday at midday! Can't wait! I just hope all my favourite characters survive... (I know nothing about this film at all).

I'm glad I've managed to get this chapter out before Endgame too. I hope everyone enjoys it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

PART SIX
THE RECOVERY OF TONY STARK

Chapter Six
Conflicted Feelings

They hugged for a long while until Tony decided he needed to leave. Pepper remained alone in the secluded garden, having not moved from the same spot, deciding to just enjoy the peaceful nature of the atmosphere around her.

“I wondered if you would be here.”

Pepper turned her head and saw Steve standing there, hands thrust in his pockets. Her expression soured. She was not keen on Steve, not after he had gone against her to confront Tony, instead believing that he was right. “Rogers.”

“Look, Pepper, I’m sorry for talking to him! I thought what I was doing was right!” defended Steve.

Pepper rolled her eyes. “People told you not to confront Tony but you still did it! We’ve known him longer than you ever did! I know we became friends in the time Tony has been gone but that does not give you the reason to force your opinion on to him!”

Steve sighed. “I’m sorry. I hate seeing people die who should live.”

Pepper’s eyes turned to slits. Did Steve really not understand the problem? “You maintain I was right with what I did then?”

His silence said it all.

Pepper wanted to screech but she reigned in her anger and spoke calmly. “Do you know why I am
Steve shook his head. “Peace and quiet?”

“No.” She folded her arms across her chest, standing up, ignoring the dirt on her clothes and stared at Steve. “Tony was here.”

Steve stilled, his expression shocked.

“He told me things you have not been privy to. I know what happened to him during the years he was gone, what he was forced to do, and I understand why he wants to die, and probably a part of him still does, but he’s fighting to try to live instead. But if I could go back and change what I did on that planet, then I would.” She stepped closer to the super-soldier. “Before you keep on judging Tony for his choices perhaps you should get to know him. Maybe then you will understand rather than continue to assume your opinion is the correct one.”

And with that, not wanting to continue the conversation anymore, Pepper walked past Steve and back towards her quarters, ignoring him completely as he tried to talk to her.

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Tony walked back to his quarters feeling a lot more positive about the future than he had felt in a long time. He and Pepper had had a good long chat and though he doubted she really understand the horror he had lived through, she had shown her desire to atone for her actions by wanting to support him. He still had niggling doubts but now he felt more relieved, happier than he had been.

When he stepped back into his quarters and headed to his bedroom, he was surprised to see Gamora sitting on his bed, waiting for him, her hands fiddling with something that he couldn’t identify.

“Tony!” she smiled when she saw him. “Where have you been? No one could find you!”

“Oh.” He stopped. He supposed after his attempted suicide Gamora would be on edge. “I was with Pepper.”

“And?”

“We talked.” He felt a bit awkward and he couldn’t place why. “I think we are on the road to mending what was broken between us.”

“Good.” She stood from the bed. “I didn’t feel I needed to worry. But I did. I thought it would be okay if I stayed here and waited for you to return.”

Tony smiled lightly. “It’s nice you care.” It gave him a warm feeling inside.

“I’ve always cared about you,” she responded. “I hated leaving you there. Once I deserted Thanos I could not have come back. If the Orb hadn’t have been an Infinity Stone then I would have returned but when I learned what it was, I knew I had to stop him from getting it.”

Tony had mused over this a lot. He didn’t blame Gamora for leaving him behind. She had done what was best for the universe. It was completely unselfish of her to do that. “I don’t blame you. I never have.”

“You still hated me though. I broke my promise,” she replied sadly. “You wanted to kill me.”

“My feelings for you would have overridden any attempts to kill you.”
“Are you forgetting you did try to kill me?” Gamora quirked one eyebrow up. “You had feelings but you still attempted to kill me.”

“I’d rather forget I tried to kill you…” admitted Tony. “I feel ashamed I was angry at you.”

“You had every right to be,” she replied.

He drew his attention back to the device Gamora held in her hands. “What have you got there?”

She shrugged. “A communication device. It’s linked to our ship. I can talk to the others from here, give them updates and maybe estimates as to when I might call them to come and get me.”

“Oh.” Tony’s upbeat feeling vanished. He didn’t want her to leave.

“I cannot stay here forever,” she said, sitting down on the bed again.

Yet she still seemed sad. Tony could see it in the way she held herself.

“Why are you upset?” he asked, moving towards her and sitting down beside her on the bed.

“Peter…” she replied.

“What did he do?” Tony didn’t know her boyfriend that well but knew he was a human from Earth. They’d barely interacted during the time they had been allies either.

“He accidentally slept with someone else.”

It wasn’t something he had expected to hear. He was taken back by her statement. “How can one accidentally sleep with someone else?” He’d cheated on Gamora. Why would someone do that to her?

“It’s complicated. Peter feels awful about it. They were on a planet, invited to a big meal to celebrate the Guardians. Apparently, our adventures have caused populations to admire and honour us. Peter got a bit too intoxicated… didn’t realise the alcohol would mess with his head… He became very easy to sway into bed and the rest is history… He woke up in another person’s bed with no clothes on. I know if I had been there Peter wouldn’t have made that mistake.”

“Huh.” Tony mused. “So it was on accident.” He didn’t want to say the other word which probably better described the situation the other Guardians had found themselves in.

“I know what you are thinking,” she hinted. “And, yes, Peter was too drunk to say no, so it could technically count as not consensual. Peter feels awful about it.”

“Are you angry?” asked Tony.

“Angry I wasn’t there to stop it,” she growled in response.

Tony felt guilty. “I’m sorry. Wouldn’t have happened if you had to stay here with me.”

Gamora immediately looked up aghast. “Tony, this is not your fault at all! I like to think his situation wouldn’t have happened if I’d been there but there is no guarantee I wouldn’t have been tricked either. They managed to get Peter away from the others.”

“You’re too smart,” mumbled Tony. “No one can trick you.”

“Tony, I can be tricked. Do not believe I am incapable of being tricked.”
Tony sighed. He knew that. “I’m sorry about Quill.”

She shifted then, changing position. “It’s okay. It’s fine. We’re still together. What happened wasn’t done intentionally. I’ve done many more questionable things than he has. We are not your average couple, I’m sure you’ve realised.”

“A decade ago I wouldn’t have believed humans and aliens were compatible.” Tony shuddered. “I’ve changed so much since then…”

“Experiences do that,” replied Gamora quietly. “It’s what life does to you. We are shaped by our experiences. Things we once believed impossible become probable.”

Tony fiddled with the bed covers. “Yeah. They do.”

She tilted her head then, looking at him curiously. “You still have hope.”

“About what?” he queried, knowing she had guessed what he had been referring to.

“Us. Tony, you and I cannot be together. You love me because I helped you. Is it really love if you feel grateful for what I did for you?” she asked quietly. “Your emotions for me are all over the place, but for Pepper, they are pretty much constant. She was your light, not me. When it came down to it, when you returned to Earth and you attacked Stark Industries, you turned on Thanos, regardless of the consequences, just to save Pepper.”

He had, that was true but he couldn’t deny how he felt about Gamora.

“I believe what I feel is real. When I kissed you…” He had liked it, enjoyed it, wanted more. “And you responded so you must feel something!”

“I love Peter,” she stated. “Nothing is going to change that.”

But he didn’t believe her. “You struggled to stop it before. You told me to enjoy my life! How can I when one of the things I want, I can’t have?” he yelled, standing and moving away from the bed.

Gamora hesitated.

“And don’t tell me that life has hard choices and it doesn’t always go to plan. Don’t think I don’t already fucking know that?” Tony was angry and he was scary when he was angry. “Get out!”

“Tony –”

“I don’t want to see you!” he shouted again. He wanted her to leave. The day had started off so well too but now he felt lost again, unsure of his place in the world. He couldn’t have everything he wanted. Never.

Gamora reluctantly made her way out the door. “Tony… I’m sorry. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You already have!” he sneered before he shut the door on her, and locked her out.

Looking around, he saw a lampshade on the table, grabbed it and threw it at the wall angrily, shattering it to pieces.

And then his barriers broke and he crashed to the floor, sobbing.
Gamora listened to Tony’s sobs through the door, her back pressed up against it. She had not expected that turn of events. Tony’s emotions were still volatile, still all over the place. He was healing but he was still fragile, still capable of breaking down.

A shadow fell over her and she rose her eyes to see Nebula standing there.

“You heard everything?” she assumed.

“I did,” replied Nebula. “It’s hard to block out the voices.”

“I don’t know what to do,” moaned Gamora, rubbing her face with her hands. “Tony… Tony is not letting me go. He thinks he wants me, to be with me. But I’m with Quill and he has Pepper…” Though, admittedly he didn’t have Pepper just yet.

“I think you need to stop lying to yourself,” stated Nebula.

Gamora looked incredulously up at her sister. “I’m not lying!”

Nebula rolled her eyes. “You like both. I can see it!”

“Nothing can ever happen between Tony and I,” stated Gamora tiredly. “I’m not giving him hope when there is none.”

Nebula shrugged. “Then he is going to continue to suffer. He won’t let you go until he knows you are not right for one another. If you keep on pushing him away you are damaging him further. Emotionally only. That’s how I felt when we grew up. You always won and I always lost. We were once close when we were children. But each time I lost, I become more and more emotionally damaged. I can… understand Stark.”

Gamora sighed. She felt conflicted, confused. She didn’t know what to do. She was here to help Tony but she couldn’t help him in the way he wanted. “If I gave in and we did start something, would he be able to let me go? The problem is, even if I do like him, I love Quill more.”

“Then you have a problem.” Nebula folded her arms across her chest. “You stayed to help him, but you can’t help him. Staying will only hurt him if you continue to stay here. Stark needs you for now but I don’t think he always will. But you’ve got to let something give otherwise he won’t ever heal.” She moved away from her sister. “Honestly, I’d try myself but Stark wouldn’t take too kindly to me, not after what I did to him.”

Gamora leaned back. “I need to talk to Peter…”

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“You want to what?” Quill’s voice was surprised and the horror across his face was spreading. “No! Absolutely not!”

Gamora rolled her eyes. Trust Peter to think she meant sex. “It won’t come to that.”

“But you basically asked me if it’s okay for you to have a relationship with him!” Quill retorted. “And I don’t like it!”

“Tony is hung up on the idea of him and I. He doesn’t believe there is nothing between us,” she explained. “Peter… he needs to be shown. He won’t be able to go back to Pepper if he believes there is hope for him and I. It isn’t ideal but I’m supposed to be helping him, and not being able to completely do so will limit and hinder his recovery. Tony will never be able to accept who he is now
and who he loves more if I do not prove to him any relationship between us will not work.”

Quill’s face was changing expression. “No matter what I say you’re still gonna do it, aren’t you?”

“I’d rather do it with your blessing. Peter, I love you. Nothing is going to change it. But Tony needs me and if this works it means I can return to you sooner.”

Quill perked up. “Really?”

“Yes.”

“What are you going to do?” asked Quill quietly. It was clear he didn’t like Gamora’s plan.

“I will not sleep with Tony, you have my word.” She needed to emphasise it, reassure Quill that nothing like that would happen. “I need to show him people love him, that he is capable of being loved, and if need be, show him there is nothing to be afraid of letting me go. If I don’t do this then I’ll regret it, always wondering what I could have done differently.”

Quill stayed quiet, his eyes moving around.

“He’s not ready for Pepper yet, but he is ready for me.”

Quill didn’t look happy. “You’re asking a lot of me.”

“I know, and I’m sorry,” she muttered. “I wish it could be different but I need to do this.”

Quill sighed. “And I can’t be there?”

She shook her head. “No. If you were, I don’t think he’d dare to be around me as much as he is now. Tony’s mental state is still fluctuating. He has good and bad days, sometimes a mixture of both. All I know is that he has to see himself living again for him to embrace himself again. He won’t allow himself to get close to Pepper just yet… but with me, I know he wants to. And I think it might just help him if I can. I didn’t want to do this without you knowing. If you don’t want me to do it, then I won’t.”

Quill leaned back, closing his eyes in frustration. “I can’t really complain. I did end up doing something stupid myself and…” He kicked something out of sight. “Fine. Do it.”

She smiled. “Thank you. I will make it up to you. I promise.” She reached out to the screen. “I love you.”

A small smile crept at Quill’s face. “Love you too.”

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Tony was alone in his workshop when Gamora entered it. He hadn’t been in his quarters when she’d tried to find him and had hoped he was still on the premises. She was surprised when requesting entry she hadn’t been denied, but Tony probably felt guilty over the way he had reacted earlier.

He didn’t even give her a chance to speak before he was talking.

“I’m thinking of experimenting on myself. I’ve been changed by what was done to me. Maybe the part of me that is alien could be used to cure diseases here, potentially stop our cells dying so quickly.” Tony fiddled with a device which had a small, protruding needle. “I need to get my own blood and see what changes there are. I’ve been enhanced in two different ways. First with what Thanos did to me and secondly with Extremis. The two have combined. I want to see the changes
that I have experienced, see if I can find any benefit in researching my blood. Maybe if I can help my home, I may find some sort of closure. What was done to me was for a reason. If it wasn’t to help others, what was it for?”

Gamora wanted to say something but knew she would regret it. Tony had been enhanced into a weapon but he was refusing to acknowledge that truth, the reality of it, trying to ignore what he had become in order to realise his full potential. Even though he’d saved the universe, he could still be a huge benefit to Earth, if he chose to unlock his potential.

By ignoring what he had become, he was trying to move on. Trying to forget the purpose he had been spared from death for.

“Good for you,” she smiled.

He looked up at her and smiled back. “Thank you.” He twisted the device, securing the needle to it. “I think that should work. Hmmm, would you like to do the honours?” he asked, holding out the device.

Gamora looked at it and carefully took the small needle gun. “Are you sure?”

“Positive. I trust you.”

Tony sounded so different from their argument from before.

“Are you sure?” She couldn’t help but feel he was putting on an act.

