Hiding in Plain Sight

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Summary

After Tony Stark is kidnapped, his parents send him into hiding while they try to find the perpetrator. Tony is dropped into a high school in the middle of nowhere without his two best friends Pepper and Rhodey. Even though Tony is traumatized and determined to stay safe, a group of persistent high schoolers wiggle their way into his life anyway. He is supposed to keep a low profile, and he is definitely not supposed to be fantasizing about Steve Rogers: the school's football captain. Steve’s kind smiles and fierce attitude make avoidance impossible, and he is pretty sure that Natasha Romanov will kill him if he tries to run away from this. It seems like his life is going to change whether he wants it to or not.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Tony adjusted his glasses and frowned at his reflection. He hadn’t liked looking in the mirror since the incident. His hair was too long and it curled around his ears. His face had barely visible scars that weren’t there before. His eyes looked older and it bothered him. Everything about him had been off since the day of his abduction. He didn’t feel like himself anymore. Everything he used to enjoy felt foreign and his fragile social relationships had withered away until he only had two friends left. He buttoned up his shirt and tugged at the collar. He looked worse than he normally did, and he felt like he was looking at a stranger in the mirror. His normal band shirt and ripped jeans were replaced with a button up, glasses, and pressed pants. He looked like an idiot. He couldn’t wear tee shirts in public anymore anyway with the gruesome scars that decorated his tan skin.

“Young sir. I’m afraid if we don’t depart soon; you will be late for your first day of school.” Jarvis said flashing Tony with a sympathetic expression. Tony rolled his eyes at the butler. Tony had graduated from MIT before he got abducted; it was ridiculous that he was being forced into hiding under the guise of being a senior in high school. His genius was the main reason he was being forced into his stupid nerd getup. Without a disguise, it was all too easy to recognize the boy as the famous Anthony Stark. Albeit, a roughed up, messed up, broken Anthony Stark. Maria and Jarvis had insisted that Tony go into hiding after the incident. Tony had fought hard, but in reality, he was kind of grateful to get away from the prying eyes of the media. He didn’t need his brokenness broadcasted across America. At the moment, the world thought Tony was studying at his father’s business in Japan. They knew he was kidnapped and then discovered, but that’s where their Intel ended. Even the police records of the incident were quickly deleted from the database. No one knew about the extent of everything. No one knew about the torture he went through. Everyone had asked; the media, Howard, Jarvis, Pepper and Rhodey. He hadn’t told any of them. Telling someone would make it real, he wouldn’t be able to compartmentalize and pretend he was fine if there was someone to call him out on it.

“Come on, Jarvis. Cool kids get to school late.” Tony sassed flashing a smile at the stone-faced butler. Tony knew that on the inside Jarvis loved his sense of humor. There would be no reason to put up with him otherwise. No amount of money could convince people to stay with Tony for too long. He learned that lesson twice from the only romantic relationships he had ever been in. The girl was after his company secrets and the boy -who was kept a secret from the media- wanted Tony to finance his every whim. He took advantage of Tony’s giving nature and reaped the benefits for about three months before he couldn’t take hanging around Tony anymore. No one could stand being in a relationship with him. A tentative friendship was extremely rare. A relationship was impossible.

“I believe your alias would not be considered a cool kid.” Jarvis deadpanned. He handed the boy genius an apple, which he promptly put on the table in exchange for a cup of coffee. Jarvis gave him a disapproving look but didn’t comment. He knew that Tony would be more cooperative with some coffee in him. He had long ago abandoned trying to reprimand the ridiculous genius.

Tony gave a mock gasp as he turned back to Jarvis, “You wound me, J. I’m cool in every form.” Jarvis made a noise of disbelief, which Tony ignored in favor of kneeling down to one of his bots. “Dummy loves me, don’t you boy?” Tony coaxed, petting the robot. The robot gave a whirl in agreement and Tony turned back to Jarvis with a smug expression on his face, “See.” Jarvis opened the door and motioned for Tony to exit. Tony pranced out the door and smiled when he looked at his car. It wasn’t his prized Audi of course; it would be too conspicuous for him to roll
Tony saluted Jarvis, got in the car, and drove off. He drew in a sharp breath when he realized that this might be the last time he saw Jarvis for a long time. Jarvis was too well known as his butler. He couldn’t be seen around Tony Scott: the innocent nerdy senior. Tony fought off his anguish at watching his loving father figure disappear in his rear-view mirror. He wasn’t as upset about not being able to see Howard or Maria. They were never really around anyway; he had been going to college where they never bothered to visit. Jarvis made the drive as much as possible and it always choked Tony up when he thought about the care the old man showed him.

