New Beginnings

by Stark-N-Barnes (StarSpangledBucky)

Summary

When Tony's heart gives up on him, and the arc reactor no longer works as well as it should. He makes the biggest decision of his life to step down as Iron Man, passing the responsibility over to somebody else. The last person everyone expected was Bucky. Along the way, he begins to understand who Tony Stark truly is, and falls in love with him in the process. And it seems the feeling is quite mutual...

Notes

Winteriron Holiday Exchange gift for the lovely Juulna! Thank you for being such a delight to work with and also talk to through this whole process. You're an absolute gem!

I set this fic between two timelines, I did have to play around with it a little and decided to have that there's a gap between the times after The Winter Soldier and before Age of Ultron started. It's a little hard to explain but it was the only way it could work out for me while writing this fic. But I do hope you enjoy it regardless. Not sure it's very canon compliant as you might have hoped, being canon compliant honestly isn't my forte most of the time. So I
Tony suspected something was wrong when the unexpected pain began.

Himself and the team were in the countryside of Tuscany, Italy, breaching a secret base owned by A.I.M. According to Fury, A.I.M were planning to develop a new form of Extremis, something stronger and more versatile. Tony knew all too well what Extremis could do, he almost died trying to stop the man behind it all, Aldrich Killian, as well as almost losing Pepper. Now it appeared that A.I.M didn’t shut down after Killian’s death, despite the government retracting its funding upon becoming aware of A.I.M’s intentions. They’d cleared the base, from top to bottom, it was only a matter of finding kidnapped scientists who had been missing for weeks.

Bucky, Thor, Rhodey and Steve were searching around the building from the outside, while Clint, Natasha, Sam and Bruce scoured the inside, finding two out of the six scientists in a locked room. Tony flew overhead, having Jarvis scan the building, before sending coordinates to Natasha. It’d been a year and a half since the fall of the Triskelion, Hydra and supposedly S.H.I.E.L.D, though Fury remained silent about that. Yet, since then, Bucky became a part of the team, after a whole year receiving psychological evaluation, to then be given the all clear by experienced psychologists. That year was also spent standing trial for the crimes committed by the Winter Soldier. Bucky was later released, on account of the evidence provided to prove his innocence as a prisoner and weapon of Hydra, through no consent or fault of his own. In that time...Tony grew
accustomed to having him around.

It was Bucky’s comm that he was linked through to when the pain commenced, from his left arm, to his jaw. At first, he figured it may be a panic attack, but the symptoms soon became too evident that it wasn’t the case. Shortness of breath followed, along with tightness in his chest, and an abnormal heartbeat when he shakily asked Jarvis to check his vitals. He knew then that he was suffering from a heart attack. His skin became clamming and a wave of dizziness saw him swerving around a tree that clipped the side of his suit.

“Tony? Everythin’ okay up there?”

Tony tried to breathe, but it only came out as a choking sound, his chest suddenly feeling like someone had a closed fist around his heart.

“My chest,” he wheezed.

“What’s goin’ on, talk to me,”

Bucky’s voice seemed to drone in and out, sounding tinny in Tony’s ears.

“I’m-I-”

“Jarvis, what’s happening?” Bucky asked.

“I believe Mr Stark is suffering from a heart attack Mr Barnes.”

“Shit!” he cursed.

“What’s wrong with Tony?”

Steve’s voice filtered into the comm, statically.

“Tony’s having a heart attack.”

“Well does he need help!” Rhodey shouted.

“Stark! Can you hear us!” Thor exclaimed.

Tony felt weak, like he’d pass out from the overwhelming pain and tightness.

“Jarvis, I-I can’t-”

Without warning, Tony started falling, a dead weight in the suit, with no protocol being activated with Jarvis to autopilot the suit. Tony couldn’t keep his eyes open any longer, he closed them, letting himself go free fall, still gasping for a much needed breath. Down below, Bucky glanced up, eyes widening when he saw Tony dropping at breakneck speed. He was frozen in his spot with panic, only managing to open his mouth to yell one word.

“Tony!”

"How is he?"

“He’s stable now, and responsive, but we allowed him to rest. He should wake up soon, Miss Potts.”
"But? There's always a but isn't there?"

"The strain put on his heart was severe. Despite his arc reactor keeping that shrapnel at bay, it still doesn't stop the possibility of more heart attacks if he keeps going with his superhero business. I suggested to him earlier that he may want to think about retiring, but, you can imagine...it was met with a negative response."

"Doctor, his suits mean everything to him, and being a hero too. He destroyed every last suit he had, for me, but months later was building them again. I'm not saying he isn't aware of those around him, his friends, those he considers family. But Tony feels the need to help people and right some wrongs that aren't his fault. I'm sure you can understand, he did save your family when New York was attacked by Loki and the Chitauri."

"Yes...I can understand. But, there's a very high chance that if Mr Stark continues to put added stress on himself, the next heart attack might take his life."

"I understand...thank you doctor. I'll discuss it with him when he wakes up."

As soon as the door closed behind Pepper, she turned to face Tony, who slowly opened his eyes to stare back at her. She smiled sadly at him, looking over the unreadable expression on his face and the tired look in his eyes.

"Great, he’s gone."

"Tony..." Pepper sighed, with a hint of a laugh.

"What? I’ve heard everything I’ve needed to three times. Three times Pep. It’s too much."

"I know but-" she stopped abruptly.

"Before you say anything else, I know. You were right and I was wrong," Tony interjected.

Pepper walked over to the side of the bed, before sitting down on the edge of it, her hand reaching up to push some of Tony’s hair away from his forehead.

"I wasn’t going to bring that up. I’m not here to lecture you, I’m here to make sure you’re okay."

Tony averted his gaze to the heart monitor, listening to it for a few beats, the sound he’d grown used to the past three days.

"I’m sorry," he said.

"You’re not going to argue with me?"

The brunette shook his head.

"Y’know how they say a heart attack can change a person...that it can make them question how they’ve acted before it happened."

Pepper nodded slowly.

"That’s what it felt like for me when I woke up this morning. Sitting here in the hospital bed, with these wires-" Tony paused, lifting his arm with two wires draped over it. "...it made me realise that if I get back in those suits, it could happen again, but I could die. I-I’m not ready for that Pep," he added.
“What are you going to do?”

Tony’s hand dropped down onto Pepper’s as he gripped it warmly, giving it a gentle squeeze. He knew it wouldn’t be easy to tell her, or even anyone about what he was going to do about his situation. The previous night was spent mulling over his options, whilst getting little to no sleep in the process. He didn’t exactly have many options, it was either take the risk and die sooner than he’d want to before he got to experience things he never had before...or step down from being Iron Man. Unfortunately, the latter was his only hope at the end of the night.

“I’m going to step down as Iron Man.”

Pepper’s hand squeezed tighter on Tony’s.

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“Yes…”

The way Pepper exhaled the breath she’d been keeping in caused Tony to stare at her with a raised eyebrow.

“You okay?” Tony questioned.

“I have one question. What’s the team going to be like without Iron Man. How do you think the press are going to handle this news?”

“Technically that’s two questions,” he retorted.

Pepper frowned at him.

“But...for one, they won’t be without Iron Man. As for the press, we’ll cross that bridge when we get there.”

“Wait...what do you mean they won’t be without Iron Man?” Pepper replied.

“It’s simple Pepper. Someone else takes up the mantle of Iron Man.”

“Uh, Tones, I’m sorry did I just hear you say that someone else is taking up the mantle of Iron Man?”

Tony and Pepper turned their attention to the door, now sitting wide open, with Rhodey standing in the doorway. He looked surprised at the announcement Tony had made, which was generally a rare occurrence these days.

“Rhodey, hey,” Tony answered.

“I’ve been tryin’ to keep the press off your scent for the past three days. Won’t stop askin’ questions about whether you’re alive or dead. Rumours are going around that you’re on your deathbed. You gotta’ let me tell them something.”

In the time it took Rhodey to explain the fiasco with the press, he’d made it across the room to embrace Tony warmly. Tony wrapped his arms around Rhodey in return, feeling incredibly happy to see his best friend. They embraced for a lot longer than they’d ever done when greeting each other, most likely from the relief that Tony had pulled through.

“Don’t scare me like that again Tony, I’m serious,” he murmured.
Tony pulled back a little, his hands resting on Rhodey’s shoulders.

“ I'm sorry, honeybear. Thanks for catching me.”

Rhodey chuckled softly.

“Trust me, it was hard, you were like a dead weight.”

“Well, you won’t need to do it anymore. Now that I've decided to step down as Iron Man,” Tony muttered.

Pepper and Rhodey exchanged solemn looks at each other, clearly hearing the sadness and disappointment in Tony's voice.

“Are you really sure about this Tony?” Rhodey spoke up.

Tony shrugged, lazily.

“I have to be...I just don't want to take the risk anymore.”

“You were all for takin’ risks man,” he said.

“I know. But this time is kind of a wake up call.”

Rhodey squeezed Tony's shoulder in a comforting manner.

“I'll respect whatever choice you make.”

“Now you need to find someone to take over, it's a big responsibility. And I know you won't give it to just anyone.” Pepper interjected.

“Rhodey, believe me, you were the first person that crossed my mind. But you, make a great War Machine,” Tony replied.

Rhodey nodded.

“I think so too.”

Tony’s nose scrunched up as he let out a tired laugh.

“I don't have many other options…”

Pepper smiled fondly.

“You'll think of somebody. It'll click.”

Rhodey’s phone chimed suddenly, prompting him to fish it out of his pocket, before letting out a sigh.

“Sorry to cut this visit short Tony, but Pepper and I need to give a statement to the press so they can move along from the hospital.”

Tony shook his head.

“Don't worry about it. I'll be fine, I might fall asleep again anyway.”

“Not yet,” Pepper piped up. “You have another visitor, he's been waiting for a chance to see you.
He's sitting in the lobby though because there's no chairs outside your room,” she added.

“Uh...who?”

Pepper grinned as she stood up, after pressing a kiss to Tony's cheek.

“Bucky.”

"You'll think of somebody. It'll click.”

Tony's eyes widened.

“Oh my god.”

Pepper raised an eyebrow at Tony, who leant back against the pillow and waved his hand dismissively.

“Sorry, having thoughts to myself. Go. Send Bucky in.”

“I'll come by later and see you, unless you get discharged,” she hummed.

“Here's hoping,” Tony scoffed.

As soon as Pepper and Rhodey took their leave, Tony propped himself up more on the bed, and picked up his phone on the table beside him. He took a few minutes of his time to read over articles that were spreading like wildfire not just in America, but across the whole world. Tony pinched the bridge of his nose, then tossed his phone aside, hands scrubbing down his face with a deep sigh. It wasn’t exactly what he was expecting from the fallout, he couldn’t even comprehend how the world would react when he made his announcement.

There were so many things he would need to organise like an official press release, a TV announcement, before moving onto modifying his suits for a new bearer. Of course, he had to get approval from Bucky, feeling ever so confident that he was the right choice. Tony didn’t openly admit to being fond of people, he had strange ways of showing it. Though as he started seeing more and more of Bucky when he was house bound for awhile and the Avengers weren’t... avenging...he felt somewhat close to Bucky.

“Tony.”

The sound of Bucky’s voice drew Tony’s attention away from the window, to the doorway where the brunette stood. Tony managed a smile as Bucky stepped into the room, dressed down in his civvies, hair damp and clinging to his forehead from the rain. His eyes moved to the flowers tucked under Bucky's arm, as well as the duffel bag held in his gloved hand.

“Flowers?” Tony replied, while looking perplexed.

Bucky smiled shyly.

“I thought you’d want ‘em to brighten up your room.”

“It is a little dull in here,” he admitted.

“And you don’t like dull,” Bucky added.

Tony chuckled and tilted his head slightly.
“They’re blue too, I like blue.”

“I know,” the brunette chimed, as he set the flowers down on the table.

“Thank you.”

Bucky glanced at Tony with a warm smile and placed the duffel bag on the floor by the bed. He sat down in the chair, scooting it over until he was closer to the bed, his hands resting under his chin.

“How you feelin’?”

“Been better, but I’m still here aren’t I?” Tony answered.

“Uh...I dunno’ if you are.”

Tony knew he was teasing.