“I wouldn’t trust you with taking my blood if I didn’t.”

“Tony… We had an argument…”

“Forget it,” he interrupted. “I was wrong. I shouldn’t have had a go at you.” He lowered his arms. “I know I can’t be with you. You love Quill and I shouldn’t be forcing my feelings onto you, no matter how conflicted they are…”

She stilled, aware of what he was saying and how he was bearing his heart to her.

“A part of me believes we could be great together… but I spent so long thinking of Pepper and we’ve finally starting to repair what was shattered between us… It is a long road and even though I do think about kissing you… And wanting something more…”

She waited, wanting him to continue in his own pace.

He shuffled on his feet. “But it wouldn’t work. We couldn’t be together. It’s a reaction to the circumstances I was in. You helped me survive and gave me hope. I will always be grateful for everything you did for me. If something did happen…We need to stay friends. It shouldn’t become complicated because I have misguided feelings for you.”

“When… when did you come to this conclusion?” she asked. She hadn’t expected Tony to say this to her.

He moved back, leaning against the table. “I’ve… known for a while, I was just denying it. I didn’t think Pepper and I would be able to fix things but… she surprised me. And I know she regrets saving me… I want to work with her and I still have feelings for her. I don’t think I will ever stop loving you… but you want me to enjoy my life and that is what everyone is saying to me. Trying to force you into something to please me isn’t going to work and it opens up problems that I do not
want to have.”

She did feel surprised. Surprised but pleased. She hadn’t needed to talk to Quill. She didn’t need to be with Tony in any intimate way. She felt disappointed and that feeling worried her. Why **do I feel that?**

“I can’t throw away what Pepper and I built together before… this happened,” he indicated. “If I don’t try to be who I was before then how am I ever going to be able to let you go?”

It was a valid point.

Tony was trying to save her the trouble of having to leave him. He knew nothing could happen between them, even if they did both desired it.

“I won’t leave your life forever, Tony,” she said. She didn’t want him to believe they’d never seen one another again. “We’ll visit. I still want to be a part of your life, no matter what happens.” She reached out and gave him a hug. “So, want me to take your blood now?”

Tony held out his arm. “Sure.”

She smiled again and placed the injector over a vein in his right arm. “Then let’s get to work and see what we find that could help your people.”

**To be continued...**

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

Both Tony and Gamora have conflicted feelings for each other. Originally with Quill having an accidental tryst with someone else, it was going to prompt Gamora to have more of a relationship with Tony but the idea wasn't working out so I decided to still have the same idea but have Tony come to a conclusion he and Gamora couldn't be together. There may still be bits of Tony/Gamora propping up still but they won't be getting involved as what was my original intention.

The next chapter has already been written and will be posted on Tuesday 30th April.

Until then,

the-writer1988
Part 6: Chapter 7 - Dinner, Discoveries and Discussions

Chapter Summary

Tony attempts to go back out into the world as himself.

Chapter Notes

Ok, first of all, Avengers: Endgame killed me. I loved it but it killed me. Just in case any of my readers have not seen it yet I will not be discussing spoilers here so please do not mention anything to do with Endgame in reviews. I will be writing a Fix-it fic which I hope to start posting later today or tomorrow.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

PART SIX
THE RECOVERY OF TONY STARK

Chapter 7
Dinner, Discoveries and Discussions

They spent the next week encased in Tony’s work and desire to find a way to help the people of Earth. He barely left the lab but Gamora made sure he ate and drank properly, pushing him away from his work when he was refusing because he didn’t need it to survive. He’d been starved for so long his whole body had acclimatised to surviving for a long period without food or water. His enhancements enabled him to survive longer too so it didn’t bother him if he didn’t eat.

It did bother Gamora and because he knew she would be able to forcibly march him out of his lab if he didn’t eat, he acquiesced to her requests to keep himself well.

He kept running different tests on his blood, extracting skin cells too and using samples of diseases to interact with his blood and the skin cells to see how they reacted. Tony had never been interested in this branch of science however he found it interesting to see how his blood and his cells reacted to Earth-bound diseases.

His physiology was able to counteract all viruses and bacteria he had been able to test it on. The problem Tony had was ensuring he was not discovered. If people learned of his enhanced physiology people might try to experiment on him – not that they would stand a chance against him – to take what they wanted for themselves. He’d have to be careful about marketing the new discoveries to things he had learned during his captivity.

“It’s interesting how adaptable the human body can be in the face of adversity. By rights, I shouldn’t have survived half of what I was forced through,” explained Tony as he wrote down notes.

“Humans are more resilient than most of the universe believes them to be,” smiled Gamora. “Your species have a particular way of surviving adversity when others may not be.”
“But there are ways to keep people alive when they should be dead,” added Tony quietly. He felt sure he had been forced to be kept alive. His body had been through such strenuous torture, the fact that he hadn’t died surprised him.

Gamora bit her lower lip. “I won’t deny it. I think it is possible you were forced to be kept alive for a while until your body adjusted. Thanos wanted everything from your head. He wasn’t going to get it if you were dead.”

“I bet if Thanos could have seen the future he would have regretted saving me.”

“He would have. Even if you had returned to Earth, you would still have been a marked man in Thanos’ eyes. He would have wanted to know who you were. He would have sent people out to collect intelligence on you, find out how much of a threat you could be,” explained Gamora.

“So, no matter what had happened that day in New York, Thanos and I would still have crossed paths?” asked Tony. “We were always destined to face one another?”

Gamora nodded, inclining her head slightly. “I think so, yes.”

“Well…” Tony shrugged. “I can’t change what happened, only adapt.”

“What are you going to do about what you’ve learned?” she asked, placing the container which held a bit of his blood back on the table.

Tony frowned. “Talk to Pepper. She might be able to help me market something. Thing is… the world hasn’t seen me yet since I returned… I’m not sure what I should do…”

“It doesn’t need thinking about right now.”

Tony frowned. He had been thinking a lot lately about how he should present himself to the world. For him to be able to get back into his old life he needed to talk to the public. People were clamouring for interviews with him, wanting photos of him… They still waited outside the Compound, hoping he would emerge.

“I can’t stay cooped up here forever. I need to make an appearance… though it terrifies me. I’m… scared of what they will ask…”

“If they respect you then they shouldn’t push you to answer questions you do not want to,” replied Gamora.

Tony really wanted to laugh. “The press here does not work like that…” He’d had a lot of experience in years gone by but the press had not seen him at all since he’d returned. He doubted there was a clear picture of him. As soon as he made his presence known they’d go mad for him. “No… it is something I need to work on. I feel safe here but staying cooped up and using disguises to get around isn’t the way to lead my life…”

Gamora reached out to him. “After everything you’ve been through you deserve the chance of a quiet life.”

“Maybe.” Tony bit his lower lip, uncertainty seeping in. “I need to face the public one day… Not now but soon.”

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“Pepper…” Tony smiled as she entered the living room. “I’ve been meaning to ask you something.”
Pepper stopped, her hair falling around her shoulders. Two days after she and Tony had spoken, she had decided to return to work but ensured she was still able to be around the Avengers Compound as often as possible. Since Tony had been holed up in his lab for the last week they hadn’t really had a chance to speak again. “What is it?” Her voice was soft but caring.

He shuffled awkwardly on his feet. “I don’t know how soon it will be… but I need to step out. By that I mean getting back into a normal routine. They want to see me, right? The public.”

She nodded. “I’ve had a lot of requests this week since I returned to work. The press does want to see you. What are you thinking?”

“Well,” he leaned back on the sofa, pressing his palms into the soft cushions, “I’ve been experimenting with myself the last week or so, with Gamora’s help, just trying to find out how human I still am. We’ve learned I have an edge over any Earth-bound illnesses. By the time any virus or bacteria will have taken hold, my enhanced immune system will have already worked out a way to defeat it without even giving me any symptoms. This discovery could lead to a major breakthrough in human medicine. I want to work with the medical division of Stark Industries to research and market new drugs that could eliminate diseases from the planet, as well as providing a cure for other life-limiting diseases. My own enhancements mean I could have a longer life myself, perhaps longer than the average human.”

“You want to return to work?” asked Pepper, surprised by the revelation, sitting down beside him.

“I do. I was spared for a reason. If it wasn’t to help kill that purple grape then it was to help advance Earth. Our planet is being noticed and we won’t be able to live in solitude for long. Word will reach out into the universe and others will follow in Thanos’ wake. I have the knowledge and experience necessary to help Earth move forward. But for me to be able to do that, I need to work with the best team on the planet.”

“Then you have my support,” said Pepper. “It would be good to work with you again.”

“I can’t say when I will return… I need to recover still. I’m getting there, bit by bit. Each day I feel a little bit happier. And working helps to concentrate my mind. But, something I was hoping to do in the next few weeks is to go out to dinner with you and allow the public their first glimpse of me. They’re starving for it. It makes me uncomfortable after what I’ve done but…”

“You were coerced, Tony. It wasn’t your choice. What happened at Stark Industries and elsewhere across the world wherever Thanos and his minions attacked was not on you. It was on them. You were a prisoner of war. Anyone seeking judgment upon you is foolish and they will feel the full wrath of our lawyers. The public is rooting for you, Tony. You were their hero and still are. Just like me, they want to see you happy.”

Silence reigned between them, causing a slight feeling of awkwardness to rise.

“When I feel ready I want to hold a press conference announcing my intention to help enhance medical knowledge in the world. If I believe it is the right thing to do, I may also make a statement about… other things… But questions afterward will be agreed beforehand. I do not want any surprises.”

“That can be easily arranged,” smiled Pepper. “Just let me know and I’ll make all the arrangements. Dinner included.”

He grinned and pulled her into a hug. “Thank you.”
It was a few more weeks of Tony going out in public disguised with Gamora until he summed up the courage to ask Pepper to arrange the evening meal in one of his favourite restaurants. Whether he would still like the food or not remained to be seen. He hoped he did. His appetite for Earth-bound food was increasing however there were some things he refused to even contemplate eating at all: the first being rice. He never wanted to see another bowl of rice again in his entire life.

She decided on a mid-week meal, on a Wednesday, one of the days that the restaurant itself wouldn’t be crowded. Pepper had arranged a private booth for them to maximise their privacy and reduce stress for Tony of having to sit in public. Years ago, when they had been dating, Tony had enjoyed the attention he had brought with being with Pepper, but now he just wanted to have more of a quiet life, able to live his life without any interruption.

It wasn’t completely possible for him to do that, however.

He asked Rhodey and Gamora to accompany them as security. Gamora, disguised as a female security guard, to hide her identity. Despite the World Security Council being notified of Gamora’s (and Nebula’s) stay on Earth, the rest of the world was unaware. After the recent spate of alien attacks the Council had made the joint decision to inform the public the alien threat had passed and all alien life had since left the planet.

Tony agreed with this. There was already too much attention on the Avenger’s Compound with just him staying there. If they knew there were two alien women on the premise as well…

He was sure the security surrounding the Compound wouldn’t last long. People would want to see them, expose them and make them out to be a threat they weren’t.

Tony could vouch for Gamora but for Nebula… He couldn’t. He still couldn’t bear to be around her, his thoughts always moving to what she had done to him whenever he was unfortunate to see her. He didn’t grudge Gamora for having her around. Both of them had a shared history and they deserved the chance to be proper sisters for once. They had all suffered but Nebula’s slights against Tony had caused him undue stress and he doubted he would ever be able to talk to her probably again, even though he had unintentionally saved her life.

“Hey, you okay?”

A firm hand grasped his shoulder.

Tony turned his head to see Pepper. They were sat in the back of the car with Rhodey driving them to the restaurant Pepper had booked.

His lips were dry. “Yeah, I’m fine.” Why did he feel nervous? He moved his hands up to his face, wishing he had used a disguise.

“We do not have to do this if you don’t want to,” said Pepper quietly. She wore casual clothes, having decided to not put pressure upon Tony to make himself look good just for going out to dinner with a friend.

He shook his head. “No. If I back out now, I won’t do this at all.”

Even the photographers back at the Compound had had no idea he had been in the car that had driven past them twenty minutes ago. The windows being tinted had given him that much-needed privacy.
Gamora leaned back over her seat. She was now blonde, with startling green eyes and smooth lips. Her disguise working perfectly so she could be here with them. “I do have them here if you need it.”

He perked up, tempted to take her up on the offer. It took a lot for him to swallow the lump that had formed in his throat. “No… I can’t hide away. I have to walk out, show myself for once.”

“We’re nearly there, Tones,” confirmed Rhodey, as he turned right at traffic lights and pulled into a quiet, up-market side-street, where he pulled over in front of the restaurant. “Was the manager notified of who was coming?”

Pepper nodded. “He was. We also told him if he alerted the press than Stark Industries would be suing him and all of his employees for damages. He has promised to brief his staff of this. But we all know the plan. Close to when we are leaving, Gamora you will use your phone to notify the media we are here. As long as Tony feels he can go through with this. If he does, the press will be waiting for us outside this main entrance. It will be quick and it will give them the story they want. It may also stop the paparazzi from maintaining a constant watch on the Compound if they realise they’ve missed taking the first pictures of Tony out and about.”

“Oh, that is tricky,” grinned Rhodey. “Those photographers will not like that one bit.”

Pepper laughed. “Which is why we are doing this, so they miss the chance to get Tony’s first picture.”

He nearly felt like hyperventilating. “Can we get this over with, please?” Why was this so difficult? He’d been out plenty of times in disguise with Gamora. Why was being here, with his true face on, worrying him so much?

Pepper’s hand curled around his. “Tony… We will do this in your own time. If you do not want to do this we can turn this car around and try another day.”

“No,” he rebuked again. He chewed his bottom lip. “Let’s… let’s… let’s go in.”

And he reached out and opened the door of the car.

The restaurant itself wasn’t packed yet there was still a good amount of patrons already seated and eating their meals when Pepper and Tony stepped in.

They were recognised almost immediately with people staring at them and whispering amongst themselves. Some even went for their phones to take photos or to text others but Pepper’s quick glare silenced them as they walked through the foyer to a private booth.