Tony was ecstatic to find out that he was allowed to have contact with his best and only two friends. No one knew about Rhodey because the media was more interested in his inventions than his personal life during his time at MIT. Pepper as an extension was also excluded from the media’s attention. It helped that almost all encounters with Pepper that the media caught were arguments. The media wrongly assumed that she was a jilted lover and didn’t even bother to run the story. Tony Stark the obnoxious hetero playboy was old news to anyone with a television set. No one considered that he entered MIT as a small innocent fifteen-year-old that had exactly zero people waiting in line to jump him. They assumed that the girls filtering out of Tony’s room (all Rhodey’s fault. He was like the entire campus therapist. He was nice that way.) in various stages of undress, were Tony’s conquests.

The first-time Tony met Rhodey, he was drunk off his ass. He was blasting ACDC, lying on his bed, and probably crying. He had gotten in an argument with Howard that he couldn’t really remember, but it had upset fifteen-year-old him quite a lot. Rhodey walked into the room and promptly walked out. Tony figured he had already fucked up his relationship with his roommate which only made him cry harder because how was he so bad at making friends? Was he really as horrible at socializing as Howard told him? Tony was shocked when Rhodey returned with a large box of tissues and a hangover concoction that the boy next door apparently had down to a pat. Rhodey didn’t turn off his music which was an instant love connection in Tony’s book. He just sat down next to Tony and waited for the boy to calm down. They had a heartfelt conversation which ended with Tony spilling all of his insecurities to a boy he barely knew. When it sunk in, Tony was so horrified that he promptly passed out. He woke up with an Advil and hangover concoction on the table next to him. Taped to his chest was a note that read – ‘You aren’t the dick I thought you were going to be. Let’s hang out when you aren’t super drunk. You seem pretty cool. James Rhodes.’ They had been best friends ever since.

Pepper was more of an accident. Pepper was one of Rhodey’s many friends. Rhodey had to go visit Mamma Rhodes one weekend and was worried about Tony blowing himself up and setting fire to their dorm room. In all fairness, Tony only set fire to the dorm once and it was small. He put it out quickly enough so that the only thing it burned were Rhodey’s textbooks. He paid for them of course so no harm done. Rhodey didn’t see it that way. Rhodey called Pepper and asked her to babysit him. Pepper upon seeing the fifteen-year-old enveloped in a huge MIT sweatshirt was instantly struck with the desire to protect him. Tony hadn’t liked her in the beginning until one day she was scanning over his calculations and pointed out a math mistake he made when he was drunk. From that day on Virginia became Pepper and the two were inseparable.

Tony pulled into the parking lot of the school. He hoped the school had a well-stocked science lab or he was going to pitch a fit. It physically pained him to waste so much time going to school when he could be a home inventing and working. Maria was convinced that the only way he would go
undetected was to blend in, and a teenage recluse living alone and not going to school didn’t really constitute blending in. Someone would find him that way. They were looking for someone in hiding, not a high school kid.

Tony bit his lip as he grabbed his bag and climbed out of the car. He had been briefed about what high school was like from Rhodey. Apparently, it sucked. And Rhodey was a jock and popular! He assured Tony that life as a nerd would be much worse. High school was the one aspect of childhood that he wasn’t bitter about missing.

He strolled into the front doors and his eyes widened at the sounds that assaulted him. Everyone was talking, laughs and jeers could be heard from all directions. Tony closed his eyes suddenly overstimulated. His captivity had gotten him so used to the utter lack of noise and visuals that he was still scared by touch and loud sounds when he didn’t know they were coming. After all, it had only really been about two weeks since he was rescued, and most of that time was spent in a hospital bed and (a useless) debriefing with the police. He hadn’t had anytime to try and work on his irrational fear of loud noises, and people touching him, and the sound and feel and sight of water. At least Anthony Stark had none of those fears. It was just another detail that would separate his two identities.

He startled when he felt a hand touch his shoulder. His heart seemed to stop and for a moment his eyes widened and he wasn’t seeing school hallways; he was seeing pain and blood and darkness and water everywhere. He blinked and it was gone. He blinked again and then turned to look at the person who touched him. He wasn’t particularly tall. His eyes were framed by faint smile lines and his hair was styled back. He didn’t look like he was going to attack Tony, so Tony just stared at him with a puzzled expression. What did this random kid want?

“Hey, are you new? I’m Coulson, Phil Coulson. I’m a junior.” Tony grinned a little at the James Bond reference. This Phil seemed like a cool enough guy. Maybe he could help him find his way to his first class. Tony despite his genius was not very good about navigating new places.

“Okay Agent. I’m Tony Scott. Do you think maybe you could help me find my way to English class? I’m a senior by the way.” Tony pushed up his glasses as he waited for the boy to respond. He hoped he would say yes. He was kind of scared about navigating the hallway alone. Filled with people, someone could touch him, touch touch touch. Tony felt like vomiting and he hoped his green face was coming off as normal first day nerd jitters to the other boy. The last thing he wanted was to blow his cover with the first person he met. Normal high school kids didn’t have extreme cases of PTSD.