“I know you’re joking,” he laughed.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” Bucky said, his voice a little muffled against his clasped hands.

“Aw Barnes, were you worried about me?”

Bucky’s eyes met Tony’s for a moment, unmoving and speaking more emotion than his face was. Tony had seen that look before, one night when he offered Bucky a drink and a talk when they both couldn’t sleep. He’d said thank you, Tony didn’t think he meant it, but his eyes, so sincere, said otherwise.

“You know I was, all of us were,” he muttered.

“Still not used to people worrying about me.”

Tony dropped his hands down to his side, eyes still on Bucky, who wasn’t looking back at him now.

“Maybe it’s time you did.”

Bucky stared at Tony’s hand lying face down on the bed, watching the way it trembled every sixty seconds. He wondered if Tony noticed, or if he didn’t want to say anything, when he was often so hypervocal about a lot of things. The brunette moved his gloved hand towards Tony’s, deft fingers running across knuckles before closing around them. He wasn’t sure if it was a good idea, or bad, but he went with it, closely watching how Tony reacted. With only a slight flinch from him, Bucky proceeded to bring Tony’s hand up until he clasped his hand around it in a warm grip. Bucky’s mouth was pressed against his own hands, but Tony could still feel the brunette’s breath ghosting over his skin.

It was in that moment where Bucky felt he may have made a mistake. Yet, when Tony’s hand also gripped his back, the weight on his shoulders eased off of him. He didn’t look at Tony, only holding his attention to the wall on the other side of the room...Tony however, was. In his head he was contemplating on what possessed Bucky to go forward with a gesture that Tony always saw as tender. Not that he didn’t mind, it gave him a sense of comfort. Because on the other hand, his mind was still rattling on how he would tell, or ask Bucky to take over as Iron Man. How could he ask for something like that, from a friend?

“Bucky...”
“Sorry, is it too much? I can stop,” Bucky uttered, as he went to remove his hand from Tony's.

“No!”

The heart monitor beside them blipped once at Tony's sudden outburst, his hand holding tighter onto Bucky's. He relaxed against the pillow again, nervously biting at his bottom lip, as Bucky waited for a response.

“I need to tell you something, and I don't want you to freak out about it.”

“What is it?” he asked.

“I'm stepping down as Iron Man…” Tony confessed.

Bucky's lips parted as something that sounded like a breathy gasp left his mouth.

“Really?”

“Yes. I said this to Pepper and Rhodey, that I don't want to risk it happening again. The doctor said I might not be so lucky next time. He suggested I think of options, but this was the one that he thought was the best,” he explained.

“Tony, we’re nothin’ without you. We ain’t a team without Iron Man.”

With an exhausted sigh, Tony clasped both his hands around Bucky's, the expression on his face turning serious.

“Iron Man won't be gone. I've decided to let someone else take up that role.”

“Who?” Bucky replied.

Tony swallowed thickly and drew his gaze away.

“You.”

Bucky gawked at Tony, whilst letting his hand fall into his lap.

“Me?” he queried.

“Yes, you,” Tony whispered, noticing the immediate change in Bucky's body language.

“Are you insane!”

“Maybe,” he said, trying to lighten the mood with a nervous laugh.

“You want me to take over as Iron Man!”

Tony winced.

“Please stop yelling.”

Bucky raked his fingers through his hair, pacing up and down at the foot of the bed, before whirling around to hold onto the frame of the bed.

“You want me to be frickin' Iron Man, Tony, how can I not yell!” the brunette shouted.

“I had no other choice.”
“Why me?” Bucky interrogated.

“Because I trust you the most!” Tony yelled.

Both of them remained silent for a brief period, only to have it broken by Tony’s voice.

“Look, at first I thought about Rhodey, but War Machine is such a badass, I wanted Rhodey to keep being that. Pepper told me I’d think of somebody, it’d click. She said your name...and it clicked. That’s why I chose you,” he added.

Bucky sighed and hung his head.

“You’re askin’ a lot of me Tony…”

Tony nodded at him in understanding.

“I wouldn’t have asked if I didn’t believe you could do it.”

“You sure you wanna’ pass this over to me?” Bucky snorted, in mild amusement.

“Yes! Why can’t you just accept that!”

“Cause it’s hard to process that you’d trust me with this okay! It’s such a big thing to ask of me and I don’t feel like I can do it. I don’t believe in myself Tony!” he snapped.

“Isn’t it enough that I believe in you!” Tony argued.

Bucky groaned and moved away from the bed.

“So it’s no then?” he asked.

“I didn’t say that.”

Tony slapped his hand against his forehead.

“What is it then?”

“I don’t know!” Bucky barked. “Just don’t get your damn hopes up, it’s likely gonna’ be a no,” he huffed.

“Okay. Just remember what I said.”

Bucky walked over to the duffel bag he’d placed on the floor, rifling through it, before throwing out a small bag of warm pastries and a pack of cards onto Tony’s lap. He sat back down in the chair, pushed the bag towards Tony while he emptied the cards into his hands to shuffle them.

“What’s this?” Tony inquired.

“Somethin’ to pass the time until you get discharged.”

“Wait, you’re staying?” he said, with genuine happiness in his voice.

“Do you want me to leave?”

Tony remained silent for a moment.

“...no.”
Bucky smirked.

“Didn’t think so,” he hummed.

“I changed my mind. Nurse! Nurse, help me!” Tony teased.

He watched the smirk grow on Bucky’s face, finding it in himself to smirk right back. There was a fondness shared between both of them, one that Tony often found himself engrossed in. Though...he didn’t always know why.

“Bucky,” he mumbled, dropping his gaze to the cards in his hands and Bucky’s hand hovering over his to drop another card in them.

“Hm?”

Tony exhaled deeply, then glanced over at Bucky, while blue-grey eyes watching him intently.

“Thank you.”

Bucky’s eyes looked him up and down, in the way that makes them appear as if they’re shaking, like when somebody is on the verge of crying. Tony saw the tears in the corner of the brunette’s eyes, rising, until one slid out, rolled down his cheek and deposited itself on Bucky’s jeans. He planned to speak, but Bucky latched onto his hand, shoulders trembling as he hung his head. Weak sobs escaped from his throat, filled with relief, as well as fear, from what Tony could sense. He hadn’t thought to ask Bucky how he was feeling after seeing what had unfolded in Tuscany. Yet Bucky’s reaction said it all, so Tony held Bucky’s hand tighter, letting his fingers stroke the other’s wrist to soothe him.

“It’s okay Bucky. I’m going to be fine…”

Tony refrained to say the last part, whispering it meekly under his breath.

“I have you…”

The journey to the workshop was daunting for Bucky. He glanced out at Manhattan from the tinted glass of the elevator, trying to calm his nerves. Tony wasn't expecting him and he didn't make any effort to say he'd be paying a visit, or more so, that he had something to get off his chest. Any day now Tony would be holding a press conference to make his retirement announcement, before appointing a new ‘heir’ for Iron Man, as Thor so loosely described it. So far, no one came forward to offer or accept it, not that Bucky anticipated Tony went and asked many people. He was positive that Tony was still hanging onto the hopes of him taking up the offer.

Bucky was flattered, to say the least, that Tony even thought of someone, like him, to be goddamn Iron Man. It felt like an honour and a great privilege to be asked to take up such a huge responsibility. But, Bucky did see how much it pained Tony to come to the realisation that the Iron Man suits would no longer be worn by him, he saw it in his eyes. One day after Tony was released from hospital, Bucky watched him from a gap in the doorway of the workshop, staring at his newest suit standing in front of him. It’d taken Tony some months to craft the suit, and Bucky saw how much it hurt him when he saw the brunette slam his fist against the suit’s chest plate, with his head hung low.

When the elevator stopped, Bucky gave himself a moment to take some deep breaths, before stepping out. Tony was hunched over a workbench, his back turned, to which Bucky cleared his throat to gain his attention. It startled him, but when he looked over to see Bucky standing in the
workshop, a wide smile graced his face. He did appear tired however, with dark circles under his eyes and a certain weariness in the smile he'd given Bucky. Though, he didn't blame him, Tony had trouble sleeping since he left the hospital, sometimes he felt dull aching in his chest, yet the doctor said it was nothing to worry about, more so over-exertion from the trauma of the heart attack. Nonetheless, it didn't seem to stop Tony from working, in a stress free environment.

“Bucky, good to see you.”

The brunette grinned and held up a bag with food inside, along with a small tub that he shook lightly.

“I brought your medication.”

“Is it that time already?” Tony asked, with a frown, as he glanced at his watch. “I'm never going to keep up with this,” he sighed.

“I could keep track. If you like?” Bucky suggested.

Tony nodded as he took the two pills in his mouth and swallowed them down with water.

“Couldn't ask that of you.”

“It's no problem,” the brunette said.

“And what if you're not here?”

Bucky pursed his lips in thought.

“Then I'll call you. Or text you a reminder.”

“Fine, I suppose that works,” Tony huffed.

He nonchalantly rubbed his hand over his chest, with a slight look of discomfort on his face. Bucky eyed him suspiciously, he did hear the doctor say that it was nothing to be concerned about, but he couldn't help but worry for Tony.

“Feelin' okay?”

“Huh? Oh...yeah, the usual discomfort like the doctor said and their prodding and poking around the arc reactor,” he explained, while leaning back against the workbench.

Bucky walked over to Tony from where he'd been standing, cautiously raising his hands into Tony's view, before pointing to Tony's buttoned shirt.

“Do you mind?”

Tony shook his head without hesitation.

“Be my guest.”

With careful hands, Bucky popped the first three buttons of Tony's shirt, pushing it aside to reveal the arc reactor. Bucky stared at it in wonderment and curiosity, his fingers tracing over it gently. He'd never seen it up close, he knew it was there, but he didn't picture getting to look, nevermind touch it. Tony remained still, his eyes following Bucky's hand, as he kept his hands placed on the edge of the workbench. Bucky switched to his metal hand, doing exactly the same, only this time there was a small knee jerk reaction from Tony. His breath hitched sharply, prompting Bucky to
look at him, with some hidden surprise in his eyes.

“This okay?”

“I-yeah...just your metal hand. It's-uh, a little cold,” Tony breathed out.

“Sorry,” Bucky apologised, while removing his hand. “I forget sometimes,” he added.

Tony hummed, as he buttoned his shirt back up, then turned away. It was strange, because Bucky could have sworn there was a pink tinge to the brunette’s cheeks, or maybe he was exaggerating. It didn't stop a wave of disappointment crashing over Bucky, rendering him clueless as to what to say next. He only watched Tony turn back around, before rubbing the back of his neck.

“So...what did you come down here for? That came out wrong. It's not that I don't like seeing you but you're never down here at this time.”

Bucky shifted his weight from one foot to the other, while wandering over to the Iron Man suit standing in the middle of the room.

“I've been thinkin’...about what you said in the hospital the other day.”

Tony dismissed the comment with a shake of his head.

“Don't worry about that. I know it was too much to ask and Iron Man may as well be dead instead of giving it-”

“I'll do it,” Bucky interjected, abruptly.

“What?”

“I said I'll do it,” he repeated.

Bucky moved away from the Iron Man suit, facing Tony to look at him in the eye, baring no dishonesty towards him. Tony saw every piece of seriousness and determination in Bucky's expression, the look of someone who meant business. It brought an overwhelming sense of relief over Tony.

“You're serious?” he asked, receiving a nod in return.

Tony averted his eyes, quickly turning himself around, one hand resting on the workbench and the other cover his face, promptly worrying Bucky.

“Tony, hey. What's wrong?”

He waited patiently for Tony to respond, noticing how his shoulders rose, then fell with little shake to them.

“Do you have any idea-” Tony started. “...how happy I am to hear you say that,” he added.

Bucky saw the tears forming in the corners of Tony's eyes, clinging to his eyelashes when he tried blinked them away. It sent a warmth through Bucky's chest, to see Tony so happy after the terrible week he'd had. He thought about his decision for hours, even losing precious sleep in the process, but...he believed he could do it.