Tony slid into the furthest seat possible from the door and nearly curled up. He was shaking. Just being in a normal situation was terrifying for him. Pepper laid a gentle hand on his arm.

“Hey, it’s alright.”

“This is all going to go wrong. I can feel it.” His paranoia was settling in. “We can’t stop them sending photos or messages out.”

“Actually, we can.”

He tilted his head to the side, curiosity overcoming his fear. “What have you done?”
Pepper held up a small device. “This will block all signals down this road. Anyone trying to send a message or make a phone call…” she trailed off.

Tony laughed. “Brilliant.” He leaned back, feeling a lot more relaxed now he knew he wouldn’t have to deal with the press until a lot later.

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With Rhodey and Gamora on guard outside the private booth, Tony and Pepper enjoyed a quiet meal, just talking about the advancements Stark Industries had made in Tony’s absence. He was remarkably impressed with how far his company had come in the years since his disappearance.

He raised a glass of clear water, having refused to have a proper drink. He’d gone so long without it. “I think I made the right choice in making you C.E.O. I always knew you were special.”

“ Took you a long time to realise,” replied Pepper, taking a sip from the wine she had ordered.

Tony shrugged. He was feeling more and more relaxed as the evening went on and he was enjoying her company. It took him back to the good old days. “You stuck with me for a decade putting up with my shit.” He frowned. “I’m honestly surprised you still want to be around me.”

Pepper smiled sadly and reached out for his hand. “Tony… I knew a long time ago that I was never meant to leave you. I stayed because I loved you and I still do. I have no expectations for us. I just want to help you.”

He could see the sincerity in her eyes and knew she was speaking the truth.

Bowing his head he felt a little guilty. “There was a point when I didn’t want to talk to you again or see you… I think… I spent years wanting to die and having it denied to me. What kept me going was you. I wanted to come back to you but I never thought I would have that chance again. I’m not saying we can be together again, nor am I ruling it out. We’ve both changed too much for us to leap back into it… and I honestly don’t know if I will ever be ready for any sort of physical relationship. I don’t want you to spend the rest of your life waiting for me.”

Pepper smiled gently. “Tony… I’m in this for the long haul. Marriage and children do not bother me. If it is something I never have it doesn’t matter. I’ve done you wrong, I’m trying to make up for it.”

His face twitched and he wanted to hug her, refraining himself from doing so.

“Thank you.”

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When they left the restaurant, as arranged by Pepper when she briefly dropped the interference field so Gamora could send a message to the press as to Tony’s location, they found themselves surrounded by photographers.

Tony, who had agreed to this tactic, looked overwhelmed by the flashing cameras and the constant shouts of his name. The fear rose quickly and he wanted to run and hide back into the restaurant so he didn’t have to face this. This was the first time they were properly seeing him, the first time his face would be plastered all over the net since 2012.

His whole body was shaking before he felt the comforting hand of Pepper on his back, gently pushing him forward. Rhodey and Gamora pushed through the press to the car before Tony slid into the car first, before Pepper stopped in front of the door and turned to face the photographers. He
listened to her from inside the car.

“Mr. Stark would like to thank you for your co-operation tonight.”

Every paparazzi seemed confused by that statement and Tony couldn’t help but allow himself to smile.

“In time, when Mr. Stark feels ready, he will be calling for a press conference. Until that time arises we humbly ask you continue to respect our privacy during this time. Thank you.” Pepper sank back into the car, pulling the door shut behind her. She turned to face Tony. “You did well. I know you froze, but you did well.”

“I think, after tonight, I will need a nice long sleep just to recover,” groaned Tony.

It didn’t surprise anyone that he did sleep through the whole night once he retired to his room.

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The next morning Tony’s appearance at the restaurant was all over the news. Video had been taken of him going to his car at the end of the evening and numerous photos had been posted, as well as Pepper’s speech before they left. The question on everyone’s minds was when would Tony Stark hold this press conference?

Speculation was rife and the news had surprised Steve who had found himself glued to the television since he had heard of Tony’s outing. He’d been kept in the dark, as had the rest of the Avengers. None of them had known Tony would be stepping out but he didn’t exactly trust them, so why would they be trusted with such information?

Steve sighed. He really wished he could fix things between himself and Tony. He knew their opinions differed. I honestly believe Pepper did the right thing even if she now believes she doesn’t.

He wasn’t sure what he could do to make it up to Tony. Guilt still gnawed at him. Everything that had happened to Tony was on him. His choice back in New York to close the portal had doomed Tony to years of pain and torture. How could he ever make up for that? Steve assumed Tony was like him. Would want to live despite what had happened to him. He liked to think if he had been put in the same situation that he would have still chosen life over death.

Was it fair of Steve to push his own views on another person when Steve really had no idea what Tony had gone through? He doubted Tony would ever talk to him about his time as a prisoner. Steve would never have the knowledge…

Switching off the TV, Steve moved from the couch and turned to see Tony standing there, looking a bit wary. “Oh. Tony.”

“Steve.” Tony’s voice was cordial. “I wasn’t expecting to see you here.”

“I rarely come to this part of the building…” admitted Steve. He mostly kept to himself now. “I don’t know why I’m here really…” Though that was a lie. He hoped Tony wouldn’t pick up on it.

Tony folded his arms across his chest. “Spit it out, Rogers.”

Fidgeting on his feet, Steve felt awkward. He wasn’t sure how to say what he wanted to. “I saw you went out last night… Was that the first time?”

Tony’s eyes narrowed. “What do you think?”
Steve bit his lip. “I know I messed up but so did Pepper!”

Tony’s face darkened.

Steve had said the wrong thing.

“At least she had the decency to admit she was wrong and now has some understanding of why I wanted to die in the first place!” retorted Tony angrily. “Whereas you refuse to even entertain the idea that your precious ideals may be wrong!”

“So you don’t want to die now?” asked Steve hopefully.

Tony’s face darkened even further.

Steve stepped back as Tony stalked forward. He’d been on the bad side of Tony twice before. He didn’t really want to be on it a third time but he had the uncanny feeling he already was. He always said the wrong thing even if it was with the best of intentions.

Tony reached out for Steve and he backed away. He did not want that vice-like grip around his throat again. He raised his hands. “Wait! Tony! Stop! I didn’t mean it like that!”

Tony growled, bearing his teeth. He glared daggers at the super soldier. “What am I supposed to think when you ask me ‘so you don’t want to die now’? You tell me!” But he did stop prowling towards Steve.

“Look,” swallowed Steve, “I know we have vastly different opinions. I’ve made the mistake of believing you and I are the same. We’re not. We react differently to situations. I cannot even begin to imagine what I would have done if it had been me in your place.”

“Until you live it, you have no right to foist your opinion on me,” scowled Tony. “I’ve seen and done a lot of things I’d rather not have survived. It was not fun and games for the last few years. If you had any idea of what they did to me, you would feel ashamed at wanting me to live on when I clearly didn’t want to.” He raised his hand to prevent Steve from commenting further. “At the moment I am living and I am enjoying being around people who care for me. I am not ashamed to admit that in saving me was the right thing for Pepper to do on reflection. It’s only because I decided I wanted to try that my own opinion has shifted. But that does not mean I do not still want to kill myself. If I was continually pushed to the breaking point, I won’t hesitate to go up to the roof and fling myself off.”

Standing quietly as Tony spoke gave Steve a moment to pause. He couldn’t keep on doing this. He couldn’t keep on picking up on the words Tony was saying. He was implying if Steve kept pushing his own agenda than that may just make Tony take the next step towards death.

His shoulders sagged as he spoke. “I never intended for my opinions to come between us.”

“There was never an us, Rogers,” answered Tony stiffly.

Steve nodded. They’d clashed when they had first met. Steve’s own words to Tony had triggered him to take the biggest risk of all. “If I hadn’t accused you on the Helicarrier of never making the sacrifice play…”

“That wouldn’t have made a difference. I still would have taken the nuke through the wormhole. I was the only one who could. I do not regret that.”

“I should have waited longer for you. When Gamora first came here she told us you’d been falling
back when the portal closed. If I’d just waited a few seconds more, I could have spared you from all this pain you suffered.” Steve’s legs shook and he pressed himself back against the wall as a support. “It’s my fault…” He actually felt like crying, something Steve rarely did. All the emotions he had bottled up were threatening to crash out in one cascading wave. What Steve had done to Tony unintentionally was at the crux of it.

And he hated himself for it.

Slowly, he allowed himself to sink to the floor. “I’m sorry.” He didn’t want to look up and see Tony’s face, afraid of what his reaction would be.

But Tony knelt down to face him.

Steve couldn’t help but look up.

Tony didn’t look angry anymore. In fact, he looked sad. “I don’t hate you, Rog- Steve. I just hope one day you will be able to understand what I went through and realise we all make different choices. The key is accepting each choice as it comes. If you can respect me, I’ll respect you.”

Tony stood and walked away leaving Steve alone to contemplate the roaring, conflicted thoughts that were running through his head, wondering if and Tony would ever find common ground again, or if they would be destined to keep on clashing.

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

Tony is starting to go out into the world, which is an achievement for him! Next chapter will cover Tony's press conference. I hope to post it on Tuesday 7th May but it all depends if the next chapter is finished because Endgame has stopped me in my tracks in writing for a few days. Hopefully, I'll pick up speed now.

Until next time!

the-writer1988
Part 6: Chapter 8 - The Press Conference

Chapter Summary

Tony holds a press conference...

Chapter Notes

Hi, everyone!

Apologies for not updating last week. This chapter hadn't been finished yet. Avengers: Endgame really stopped me from writing for quite a few days. I love the film but it affected me...

If anyone is interested, I am writing and posting a Fix-it fic for Endgame because, even though I have now come to accept the ending to one of my favourite characters, in fanfiction you can change it, so naturally, I'm making sure they get the ending they should have got. :)

Enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

PART SIX
THE RECOVERY OF TONY STARK

Chapter 8
The Press Conference

For the next few weeks, Tony and Pepper continued to go on nights out together, always accompanied by Rhodey and Gamora as security, and with each evening out, Tony’s anxiety about being seen in public decreased with each successful dinner.

They also found that they were spending a lot more time together. Tony had yet to decide when to return to the fold at Stark Industries and Pepper was content to allow him to wait until he felt he was ready. His recovery was the most important thing that they had to concentrate on.

Roughly three to four months had passed since Tony had defeated Thanos. He hadn’t been keeping track of time since his return. A month had flown by since he and Pepper had started having evening meals out. He was rather enjoying the evenings though they mostly hired out the restaurant for the evening. He was feeling a lot more human, happier with his life decisions.

It was one such night out that Tony decided to tell Pepper something that had been playing on his mind for a while.

“I think it is time I… We arrange this press conference.” It wasn’t something he particularly wanted to do yet he knew it would be important to do so. “I can’t keep on delaying this… People know I’m
going out and about. There are photographs online of you and I. I feel ready to return to Stark Industries. I think it is time I begin working with others.”

“Are you certain?” asked Pepper.

Tony hesitated. He would rather stay hidden for the rest of his life, live it out quietly but he was too popular to be ignored. For him to have total anonymity he’d have to go off the grid, build himself a home in a remote area and only have his location known to those he trusted. And those he did he could count on the fingers of one hand.

“I need to start living a normal life. If I do not push myself to get out and integrate… I never will. The fear of doing so will be too much,” he answered. “But the press conference has to be arranged so that I do not feel uncomfortable. Questions will be vetted beforehand. No surprises.”

Pepper frowned. “You know there will be some reporters who will break that rule. We can lay down rules…”

Tony sighed. “I know. Christine Everhart?” He remembered her. She had plagued him for years, especially after he had slept with her. “If there is one woman I don’t want to be there is her. She’ll break the rules we set down. It’s part of her trade.”

“If we want to have broadcast around the world we would have to invite her,” explained Pepper. “She’s a news reporter now, not with Vanity Fair. She works for WHiH World News, mainly focusing upon the Avenger’s activities since…”

“You can say it,” spat Tony. He didn’t want anyone trying to walk over his torturous past.

“New York in 2012,” finished Pepper. “Her views have changed, especially on you. Since you went through the portal and never came back you’ve become a hero. It’s very hard to criticise someone when you’re labelled a national hero. You saved the world from a further invasion. Steve and the others made sure the public knew that. That’s why people are so forgiving of what you’ve done recently because they know there is more to this. And they respect the Avengers.”

Tony gritted his teeth. “I’ll have to say something about what happened during my time… away.”

“If you don’t want to…” she hesitated.

“I know it would be for the best… People will always want to know. Maybe I should write a book then I won’t have to talk about it.” Tony ran a hand down his face. This was becoming more and more complicated as time went on. “We need to organise this conference so I’m not compromised. We also need to hold it in a central location too.”

“Where were you thinking?” asked Pepper.

“Stark Tower in New York? That’s still mine, isn’t it?”

She nodded. “I never sold it. It was our last project together. It’s still an office site for S.I but we added – after public clamouring – for there to be a memorial floor for you. Surprisingly, despite how rich the company is and what I inherited from you… the state still funded for it. I think they felt they owed you. All proceeds for the exhibition go towards a memorial fund for you. Or did.”

“I’ll have to change that,” he mused, frowning slightly. “Since I’m alive and all.”

“Any ideas?” she prodded.
“I know so much about the universe now that I do want to help other people out there too… I’ve become one of the well-travelled human beings on the planet. I’m not sure what I can do from Earth for other civilisations. During my time as an… Enforcer… I hurt loads of people. I want to make up for it somehow.”

“You can’t help everybody,” whispered Pepper quietly.

“I wish I could,” muttered Tony, leaning back, resting his head against the booth they were in. Despite renting out the restaurant to avoid the unnecessary pressure of being seen in public, Tony still wanted his privacy. “I’m in two minds, Pep. I want to help…”

“But you also want to hide.”

“Yeah…” His lips twitched.

“Tony…” She reached across the table and took his hand. “I want you to know that I will be there with you. If at any point you want the Press Conference to stop it will do. If anyone even attempts to step out of line they will be escorted out and the publication sued for breaking contract. We will make sure the contract is stipulated in advance and agreed by the managers. If anyone ignores the contract, we will bring the full force of the law down on them.” She squeezed his fingers. “You’ve suffered enough without needing to suffer more.”

“Thanks.”

---

It was at least another week before everything was arranged. Pepper was efficient. She ensured all contracts were signed and Stark Tower was ready to welcome a surge of reporters for Tony’s press conference. She had even arranged for extra security.

In addition to Gamora, once again disguised as human, she had also drafted in some of the other Avengers. Steve, Natasha, Clint and Bruce had all agreed to work security. Bruce wasn’t going to Hulk out unless he really needed to. The wounds Natasha and Bruce had sustained in the final battle against Thanos had left them in need of medical care for nearly two weeks but both had made a fighting return to the field.

Thor was dealing with the remains of his people and was unavailable to aid them. Rhodey was going to be on guard in his War Machine suit, just in case Tony needed a quick escape. Rhodey would be the one who’d be able to get Tony out of the room.

Sam and Bucky were checking all entry pass's into the conference, thereby ensuring no one passed through if they had not already been authorised to do so. Contracts were double and triple checked before everyone had taken their seats in front of the podium with the Avengers standing aligned around the room.

Pepper stood on the stage, leaning into the mic. “Thank you for coming and agreeing to our terms. Tony will be taking the stage shortly. Any reporting and any articles written after this press conference do need to go through Stark Industries’ legal team first prior to publication or televised. This is stipulated on page five of your contract of which all of your managers agreed to. This is the same for any audio recordings as well.” She focused her eyes upon Christine Everhart who scowled at Pepper’s proclamation.

“Now that you are all seated, we are ready to begin.” Pepper stepped away from the podium. “Please welcome, Mr. Tony Stark!”
Tony felt nervous, scared even.

A part of him wanted to duck out now before he was called forward.

Yet he couldn’t bring himself too. The amount of work Pepper had put in to make this press conference a reality in such a short space of time, on top of all the other stipulations she had made, would be a betrayal for Tony to not go through with it. This had been his idea after all. He had requested this.

Moving into the room he walked towards the podium and stepped behind the mike, taking a deep breath as he tried to calm himself. He’d prepared a speech. Looking down at the speech… He couldn’t bring himself to say those words. He’d always excelled at speaking from the heart, even though his brain usually ran away with his mouth.

The silence dragged on.

Tony braced himself against the podium and then raised his head to look out at the sea of reporters in front of him.

“...” His voice nearly broke. Why was this so hard? “... would... like to thank everyone... for coming today and abiding by the terms Stark Industries set out. This is... the... first time in years that... I’ve stood here.” He shuffled his feet, feeling anxious. “As you know I disappeared in 2012, presumed dead after taking a nuclear missile through a portal in the sky. What I did stopped an advancing alien force from taking our world for their own and enslaving us. I... didn’t die...”

He knew he was stating the obvious facts but he had to get this out. He’d rather not talk about his imprisonment yet they had earned the right to know in some form.

“I was captured by a warlord called Thanos. He was the one behind the attack on New York. I was his prisoner for years. He slowly warped my mind, forcing me to do his bidding. I was scared, lonely and unable to fight back after so long resisting him. I worked for him but hated doing it. Returning to Earth as part of his advancing alien force wasn’t something I wanted to do. I did resist. I fought him and came back to the Avengers. Some of you may believe I deserve to be imprisoned for what occurred at Stark Industries. I don’t think I should be forgiven but I have been.”

He bowed his head. This was hurting more than it should be.

“What I learned out there, in the wider universe, is that we are not alone. There are many civilisations out there, far advanced than our own. I can bring so much more to our world. I can improve our defence capabilities, our medical treatment. I have so much to offer the world.”

Tony cast his eyes over the crowd. They were still waiting for him to finish. “I would like to announce my intention to return to working with Stark Industries to further our technological advancement. I will be working on a variety of projects and full details will be announced once progress has been made.”

He stepped back from the podium. “This now concludes my statement.”

Relaxing was still not possible. He still had to face the questions.

Pepper stepped forward. “Mr. Stark will now take questions.”

Hands went up around the room, including Christine Everhart’s. Tony didn’t want to take a question
from her. He knew she’d break contract. It was just the feeling he had in the pit of his stomach.

Thankfully Pepper selected the first question to come from a reporter of the *Washington Post*.

“Would you say the knowledge you have returned with is beneficial to the majority of illness on the planet? Can a cure be found for cancer, for multiple sclerosis, for heart failure? Is it possible now to extend human life?”

It wasn’t an unreasonable question.

Tony frowned. “One of the things that were done to me against my will was I was given durability, to survive things a normal human being would not. You could say I was enhanced to a degree. Part of my research into medical conditions will be using my own blood, which is different now because of what was forced on me, to determine if it can benefit people in other ways. This research could take time, medical research does. If anything comes of my research, the benefits will not be known for years, not until all the safety checks have gone through and passed and any medications are legally passed by the government and the world health organisation. What I am proposing is a stepping point forward which could eliminate some illnesses from ever manifesting themselves again. But in doing so, I could open up the world to deadlier diseases. There are always risks to developing cures to illnesses. Extended human life could potentially be possible. At the moment my focus would be on finding a cure for illnesses and rare diseases. I want to help save lives. If extending human life is possible, it will be something I will look into, but for now my focus will be solely upon ensuring a cure for certain ailments that already limit life.”

Pepper indicated to the next reporter to ask a question. “Defence wise, what do you plan to help design in the event of another invasion? We’re not alone out there and we are not prepared for another attack of this magnitude.”

“There are many things I can design. My own suit has advancements in it that are not available from Earth. Some of the raw materials we need to further advance our defensive systems would need to come from other planets. I am hoping, after a lengthy consultation with the governments of the world, that they will be happy for me to act as an interim between other planets to ensure trade is set up. Because of where I have been, I do maintain contact with a group of people who are defenders of the wider galaxy. Earth will eventually become a part of the wider universe and we need to start somewhere. Opening up our borders when we do not have the ability to travel far in space is problematic. Defence will be a long time in setting up. My first priority will be shielding capabilities for the whole planet. And then potentially begin to explore ways for interstellar travel.”

He pointed to the next reporter. “Mr. Stark, what if someone attacks us before these defences are set up? What if we lose?”

Tony had expected this type of question. “Earth is already home to an alien race, is it not? Thor’s people have settled here. He isn’t human yet he is widely accepted on this planet. He is a force to be reckoned with. As I said, I maintain links to a group of people who protect the galaxy at large. They have excellent links themselves. I think it would be worth following this up and starting to forge links out in the wider universe. We may be a small planet in comparison to others but we have a lot to give. Thanos isn’t the only danger out there. He’s gone now but others linger on. Earth is moving up in the universe. We are being noticed. If we do not defend ourselves and adapt we will be dooming all of us. I can help forge links with other planets but I will not force an alliance on a world that has no wish to expand into the wider universe. We all deserve choices. If the people of Earth do not wish to fraternise with other life, then we won’t but I will not make the decision for you.”

“You want a world-wide vote on the issue?” the reporter continued.
Tony nodded. “Yes. We’d be opening up our world to alien life. Surely the people of this planet have the right to decide what they want? We cannot rely on politicians with a decision of this magnitude. I feel it is time the people took their fate in their hands.”

“The type of vote you are suggesting would take a long amount of time to set up.”

Tony nodded. “It would. But at least there would be a consensus decision on the part of the people rather than government officials. I believe this would be the correct course of action.”

There were a few other questions asked after this, mainly pertaining to Tony’s position among the Avengers.

“As of now I am not an Avenger. I do not intend to don the suit again.” It wasn’t a conscious decision; more one he had slowly drawn towards in the last few months. He wasn’t sure he could keep on fighting, not after what had happened. “My decision could change but… after the last few years… I need to let go. I need to…” he hesitated, unsure whether to say it. Shaking his head, Tony allowed himself a small smile. “Never mind.”

Nearly every reporter had had a chance to ask a question. He could see Christine Everhart getting increasingly annoyed she kept being stopped from questioning him. He had a horrible feeling she was going to try something. It didn’t matter she had signed a contract. She was a reporter who rarely kept to the rules and if she could find a way to break them without suffering consequences she would.

He nodded to Pepper to allow her to finally question him.

Christine uncrossed her legs and leaned forward in her seat. “Much as we would all like to know your plans for the future, the public has a right to judge you on your crimes.”

He’d known it. She was breaking contract.

Pepper stepped forward to interrupt but Tony raised a hand to stop her and the other Avengers from intervening.

“What makes it alright for someone to reform and then return to their old ways when life doesn’t go the way they want it? You’ve been honoured, Mr. Stark, as a hero and yet you come back to this planet, as part of an advancing alien force, and attack your home. Coerced or not, you are responsible for deaths, some of them even your own employees. Shouldn’t every war criminal be treated the same as you? Given a second or even a third chance?”

Christine stood from her chair. “What could have possibly happened to you that was so bad that you wouldn’t have died for us? I don’t think you were hurt up there at all. You willingly aided them.”

Tony’s mouth went dry and his throat tightened. Images flashed through his mind. He was back on that table. The Arc Reactor being pulled out again and again. Thanos sweeping into his mind… Nebula reaching out to stroke him, touching him… His back bleeding and raw from bouts of whipping… The eyes of the children that begged him not to kill them…

Without meaning to he said out loud as the images of the children’s face flashed through his mind. “I killed children… Oh god, I killed children…”

His legs collapsed beneath him. His whole body shook.

There was commotion all around him but his mind was back in that place, with Thanos and his minions, watching as his own hands strangled those children… He’d killed more than three children
They’d been the first.

Someone reached for him.

He shrugged them off, blinded by the images in his head and the desire to escape from wherever he was now. “No! Leave me alone!”

Somehow he got to his feet, somehow he made it to the lift, somehow he fell into it, pressing one of the buttons, and the doors closed, shutting him inside. He didn’t notice the lift ascending, his mind wrapped in the memories of his torturous past.

He only became aware when the doors of the lift opened and a breeze rocked his face.

He’d brought himself to the roof of Stark Tower.

He couldn’t help but realise it was a long way down…

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

Tony and roofs are not a good combination at all… The next chapter I hope to post next Tuesday...
Part 6: Chapter 9 - The Roof

Chapter Summary

Tony contemplates the pavement below him from the roof of Stark Tower...

Chapter Notes

A shorter chapter today but we are nearing the end of the story now so chapter length could reduce depending on the content of the chapter...

I think there will be another 4 chapters plus an epilogue before I finish this story. I'm hoping to have this story finished by the end of June :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

PART SIX
THE RECOVERY OF TONY STARK

Chapter Nine
The Roof

The Avengers acted quickly when Tony ran off. The building was put on lockdown, preventing anyone from leaving. Christine Everhart stood there with a smug smile on her face, pleased by her actions in forcing Tony to break down in public like that and admit some of the most heinous crimes he had committed as a prisoner of war.

Pepper strode forward, anger seething through her body. “How dare you. You signed a contract to abide by our rules, which all of your other esteemed colleagues have abided by. You know what the consequences of your actions will be, Ms. Everhart.”

She threw Pepper a sly smile. “I’m not under contract, Miss Potts. I quit my job last night. Any contract I signed is voided now I am not employed by them. I am a freelancer. I did not sign anything. I have broken no laws. And do you really think the others here will not report back on what they witnessed today?”

Pepper ran her gaze over the crowd of reporters waiting for their reactions.

“Unlike you Miss Everhart,” said one of the reporters, “we do abide by contracts we’ve signed. We do not look for ways out of it to make the subject uncomfortable. You may have had a personal history with Mr. Stark but your attitude to reputable reporting is horrible. We will not be reporting on what you forced Mr. Stark to reveal. I think I can speak for all of us here that we have a lot more honour than you do.”

Christine’s face went dark. “Did you not hear him? He killed children! The public deserve to know!”

Another reporter stepped forward. “No, they don’t. Tony Stark is a hero. I echo Mr. Thompson's
comment. We will not be revealing this information to the press. We will not risk our exclusive contracts with *Stark Industries* by mentioning this in our report.”

“Fine. You are all idiots. We are meant to report the truth!”

Pepper shook her head. “No. You are meant to abide by contracts and rules when a place you are permitted to be in makes them. NYPD are already on their way here, Miss Everhart. We will be following the full force of the law on this matter.” She stepped forward, her lips perusing. “Let me promise you this, Miss Everhart. I will ruin you for this.”

---

The breeze swept through his hair as Tony stood at the edge of the roof, looking down at the pavement below. It was a very long way down. He swallowed. All it would take was one step forward and perhaps all his pain would be over.

He hovered there, his clothes whipping against him in the breeze.

It would be so easy.

He wouldn’t feel guilty anymore.

He wouldn’t feel anything.

His head would stop hurting with the memories.

Why should he live with this pain?

Just one foot out.

No one would miss him.

He closed his eyes.

---

Someone tugged at her arm. “Pepper. We need to find Tony,” breathed Gamora into her ear.

Pepper moved away from the crowd of reporters she had just been addressing. The NYPD had yet to arrive but Steve, Natasha, and Clint had taken Christine into custody. Pepper wasn’t joking when she said she’d ruin her. No one should dare to hurt Tony the way she had attempted. His mental health, despite making a good recovery so far, was still fragile and if Christine’s words made him throw himself off the edge…

Pepper swivelled. “The roof?”

Gamora nodded in her disguise. “The lift went up there. We have to hurry.” She grabbed Pepper’s hand and they ran for the lift.

*Please Tony, don’t do anything stupid!*

---

He didn’t know what made him stop but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. He couldn’t take that leap of faith.
He hovered, leaning over the edge of the roof, wind buffeting his face as his eyes glanced down.

Footsteps came from behind him and he stiffened.