“The world still needs Iron Man, and if that means taking up the mantle to prevent him from being gone forever, then I'll do it.”
Tony smiled so wide it hurt to do so, before walking over to Bucky and throwing his arms around him, embracing him tightly. Bucky froze at the contact, because he and Tony weren't always *this* close with each other. He understood Tony's happiness, he'd felt that kind of relief himself, only he didn't expect such a reaction from Tony. Lately Bucky noticed that Tony was open with his emotions a lot more than usual, but simply linked it back to his scare with the heart attack. Of course, they'd hugged before, once, when Bucky was given the all clear from his evaluation. Maybe, they were a lot closer than Bucky first thought.

“Thank you Bucky.”

“You're welcome, Tony,” Bucky replied.

They pulled apart from the hug, with Tony holding Bucky at arms length, his hands squeezing the brunette’s shoulders, firmly. He emitted a light chuckle as he clapped his hand on Bucky's back, before directing him towards one of the workbenches.

“C’mon, let's get these suits configured for you. And maybe we can make some upgrades to your arm.”

“We?” he uttered, softly.

“You and I, Bucky. I might be out of action on the battlefield, but something major would have to happen for me to stop working here, basically this is a facility as well as a home,” Tony explained.

Bucky chewed down on his bottom lip.

“So...we’ll be spending a lot of time together?”

“Mostly. I was thinking of being with you on comms now and again. Of course, I can give you J.A.R.V.I.S, or another AI for other things that I can't handle,” he chimed.

“This is a lot to take in already.”

Tony scoffed, and nudged Bucky.

“Get used to it. In a way we're going to be partners. Oh and I want you to be at the party when I make my announcement, please. For me.”

“Oh…sure,” Bucky exhaled, with nervousness.

Every other sound seemed to drown itself in Bucky's ears, focusing only on Tony's voice, his eyes solidly locked on him, as if Tony were to disappear if he even looked away for a *second*. And whenever Tony's honey coloured eyes stole a quick glance at him, he found himself almost sweating bullets at how serene they looked. Bucky knew he was in deep shit now...because Tony didn't know of what he was thinking, too afraid to utter the truth. That is what hurt him the most.

Bucky stared at his reflection in the mirror, donning a Tom Ford suit, one of Tony's personal favourites. He almost choked on his breakfast in the morning, when Tony revealed what he’d bought for him. It was a nice suit, perfectly fitted against Bucky's figure, and his metal arm as well. The material was comfortable on his skin, coloured black, upon a silk black shirt underneath and accented with a red tie. Deft fingers smoothed down the lapels slowly, as Bucky took in the sight before him.

The last time he could recall wearing a suit was way back, when he and Steve had no troubles to
worry about. There was a dame, pretty as a picture, brunette with tender, brown eyes and lips tinted pink, like a blush on someone's cheeks. It seemed uncanny to Bucky, that the first person he thought of that reminded him of her...was Tony. A blush of his own spread across his cheeks at the thought, making him move away from the mirror to calm it down. This wasn't what he needed to think about right now.

“What the hell Barnes,” he breathed out, whilst raking a hand through his hair.

A knock on the door took his attention away from the dilemma, as Rhodey stepped into the room.

“Hey.”

“Hi,” Bucky greeted.

“Are you ready? The party is pretty much in full swing now. Tony sent me up to check on you.”

Bucky raised an eyebrow.

“Kinda’ thought he would have sent Steve.”

“Well Tony seems to think we’re friends,” Rhodey replied.

“Are we?”

“We haven't had a chance to talk a lot. But, you're a good person, from what I've seen whenever I saw you around here,” he said.

Bucky smiled shyly.

“I uh...took to you immediately, before anyone else. Besides Steve, obviously, I felt like I could trust you,” he admitted.

Rhodey grinned.

“Maybe we should get lunch one day, and actually talk.”

“That sounds good Rhodey, I can call you that, right?” the brunette chuckled, while fidgeting with his tie.

“Yeah, just don't call me honeybear or Tony will be pissed.”

Bucky laughed heartily.

“Noted.”

“You look great, that suit works for you,” Rhodey commented.

“I think Tony added his own personal touch.”

“He likes to do that,” he murmured, as he admired the red tie.

Rhodey approached him, then reached out to straighten the tie slightly, smiling with pride at it.

“Did your mom never tell you to straighten your tie?”

“She always told me to straighten my tie. I never did,” Bucky answered.
“That explains everything. You ready?”

Bucky swallowed down the growing lump in his throat, peering out at the party between the crack in the door. It'd been awhile since he'd surrounded himself with so many people, especially with those he didn't know. And the fact that two or three journalists would be there, made it all the more nerve-wracking for him. But he knew he had to go out there, to not hide away...to do it for Tony.

“I'm ready,” he said.

“I'll see you downstairs, if you need help or anything, come find me. But I think you're gonna’ be fine,” Rhodey assured him.

After Rhodey left the room, Bucky stared at himself in the mirror once more, then turned away. He walked out of the room, with confidence in his stride, closing the door quietly behind him as he glanced out at the party scene. It appeared relaxed and lively, guests mingling all around the room, their voices raised over the smooth jazz playing to give it some ambience. Bucky forgot what it felt like to be at a party, he only hoped this one would run smoothly for him, given that he hadn’t been much of a public person, despite finding a sense of stability in life.

“Well somebody scrubs up well.”

Bucky felt a hand on his arm, before seeing Pepper appear in his line of sight, her warm smile brightened with deep red lipstick.

“Miss Potts, you look...um-”

Pepper suppressed a giggle behind a grin.

“Bucky, I told you, you can call me Pepper. Don’t feel shy about what you were going to say either.”

“I was gonna’ say you look stunning,” Bucky said.

“Thank you.”

Bucky smiled as he offered his arm to Pepper, allowing her to loop hers through his, while they made their way over to the stairs.

“Everybody’s been waiting for you, especially Tony,” Pepper stated.

“He has?”

“You made him a very happy man when you agreed to take over as Iron Man,” she replied.

“Tony told you about that?”

Pepper nodded slowly.

“Tony will tell Rhodey and I a lot of things.”

“I should’ve expected that,” Bucky hummed.

As they descended the stairs, Bucky felt Pepper squeeze his arm firmly when a few heads turned their way.

“Anytime you want to find somewhere quiet, come and find me.”
“Thanks,” the brunette murmured.

He felt anxious all over again when Pepper left him in the middle of the room, so she could direct everyone’s attention back to her. Bucky was grateful, because the only time he wanted people’s eyes on him was when Tony made his announcement. Tony was also the one he was searching for in the crowd, since he was supposedly waiting for him. It made Bucky happy that Tony was so eager have him included, though he never did doubt for a second that he’d be kept in the shadows by him.

“There he is!”

A firm hand lightly slapped him on the back before he had a chance to turn around, suddenly ambushed by Steve, Sam and Tony.

“Scared the hell outta’ me Steve.”


“Yeah, it’s been non-stop compliments since I stepped out of the room.”

“Everyone’s just tellin’ you the truth man,” Sam interjected.

“Right! Lap it up Barnes, Tom Ford works for you,” Tony spoke up.

Sam glanced between Tony and Bucky with suspicion, clearly noting how Tony hadn’t taken his eyes of Bucky since they’d found him.

“Rogers, how about a game of pool?”

Steve shrugged.

“You wanna’ wager a little money?”

“Oh now you’re talkin’!” Sam exclaimed.

Tony smiled warmly at Bucky.

“You look fantastic.”

“I kinda’ feel fantastic,” Bucky replied.

“C’mon, let’s get you a drink.”

Tony’s hand settled in the middle of Bucky’s back, weaving through groups of guests, while trying to find their way to the bar. Bucky felt awkward that he was walking with his arms by his side, almost like a statue. So he cautiously put his arm behind Tony and placed his hand on the small of the brunette’s back. Tony threw a side glance at him, complimenting it with a subtle smirk, which only made Bucky wish he could see that sexy smirk every morning.

“So, what’s your poison Barnes?” Tony asked, as they approached the bar.

Bucky leant against the bar, eyes on Tony who tried to discreetly hide the fact that he just bit down on his lip after staring at him.

“Uh, I’ll take a beer.”
“Beer it is!” the brunette chimed.

Tony reached over the bar to pluck a bottle of beer from some ice, before reaching for the scotch and pouring it into a glass.

“So how are you feeling about tonight? You’re not going to bail on me are you?”

Bucky scoffed.

“I wouldn’a’ bailed before now.”

Tony laughed as he raised his glass.

“To good luck.”

“To good luck,” Bucky repeated.

They clinked their drinks together, then took a swig, Bucky more so than Tony, given the volume of beer in his bottle compared to Tony's glass. Bucky averted his gaze, in favour of looking down at his metal hand wrapped around the bottle, his fingers wiping away condensation aimlessly. Tony tilted his head to the side, drawing Bucky's attention away from the beer, like he was physically pulling the brunettes gaze to him, without even touching him.

“Hi,” he said, with a grin.

Bucky couldn't help the chuckle he elicited, eyes dropping down, only to come back up to meet Tony's again. His smile spread all the way to his eyes, laugh lines creasing in the corners and over his nose that scrunched up when he laughed. Tony found himself transfixed to that smile, like he had over a week ago in the hospital. He knew Bucky went through a lot of shit to get where he was, but now every time he entered a room, it would light up whenever he smiled.

Out of nowhere someone cleared their throat, interrupting Tony and Bucky's moment of silent longing. At least, from somebody else's point of view that'd be what it looked like. Rhodey appeared greatly amused while he stood in front of them. It became clear to both of them that they were in fact, standing close, with Tony's hand almost touching Bucky's as it lay atop the bar. Tony backed away partially, trying to keep any suspicions at bay, even though Rhodey had clearly caught on by now.

“It's time for you to make your announcement man, press are getting restless.”

“How many are here?” Tony inquired.

“Three, just like you asked.”

“Rhodey, you’re amazing,” he sighed, contently.

Rhodey dropped his hand down on Tony’s shoulder and pulled him in for a side hug.

“Good luck Tones.”

Tony turned to Bucky, who was glaring down at his beer like it just offended him. But it was far from that, he could sense the worry crawling it's way back into Bucky's thoughts. He was going to make his announcement, go public, and take Bucky there with him. In the back of his mind, he thought he would be dragging Bucky into something he wasn't ready for yet. But the other part of his impulsive mind said he was ready.
“Bucky, are you sure about this?”

“I-yeah. Sorry, I'm just...preparin’ myself for the worst,” Bucky responded.

“I'll be there with you.”

For such simple, last minute encouraging words, Bucky sensed every bit of sincerity in Tony's voice. What tied into it further, was the fact that Tony stood there, hand outstretched to him and remaining silent. Bucky didn't need to read into it, Tony was silently asking him to take his hand, for what, he wasn't sure. Perhaps a way of coping and keeping his elevated heart rate steady, it hasn't stopped racing since Rhodey told them it was time.

“Tony, can I be honest with you, right now?” he whispered.

“Of course,” Tony answered.

“I'm pretty damn scared.”

Tony smiled slightly at the delivery of Bucky's confession, given that the brunette did utter a breathy laugh while doing so.

“You and me both. Let's get this done,” he murmured.

Bucky put his hand in Tony's, letting his fingers curl around the brunette’s carefully, since he was still growing used to feeling a lot more with his metal hand after Tony upgraded it. He could feel the weight and every shape on Tony's hand, even the lines on his palms. Tony's hand was warm, that also radiated off of him enough for Bucky to feel too.

“Let's go.”

No one noticed that their hands were joined, as all eyes were focusing on the reporters who stood with cameras now, and notepads in their hands. When they got closer, both of them decided to let go, before Bucky split off from Tony to stand between Steve and Natasha for the time being. Tony stood in the middle of the guests that were gathered, looking up at the ones who were seen mingling upstairs, now devoting their attention to him. Bucky stole a glance at him, to give him one final nod of agreement that this was it, he was ready. But the dread still sunk its nails in, leaving him with so many questions. **What would they say? Would he be shunned because of his past?**

Bucky exhaled deeply, not knowing where to rest his hands, but settled for letting them hang by his side. Rhodey appeared by his side, his arm slung around Bucky's shoulders as he jostled him gently. All he could do was smile back at Rhodey, deeply thankful that he was checking up on him. The last thing he wanted was to panic and escape from the situation, feeling that he'd let Tony down by doing so. He didn't want that, all the stories Tony told him about the people who let him down, made Bucky vow that he wouldn't be one of those people. It had all been shared over a full bottle of whiskey, but they both found common ground and security by being open with each other.

“Good evening everyone. Uh thank you for coming here tonight to another one of my glamorous parties,” Tony began,

A few laughs circulated throughout the room.

“...but I didn't just invite you all here for a night of fun and drinks. I actually have an announcement to make,” he continued.
“Roll the cameras,” a reporter muttered to her coworker.

Tony cleared his throat.

“As most of you are aware, I've had my arc reactor in my chest ever since I came back from being held hostage in Afghanistan by the Ten Rings. Of course I made adjustments when I came back, then this piece of shit almost killed me from palladium poisoning. I fixed that. But, it hurts to say this, for a third time, that...the arc reactor isn't working as well as it should be. Over a week ago you were all aware I was in the hospital for reasons yet to be disclosed. When myself and The Avengers were on a mission in Tuscany, I had a heart attack, it was severe. I became a dead weight in my suit and started falling, if it wasn't for my best friend Colonel James Rhodes catching me the outcome might have been worse.”

Bucky watched Tony speak so fluently, like he'd rehearsed it, yet he knew everything Tony said was off the top of his head, never scripted.

“Because of the severity of the heart attack, I had to make some tough decisions. My doctor told me if I kept going the way I was going, the next one could likely be fatal. I thought about that a lot, since I know there's so much more I want to experience in my life. Having the heart attack changed my outlook on a lot of things. It's not easy to make this choice, but it has to happen…”

Tony looked over at Bucky, with that flicker of hope in his eyes, so Bucky nodded for him to continue.

“Starting tonight, I’ll be stepping down as Iron Man and handing that responsibility to someone else,” the brunette announced.

Murmurs and gasps flooded the room, sending Bucky's anxiety skyrocketing, his jaw clenching, as well as his body tensing.

“So...who is it Mr Stark? I'm assuming Colonel Rhodes?” a second reporter asked.

“No. I've known Rhodey for longer than a year, trusted him for longer than a year too. And there would be no War Machine without him, so it stays. This person, he may feel like an unlikely choice, but I believe in him. And he has willingly accepted my offer, I gave him time to think it over. Even if he had said no I would've accepted it and given up Iron Man entirely,” Tony explained, as the reporter raised an eyebrow.

“Then who?”

Tony held his hand out in Bucky's direction.

“Once the suits have been reconfigured...Bucky Barnes will take over the mantle of Iron Man, effective immediately.”

Everyone shifted their attention over to Bucky, who started to make his way over to Tony after Rhodey ushered him forward. Most glared at him as he walked by, and it sent the confidence he had at the beginning of the night, straight to rock bottom. It was everything he dreaded, but he knew he shouldn’t have kept his hopes so high. The feeling of wanting to back out seemed like a fairly good idea in his head at that moment.

“I’d also like to say that after discussions with the rest of the team, they also agreed that Bucky would be the best choice to technically...keep Iron Man alive,” Tony added.

“Isn’t that taking a risk, Mr Stark?”
Tony opened his mouth to speak, but it wasn’t his voice that was heard.

“No, it isn’t.”

Bucky stood before them, scoping the room, while taking note of every person that was there. They looked surprised that Bucky spoke up, with the fact that he did keep quiet most of the time, stuck brooding in his own thoughts. But this time was different, he wasn’t going to stand there without saying something. One reporter looked at him with a smirk on her face, as if she knew this was her chance to get under his skin, possibly twist his words.

“From what I know you had to go through a psychological examination,” she spoke.

“Yes. I did, that was over a year ago, at the same time I stood trial, which I was later cleared for after the evidence provided by anonymous sources to what Hydra did to me. And I need to correct you, it was an evaluation, not an examination.”

“A year doesn't seem like a long time for things to be forgotten about,” the reporter rebuked.

“Well, people are full of surprises,” Bucky retorted.

The way she grinned began to be off putting for Bucky.

“'I'm not a perfect person, but truthfully...nobody is. You can't walk around saying you don't have flaws, it's not possible,” he stated.

“You're very well worded Mr Barnes.”

Bucky breathed an exasperated sigh.

“Because I know you're trying to make me crack.”

“I wouldn't say that. I'm simply stating the truth,” she uttered.

“What truth exactly?”

Tony grunted under his breath at the reporter.

“That this is a big mistake. Tony Stark chose you, an ex-assassin, to be Iron Man, who is supposed to be a superhero. How do you think the world is going to react when that bright red communist star is showing whenever you're around?”

Suddenly, in a fit of rage, Bucky tore the left sleeve of his suit off, stepping toward the reporter and revealing his silver metal arm, bearing no red star.

“Is that a good enough answer for you!” he barked.

Olivia, as displayed on he name badge that Bucky caught sight of, only smiled wider like she'd hit the jackpot.

“I rest my case.”

It took no more than a second for Bucky to realise what she meant. He'd been conned into reacting that way, for Olivia to have her so called point proven. She used his hatred of the symbol that haunted him, to get an angered reaction and get others on her side. He was back to square one again.
“I-” he exhaled, shakily.

“It’s clear that Bucky Barnes isn't ready to take up the mantle of Iron Man, nor should he ever. Poor choice, if I'm being honest,” Olivia chided.

Numerous guests seemed to agree with her, muttering their own complaints and distaste for the announcement. Others refrained from saying anything, deciding to stay silent, which only made Bucky feel worse. But the outrage outweighed the silence, and he couldn't take it.

“That's enough!” Tony exclaimed.

Bucky abruptly turned away from the crowd, heart beating too fast for him as the panic set in. His only want was to get out of there as quick as he could. So he pushed past guests, while keeping his head low to shield the expression on his face. He felt ill, like he might throw up any second, feeling lost and scared like he'd admitted to Tony. There were voices, calling out his name, somewhere in the background he could hear Tony, shouting, but not at him, at the reporters and the guests. Deep down Bucky hoped they were getting a mouthful.

He reached one of the rooms upstairs, a spare room, tucked away from all the commotion downstairs. The bathroom door was open and Bucky rushed inside, slamming the door behind him, before collapsing to his knees. His body heaved as he retched into the toilet, coughing and struggling to breathe, hands trembling when they grasped the sides of the toilet bowl. It passed quickly, but Bucky still let his head hang, chest rising then falling rapidly, because all of the emotions he was fighting with wouldn't settle.

“Buck?”

Steve’s voice echoed through the door, while he tried the handle, only to have it jam because it was locked. Bucky hadn’t realised he’d even attempted to lock it, maybe it was instinct, as there had been several times during his trial where he needed a break. He would always retreat to the restrooms and be subjected to making friends with the toilet, after seeing footage of the distress he was put through with Hydra. Now this was for a different reason, feeling like this may have been one good thing to happen in his life. But it was swept out from under him by a skillful journalist, who knew how to stir things to their advantage.

“Hey, open up pal.”

Bucky pushed himself to stand up, flushed the toilet, then staggered over to the mirrors. His reflection was gaunt, staring back at him, taunting him, like it had so many times before. The brunette raised his fist and smashed the glass, sending some shards falling into the sick, whilst letting out a frustrated yell. He turned the tap on, before scooping water into his hands, which was then splashed over his face, the coldness of it sending a shiver down Bucky’s spine.

“C’mon, open!”

The lock on the door clicked then swung open, revealing Steve, who looked worried, which dissolved to relief when he saw that Bucky wasn’t hurt, not physically hurt, at least. He closed the door behind him, took some cautious steps forward and placed his hand on Bucky’s back.

“It’s alright Bucky,” he soothed.

Bucky let out a strained sob, overcome with disappointment, like he’d lost his chance at ever redeeming himself to the people that judged him the most as a person. His shoulders shook violently as he moved away from the sink, spinning himself around to face his best friend and
welcome the open arms held out to him. Steve pulled Bucky to him, embracing him warmly, knowing that the brunette coped better when he felt secure.

“I’m sorry, I screwed up,” Bucky choked out.

Steve sighed and hugged the brunette tighter.

“You didn’t. Y’know why, you’re gonna’ show everyone that things are different now. I’ll stand with you on that.”

Bucky managed a smile through his tears.

“Thanks Steve.”

“I think the party is over,” the blonde said, as he and Bucky parted from the hug.

“I ain’t surprised. What the hell, it was a mess.”

Steve smiled sadly.

“You should’ve seen Tony though, he was angry. Pretty sure he gave ‘em a mouthful. Never seen him react that way for somebody before.”

“Don’t even say it,” Bucky muttered.

“Oh c’mon.”

No Steve, it ain’t like that,” he snorted.

The blonde gave Bucky a knowing look.

“C’mon, there’s somethin’ there.”

Bucky groaned and sat down on the edge of the bath, with his head in his hands.

“Do we need to do this now?”

“We don’t need to. But you’ll tell me one day,” Steve replied.

“In your dreams, pal.”

A chiming noise sounded out from Bucky’s pocket, before he fished it out and read over the message he opened.

*Going down to the workshop. Care to join me? - T*

He responded instantly.

*I was gonna’ go to bed - B*

Tony’s reply was also sent hastily.

*I have an expensive bottle of scotch and those appetizers you like - T*

The brunette suppressed a smirk.

*Be right there - B*
“I’ve gotta’ go Steve.”

Bucky brushed past Steve hurriedly, wanting to avoid any questions the blonde might throw at him. He should’ve known Steve would’ve been quick to react anyway, and was already three steps behind him by the time he exited the bedroom.

“Where are you goin’?” Steve asked.

“To the workshop.”


The elevator doors opened after Bucky called it down, as he stepped inside, then turned back around to face Steve, his face unreadable.

“G’night pal,” he said, before closing the doors behind him.

Steve stood in silence, with his arms crossed loosely over his chest and disbelief spread on his face.

“You think there’s somethin’ going on there?”

He looked over his shoulder to see Sam sidle up to him, indulging himself in more of the absence of sound, until he decided to reply.

“Yeah, there’s somethin’...”

“Okay everyone wake up. Let’s go! We’ve got a big day ahead of us! Jarvis, c’mon buddy I need you, front and centre.”

“Good morning sir.”

“Morning. Hey! Dum-E, U, I need both of you too.”

The robots responded to Tony's voice immediately, coming to life as they moved from the corner of the workshop to where Tony stood.

“How are you feeling sir?”

“Uh, a little nervous, but excited,” Tony replied.

If Jarvis were still alive, Tony would bet that he’d be trying to hide a smirk right now.

“Is Mr Barnes awake?”

“As far as I know, yeah. Pretty sure I heard him stumbling out of bed when the call came through about a mission,” the brunette chuckled.

Tony moved from one workbench to the other, taking large sips out of his freshly brewed coffee, while opening several interfaces and holograms. His gaze shifted to the closed display where Bucky's new suit was ready and waiting. Bucky wasn't around to see Tony make the final crucial adjustments to the suit, so Tony was on his own to try and make it something exciting. He could only hope it was everything that he expected it to be.

“Mr Stark, Mr Barnes has arrived.”
“Thanks J, unlock the door for him,” Tony said.

Bucky was rushing down the stairs to the workshop, causing Tony to laugh because the brunette would have been quicker taking the elevator. Only, the laugh was cut short when Bucky walked through the door in his new undersuit.

“Hey, sorry I got here as quick as I could,” he greeted.

Tony blinked rapidly.

“I…”

The very sight before him rendered Tony speechless. There was no way someone could look _that_ good in a simple undersuit. Every muscle on Bucky's body was hugged by the tight, synthetic fabric, except for his metal arm which stayed exposed. Then there was the fact that the front of the suit still lay slightly unzipped, bearing his broad chest.

“Um, Bucky…” Tony murmured.

“Hm?” the brunette hummed, as he combed his fingers through his mussed hair.

Tony walked over to him, reached out and tugged on the zip to close the suit up.

“You forgot to zip up.”

His hand remained on Bucky's chest, fingers aimlessly running down his side and to his waist. Bucky stared back at Tony, after swallowing down the lump in his throat, the sensation of Tony's fingers through the suit making it feel like he was only touching his skin. He had to quickly diffuse what was happening.

“So what do you think?”

Tony flashed him a wide smile.