“Tony?” Pepper’s voice reached his ears.

He didn’t want to look behind him. This was his future. He didn’t need to be here anymore.

“It doesn’t matter what you’ve done,” said Pepper quietly. “It’s not getting out, Tony.”

Tony swallowed. He wanted to believe so badly… When he spoke his voice was broken. “They are reporters. They have no concept of trust or loyalty… Just breaking the stories that garner the most attention, the most sales, the most chatter…” The wind buffeted around him.

“The reporters are not going to reveal you killed children. They respect you too much to do that to you,” continued Pepper.

“If they’ve told you, they’re liars,” bit back Tony. He didn’t want to believe they would be honourable.

“They know what the consequences of their actions will be if they expose it. We could sue for billions. No one is stupid enough to risk that amount of money,” said Pepper. “Tony, you are a hero. You’ve saved countless of lives and you deserve to have one of your own.”

“Ending things would be easier,” he stated quietly. “I’d be at peace.”

“You have so much more to live for though,” replied Pepper quietly.

“What have I got to live for?” he spat. He didn’t step down, nor did he edge closer to the fall.

“You just held a press conference,” replied Pepper. “You have so much to give everyone. Don’t let one small incident get in the way of doing what is right.”

“Maybe killing myself is the right thing to do,” he responded. “All it would take is one step… One step and I’d fall. Everything…” he breathed slowly, “everything would be over… All the pain, all the memories…”

“But do you really want to?” Gamora’s soft voice floated to his ears. “Think of what you’ve gained, what you could have, who you still could be… Staying may be painful, sometimes traumatic, but in the end, you deserve to have peace in your life. To be able to do what you want, be who you want to be, instead of used and broken.”

Tony shivered.

“You’ve been doing so well, Tony,” whispered Pepper. “You’ve come a long way.”

“I know…” he whispered. He had been enjoying his life. He had been having fun with Pepper. He had been happy for the first time in a long time.

And that was when it hit him.

Pepper.

If he did this, he’d be leaving her.

Alone.
The two people she had loved would be gone.

She’d lost Tony first but only gained him back.

And Happy she had lost forever.

Pepper…

His heart ached. He’d been denying it for a few weeks now.

He still liked her. Still loved her. Still had the feelings he’d once had for her. They’d always been there, regardless of how her actions had affected him. He had forgiven her. And he wanted to be with her.

Realisation struck him.

“I know you probably do not want to hear this, Tony,” said Pepper quietly, but enough for him to hear her words, “but I have never stopped loving you. I will do everything in my power to protect you and to love you… even if you do not love me anymore.”

A single tear trickled down his cheek.

God, he still loved her.

He couldn’t do this to her.

Or to himself.

Instead of leaning forward, he leaned back, holding his right hand out to them. “Please,” he said, “help me.”

---

Pepper reached out and took Tony’s hand in her own, gently helping him down from the edge of the roof. She wanted to yell at him for being so reckless but knew doing so wouldn’t help his mental state.

His body shook. “I’m sorry. I didn’t… I didn’t…”

“Shh…” she whispered. “It is alright.” She wasn’t going to blame him for his reaction to the reporters. Everhart had lost her career because of her own actions. She was going to be sent down for nearly causing a man to commit suicide. Pepper would find a way.

“I don’t… don’t deserve you,” whispered Tony.

“You deserve anything that makes you happy, Tony,” replied Pepper. “Whether I am part of that I don’t care. Whatever you want is yours. You know that.”

His hands came up to her face, gently brushing her cheeks with the tips of his fingers. “I want you.”

“What…?” she gasped, unsure of what Tony meant by his words. Just out of the corner of her eye she could see Gamora smiling, her eyes shining brightly. What did she know?

Tears trickled down Tony’s face, the wind still buffeting his hair and clothes, as he gazed down into her eyes. “I love you. Always will. And… and…”
“Tony?” whispered Pepper.

And then his lips were pressed against her own and Pepper felt herself melting into his body as his hands moved from her face down to her shoulders to hold her gently in his embrace, as his lips continued to move over her own, making the kiss deeper and loving.

He pulled away from her, resting his forehead against hers, smiling gently, enjoying the smell of her perfume. “I think… I think… we need to talk.”

- - - - -

Pepper was still buzzing from the kiss Tony had given her on the roof. Her lips tingled from the feel of his lips pressed against hers. They managed to sneak out of Stark Tower, away from the other press who still remained behind in the foyer, but not before informing the other Avengers that Tony was fine and they were returning to the Compound.

The whole journey back, Tony refused to let go of Pepper’s hand. They didn’t talk. When she looked at him, his head resting back against the seat, there was a hint of a smile pulling at his lips.

He looked happy, at peace.

Content.

Considering he’d nearly leaped to his death not that long ago the change in him was remarkable.

And she had the feeling it all had to do with her.

He’d come to a realisation and it had helped him to make the decision to reach out to her and ask for help to step back.

She didn’t know what this meant for them, or if they would be together, but Tony had clearly made a choice to try to live. And he wanted Pepper to be a part of it.

- - - - -

Once they were back at the Compound, Tony and Pepper returned to his quarters. He made her a cup of tea whilst she sat and waited, unsure of what to say.

When he had seated, he began fiddling with his hands in his lap before turning his gaze to her.

“Thank you,” he said.

She sipped her tea. “What for?”

“For coming to the roof… stopping me from doing something stupid and making me realise there is something to live for.”

“Tony…” she smiled. She didn’t want him to feel in debt to her. “I was doing what I thought was right. You reacted to a bad situation the way anyone would when faced the way you were. With everything you’ve suffered…”

Tony bowed his head. “I’ve enjoyed spending time with you the past few weeks. I’ve realised the more time I’m with you, the happier I am. I know I’m damaged, I know I’ve had bad – very bad - experiences… but I want to try with you.”

“A relationship?” Her breath caught in her throat.
“Yeah,” he answered. “I think we’ve kinda been dating for a while now… just not made it official?”

“Huh…” She felt pleasantly surprised by Tony’s choice of words. “So we were never going out as friends?”

“We were… but…” he faltered. “Do you still want us to just be friends?”

She shook her head. “No, I don’t. I want something more but only if it is on your terms, Tony. I’m not going to push you into something you don’t want.”

He smiled. “I want to try… I wouldn’t be asking if it wasn’t something I wanted.” He reached for Pepper’s hand, taking her small palm in his larger one, gently stroking her fingers.

“Pepper Potts, will you go out with me?”

She didn’t really need to answer. He already knew what it would be.

“Yes, Tony, I will go out with you.”

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

Finally! Tony and Pepper have made progress! My plans for Tony and Pepper throughout the fic have kept changing but I have now settled on what I want to do. We are close to the end of this fic... We've got a few more plot threads that still need to be resolved... Most of which will be tied up in the next few chapters.

I haven't started writing the next chapter yet but I hope to update again next week though it is likely to be on Wednesday 29th May or Thursday 30th May... depending on my working schedule :)

Until next time,

the-writer1988
Part 6: Chapter 10 - Farewell Gamora

Chapter Summary

Tony bids Gamora farewell as she leaves Earth...

Chapter Notes

Hello all!

We have got another three chapters to go after this one... Can hardly believe this fic is nearly done! I hope everyone enjoys the last few chapters :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

PART SIX
THE RECOVERY OF TONY STARK

Chapter Ten
Farewell Gamora

It soon became obvious to the residents of the compound that Tony and Pepper were in a relationship. And Tony seemed… happier. More at peace. He laughed a lot more and made sure he joined in with team activities. He had even taken up a part-time post working in the labs at Stark Industries where he was beginning to put his plans in motion for advancing the planet. His negotiations with the governments around the world regarding reaching out to other life beyond Earth had begun but were slow moving as other agendas were taking up their time.

Tony didn’t mind.

Gamora had already told him if he needed any raw material the Guardians would be happy to barter on his behalf, especially since Tony was rich enough he could afford to begin making outer world trading on his own. This offer meant he would be able to begin constructing his defensive systems on the sly so that when it was approved – and Tony was sure it would be – the implementation would be quick.

Tony still avoided Steve as much as he could though he was happy to talk to the other Avengers and spend time with them. Even though he had officially resigned as an Avenger, and had no intention of donning the Iron Man suit again in a defensive or offensive capability, Tony still occasionally joined the team on drills and practices.

Now he was enhanced he was able to keep up with them and give them a run for their money.

Three nights a week, Tony and Pepper had date night. Friday night was always go out for dinner. Tony was less opposed to being photographed now though he did try to sneak in and out of places as much as possible and Gamora always accompanied them in her human disguise. Saturday was film night where the two usually fell asleep on the sofa. And Wednesday they went out for dinner.
Though Tony was happy to kiss Pepper and give her hugs, he still could not bring himself to share a bed with her. He wasn’t sure when he would be able to but Pepper was content with what she had. If she and Tony couldn’t be physical then it didn’t matter to her.

One afternoon Tony returned to the compound to find Gamora waiting in his quarters. She was sitting on his bed, looking conflicted and unsure of herself.

Concern washed through him. “Gamora? Has something happened?”

She shook her head, her hair falling about her shoulders. “No.” She looked up and smiled. “Good day?”

“Yeah,” he shrugged. “Made a bit of progress with the defensive shields but I need raw materials which are not on Earth…”

“As I said, I can help you there.”

Tony leaned back against the wall, watching her carefully. She seemed stressed. “So, what brings you in here today?”

Gamora’s mouth twitched. “Do you know how long I’ve been on Earth?”

Tony flinched, grimacing, and rubbing the back of his head, messing up his hair. “Err… a while? I’m not very good at keeping track of time…”

“Seven months.”

His eyes widened. “Has it been that long already?”

She nodded. “It has. You and Pepper have been dating for four months already. Time flies by when you are having fun… But, that’s what I need to talk to you about.”

Tony knew what she was going to say. He’d been expecting it for a while now. “You’re leaving, aren’t you?”

“I am. I think it is time. You do not need me here anymore. You’ve done so well. You and Pepper are in a good place, you’ve got so many projects going on and… I miss Peter. My Peter. I’ve put off calling him for a while. I had to be sure you’d be ok before I left. You will be, won’t you?”

Tony lowered his head. Gamora had become a constant presence in his life and it would feel odd to not have her around him. “You’ll come back?”

“For visits, yes. Often,” she promised.

“How often?” he bargained.

A small laugh left her lips. “Every six months?”

“Four.”

“It’s a long way to travel…” she smiled.

“Five then,” he relented and held out a hand.

She took it, sealing the deal. “Five months. Every five months I will come back.”
Tony felt sad. She was leaving him. “When will you be going?”

“I contacted Peter this morning. It will be at least another two weeks. He’s on a mission and cannot exactly break away from it. I didn’t ask what he was doing. We still have time together.”

He smiled. “Good.”

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Gamora returned to her rooms where Nebula waited. In the time they’d been on Earth and since Tony had accidentally restored Nebula to a full organic form, the former cyborg had spent the better part of three months away from the Compound, exploring the Earth, learning more of its sights and history. Nebula had only recently returned, surprising Gamora with a short length of hair that had grown in the time she had been away.

“How’d he take it?” Nebula drawled.

“I think he was a bit sad,” admitted Gamora, sitting down next to her sister.

“Understandable. You’ve helped him a lot and I’ve been a hindrance. Main reason why I decided to leave for a while to explore was to give him some space.” Nebula sighed. “He still hasn’t said a word to me.”

“I don’t think Tony ever will,” replied Gamora. “Nebula… what you did to him… He won’t forgive you for. I can’t forgive you for it either.”

“And yet you still talk to me? Let me stay here?” Nebula raised an eyebrow in confusion.

It was a dilemma Gamora always found herself in. “We both had pretty bad childhoods. We were taught to serve. We were taught to be mean and inflict pain upon others. You took pleasure in it because you wanted our father to be proud of you. You became sadistic and hateful of anyone because of your experiences. I closed down, did the best I could without shedding blood and when I had the chance I formed a plan to escape. You’ve tried to make amends. So have I. You’re not the person you were when you raped him. You feel remorse, Nebula, and you’ve told him that. But, Tony… for him, what you did, ruined him. He was forced to become the very thing he never wanted to do. If you hadn’t shown remorse for what you did or hate yourself for raping him, we wouldn’t be here now as sisters. The only reason you and I have reached this point now is because you’ve grown and become someone I can see as a sister, despite what we’ve had to do in our lives.”

Nebula managed a small smile. “I wish I hadn’t been jealous of you. I wish we could have been sisters, helped one another more when we were training.”

Gamora sighed. “I wish that too but we cannot change the past, only live with what we have.” She reached out for Nebula’s hand. It was odd to feel flesh since she’d spent so many years with replacement limbs. “I know you wish he would talk to you but he won’t. Tony wants to move on and forget. He’s enjoying his life again. And he deserves to.”

Nebula nodded. “I know. He does.”

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The two weeks before Gamora left went past quickly. Tony spent as much time as he could with her, wanting to make the most of it before she left. He was thrilled about Nebula leaving too. When he had learned she had decided to explore Earth, Tony had relaxed a lot more and found himself happier. When he’d discovered she had returned, insecurities had reappeared and he’d had the small
anxious feeling she might try to attack him again, even though she had shown no intention of harming him in all the time she had been on Earth.

It was habit.

She was his nightmare.

She’d done such terrible things to him.

And he was glad she was finally leaving.

Even though he would prefer Gamora to stay but he couldn’t be the reason for her not being able to live her life. He’d see her again. He’d already marked the month as to when he expected to see her again.

When Quill arrived, Tony and Pepper decided to be there for their departure. Gamora had already retrieved the small amount of belongings she had attained over the course of her time on Earth and placed them on the \textit{Benatar}. Nebula was standing by the ramp, waiting for Gamora, whilst Quill leaned against one of the landing struts, watching as Gamora walked back towards Tony and Pepper.

“So, this is farewell,” said Tony sadly.

“You could always come with us, you know. The offer is there,” replied Gamora.