“You look great, and you’re going to look even better in the suit.”

“Really?” Bucky said, with a satisfied grin.

“You’ll steal people’s hearts for sure Barnes.”

“Even yours?” he joked.

Tony’s eyes met his for a brief period, as if he was thinking of what to say next, like his words had to be chosen wisely.

“Let’s get you into this suit, the others will be waiting for you,” the brunette mumbled.

Bucky’s brows furrowed while he followed Tony over to the casing, which held the new and improved Iron Man suit inside. Tony hadn't given him a solid answer to his joke, he used to be so quick with a comeback, but Bucky received nothing in return. The brunette’s reaction only sent so many questions racing through Bucky's mind, yet he mostly wondered if he'd crossed a line.

“Tony, I can't thank you enough for this. You've been real busy to get this ready, and I just admire that about you.”

“Don't mention it,” Tony replied.
“Did you take your pills this mornin’?”

Tony nodded.

“I did. Thank you, for sending me a reminder.”

“Don't mention it,” Bucky retorted.

A soft scoff fell from Tony’s mouth.

“You're a joker, Bucko.”

“Bucko?” he huffed out.

“Would you prefer Buckaroo?” Tony teased.

The brunette winced.

“Let's stick with Bucko.”

“Sure thing, James,” he uttered.

Bucky grunted under his breath.

“Hmph.”

He approached Tony, who had his back to him and leant in close.

“My birth name sounds nice comin' from you.”

Tony couldn't help the squeak that escaped him, feeling Bucky's hot breath on him, while making the hairs stand up on the back of his neck. He shifted to the side, before pressing a button on the interface to open it.

“Here, just for you.”

The doors of the casing hissed while opening slowly, eventually uncovering the suit.

“Holy-” Bucky paused abruptly, as his jaw dropped open.

He stared in awe at the suit, noticing that it was very much the same colours as what Iron Man had been, only with added sections of silver to it like his arm. The suit was shaped to fit Bucky’s broad figure, with an open space for Bucky’s left arm to remain visible.

“There’s plates of the suit armour that’ll clasp over your shoulder, essentially interacting with the cybernetics in your arm.”

“Tony I-what the hell...” the brunette murmured. “This is amazing,” he added.

“You’ll need this. It’ll sit on your wrist and if you whip your arm out the suit will come to you, so try not to move so it can correctly fit onto you,” Tony explained, before handing Bucky a small disc.

Bucky put the disc into an indent on his wrist, watching it glow a light shade of blue when it connected to the metal arm. He breathed in deeply, then whipped his arm out towards the suit, his other arm held out to the side. Different sections of the suit gravitated to him, locking around limbs
and sent several plates of the armour climbing downwards. Tony stood back, eyes widening when
the final piece, most specifically the helmet, was carefully placed on Bucky's head by U.

“Wow...”

The faceplate moved into the inner casing of the helmet, with a happy faced Bucky looking over at
Tony.

“This is awesome!”

Tony laughed and sauntered over to stand in front of Bucky.

“You look incredible in this.”

Bucky smiled warmly.

“Couldn’t have done it without you though.”

“Oh c’mon,” Tony chuckled.

“I’m bein’ serious, you believed in me Tony,” Bucky said.

Before Tony could reply, Bucky drew him in for a hug, yet despite the awkwardness of the suit,
Tony felt secure.

“You’re welcome Bucky,” he whispered.

“Sir, the others are on their way to investigate the disturbance, they’re requesting an ETA for Mr
Barnes.”

Tony pulled away from the hug.

“Yeah, thanks J. ETA should be about ten minutes.”

“Gonna’ be there in record time,” the brunette commented.

“I’ll just need to check a few things while you make your way over there. This is basically a test
run, not a major disturbance, just a mild one, but we’ll still need you there. I’m going to be in your
ear for the whole thing. There’s still a few things I need to do in terms of calibration and such with
Jarvis so I can put him in this suit.”

Bucky nodded thoughtfully.

“I'd prefer your voice right now anyway. No offence Jarvis.”

“None taken Mr Barnes.”

“Okay Bucky, are you ready?” Tony asked.

“More than ever.”

“Stand right here and I'll open one of the hatches from the workshop for you to go through. Just
take it nice and easy, remember everything I taught you when we tried out the prototypes for the
suit. You want to remember to keep good balance while flying, be aware of your surroundings and
don’t ever put your guard down unless you feel it necessary,” he explained.
“I'll remember everythin’,” Bucky assured him.

Tony turned around, then put in a code for one of the hatches.

“And another thing.”

Bucky raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah?”

The brunette activated the faceplate to cover Bucky's face again, before he walked over and dropped his hand down onto Bucky's chest.

“Be careful. I want you back here.”

Bucky's chest tightened a little, causing him to inhale a sharp breath, as Tony only said ‘I’ and not ‘we’.

“Got it.”

Tony grinned happily.

“Good luck.”

Like a true natural, Bucky exited the workshop with no hesitation or issues to follow. Tony hurried over to the hatch to see him skyrocketing into the air, then doing some manoeuvres he’d shown him over the past few weeks.

“Show off,” he snickered.

Tony slid an earpiece into his ear, as he sat back down at a workbench, with a dull ache in his chest. It wasn't from his heart, he knew that full well. But it was more an ache of joy, that the whole thing succeeded. He was not only thankful of Bucky, but also proud.

“All connections are running smoothly Mr Stark.”

“Put me through to Barnes.”

“Connecting you through now, sir.”

Bucky was flying towards the abandoned subway, feeling adrenaline pump through his veins from finally getting the chance to show the world he could do this. He didn't want to doubt himself anymore, he could do this, for the people...for Tony.

“Steve, this is the greatest thing to ever happen to me,” he said, on the line to the team’s comm.

Steve chuckled.

“I know Buck.”

Bucky sighed deeply.

“Feel like I’m gettin’ a second chance, and it’s thanks to Tony. He’s done so much.”

“Thanks Barnes, those are some kind words.”

The brunette had to swerve to miss a building, too distracted by Tony's voice speaking suddenly.
“Oh, god...hey Tony.”

Tony snorted loudly.

“*Don't sound so surprised, I did say I was going to call.*”

Bucky huffed.

“Yeah, you did, but I wasn't expectin’ it so soon.”

“Well...connecting to your comm didn't take as long as I thought.”

“Mm, I forgot, you're smart.”

“*Is that a compliment, James Barnes!*”

“Of course,” Bucky stated.

Clint groaned over the comm.

“*Can you two quit flirting so we can focus on the mission!*”

“*Compliments are different to flirting Barton.*”

Bucky smirked.

“*I think they're pretty similar.*”

Tony muttered meekly, under his breath.

“*Romanoff, should've known you'd drop in on this conversation.*”

It seemed everyone wanted to get involved.

“Alright, enough talkin’, we've got an underground gang to deal with.”

Tony hummed.

“I'm disconnecting everyone else's comms to mine, I need to focus on helping Bucky through this.”

Rhodey interjected quickly with his own comment.

“One on one time with your new buddy.”

“Rhodey, c'mon!”

Sam cleared his throat.

“I mean...you didn't deny you two were flirtin’...”

“Really Sam you too!”

Bucky's laughed as he heard everyone's lines disconnect, except for Tony's, leaving the pair in their own bubble of conversation.

“Did you always have to put up with this?”
Tony muttered.

“*You bet.*”

“So, I know I sounded excited to get started as Iron Man, but I’m a little nervous too.”

“You’re going to be fine. Look, you just need to knock a few guys out so the cops can deal with them later. Maybe rescue some people, we’re unaware about hostages right now.”

Bucky switched his comm over to Steve’s.

“Hey Steve, any word on hostages?”

“*Heard there’s at least five, two of ’em are kids.*”

“Shit,” Bucky hissed, as he went back to Tony’s comm. “Five hostages, and two are kids,” he added.

“Okay, we’re going to need to be smart about this. I think you and Rhodey can handle the gang members on the higher level, they’ve got a whole facility built up in there. If you scan the subway you’ll find out where all the hostages are.”

“Don’t I need an AI to ask for that?” the brunette inquired.

“No, if I can get this working, I can also become your eyes, there’s a drone inside your suit, it can get used for scanning. Just...tell me when you’re close enough.”

Bucky’s eyes scoped the area for a safe landing, before he dropped down with ease beside Rhodey, who was waiting for his arrival.

“Glad to see you made it here in one piece.”

The brunette rolled his eyes.

“So you’re crackin’ all the jokes on me now huh?”

“I’ve got to when Tony’s not here,” Rhodey answered.

“He said we’re going to deal with the gang members on the upper level. But the new drone Tony made is going to scan for the hostages first.”

Rhodey nodded with a grin.

“We need to get them out safely though that’s our main priority.”

“There’s two kids too, we can’t mess this up,” Bucky said.

“How are we looking for the scan Barnes?”

“All good to go, Stark,” he issued.

From the back of Bucky’s suit, a small sized drone flew out and floated in front of him.

“I can see you both.”

Bucky raised an eyebrow from behind his faceplate..
“Now we know it works.”

“Scanning the area now for the hostages.”

The scanner moved from left to right over the main entrance to the subway, then up and down, with blue lines covering every inch of it. Bucky saw the locations of the hostages show up on the HUD, marked with green dots, the perpetrators marked in red. He looked over it carefully, but noticed that there were only four green dots and not five.

“Uh, Tony, double check on the hostages, the drone scanned four, but no fifth is detected.”

“The distress call said there were five.”

“Tony...please tell me the drone doesn't just pick up live civilians.”

“Absolutely not! It picks up every kind of civilian status, it sounds terrible but it's so we're absolutely sure about how many we need to rescue!”

“Hey, Tones. Calm down alright, it's fine, we've got this,” Rhodey informed.

“You two need any help?”

Bucky turned his head to see Sam land beside him.

“Well, the three of us can fly, so we could use the extra hands. Think you can help with the hostages on the upper level. I think they're the kids, we've gotta’ be careful,” Bucky explained.

“Still no sign of that fifth hostage?” Sam asked.

Rhodey shook his head.

“None, Tony’s adamant that the drone would pick up everyone, I don’t want him to stress out.”

“One of you needs to find them!”

Bucky blocked all the other comms and turned away from Rhodey and Sam.

“Hey, Tony...listen to me. Take a deep breath for me huh?”

“Okay...okay, I just, don’t want anyone dying.”

“It’s not gonna’ be like that. I’ll find ‘em, stay calm sweetheart, yeah?”

Silence fell over the comm, until it clicked with Bucky as to what he blurted out, his hand coming up to smack against his faceplate.

“Did you just...call me sweetheart?”

“Uh, it just slipped out. I’m sorry,” Bucky uttered.

“It’s okay, honey.”

“Please don’t tell me I just heard that.” Steve teased, as he walked past Bucky and lightly punched his shoulder.

Bucky felt his cheeks run red hot.
“You did that on purpose,” he hissed.

Tony snickered on the comm.

“Do you expect less of me?”

Rhodey let out a sigh of exasperation.

“Guys, c’mon, focus.”

Sam crossed his arms over his chest.

“So how are we doin’ this?”

Tony cleared his throat.

“Bucky, this is your call.”

“Okay. Thor and Hulk, take the lower level, try create an opening for Natasha, Steve and Clint to get to the middle level to rescue the first two hostages. By then it’ll be alerting the others on the higher level but at least two or three need to stay behind to keep eyes on the hostages. Sam, Rhodey and I will take the higher level, they can get the kids safely out of there. But I’ll stick around, scan the area for the fifth hostage. If I need backup...I’ll call for it.”

“You heard the guy.”

“Steve, we’ll wait on your signal.”

“Copy that, Buck.”

Bucky held his gaze on the scans from the drone, keeping watch for movement and signs of the team. He heard Rhodey and Sam talking beside him, so he decided to check up on Tony, given that the line went quiet after their plan was laid out.

“You doin’ okay Tony?” he chimed.

“Yeah, yeah...I'll be fine. I'm not used to all of this. Usually I'm out there, saving people. That's all I ever wanted to do after Afghanistan. I wanted to learn from my mistakes, then I felt this need to protect others. I should be there but I know I can't.”

“Tony you did so much before your health screwed you over. But you're still important.”

“That need never disappears, for what feels right. I wish there was one person, or more to really understand me. To really understand why I became Iron Man.”

Bucky opened his mouth to speak, only to be alerted by the signal from Natasha.

“Rhodey, Sam, let’s go!”

He lifted himself off the ground, and set his course for the subway, while Rhodey and Sam following close behind. It was dimly lit in the subway, with a dangerously eerie atmosphere that unsettled Bucky. They passed by Natasha and Clint, who were shielding two of the hostages from the enemy, gunfire and cries of pain echoing off the walls.

“I've got readings of three hostiles in the upper level. Don't forget these are the kids.”
Upon entering the upper level, Rhodey and Sam flew in the opposite direction to ambush the enemy from their blind spot. Bucky lowered himself to the ground, with his hands held up after he was detected by one, tall, brutish man who looked to be like the leader.

“Tony Stark, what a surprise.”

Bucky had the faceplate disappear to show his face.

“’Fraid not.”

The leader sneered.

“Oh, we have The Winter Soldier instead.”

“That's not my name either,” Bucky rebuked.

“Surprised you took up this superhero job. Coulda’ been workin’ for people like us.”

“I'm not that anymore,” he said.

Bucky's eyes never wavered from the leader, his hands still held up close to his head, as he waited for an opening to make his move.

“You wanna’ rescue these kids, you gotta’ go through us first.”

The brunette clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth.

“That ain't my move to make.”

Suddenly, Rhodey and Sam emerged, knocking the leader’s goons to the ground, which disarmed them of their guns.

“Your move pal,” Bucky sniped.

With a well timed move, Bucky blocked the bullet heading straight for him with his metal arm, before firing a repulsor at the leader, pushing him back into a solid wall. His body went limp, knocked out cold from the force of the impact, with a decently sized dent in the brick. Bucky slowly dropped his hand, his breathing laboured from how fast it had all ended, after it escalated so quickly. The kids who still knelt on the ground, looked over at Bucky, their eyes filled with relief, but also amazement, like any kid would at seeing their superhero.

“Wow, you totally kicked his ass Iron Man!”

Sam glanced over at Bucky with a knowing smile.

“Let's get you kids outta’ here huh?”

Bucky brought the faceplate back over his face to bring up the HUD again.

“Tony, we have the kids, but I'm gonna’ search for the fifth hostage.”

“Bucky you need to get outside, now. The fifth hostage is in a helicopter and they're being held near the edge of the open door with no parachute secured to them!”

“On my way, give me coordinates.”
“It's not far.”

“I’ve got it,” Bucky replied.

“Listen, I need to leave this in your hands, I don’t know what I can tell you, to make this go right. This is up to you Bucky.”

“Do you trust me Tony?” he asked, hopefully.

There was a pause, followed by the sound of Tony’s chair sliding across the floor.

“I do.”

Bucky disconnected his comm from Tony and the others, focusing on rescuing the hostage without distraction. He looked ahead to see the helicopter appear from behind the Empire State Building, the HUD displaying the targets with red rings around them. The fifth hostage, a young adult, was in plain sight, and only being held by the collar of his jacket. As Bucky gained on them, he saw the sheer fear in the man’s eyes, unknowing of whether he’d live or die. Bucky wanted to make it certain that the latter would not be the case.

When he got as close as he felt necessary, the last remaining gang member, who came up as Kelso on Bucky’s scan with no first name, glared at him, no fear nor remorse in his eyes. Bucky wondered how people could be like this, although...he had seen that cold, stoic look in someone’s eyes before. A chill surged down Bucky’s spine at the memory, the foul memory that never ceased to keep him awake at night. But there were bigger matters at stake, right now, in the present.

“Land the helicopter, now.” the brunette ordered, while raising his right hand.

“Boss says I can’t! Wouldn’t want to disappoint him!”

“Then let the hostage go, safely,” he urged.

Kelso laughed coldly.

“Safety isn’t my thing kiddo.”

Bucky’s eyes widened when Kelso released the hostage and pushed him out of the helicopter.

“No!”

The brunette raced forward after firing a repulsor, which the pilot of the helicopter narrowly missed, leaving Bucky with a split second decision. He couldn’t try and apprehend Kelso and the pilot...but he could save a life.

“Jarvis I know you’re in this suit even if you’re not fully calibrated but help me here I need thrusters at full power!”

“Full power to thrusters Mr Barnes.”

With his heart racing, and hope fading promptly, Bucky swiftly turned himself and sped towards the man falling at rapid speed. He heard the wind roar by him like a turbojet engine, pushing himself closer and closer to his target. His hand was outstretched to the man when he achieved closer proximity, trusting that this rescue would be a success. This was a chance for him to prove himself to every naysayer who’d crossed his path.

“C’mon, c’mon!” he shouted, with a cracked tone in his voice.
Suddenly, Bucky felt the weight of the man’s hand in his, prompting him to stop abruptly and hoist the man up so that he could hold him securely. The relief hit Bucky like he’d walked straight into a brick wall, weighing heavy on his chest but in the best way possible. Down below, a crowd had gathered, cheering and clapping for him, as the man he’d rescued held onto him for dear life.

“Well done, sir,” Jarvis complimented.

Bucky exhaled the breath he’d been holding in, before carefully flying to the security of the city ground. His faceplate opened just as they touched the ground, with his attention solely on the man, who was staring up at him. He looked almost shocked that he was actually staring back at Bucky, that he was saved by the new Iron Man.

“Thank you...”

“No problem,” Bucky said.

“I didn’t want to believe it at first, that you were actually going to become Iron Man. But, you deserve that title.”

“I-well...it’s my first day,” he chuckled.

The man smiled slightly, then kissed Bucky on the cheek.

“You’re a hero,” he whispered.

Bucky watched him run into the arms of his family, while the crowd only got louder with their cheers. The brunette glanced around him, took it all in as he turned in a full circle to see all the faces of those who were clearly all for this change. It overwhelmed Bucky to feel like he was doing something right, that he wasn’t in something for the wrong reason, that he did this in his own free will.

In that moment, it only made Bucky understand...who Tony Stark really was.

On the weekend after Bucky's first mission as Iron Man, he was going to experience a tradition that happened at Avengers Tower every second Saturday. During his recovery he didn't take interest in it, preferring to stay alone in his room with a book. Now, he decided it was time for a change, as Avengers movie night did sound fun after all. A little rest and relaxation didn't sound to bad either. Bucky was dressed for comfort in some grey sweatpants and a warm, blue sweater, that was snug on him. It was supposedly the number one rule of movie night, to dress down and get comfortable.

He could already hear everyone else on the main floor as the elevator took him there. Laughter and friendly conversations filled the room, bringing Bucky to a standstill behind the closed doors of the elevator. The last time he’d heard such a thing, he was sitting drinking beer with The Howlies, his old friends. Bucky smiled sadly, and wiped away a stray tear as he shook his head, then stepped out of the elevator. Sam, was the first one to notice him from across the room, with a wide grin on his face.

“Here he is!”

“Sorry I'm a little late,” Bucky murmured.

“Welcome, my friend!” Thor greeted.

The brunette laughed.
“Thanks Thor.”

“What are we watching anyway?” Clint asked.

Bucky looked around the room for somewhere to sit, with the only available spot being next to Tony, on what seemed like the smallest two person couch ever. He walked past Steve and Sam, who were sharing a bigger couch, throwing smug smirks his way, ever since they’d caught on to Bucky’s secret. Natasha smiled at him from where she sat in an armchair, offering him a bowl of popcorn on the way, which Bucky gladly accepted. Then there was Rhodey, Clint, Thor and Bruce took up the remaining chairs in the room. He could’ve gone for settling with the floor, if it didn’t look incredibly uninviting. But then Tony may have gotten suspicious, it’d be weird if he suddenly tried to avoid sitting by Tony after they were becoming closer as friends.

“Bucky gets to choose,” Tony interjected.

“Me?”

“This is your first night into our little tradition here. It’s only fair,” he said.

“I haven’t seen Star Wars yet.”

Clint stared at him with wide eyes.

“What! You haven’t seen any?”

“Sorry, I meant I haven’t seen The Force Awakens,” Bucky answered.

“Oh good, I was going to be disappointed in you Barnes.”

Bucky rolled his eyes.

“Trust me Barton, I had a lot of time to watch movies. Thanks to Bruce.”

Bruce smiled.

“You’re welcome Bucky.”

“Well sit down, eat your popcorn and shut up because you’re going to watch this and enjoy it,” Clint replied.

“Hm, I’ll judge that when I see it.”

Tony glanced up at Bucky when he approached the couch, his eyes filling with the brightness that Bucky began to notice whenever he was around.

“Hi honey.”

Sam elicited a loud snort from the other side of the room, since Tony calling him ‘honey’ in his own joking way became a thing.

“Hey,” Bucky drawled, with a sweet smile. “I need to sit on the couch with you. The floor isn't lookin’ too comfortable,” he added.

“Oh, okay. It's going to be a squeeze.”

Tony tried his best to move further over on the side he was sitting on, but failed miserably. Bucky
then attempted to sit on the opposite side, but ended up bumping shoulders with Tony anyway. The pair stared at each other from the short distance between them, body warmth radiating off both of them, yet Bucky was the one that sat there with a pink tinge to his cheeks.

“Sorry.”

“This is never going to work, I can take the floor” Tony mumbled, while waving his hand between them.

Bucky scowled and put the bowl of popcorn down on the coffee table.

“Gimme the damn blanket.”

“Uh, what?” the brunette said.

“Give me, the blanket.”

Tony handed Bucky the other half of the blanket, watching him wrap it around himself, then shift around until he was pressed up against him. He raised an eyebrow as Bucky reached for the popcorn, placed it in his lap and swung his left arm over the back of the couch. His fingers lightly grazed Tony's shoulder in the process, making the brunette's skin tingle.

“This is only gonna’ work if you and I cuddle Tony,” Bucky stated, bluntly.

“Yeah, I can see that.”

Bucky grinned, before leaning in.

“Haven't had someone to cuddle with in a long time.”

Tony choked out a scoff, through a mouth full of popcorn.

“I'm the best cuddle buddy you're ever going to have James Barnes.”

“Don't let me down then,” he hummed.

“Time for everyone to be quiet the movie is starting!” Rhodey exclaimed, as he switched the lights in the room off.

The only thing illuminating everyone's faces was the light of the TV screen.

“You're going to love this one,” Tony whispered.

When the main theme song for Star Wars sounded in the room, Bucky felt go tense beside him. But upon glancing over at him, he saw Tony focused on the screen, like a kid seeing their favourite movie for the first time. It brought on that warm sensation in his chest, some deep adoration from seeing Tony look happy.

“This part always gives me chills,” he mumbled.

“Really? Hadn't noticed,” Bucky teased.

Tony gently elbowed Bucky and grabbed more popcorn.

“I loved these movies growing up. You can imagine how excited I was when they announced this one.”
“Y’know, I really can't imagine it,” the brunette uttered.

“It was-” Tony paused, with a sigh. “...everything I could have asked for. These movies were an escape for me,” he continued.

Bucky started stroking Tony's shoulder in small circular motions.

“I get it. We all want that escape.”

Tony chuckled under his breath.

“I was crazy for it. My room had the posters and I had toys, all that crap a kid wants to show how much they love something.”

“That's kinda' cute,” Bucky mused.

“You want to know something?”

“What?” he asked.

“I still have it all,” Tony confessed.

Bucky covered his mouth to stifle a laugh, yet found himself giving in too easily and breaking down into fits of laughter, alongside Tony, who was leaning into him more.

“Shh!”

Tony bit down on his bottom lip to hide his laughter after everyone else in the room made it clear they wanted silence during the movie. He felt Bucky’s arm tighten around him, as if signalling that he wanted him to stay right there, close to his side. And it was something Tony could definitely get used to.

“This will begin to make things right…”

---

Tony was wide awake at midnight. The sheets on the bed were tossed to the side, with pillows messily scattered across the expanse of the mattress. He’d only managed to sleep for two hours before his brain started to overwork, waking him from a semi-peaceful slumber. Not that it wasn’t anything Tony didn’t grow used to, it was part of his life for years now. But instead of it being nightmares, it was something completely different plaguing his mind. He looked out at the view of the city from his window, reflection staring back at him, tired and aging.