Tony’s eyes flickered to Nebula. “No thanks. I’m good here.” He squeezed Pepper’s hand tightly. “Besides…”

“You don’t have to see her again,” said Gamora. “I’ll make sure of it.”

Tony fidgeted. He didn’t know why but he felt that he needed to say something to Nebula. The feeling was back again.

“Tony?” Pepper asked as Tony pulled away from her and started to walk across the lawn towards Nebula.

Gamora followed as Pepper stood back.

Tony stopped in front of Nebula. Now he was here he felt hesitant, unsure of what to say.

Nebula unfolded her arms and studied Tony intently. She didn’t say a word to him.

Gamora paused a few steps away, watching carefully.

“I can’t forgive you. I won’t,” he began.

Nebula blinked.

“I don’t want to speak to you or see you again. I’m relieved you are going. What you did to me…” He couldn’t finish, his throat suddenly dry and the words catching in his voice.

“I regret it.” Nebula didn’t move from her position but looked Tony right in the eyes. “I am not seeking forgiveness from you. I know I cannot earn it.”

“You saved Pepper and myself…” Tony winced. Nebula had saved him from being raped. Ironic that his one-time rapist would end up rescuing him. “I’m glad you helped us… I do believe you want my forgiveness. You stayed here for Gamora but also for me too. I can’t forget what you did to me.
but… you’ve also done things for me.” When he’d tried to kill himself in his room that first time, Nebula had helped Gamora get in and stop him. “You’ve tried to redeem yourself… I will not deny you that. You left to explore Earth because you wanted to explore the planet but wasn’t it because you wanted to give me some space?”

“Yes,” admitted Nebula.

“I can’t forgive you. But…” He shifted on his feet. “But I can thank you for saving me, Pepper… And, because I wielded the Infinity Stones, I was able to, unknowingly, give you a new lease of life. Just… And I don’t know why I am telling you this… but someone I knew a long time ago, he told me something that I think should be passed on to you.”

Nebula leaned forward. “You’re giving me life lessons?”

“Don’t let resentment for what you did to me or your past cloud your future,” advised Tony. “It’s not a good look. Just… If you are truly sorry for what you did to me, take this opportunity to learn. The words I am about to say are words I am following now. What he said was significant and it is what led me down the path of donning Iron Man armour and fighting to save my world.”

He breathed slowly and closed his eyes. “Nebula… Don’t waste your life.”

Yinsen. He’d thought about him occasionally over the years but since reconnecting with Pepper, Yinsen’s final words to him had been coming back to him more often and he’d realised those words would fit not just himself but for others too.

“I gave you a second chance…” Though he hadn’t really meant to he didn’t want Nebula to waste this chance she had been given. “Live and enjoy life… Don’t waste it.”

Nebula blinked. Despite being organic for months now she had not mastered the art of expressions. Tony couldn’t blame her. For her whole life, she had been repressed by her father. She didn’t know what it was like to be happy.

And because he felt it was cordial to do so, he extended his hand.

Nebula looked at it, a brief mixture of surprise and awe across her face.

He felt nervous, a tiny bit scared as she reached forward and grasped his hand in hers.

“Good luck,” he said as they shook hands.


They let go and he stepped back, relief washing through him. He could not – and would not – forgive her.

A hand laid on his shoulder.

Gamora’s hand.

He turned to face her, turning his back on Nebula and the Benatar.

“That was a very brave thing you did,” she smiled. “I think… I think she’ll appreciate it.”

“I don’t owe her anything.” he admitted, “yet… Like me, she is just as damaged by circumstances. She did horrible and unforgiveable things to me, just as I’ve done horrible and unforgiveable things to others. Why should I be given a new lease of life, the chance to move on and try to be happy
when she can’t? And, even though I cannot extend my forgiveness to her, I think it will help her, that those words… in some way… will show there is forgiveness there because I want her to live her life for once… If that makes sense.”

“It does,” whispered Gamora.

“I have something for you too.” He withdrew a small box from his pocket and handed it to Gamora. “I wanted to get you a going away present.”

Gamora’s eyebrows quirked upwards. “Should I expect presents each time I leave when I visit?”

Tony chuckled. “It depends if your stay is long enough to warrant one…”

Gamora opened the box. Inside was a small bracelet. “What is it?”

“Designed it myself. Just for you.”

She slipped it on, the bracelet clamped around her wrist and then tightened, before twisting. Little dots appeared on it as it whirled around her wrist before it started to extend up and over her arm, running past her shoulder and spreading all over her body, rippling over her skin.

“What?”

Tony smiled. “It’s a suit. But one that has been made to suit your skills. Plus, it has got a lot of different tools in it for emergencies… and the suit changes colour if you want it to. Merges with the environment. Sort of a stealth suit. It is one of its kind. The only one I made. And if you happen to find yourself in the vacuum of space…” His smile widened. “There is enough oxygen supply installed for a week’s survivability. The oxygen comes from the suit’s particles. Plus, and I’m not sure if this will work or not, but there should be a long range transmitter installed which is directly linked to this.” He held up his own wrist, an identical bracelet was issued around it. “If you get in trouble, you should be able to get in contact with me. Whether I could help you or not I’m not sure, considering we do lack interstellar travel here. But I’d find a way.”

“Tony…” Gamora was amazed. “How did you manage to engineer something so…” She couldn’t finish, so surprised she was by his ingenuity to create something so beautiful. The suit rippled on her skin, changing colour from a grey to black to red.

He shrugged as if his achievement was nothing to be amazed about. “I learned a lot… out there… And you’re talking to the human who crafted a suit to wield all the Infinity Stones at once. If you want to deactivate the suit, you just touch the bracelet with your thumb and forefinger. It’s a handy device and one that is useful to deploy if you get in trouble and have all your weapons confiscated. No one is going to take a bracelet from you.”

“Unless they want to sell it,” observed Gamora, placing her thumb and forefinger on the bracelet and retracting the suit from around her body, watching as it rippled over her skin and back into the bracelet.

Tony grinned. “There is a tracking beacon inside of it which I would be able to trace. If it is stolen we can easily locate it.”

“You’ve thought of everything…” she marvelled at his ingenuity.

“Well, I am a genius,” he grinned, laughing gently.

Gamora reached for his hands. “I’ll miss this. Us. The fun times we’ve been having. Babysitting you
whilst you go out with Pepper… I’m really happy for you both. It’s nice you’ve been able to move on together after everything.”

He smiled gently. “I never thought I’d be able to. I mean, sure we are together, but we’ve yet to… well, you know…” He trailed off.

“She doesn’t care if you can’t give that to her, Tony. She’s told me. But I think you will.”

“Really?” He was surprised by her assertion.

“One day. Not yet. But one day.”

He flushed, feeling a bit embarrassed.

Gamora glanced over her shoulder. “I think Quill is getting impatient. He wants to leave.” She rolled her eyes.

“Probably doesn’t like me talking to you for this long,” joked Tony. “Do you think he’d shoot me if he thought I was going to kiss you?”

“Don’t joke about that. He wouldn’t just shoot you, he’d probably kill you,” responded Gamora. “A part of me doesn’t want to leave here. My life, though, is up there. Yours is down here. I’ll be back, Tony, you know I will.”

He pulled her into a hug, wrapping his arms around her body, tugging her close. He didn’t want to let her go. He wanted her to stay yet he couldn’t force her. He was just one part of her life. This wasn’t the end. They’d see one another again. He kissed her cheek and stepped back, struggling to maintain his composure.

“Don’t go crying on me,” she teased.

He was so used to being around her that the feelings had just hit him. “Me, cry? Never!” he scoffed, but he did wipe away a tiny tear from his right eye.

“Goodbye, Tony,” smiled Gamora, and then pulled him in for another hug and returning his kiss on his cheek, before stepping back.

A hand crept into Tony’s own, squeezing his fingers gently. Pepper’s.

They watched as Gamora briefly conversed with Quill before Nebula, Quill and Gamora ascended the ramp into the ship.

Tony sighed and breathed out deeply. He could see Gamora taking her seat behind Quill, strapping herself in.

As the engines fired up, Quill expertly lifted the Benatar up from the ground. Tony raised his arm and waved, seeing just briefly Gamora do the same through the window-shield, before the ship rotated around and roared up into the sky.

His arm slowly fell to his side. A sad smile crossed his face as kept his eyes on the spot where the Benatar was rising through the clouds before it vanished and out through the atmosphere and into space.

“Are you ok?” asked Pepper quietly.

“Yeah.” His lips twitched. “Yeah, I am.” Glancing at Pepper he pressed his lips to her head. “Come
on. Let’s go back inside.”

And together they walked back to the Compound.

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

Gamora and Tony mean a lot to one another. They will always be in contact.

I think Tony needed a bit of closure with Nebula which is why I had him talk to her, and giving her words of advice. He still cannot forgive her and he never will but he is trying to be the better person.

Next chapter... Steve and Tony have a long, overdue chat... Will be posting next week, either on the Tuesday or the Wednesday!

Until then,

the-writer1988
Part 6: Chapter 11 - Reconciliation

Chapter Summary

Tony and Steve have a long, overdue chat...

Chapter Notes

Hello all!

I think I can officially announce this story has just one last chapter after this one plus an epilogue to go before this story is finished!!! I'm still writing the next chapter but the whole story should be completed in two weeks.

Without further ado, here is the next chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

THE RECOVERY OF TONY STARK
PART SIX

Chapter Eleven
Reconciliation

A few months went by since Gamora’s departure in which Tony and Pepper moved out of the Avenger’s Compound and to a secluded lakeside house about a forty minute drive from the Compound. Tony wanted to maintain his links to the Avengers and his primary lab had become the Compound.

Pepper commuted a lot to Stark Industries headquarters in Malibu but had moved the majority of her work and office to New York and to the Compound, thereby enabling her and Tony to have a good working relationship with the company.

Tony’s choice in moving out to the country was mainly because he wanted to get away from the hustle and bustle of busy city life and he loathed it when people stared at him. He wanted to keep his life as quiet as possible.

Being away from the Avengers meant one good thing: he didn’t have to be around Steve. Despite not disliking the man, to not have to see him on a daily basis was a huge relief for Tony. Steve’s opinions had been toxic to Tony’s mental health state in the past. It was better for the two of them to not be in the same room as one another.

Still, when he did see Steve on his trips to the Compound, Tony was cordial and respectful in his presence.

He was sitting in his lab when JARVIS announced Steve’s imminent arrival.
“What does he want?”

“He doesn’t say, sir,” the A.I replied.

Tony felt a little wary. Steve never purposefully sought him out.

“Let him in,” sighed Tony. He didn’t have to but he did feel morbidly curious as to what the super-soldier wanted. He whirled around in his chair, adjusting his position and sat up as Steve walked into his lab, a place the super-soldier wasn’t usually permitted.

“Hi…” Steve stopped. “Thanks for letting me in.”

“I didn’t have to,” stated Tony.

“I know.” Steve fidgeted on his feet. “Can I sit?” He eyed the spare chair on the other side of Tony’s desk.

“Sure.” Tony tracked Steve with his eyes as the other man made his way around the table to pull out the seat and sat opposite Tony. He couldn’t help noticing Steve looking uncomfortable. “What is it?”

“I need to tell you something…” winced Steve. “But… I’m not sure how to say it… I’m not sure if I should tell you.”

“Whatever you do, do not keep secrets from me,” advised Tony. “I’m not just a normal human with a suit now.”

“I remember…” Steve leaned forward. “I came across information a few years ago which I’ve kept hidden for years. I’ve told no one about this. Nat knows, only because she was there when we discovered it.”

“Something to do with me then,” summarised Tony. It had to be if Rogers was here.

“And Bucky…” admitted Steve.

Confusion settled in but also curiosity. Tony had learned a lot of what he had missed out on during his years of captivity. One of the major catastrophes to hit Earth had been the discovery of Hydra living within SHIELD and their project of Winter Soldiers. Steve’s friend, Bucky, had been captured and turned into one and had been used to carry out missions for Hydra over the decades. They’d kept him under compliance and when not needed for assignments he had been frozen.

Tony had only met Bucky a few times since he’d returned to Earth. He didn’t really know him that well. He seemed nice enough and he wasn’t influenced by Hydra conditioning anymore. Bucky was part of the Avengers now and a good member too from what Tony had observed.

Folding his arms across his chest, Tony leaned back in his chair, scrutinising Steve.

“I was on the run during the time we learned Hydra was inside SHIELD… We returned to an old army base and we found evidence regarding the activities of the Winter Soldier,” began Steve, shuffling nervously. “Bucky was sent out on many different missions. He assassinated, murdered and kidnapped a lot of people… I guess he was lucky when we broke his condition that we were able to prove his innocence. He’d had no control over his actions, being forced to carry out orders on a whim. One of the things I learned – and Bucky later confirmed – was Hydra…” His voice stopped, breaking slightly. “Tony… please do not get angry.”

“What did Bucky do?” asked Tony, wanting to get this over with.
“Hydra ordered the deaths of your parents.”

Tony blinked. “Oh.”

He hadn’t been expecting that.

“And your friend was the one who killed them, right?” Tony asked for clarification. He already knew the answer otherwise Steve wouldn’t be here.

Steve nodded. “He was. But, Tony, he wasn’t in his right mind and –”

“Shut up, Rogers!” Tony rolled his eyes exasperated. “If you’re worried I’m going to go and murder him, I’m not. Don’t forget what I’ve been doing the last half a decade. It would be highly hypocritical of me to go off on one since I’ve murdered people too! The difference is I knew what I was doing. Your friend didn’t.”

Steve’s eyes widened. He’d clearly been expecting a different reaction. “You’ve read up on what happened with Bucky?”

Tony nodded. “Yes. And Rhodey and Pepper filled me in on everything.” He scrutinised Steve, watching his reactions carefully. “Do you really think so little of me that I’d go and attack him for this?”