A few hours ago after watching four movies in a row, everyone retired to bed. Braveheart was the last movie they watched, and the final scene was where Tony heard Bucky muffle a sniffle into his sleeve. His eyes had become glassy before the tears streaked his cheeks, a side to Bucky that Tony hadn’t exactly witnessed yet. Of course, Bucky was emotional that week Tony remained in hospital, but seeing it again made him see just how much his new friend expressed himself, without hiding. Tony should have hated to admit it, but he was feeling lonely without Bucky being beside him.

Then, as if by chance, the bedroom door creaked open, revealing Bucky on the other side. Tony still faced the window, given that he could see Bucky’s figure in the reflection of the window, while also wondering why he was there. Bucky tossed a pillow onto the bed, more specifically, his, going by the red patterns against the black. They were the ones Tony picked out for him after he moved into Avengers Tower, everything in Bucky’s room was done by him.
“Hey...thought you might be awake,” Bucky spoke, faintly.

Tony cast his eyes downward, exhaling a sigh.

“Couldn’t sleep.”

“Me neither,” the brunette replied.

“So you came here?”

Bucky shrugged.

“I thought if anyone else was gonna’ be awake, it'd be you.”

“Guess you were right about that huh,” Tony said.

“I guess I was.”

Tony wrapped his arms around himself as he continued to look down, his hands absently rubbing up and down his bare skin.

“Did you like our movie tradition? he asked.

“Yeah, I did, it was great,” Bucky chimed.

The brunette nodded languidly.

“Hm, good.”

Bucky slowly walked towards Tony, feet padding softly on the wooden floor when he stepped off the rug.

“What’re you thinkin’ about?” he questioned.

Tony lifted his head in time to see Bucky behind him, standing in his personal space, which he didn’t exactly object to. Half of Bucky’s face was lit by the moonlight, the other half cast in the shadow because of the angle Tony was standing at. His eyes looked almost grey in the light, shining vividly despite the dark circles under them. But he was... beautiful, a simple word that's been running through Tony's head whenever he saw Bucky. He wouldn't lie to himself and say that there wasn’t anything different, since he and Tony spent time together. Everything, was different now.

“Hey, tell me.”

The brunette averted his gaze from Bucky’s reflection and shook his head, after Bucky put his hand on his shoulder.

“I can’t do this anymore.”


“It’s hard to explain.”

“Tell me in a way that’ll make me understand,” he suggested.
Tony laughed, dryly.

“I can’t keep pretending everything is okay, that I can keep dancing around all the things that are starting to change. It’s too much. And I don’t even know what I’m saying. But there’s only so much I can take. Now it just...wants to get out,” he rambled.

Bucky slid his hand down Tony’s arm and squeezed it.

“Y’know, if you’ve gotta’ get things off your chest, I’m all ears Tony.”

“That’s exactly why I can’t do it. You’re the damn reason Bucky,” the brunette uttered.

He felt Bucky’s hand fall from his arm.

“So...I’m the problem?”

Tony spun around abruptly.

“No! That’s not- ah!”

He groaned in frustration, then dropped his head against the brunette’s chest.

“...you’re never a problem.”

Bucky sighed and rested his hand on Tony’s back, rubbing small circles in the centre for consolation.

“Then what did you mean?” he replied.

Tony’s hand found its way to Bucky’s waist as he tried to think of the best way to share what he’d been thinking. It’d gone on for too long, and he knew it was unhealthy for both his mind and his heart to keep it bottled up any longer than it should be.

“You already know I’m terrible with showing some emotions. Yet, lately whenever I’m around you I feel like I can do it, a lot. Look, things haven’t been easy for either of us, like before you started living here and after I had my heart attack. But, there’s...something that’s been eating away at me since I visited you when you were getting your evaluation, then when you moved in. All of the simple things you did, bringing me food, talking to me while I worked, and after that, caring about when I took my medication. Those little things woke that feeling up so much that it won’t go away.”

“Tony…please, tell me,” Bucky pleaded.

The brunette pulled his head away from Bucky’s chest and let out a choked exhale of breath.

“I love you.”

Bucky’s eyes were wide in surprise, his hand stilling on Tony’s back as he gaped at him. Tony, felt exactly how Bucky did about him and Bucky could only do the one thing he’d longed to do for months.

“Sorry, shit, I’m sorry,” Tony said, in a panic.

“Shut up Stark.”

Tony’s brows knitted together for a brief moment, before Bucky leaned in, covering his mouth with
his own in a **passionate** and **sincere** kiss. He was pushed back by Bucky’s body pressing on his, back hitting the window, with the brunette’s hand held behind his head to soften the impact. Bucky’s metal hand was against the window, above Tony’s head, as he clenched his hands into the fabric of Bucky’s shirt. Tony gave as much back to the kiss that Bucky was, tilting his head at a different angle to deepen the kiss. Bucky breathed in deeply through his nose, then wrapped his arm around Tony’s waist, dragging him close to his chest. His hand slipped under Tony’s shirt, brushing over his hip and up his ribs, making the brunette gasp faintly into the kiss.

When they parted, Bucky placed his forehead to Tony’s, breathing heavily as he drew in his bottom lip. He caressed his thumb over Tony’s lips and closed his eyes to savour the entire moment that unfolded. Their noses bumped together, to which Tony trailed his fingers across Bucky’s jaw, and then moved in for more. Bucky compiled by hoisted Tony up into his arms with ease, before maneuvering his way to the bed while still kissing Tony. He gently laid Tony down on the bed and crawled into the space between the brunette’s legs, grasping one of his thighs, which caused Tony to moan softly.

“Bucky,” Tony breathed out, huskily.

The brunette hummed, as he peppered kisses down Tony’s neck.

“Wait,” he said.

Bucky stopped immediately.

“What is it?”

Tony smiled and smoothed down a crease in Bucky’s shirt.

“As much as I want to do this, I want to slow it down.”

“Oh,” Bucky murmured.

“I really, and I mean really want you James. But there’s another part of me that doesn't want to rush it with the possibility of screwing it up not long after.”

“You don’t need to explain it to me, Tony. I’m not gonna’ force you into anythin’,” he assured.

“You're perfect,” Tony whispered.

Bucky shook his head with a scoff.

“I'm nothin’ like it.”

“Not what I meant. I think you're perfect with your perfections _and_ imperfections,” he retorted.

“Likewise.”

Tony pulled Bucky back in for a brief, chaste kiss.

“I think I should go back to bed. Stay?”

“Okay sweetheart,” Bucky crooned.

They untangled themselves from each other, then grabbed the pillows to place back up at the headboard, whilst bringing the bedsheets with them. Bucky tucked his arm under his own pillow, intently watching Tony get comfortable. Both of them were now facing each other, just a few
inches apart, with their hands meeting in the middle.

“What’re you staring at,” Tony chided.

Bucky brushed his thumb across Tony's knuckles.

“Ever since I took over being Iron Man...I've started to understand you in the process Tony. I understand why you did this, you want to do what's right, protect the people you care about, but also protect the innocents from all the bad in the world. You felt you had to redeem yourself, for something you didn't even have control over. Because you thought you could trust this person and they screwed you over Tony. But I see why you became him, Iron Man. You're a damn hero for that, suit or not.”

Tony nodded as Bucky wiped away a tear from the brunette’s cheek.

“I really needed to hear that,” he said.

Bucky's lips met Tony's again, with a light *smacking* sound, fingers threading through silky, brunette hair.

“You deserve the truth.”

Tony yawned and covered his mouth, as Bucky chuckled.

“Go to sleep Tony.”

He saw Tony's mouth twitch up.

“Can't believe I'm sharing my bed with someone so bossy.”

“Hey,” Bucky grunted, playfully.

“Guess we have something in common.”

“Yeah sure,” the brunette snorted.

Bucky yanked the sheets up over their shoulders, then shifted towards Tony, before slipping his arm around the brunette's waist to cuddle with him.

“Not usually a cuddler, but you, are so warm,” Tony drawled, as he closed his eyes.

“I know.”

“Mm. Goodnight, honey,” he mumbled, sleepily.

Bucky grinned widely.

“G’night, I'll see you in the mornin’.”

Tony sighed contently.

“I hope so, or your ass is toast.”

Bucky bit back a laugh.

“Whatever you say, Tony.”
It didn't take long for Bucky to drift off to sleep, holding Tony in his arms, right where he belonged.

"Good morning Mr Stark."

Tony groaned.

“What time is it J?”

“Nine, sir.”

“What! You didn’t think to wake me up earlier?”

“You had a guest, I thought more rest might do good for you.”

The brunette glanced over at Bucky, sleeping in the bed beside him, with his hair covering up his face, which made Tony snort.

“Oh, right... that happened,” he replied.

“It went well then, Mr Stark?”

Tony’s mouth curved into a smile.

“Yeah, it did.”

“Shall I have the coffee brewed for you downstairs?”

“No, it’s okay. I’m going to have a shower, then wake Bucky up. Y’know what, take a rest J, you’ve earned it, recharge your batteries,” Tony said.

“Thank you, sir.”

Bucky stirred beside Tony, eliciting a loud yawn as he opened his eyes, then squinted from the sunlight coming through the window. He looked over at Tony and smiled tiredly, while running his hand over his face.

“Mornin’.”

Tony chuckled.

“Morning, sleep okay?”

“I did, better than I ever have,” Bucky answered.

“Really?”

“Must’ve been ‘cause I was here with you,” he hummed.

“Oh my god are you secretly a sap?” Tony teased.

Bucky smirked.

“Get used to it babe.”

“Honey, I plan to,” he replied.
Tony stood up from the bed, stretched his arms above his head, then made his way over to the bathroom door.

“I’m going to jump in the shower. You want in when I’m done?”

“Sure,” Bucky said.

He rubbed his eyes sleepily, before pushing himself in an upright position, with his pillows pressed against his back. Bucky glanced over at his phone on the nightstand to check the time, but having a more relaxed reaction to it than Tony had. For a Sunday, it was a good time to be awake, a few extra forty winks wouldn’t do him any harm, even though he desperately needed it. The recollection of the previous night wasn’t too far from his mind, only making Bucky glow with happiness.

His gaze drifted to the bathroom, where the door was still left ajar, giving Bucky a clear view of Tony standing there. The brunette started chewing on his bottom lip when Tony stripped his shirt off, tossing it carelessly to the side. He shouldn’t have been peeping on Tony in the shower, he truly shouldn’t be. But, if that gorgeous body of his didn’t get him so hot under the collar of his non-existent shirt that disappeared during last night, it wouldn’t have been a problem. Now it was a problem, to the point where Bucky couldn’t keep his eyes off Tony even as he dressed down to his underwear. Only disappointment hit him when Tony stepped into the shower, took his boxer briefs off and tossed them over the top of the shower.

However, then it only made Bucky wonder if Tony knew that he was watching. Bucky’s cheeks and neck were flushed red at the thought, because they had talked about going slow with...whatever it was. Not that Bucky would object to some occasional ‘checking out’ of one another, clothed or not. I’m way in over my head he thought to himself, as he tried to distract himself with his phone. But seeing the silhouette of Tony in the shower, only drew him back to staring like he was watching a very interesting movie.

“Hey James?”

Bucky almost dropped his phone over the bed when Tony’s voice called out.

“Yeah?” he called back.

“I had a crazy thought. Why don’t we just share this shower and save some water?”

The brunette’s eyebrows rose in surprise.

“Uh...are you sure?”

“I can see you peeping at me in here,” Tony sniped, in a pleased tone.

“Oh...oh my god. I’m sorry, I know we said we’d take this slow, but the door was open and-”

Bucky was stopped by Tony letting out a loud laugh.

“I planned that. Now get in here or I won’t massage this amazing shampoo through your greasy hair,” the brunette protested.

“It’s not gre-” Bucky paused, as he ran his hand through his hair. “...nevermind, I take it back,” he added.

The brunette fumbled out of his sweatpants and sauntered into the bathroom, whilst pulling his
boxers down as well. He threw them to the side as he opened the shower door, then walked in. The steam from the shower dispersed to give Bucky a clearer view of Tony, even with the arc reactor glowing through it.

“There you are.”