“Well… you did strangle me…”

Tony frowned. “That’s because you pissed me off. If you piss me off, you’re getting strangled. And your incessant belief you are always right? How has anyone else not strangled you yet?”

Steve bowed his head. “For what it is worth, I’m sorry.”

Oh, Tony was not going to let Rogers get away with it this easily. “Sorry for what?”

“For everything.”

Tony waited.

“I said this before. But if I hadn’t ordered the portal to be closed –”

“Stop it,” ordered Tony. “Stop apologising for something which isn’t your fault! You didn’t know what had happened to me! I do not blame you for closing the portal. I made the choice to take the missile through it! Not you. It was my own fateful choice to do so. I knew I was unlikely to make it back but I still did it.”

“But it was my own fateful choice which condemned you,” continued Steve.

“Steve,” said Tony quietly, wanting the Captain to believe him, “I do not hold it against you. Forgive yourself.”

Steve breathed out quietly. “I’ll try. But… What I’ve said to you over the months about living and dying… It wasn’t my place to say anything. We’ve all had different experiences. I’m the man out of time and I found a reason to live in this new time I woke up in. I’d lost everything but have gradually found a family to be with. But being a prisoner for years and being forced to do terrible things is completely different to what I went through. I shouldn’t have been comparing the two experiences. I’ve seen soldiers suffer for years from their own experiences. I naïvely assumed everyone would want to live on, to enjoy their lives after harrowing experiences.” He let his shoulders drop.
“Everyone has different experiences and everyone reacts differently to them. I don’t know what they did to you, Tony, but I think a part of me thinks it might not have been so bad because you’re still here. Still you…”

“I’ve changed a lot more than you think I have, Steve,” answered Tony quietly. “What I went through wasn’t easy. It was the most trying time of my entire life. Only Gamora can really understand what I went through.” He moved his chair back. “I told Pepper what happened to me up there… Hearing what I suffered helped her understand why death was more appealing to me than living.”

“But you can’t tell me?” asked Steve. “I want to understand… It’s just that… Bucky, he was a prisoner for years. And so were you. Both of you were forced to do terrible things. Bucky… he’s moved on with his life. He’s part of the Avengers now. I was expecting you to be like him. Move on and live your life. I didn’t think your trauma could be as bad as Bucky’s.”

“The difference between Bucky and I, Steve,” said Tony quietly, “is that I remember everything what they did to me and what they forced me to do. Bucky was lucky he kept getting brainwashed. Recovering and moving on from that? A lot easier for him than it is for me.”

“I didn’t think of it like that,” murmured Steve. “It was hard for Bucky too…”

Tony sighed. “I know but trying to compare our captivity to each other is not working, Steve. Bucky wanted to live. I didn’t.”

Steve chewed his lower lip. “Why didn’t you want to live?”

Tony fixed Steve with a glare. “Do I have to spell it out for you?”

“Bucky was tortured too…” Steve started.

“STEVE!” shouted Tony. “Stop comparing us!”

Steve winced. “Sorry…”

“Hydra’s torture technology was less advanced than Thanos’, Steve,” stated Tony bluntly. “Look, what I did under Thanos’ command was my own free will after being threatened with more torture and more…” He shuddered. “You could argue I was coerced but in the end, I had the choice to suffer more or just get on with it. I couldn’t live with what I did.” His hand moved to his chest where the Arc Reactor had once sat. It was still weird to be without it. He’d had it for so long. “They took my Arc Reactor, Steve. I never allowed anyone to touch it apart from myself or Pepper but they used it against me, as torture to get information from me. They sent my body into near cardiac arrest several times. They even touched my heart as it beat within my chest.”

Steve went green. “I didn’t…”

“They forced their way into my memories, forced me to relieve events where people I love could have died. I saw myself kill all of you. I killed Pepper several times and it was always in gruesome ways. They altered how I perceived things just to break me. They wanted what was in my head, every piece of information on Earth, everything. In the end… Thanos took it anyway. Even when I broke after…” He couldn’t tell Steve about his rape. “They did things to me I can’t and won’t tell you. Living was hell, Steve. When I felt myself dying after killing Thanos, I was relieved. I felt at peace knowing it was the end. Yet Pepper brought me back. And yes, I am glad now that she did, back then I wasn’t. I had to be helped to see that living wasn’t so bad after all.”

Tony got up from his chair and walked away. “Steve… Everyone reacts differently to traumatising
situations. And I think you need to understand that people have their reasons for ending their lives. Why should we suffer when we could be at peace?”

Steve sighed. “I can’t fix this, can I?”

“Steve, we were never friends before I was lost. There is nothing to fix. It’s the harsh truth but it is our reality.”

“I want to be friends,” murmured Steve.

Tony sighed. “Steve… it won’t happen. We both lead different lives. I’m not an Avenger anymore though I will assist if the situation is that bad you need me. I’m probably going to become Earth’s ambassador to several worlds if it is all agreed and I won’t be here. Maybe things would have been different if I hadn’t been captured and I’d made it back. We could have built a proper team.”

Steve bowed his head.

“I know you want to fix things between us,” continued Tony, “but there is nothing to fix because there was never an ‘us’. I don’t hate you. I never will.”

“You did though,” Steve pointed out.

Tony chuckled. “I did. I shouldn’t have blamed you for closing the portal. I would have done the same thing if it meant saving the Earth. We all make hard choices. We all have to live with them. You’ve had to live with your choice. You had no way of knowing if I was alive or not. You had to think about the people. You did the right thing. I will not hold it against you.”

“Thank you, Tony,” said Steve. “I wish things could have been different between us.”

Tony smiled sadly. “Me too, Steve. Me too.” He held out his hand to the super-soldier. “And you never know what may happen in the future, we could end up friends.”

“I thought… ” Steve trailed off.

“Just because I don’t think we will ever be friends, doesn’t mean it won’t ever happen, Steve,” replied Tony sadly. “It may take time but we may get there one day.”

“I guess it is better than nothing,” smiled Steve, shaking Tony’s hand.

It was a start.

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Weeks went by and Tony was caught up in his various duties with Stark Industries and meeting with other world leaders about his potential plans to bring Earth out into the wider galaxy. He and Pepper saw one another when they could though their duties were equally split, meaning they were unable to see one another as often as they would have liked too.

It was one such Friday evening when Tony had arrived back to their lakeside house where he proceeded to cook Pepper dinner. She hadn’t arrived home yet. He set up the table and sent her a message, informing her dinner was being sorted.

Pepper arrived thirty minutes later, seemingly quite stressed after what she said was a harrowing day for her at the office, where she proceeded to take a shower and dress in casual clothes, just a simple blouse, and jeans.
After dinner, they settled down on the sofa and watched a romantic comedy. At the end of the film, Pepper leaned into him.

“You know, that film reminds me of us…” she smiled against him.
“Really?” he asked, amused.

“The boss and her secretary stumbling around one another, completely oblivious to how they feel about one another? That is us, Tony. Only quite a few years ago now. And our roles were reversed.”

“Oh yeah,” he realised. He turned to look at her. “You know I love you, right?”

“I wouldn’t be here if you didn’t,” she replied, leaning in to kiss him gently on the lips.

Their lips clashed together, moving over each other slowly. Tony’s hands wrapped further around her body and she shifted to get more comfortable. It was tender and slow, their tongues touching.

He began to gently manoeuvre her onto her back on the sofa whilst he leaned over her, their bodies not yet touching as they continued to kiss.

Pepper wrapped her arms around his neck, as his hands moved down her body.

A little part of her mind recognised they hadn’t gone this far before… Not since they had got back together at least…

His hands found their way underneath her back as he continued to kiss her deeply and passionately. And that was when, in the throes of their kisses, that he lifted her hips up and pressed her to his groin.

“Ugh…” she moaned into his lips, feeling his crotch pressed against hers as he lowered her and his hips back to the sofa.

He pulled his lips away from her swollen ones and looked into her eyes. She could see desire written across them and a small smile crossed his lips.

She could barely hold her breath as he nuzzled closer to her, pressing his lips against hers tenderly.

“Pepper…” he breathed quietly. “I… I… want you…”

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

So, you've all guessed it, the next chapter (and final full chapter before the epilogue) is Tony and Pepper having sex. I feel its an important scene to include in the story, especially as the final chapter, because Tony was traumatised by his multiple rapes, and this is the final part of his recovery to move past that and realise he can be with someone. I wanted to show his 'first time', so the next chapter is sex, so if it isn't your cup of tea, then you may want to wait for the epilogue.

Tony and Steve have reconciled... I wanted to address the elephant in the room with
Bucky having killed Tony's parents. This Tony would have eventually found out and Steve had been wrestling for a while keeping it to himself. Steve also has a bad habit of coming Tony and Bucky's captivity as the same and believes they should have had the same reaction to being freed afterward. The hint is there that potentially Tony and Steve can be friends...

(And, yes, the lakeside home Tony and Pepper live in, is the same one from Avengers Endgame. I can see Tony from this story choosing a more secluded life when he can. And the cabin just provided the perfect place to set them both up.

The next chapter will be posted next week!

Until then,

the-writer1988
Part 6: Chapter 12 - The First Time

Chapter Summary

Tony and Pepper sleep together.

Chapter Notes

Hello all,

This is the penultimate chapter. All that is left after this, is an Epilogue.

And, this chapter, is smut and sex. The final stage of Tony's recovery!

Please do, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

THE RECOVERY OF TONY STARK
PART SIX

Chapter Twelve
The First Time

Pepper looked up into Tony’s eyes. “Tony, are you sure?”

“Yes, I am…” he whispered back, pressing his lips to hers again. “Unless you don’t –”

“I do want to,” she answered before he could finish his sentence. “But… I would like to be somewhere more comfortable.” She moaned as Tony’s hips moved against hers.

Carefully, Tony climbed off of her, offering her his hand, pulling her up to a standing position. She would see the bulge in his trousers and he still had that intense look in his eyes.

“Bedroom?” he asked.

“Yours or mine?” They’d been sleeping apart in separate rooms since moving to the lake house.

Tony leaned in for another kiss, his lips brushing her own. “Whatever one is closest.”

She grabbed his hand. “Mine then.”

They hurried up the stairs, pausing to kiss several times on the way up. As they entered her room, Tony paused only briefly but quickly dragged her to the bed where they sat on the edge of it, where he proceeded to kiss her again but this time he began a slow trail down her neck, sucking at the skin, all whilst his hands moved to her front and slowly unbuttoned her blouse.

Once the blouse was off, Tony unclipped her bra, revealing her breasts.
His breath hitched in his throat as he stared at them and he seemed frozen, unable to move his hands.

Pepper leaned in. “Tony? Are you okay?”

“Scared.”

“We don’t have to do this,” she replied. He was still fully clothed and she was half undressed.

“No…” He shook his head. “I want to.”

His hand trailed up her stomach, then his fingers found her breasts and he started to slowly stroke the skin, rubbing the tips of his fingers over her nipples.

He leaned in to kiss her again as his hands trailed down her stomach to hook into the waistband of her jeans. She shifted enough, raising herself slightly from her sitting position so Tony could divest her of her jeans.

Once again he paused, still scared but he plunged on, pulling off her knickers and leaving her naked on the bed.

He sat on the edge as Pepper moved back, watching him carefully. She wanted him but she wasn’t going to force him.

“Erm… I think I’m slightly overdressed,” commented Tony, his body slightly shaking.

“A bit,” she grinned. “Do you want me to help?”

He nodded.

She could tell he was scared but was forcing the fear down. His erection hadn’t gone down either. It was just the fear of being hurt again.

Gently, Pepper trailed her hands down Tony’s shirt to the hems and then pulled it up, bringing it over his head and arms. His body that had once been scarred by the Arc Reactor was clear and fresh. Pepper’s use of Extremis having wiped away any evidence he’d once had it embedded within his chest.

She trailed her hands down his chest, watching his expression carefully. Her hands reached his belt and she unclipped it before unbuttoning his jeans and pulling the zip down. He stiffened as her hand brushed over his crotch.

“Tony?” she asked again, moving her hands away. Much as she wanted this to be quick, she knew for Tony’s sake she had to be slow. He was terrified of being hurt again.

He breathed out slowly, his shoulders which had tensed, relaxed. “No… it’s fine…” He moved from the bed to slip off his own jeans leaving him in just his boxers, the front bulging out. He hovered beside the bed for a few seconds before climbing back onto the bed.

“Can I take them off?” she asked, indicating his boxers.

Tony’s whole body shuddered but he nodded and he lay on his back on the bed.

Sitting beside him, Pepper slipped her fingers into the waistband of his boxers and gently slid them down, past his hard cock before slipping them off his legs and throwing them on the floor.

Now he was completely naked but he still looked a bit scared.
“I’m not going to hurt you,” reassured Pepper. She leaned forward and kissed him on the lips. “How do you want to do this?” She didn’t want to presume he would be top.

“I’m scared…” he whispered, “but I want this…”

“What do you want me to do?” she asked. It was important he was given the option.

“I want… want you to… touch me…”

Pepper nodded and reached out with her right hand to touch his hip. She stroked the skin there before trailing her hand onto his hard cock.

Tony jerked at the contact, fists ruffling in with the sheets.

Loosely she held his cock, gently trailing her fingers down it and then up again.

Tony’s head leaned back into the pillow and his hips jerked upwards as she stroked him. But he was relaxing, the moans coming from his lips were indicative of that. “Pep… Please…”

She slowed her strokes. “What do you want me to do?”

Tony’s eyes slid open. They were foggy, filled with desire. “You… I want you…”

“How?”

“You… top…”

She had expected that to be his answer. He wasn’t ready to take full control.

Climbing onto him, Pepper placed her legs either side of his hips, then leaned down and kissed him passionately on his lips, her fingers trailing down his cheek and under his chin.

Leaning back, she hovered over his cock, standing erect in the air. “Tony… Are you sure?” She wanted to have him in her but he needed to have the time to say no if he didn’t want to go through with this.

Tony’s answer was quick. “Yeah.” He reached out for her hips, both hands resting on her sides.

Then he slowly began to pull her down until the tip of his cock was brushing against her wet entrance. Her breathing hitched as he bought her down onto him, sheathing himself fully inside her.

Her eyes rolled into the back of her head. “Oh god… Tony…”

He didn’t move her. He was panting, his chest moving up and down in deep breaths.

“You feeling okay?” she managed to ask. The urge to move was increasing.

Tony nodded. “I… I like this. The feel of you around me…” He closed his eyes. “It’s not as bad as I thought it would be…” Then he lifted her hips up, sliding himself out of her before bringing her back down onto him in a slow thrust.

He was slow at first, cautious and a bit nervous but with each thrust and with each satisfied moan coming from Pepper’s mouth, Tony’s hands only pumped faster, bringing himself out of her and thrusting back up into her.

It was slow and loving for Pepper. Tony was leading despite her being on top. It was important for
him to have some semblance of control. Tony’s eyes were dilated with desire, fogging over as he continued to thrust into her. His hands gripped her hips and then he abruptly stopped, pulling himself out of her completely.

“Pep…” he whispered. “I wanna…”

“On top?” she guessed.

Tony nodded. “Yeah…”

Gently he rolled her onto her back and climbed on top of her. He stilled again.

“There’s nothing to be scared about.” She reached out and stroked his cheek tenderly. “You won’t hurt me. And you won’t hurt yourself either.”

“I know…” he replied. “I just… No, I want to do this…” He closed his eyes and sheathed himself inside her.

It didn’t take long for Tony to feel comfortable enough to begin moving. Slow at first but he soon increased his pace, bending his neck to kiss Pepper on the lips, holding her hip with one hand and with the other caressing her face. It was slow and passionate and loving.

Sweat formed on their bodies, and Pepper, realising Tony was feeling more comfortable with the way he was treating her body, began to stroke her hands down his back, wrapping her legs around his waist. She wanted him deep and the new angle helped Tony reach places he hadn’t before.

Both hands wound underneath her buttocks and her hips were lifted. Another new angle and Pepper groaned in pleasure.

“Tony… Don’t stop… Please don’t stop…” She could feel her pleasure building, the warmth in her belly growing as she came close to orgasm.

They were now in the throes of passion, their bodies moving in sync.

Tony’s thrusts became more urgent, faster and harder, his mouth devouring hers and then with a thrust at a specific angle, Pepper fell over the edge as she came. Tony stilled his movements, still rock-hard inside her as her orgasm flushed through her.

She felt boneless, sweat pouring down her body. And she lay limply on the bed, her eyes blurry as she looked into Tony’s face.

“You’re so beautiful…” he said quietly, leaning down to kiss her tenderly on the lips. “Can I?” He shifted his hips eliciting another moan from Pepper.

Once she got her breath back, Pepper answered. “If you mean continuing this until you finish then please do. If you mean whether you can come inside me since you haven’t bothered with protection… It’s fine. I’m protected.”

Her answer caused Tony to smile and kiss her deeply whilst beginning to move his hips again, this time quicker and harder. He didn’t last long.

He stilled, his cock bursting into orgasm as she felt him come inside her. Tony’s eyes widened and his mouth hung open before he collapsed beside her, pulling out in one smooth motion.

“Wow…” he managed.
He turned his head to look at her, their hands entwining with one another.

“You liked it?” teased Pepper.

“Liked it?” panted Tony. “Loved it. I can’t wait to do it again.”

Pepper laughed, pleased Tony had enjoyed himself. She had to.

Perhaps they could find what they had once had before.

- - - - -

They slept in each other’s arms for the rest of the night. When Tony woke the next morning his arms were wrapped loosely around Pepper’s body and she was snuggled close to him, one hand on his chest and the other curled across her stomach.

Tony nuzzled into her hair, kissing the top of her head.

He couldn’t believe he was here.

This close to Pepper and it wasn’t freaking him out.

He’d had sex last night, something he had never thought he would ever be able to do again. He’d enjoyed it. It hadn’t been scary like he had feared it would be. The build-up had been but once he’d gotten over the initial fear, he’d enjoyed every second of it.

“Morning…” Pepper murmured as she woke.

“Hi.” He kissed the top of her head. “Sleep well?”

“Yeah. I did. Last night… was… amazing,” she sighed.

“It was,” smiled Tony. He shifted his hips a bit, pressing himself closer to her body.

Her cheeks went pink. “You want more?” she teased.

“I did go for years without this…” he grinned, kissing beneath her ear lobe, trailing his tongue up her neck.

She turned her neck so their lips clashed. “Good thing I have a free weekend then…”

It was all the permission he needed.

- - - - -

“This reminds me of the first time we got together,” remembered Pepper. “After the Stark Expo. Didn’t we spend a weekend not really moving from the bedroom?”

Tony laughed. “We did.”

“And we’ve just done it again.”

“You loved it though,” teased Tony. It felt good to be able to enjoy himself again like this, to be able to want Pepper and not fear sex.

“So did you,” she pointed out. “How many times since Friday have we done it?”
That stumped him. “Honestly, I’ve lost count.”

Pepper laughed. “I’d say seven times. Once Friday evening, twice Saturday morning, once Saturday evening, once Sunday morning, then once in the shower… and once just now…”

“Seven is good. Doesn’t beat our previous record though.” He trailed a finger up her stomach. “Do you remember what our record is?”

“How could I forget? You bragged about it for weeks. And I was sore,” she retorted kindly. “I’m glad we haven’t gone ten times.”

“We still could…” He flashed her a smile. “I love you.”

“I know. I love you too.” She reached up to kiss him, letting him roll on top of her. Her legs parted and he slipped inside her again. She just couldn’t resist him.

Afterward, in which Tony had tenderly made love to her, they lay together again, their hands entwined with one another.

“You know, I’ve been thinking…” Tony began quietly, “about what I want in the future.”

“What do you want?” asked Pepper, looking up into his eyes.

“I want a normal life with you. Just, you and me… together always…”

“Tony, are you-?” she began, her suspicions rising.

“You were always in my thoughts when I was a prisoner. Without you, I wouldn’t be here. You saved me in more ways than one. I know I made it difficult when I wanted to die… but you stuck by me. You came to understand, and not many people would have the capacity to understand the way you do. You know me so well. You’ve been a part of my life in more ways than one for nearly twenty years.” He kissed her on the lips gently. “I don’t know what I would do without you.”

“Tony…” she whispered.

He shifted on the bed a bit so they were looking at one another directly. “Pepper… will you marry me?”

She didn’t hesitate. She didn’t need to. She knew her answer. “Yes. Yes, Tony, I will.”

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

What did everybody think? I hope I handled it well... and of course, Tony being Tony, once he got over his initial fear, he wanted more sex. And we know the Tony of old loved sex and I think once he realised sex wasn't something to be afraid of, he would want to make up for the lost time.

Just an epilogue to go, which will be posted next Tuesday 18th June!
Until then,

the-writer1988
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

The end of the story...

Chapter Notes

Here we are, the end of the story. I cannot believe it is here.... It has been an incredible journey writing this story.

I hope everyone enjoys the Epilogue to this story!

Please do read my final author notes at the end of this though please :)

Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Epilogue

Tony and Pepper married a few months later with just a few guests. They didn’t have a large one. The media was expecting them to, however, they deceived expectations by arranging a small service at a secluded hotel in the mountains of Switzerland, bordering Italy. It gave them fantastic views and they succeeded in having a two-week break without anyone realising who they were.

It helped Tony had bought out the hotel for the dates they had in mind.

Rhodey, Natasha, Bruce, Thor, and Clint with his family were all invited to the ceremony. Steve was invited too though he felt he shouldn’t be since he wasn’t close to Tony, however at Pepper and Tony’s insistence he came.

Tony wanted the original Avengers at his wedding. They had started this journey together and it seemed only right for them to end it at this point. Tony had officially retired from the Avengers program but this was one last hurrah for them as the original team, even if it only meant celebrating a wedding rather than saving the world.

Gamora came too, bringing with her, Quill.

Her presence was what had prompted Tony to buy out the hotel for a few days so that Gamora could be there in her normal form instead of hiding behind a mask.

Life moved on for Tony and Pepper.

Tony’s duties took him all over the world as he sought to make his ideas a reality with keeping Earth safe from alien incursions and building alliances with galactic civilisations, such as Xandar.

Nearly six months after his marriage, Tony’s efforts to set up a worldwide vote on the issue became a
reality. A vote was held and the people of Earth voted yes in overwhelming support of opening up communications to other alien civilisations, for trade, and for defensive capabilities.

It was when this passed Tony brought in Gamora and introduced her and her team to the world as the Guardians of the Galaxy. Tony was given the official duty to travel with the Guardians to negotiate on Earth’s behalf with Xandar and potential other alien governments.

He hadn’t wanted to leave Earth behind again, especially since he and Pepper were enjoying married life so much.

What surprised him was Pepper’s offer to join him on his intergalactic assignment. He couldn’t say no. Travelling with the Guardian’s, making contact and negotiating with governments on Earth’s behalf took them the better part of six months. Pepper had left Stark Industries in the hands of her deputy, taking a leave of absence so she and Tony could spend the time together. They’d already lost six years before; they didn’t want to lose any more time together.

By the time they returned to Earth, successful in their assignment, it was late 2019 where Tony revealed all the offers he’d had from respective governments throughout the galaxy, interested in forming an alliance with Earth. It was agreed a few months later that Xandar would be the first planet to further negotiations with.

Thankfully, Tony was only a consultant from then on going forward and wasn’t required to travel off of Earth as much. Long range communicators were soon established – a gift from Xandar which Tony had brought back with him - ensuring negotiations could be conducted over video link.

The new technology helped as when Tony and Pepper returned from their adventure to space, Pepper was five months pregnant, having conceived on board the Benatar during their time travelling between planets.

Four months later, Morgan Happy Stark was born.

It had been Tony’s idea for his daughter’s middle name to be Happy. He wanted to remember the man that had been one of his closest friends for years. Happy’s untimely death during Tony’s attack on Stark Industries still gnawed at him. But he wanted to honour the man and giving his daughter his name seemed only appropriate.

A few weeks later, Pepper stepped out onto the porch of their lake house, finding Tony holding Morgan in his arms, watching her with a contented look on his face.

“Are you going to come in?” she asked. It was a chilly night but Morgan was wrapped up warm.

“Yeah,” he smiled. Tony stood from his chair. “I can’t believe she’s really mine.”

“Neither can I,” grinned Pepper, kissing him on the cheek.

“And to think she was made among the stars…” Tony adjusted his grip, so he could stroke Morgan’s cheek with a finger. “I want to protect her. I won’t let anything bad happen to her.”

“I know you won’t,” replied Pepper, leading Tony back into the house.

They walked up to their bedroom where Tony placed her in her cot. She was too young to sleep in another room by herself. But her cot was always on Tony’s side of the bed. If she woke up in the middle of the night, he’d handle it.

But this night, once Pepper had settled down and gone to sleep, Tony couldn’t help but look into the
cot at his sleeping daughter.

Warmth spread through his heart, engulfing his whole body, as her small hands clutched her blanket.

He was content and happy. This life, this small baby was half him and half Pepper.

And that was all Tony Stark needed for the rest of his life.

He was, finally, healed.

The End

Chapter End Notes

What a journey.

I cannot believe I have finished this epic.

Thank you to everyone who has read and supported this story over the past year and a half. This has been a massive undertaking and I am thrilled with the outcome of this story.

When I started this story back in 2017, I never expected it to go in this direction. For a very long time, Tony was going to die but I decided against it in the end, especially when this story started to become influenced by Infinity War. But it developed and I'm glad I took the route of Tony surviving and making a recovery instead because it was a challenge for me as a writer to be able to write and detail his recovery realistically.

Will there be a sequel? Probably not. I may post missing scenes, ones that never made the cut but that probably will not happen. I may write a short story of Tony and Pepper with the Guardians in space, during their six-month sojourn on their diplomatic mission. Pepper chose to go with Tony because, as explained, she wanted to be with him. They'd lost so much in the years Tony was lost to them. I hope that seemed realistic for Pepper to go with him. I may expand upon this plot line and there could be a potential short story in the works, but no promises. It's just a vague idea at the moment.

And, of course, Morgan Stark. I loved, loved, loved her in Endgame and it just seemed right to fit her into this story at the end. Her middle name is Happy. Apparently, it is Morgan H Stark in Endgame too but it is ever revealed what the H stood for so I decided to give her the name Happy in honour of Happy who died in Part 4 of this story.

I am considering writing a one-shot where Morgan, at an older age, learns about her father's dark past. I'm not sure if it is really needed but it is an idea I am interested in writing.

**What am I writing next?**

What is next for me as a writer? I have a lot of ideas.

First up, I will be finishing my Endgame Fix-It fic called Saveable which details how Tony could have survived.
Secondly, a year ago I started posting a fic called A Road Not Followed which is a Tony/Steve story and a rewrite of the MCU but with Tony being asked to help Steve acclimatise to 2012 after being unfrozen in the ice. I started to post it but put it on hold due to having too many fics to write but I am now returning to it and I have prewritten 10 chapters so far. I hope to being updating that story again in July.

Thirdly, my next story will be a evil-Wanda fic where she wants to get revenge on Tony. All I will say about this story, is Tony is in for a very rough time and Wanda will show her true colours... I'm aiming to begin posting that story in August. It will be titled: Mind Games.

I have other ideas but these three stories will be my priority from now on.

I hope those who enjoyed this story may join me for some of these.

Once again, thank you for reading and leaving such wonderful comments! It has been a pleasure to write this story and to have such a great reaction to it has amazed me.

Until the next fic...

Signing out for the last time on Fateful Choices...

the-writer1988 :)

End Notes

I felt it prudent to start this story off with Tony's sacrifice. I think it is important to show his thoughts and feelings. Tony never expected to return. He made the ultimate sacrifice play. In this fic... he doesn't fall back through the portal. The fic takes a different path from here onward.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!