Tony gave Bucky a once over, eyes scanning him up and down until a grin appeared on his face.

“Get over here,” he demanded.

Bucky cornered Tony against the wall, hands on either side of the brunette’s head, with his head hanging low touch Tony’s. His mouth found Tony’s without hesitation, one hand cupping the back of the brunette’s head to hold him steady. Tony moaned into the kiss, allowing his hands to slide down the length of Bucky’s back, fingers brushing featherlight touches to his lower back.

“Thought we were goin’ slow sweetheart,” Bucky breathed out, after pulling away from the kiss.

“So I can’t tease you huh?”

“Tony...” he sighed.

Tony snickered, then pressed a tender kiss to Bucky’s lips.

“Trust me, I’m eager for a piece of you too, but I am so hungry right now I really need food.”

Bucky shook his head and smiled.

“Always thinkin’ with your stomach.”

“Admit it, you’re hungry too,” Tony stated.

“I’m feeling two types of hunger.”

The way Bucky practically pursed into Tony’s ear, sent a shiver down his spine.

“Stop stalling. Now turn around, you’ll love me after this. Soft hair is great,” he said.

“Fine.”

Bucky turned his back to Tony, tilted his head back for him and enjoyed the feeling of Tony’s fingers raking through his hair, massaging the shampoo gently into his hair.

“Mmm, Tony, I love you.”

Tony felt a slight pinch of euphoria wash over him, since that was the first time he’d heard those words from Bucky. So he snaked his arms around Bucky from behind and whispered into his ear.

“I know.”

“Bucky they knew we were coming, the building is going to collapse if you don't get out of there!”

“I have to go back and download that data, it's gonna’ be lost if I don't get it!”

“Forget the data! We can find another way to track them down. I'm not having you risk your life for this! And I don't want anyone else on the team to risk it by trying to get you out of there either!”
“I didn’t ask you to Tony!”

“Are you insane?”

Tony could see Bucky flying back towards the room where the alarm had been tripped. Explosives were scattered throughout the building, ready to detonate using a timer. Yet, Bucky refused to leave empty handed when they were so close to tracing yet another A.I.M base that supposedly had ties with Hydra, before it became compromised.

“Bucky please listen to me. This is dangerous!”

“Isn't my suit designed for heavy impact?”

“I can't believe you're being so ignorant about this! Yes, your suit is designed to withstand some damage, but not tonnes of concrete and equipment that's inside the building!”

“I'm almost there I can make it.”

“In ten minutes, like hell you can!”

Bucky dropped down to the floor, in the room filled with computers storing important data which could supposedly aid them in tracking down the actual A.I.M base. But with every second, the timer ticked down, and Bucky was only one step closer to being buried under rubble.

“I'm begging you right now, get out of there!”

“I'm scanning the computers for the right one.”

“It doesn't matter! You're wasting time!”

Tony covered his face with his hands, as he sat at a workbench in the workshop, panic quickly rising inside him. He knocked several tools off his bench in a fit of rage.

“Shit! C'mon Bucky!”

“Jackpot, found it!”

“I don't care if you found it! Get the hell out of there now Barnes!”

“Just five minutes!”

“You don't have five minutes! You're being idiotic!”

“Idiotic? I'm tryin’ to hell Tony! Don't you get it!”

“No! I don't get it when you life is in danger!”

Bucky shook his head and went back to working on the computer, trying to scan the data with the limited time he had.

“Bucky!”

“What?”

Suddenly, a loud boom echoed off the walls as the ground rumbled below Bucky.

“Get out now!”
Tony saw fire spread wildly up the building, smoke and flames billowing to the floor Bucky was on. The walls started to crack and burst open from the force of the explosion, destroying equipment in its wake. Bucky ripped the storage device out of the computer, only to turn around in time to see the floor cave in. Without any time to escape, he fell through the hole in the floor.

Debris followed after him, falling at a speed that gave him no hope of missing. A piece battered his suit, disengaging the thrusters and anything that allowed Bucky to fly. The room above started to disappear the further he plummeted, orange flames and black smoke being the only visible thing he could see. When he hit the ground, all that was heard was a grunt of agony...then silence.

No, no, no!"

Tony's eyes filled with tears when Bucky disappeared under the rubble, hands trembling while choking back pained sobs.

“James!”

Tony gasped and flinched as he brought himself out of a terrible memory and back to reality. It was a cold Wednesday night, snow lightly blanketed the streets of Manhattan in sheets of white, just in time for the holiday season. Decorations already lined the streets, there was no holding back the festive spirit now. Even as Tony stood outside the hospital, it also had decorations and a tree in the lobby.

He was waiting for Bucky to be discharged, after he spent almost a week there. With the mission going south and Bucky being seriously injured, things had been at a standstill. Tony was hell bent on making sure Bucky got out of that rubble alive, which he did...barely. He even broke the rule of no more flying his suits, just to get to where Bucky would have needed him the most. Everybody swept it under the carpet, never to be dragged out again, because Tony only wanted to help the man he loved.

Despite Bucky having the super soldier serum, it wasn't as strong as it once was, thus Bucky needed that week to heal. Tony wasn't sure what to expect when Bucky walked out of the hospital, all he knew was that he'd probably look like hell. As he leant against the driver side door of his car, Tony replied to texts from everyone asking how Bucky was and when they were getting home. He had to apologise profusely when notifying them that they'd be making a detour on the way home. But Tony really wanted some alone time with Bucky before going home.

Tony looked up in time to see Bucky step through the doors, thanking the nurse who held the door open for him. He appeared tired, but otherwise seemed a lot better than Tony thought he would be. The brunette walked across the street towards Tony, his right arm held in a sling because of fractures and a slight limp in his walk. His face had bruises and scrapes, but the fact that he was still alive brought a much needed smile to Tony's face.

“Hey sweetheart,” Bucky greeted.

“Hi, how you feeling honey?”

“Better than I was,” he sighed.

“You look better than you did.”

Bucky rolled his eyes.

“Thanks.”
“I’m being serious Bucky, you could’ve died. You’re lucky you didn’t,” Tony lectured.

“I know...I’m sorry Tony. Can we talk about this later?”

Tony tilted his head up when Bucky moved in closer and kissed him tenderly.

“Alright. But we’re making a detour before we go home,” he said.

“Okay, where are we goin’?” Bucky asked.

“Can’t tell you.”

“Aw, c’mon,” the brunette groaned.

“Get in the car.”

Bucky muttered to himself, before opening the passenger side door, while Tony walked around to get in the driver’s side. He settled into the seat with a contented sigh, relishing the comfort of the inside of Tony’s car to what he had in the hospital. Tony glanced over at him and grinned, as he turned the key in the ignition.

“Happy to be out of there?” he questioned.

“Like you wouldn’t believe.”

Tony chuckled softly.

“I missed you.”

“Aw,” Bucky crooned.

“Don’t make me regret saying it.”

“Missed you too babe,” he said.

Bucky reached over to take Tony’s hand, holding it firmly, before they drove away from the hospital. He gazed out of the window at the snow covered road and the decorations, with a wide smile on his face. It’d been a long time since he’d seen anything related to Christmas, let alone experienced one where he was around people he’d come to care about. Now that there was also something there between himself and Tony, it made it all the more exciting.

“I can sense what you’re thinking,” Tony spoke up.

“I didn’t even-”

“You were going to ask me where we’re going again,” he replied.

“What the hell, how did you know that!”

Tony shrugged.

“Must know you better than you think.”

The brunette let out a disgruntled huff.

“Maybe...”
They started to drive into the Western side of Manhattan, then parked up to the curb, to which Bucky looked outside to see barren streets.

“Okay, you really need to tell me where we’re going/ Please,” he begged.

Tony got out of the car, with Bucky following close behind, as he walked around to meet the brunette on his side of the car, before pointing upwards.

“Remember I said I’d take you to the High Line.”

“Oh. Are we really going up there?” Bucky gasped.

“Sure are, it’s beautiful up there, trust me.”

Bucky laced his fingers together with Tony’s.

“I trust you.”

Tony guided Bucky over to the closest access to the High Line, allowing him to go first. They walked up together, hand in hand, but Tony tagged along behind so that Bucky could get the first glimpse of the view overlooking the city. Bucky’s hand loosened from Tony’s when they reached the top, eyes widening a fraction at the picturesque scene before him. He turned back to Tony, who was wandering further down the path to a bench where a basket was sitting. The brunette followed and sidled up to Tony’s side, staring down at the basket with food and wine inside.

“Did you do this?” Bucky inquired.

“Little help from our good friends Rhodey and Steve.”

“Should’ve known,” he scoffed, with a breathy laugh.

“And your face looked disappointed when I said we were making a detour,” Tony said.

Bucky frowned.

“I didn’t know we were comin’ here.”

He wrapped his metal arm around Tony, pulling him close to his chest.

“Thank you.”

Tony smoothed his hands over Bucky’s shoulders and combed his fingers through Bucky’s hair.

“You’re welcome, honey.”

“So...that wine isn’t gonna’ drink itself is it?” Bucky drawled.

“Guess not. It’s an Italian white wine, I hope you’re fine with that.”

“Sounds great,” he hummed.

Bucky sat down on the bench, watching Tony pour some wine into a glass for him. Tony sat down beside him, offered the wine, then swung his arm around the back of the bench, lightly brushing his fingers on Bucky’s back. The brunette looked down at the wine, took a sip gingerly, then sighed tiredly.
“Hey, what’s wrong?” Tony asked.

“I’m...startin’ to question whether I’m cut out for being Iron Man.”

“What do you mean? You’re awesome out there on the field,” he commented.

“After that last mission, I don’t think I deserve to be a superhero. I didn’t listen to anything you were saying to be. It was dangerous and I almost got myself killed for it...which would have hurt you. That’s the last thing I want Tony.”

Tony laid his hand down on Bucky’s thigh.

“Listen to me, you were only doing what you thought was right. Yes, I was angry, if the building wasn’t about to be toppled I would have been calm about it. But you got trapped Bucky.”

“I’m so sorry,” Bucky apologised.

“Don’t. I’m sorry for saying you were being idiotic. You’re nothing like that Bucky, I was too angry to think about what I was saying. You were pretty much doing what I used to do, took a risk, but we learn from those...eventually. I’m relieved you’re okay and I’m proud of you for doing what you thought was right.”

“Did you salvage any data?” he queried.

“Every last bit of data you found, I managed to recover it,” Tony answered.

Relief washed over Bucky’s face.

“You’re a genius.”

“Don’t feed my ego James,” he laughed.

Bucky laughed with him until he closed the distance between them, kissing Tony chastely. He put his glass down to the side, cupped the brunette’s face and kissed him deeper, causing Tony to almost spill some wine when his arm slid around the back of Bucky’s neck.

“I love you,” Bucky whispered huskily, his breath ghosting on Tony’s lips.

“I love you too. And don’t you ever doubt yourself about being Iron Man. From the first time I asked you that I believed in you...I still do.”

“I know you do,” he said.

“Good.”

They parted and started digging into the food, some of it being Tony’s favourites, the others, Bucky’s favourites. Bucky wiped a fleck of snow from Tony’s forehead, receiving a smile in return, one he couldn’t tear his eyes from.

“Tony.”

“Mhm?” Tony muttered, through a mouthful of food.

“Are we, y’know...official yet?”

Tony popped a slice of provolone cheese into his mouth.
“Do you want to be?”

“Yes, but I don't want you to feel pressured to go public with it so soon,” Bucky reasoned.

“I won't feel like that. Honestly, I was going to ask you the same thing. We don't need to hide Bucky, I want this.”

“Are you sure?” he mumbled.

Tony's hand tucked some of Bucky's hair behind his ear, then rested on his cheek.

“I'm positive.”

Bucky placed his hand over Tony's arc reactor.

“I'm yours then.”

Tony embraced Bucky briefly, then held his glass out towards the brunette.

“To us!” he cheered.

The pair smiled affectionately at each other, as they clinked their glasses gently. Bucky allowed Tony to snuggle into his side, while he admired the stars in the sky, with the city of Manhattan glowing brightly behind them.

“And to new beginnings…”

---

End Notes

Catch me on tumblr at my main blog [right here](#) or my new side blog [right here](#), that I post on from time to time!

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