“Of course,” Phil grabbed the paper from his hands and read over his schedule. He took off without a warning directly into the sea of people. Tony closed his eyes and stumbled blindly forward. He tried not to squeak when he came in contact with a hard chest. He felt hands grab his shoulders and shove him to the ground. His glasses fell off and Tony opened his eyes desperately. The boy in front of him was blurry, and Tony was too terrified to move and grab his glasses.

“Watch where you’re going, nerd.” The boy disappeared back into the crowd, and Tony barely managed to hide his flinch when Phil grabbed his arm to pull him back to his feet.

“You should be careful Tony. You don’t want to get on his bad side. He’s on the football team and he’s wicked popular. Also, his biceps are like the size of your face.” Tony blinked at the other boy but didn’t say anything “Never mind. Let’s just get you to class okay? Oh and by the way a couple of my friends are in this class. Their names are Clint and Natasha. You should say hi to them. I need to leave or I’ll be late. Bye, Tony.”
Tony was about 1000% sure he was not going to say hello to whoever Clint and Natasha were. His ability to schmooze socialites and the media unsurprisingly did not transfer over to kids his age. He decided his chances of being beat up would decrease if he just didn’t open his mouth. He really could not afford to get beaten up. He was positive that would result in a flashback which would be ridiculously hard to explain away by his usual bullshit.

Tony took a seat in the front next to the window. He figured if he needed to flee he could just launch himself through the glass. Who was he kidding? No way was he strong enough to even put a crack in that glass. He stared at the glass with a pouty expression on his face before he realized he was in a public area and stopped. The rest of the class filled in and didn’t spare Tony a second glance. Tony was equal parts relieved and offended.

The class passed by quickly due to the fact that everything the teacher was saying went in one ear and out the other. Tony was busy developing a new kind of phone that would allow him to project a holographic video chat in real time. It shouldn’t be too hard for him. He could probably finish it that night if he pulled an all-nighter. He wasn’t going to be able to sleep anyway so why not? Tony left the class with a mindset similar to a drunk zombie. It was his free period and he really needed to find a quiet place so he could call his friends. He needed a freaking pep talk. School was boring. It was even more boring than those stupid business meetings Howard was always dragging him to. At least at those there were stupid idiots in suits pretending they were smarter than him. That was always amusing enough to keep him from literally collapsing in boredom. Tony grinned when he spotted the field behind the high school building. There were a couple boys playing with a frisbee, but the trees lining the edge of the field were abandoned. He hightailed it over there, dialing Pepper’s number on the way.

“Pepper, sweetheart, I’m dying of boredom. Entertain me.” Tony moaned as he slumped against a tree.

“Hammer products are top of the line.” Pepper deadpanned. Tony let a giggle escape. That was such a blatant lie that Tony couldn’t help but react with uncontrollable amusement. The day Hammer products surpassed Stark Industries was the day the general public could assume the real Tony had been exchanged with a mindless clone because any other explanation wouldn’t make sense.

“Wow Pep. Way to stab me in the back. I thought we had something special.” Tony gasped.

“I could never. I wouldn’t steal Rhodey’s wife away from him.” Pepper stated again in a voice that anyone but Rhodey, Tony, and Happy (Pepper’s boyfriend) would assume was serious.

“Yeah you’re right. How dare you flirt with me? I’m a married man. An abandoned forgotten housewife. But married all the same. Woe is me.” Tony drawled in a high pitched southern accent that finally caused Pepper to break her composure. Uncontrollable giggles erupted from the other side of the phone, and Tony grinned in victory.

“So, how’s it going? Seriously. Are you okay? Do I need to come and fight someone? Have you made any friends?” Pepper exploded with the questions she was probably holding in from the beginning.
“It’s okay. It’s boring. I’m relatively okay. The hallways are loud and crowded. Your fighting services are not needed. I met a weirdly chipper junior. His name’s Agent. Don’t be worried Mom, I’m fine.” Tony answered in monotone.

“Is his name really Agent or are you bullshitting me?”

“Well he does have an actual name I think, but I promptly forgot it. He introduced himself with a James Bond reference. How else was I supposed to react?” Tony complained.

“Alright, I’ll give you that one. Try not to be too much of an insufferable ass though please. It’ll be a lot easier for you if you make friends here. You could be in hiding for a long-time Tony. I don’t want you to be miserable.”

“I know. It’s just hard, Pep. I don’t mean to be an ass… look I’ll try okay. But I’m not exactly in an outfit conducive to wooing people.” Tony responded sounding a lot more tired than he did a few seconds ago.

“I don’t mean seduce them. And what are you wearing? Not like that!” Pepper exclaimed, “Happy just got here. I’ve got a date. Are you going to be okay?”

“Yeah Pep. Go have fun with tall dark and handsome.” Tony hung up and leaned his head against the trunk of the tree. He closed his eyes and tried to clear his head. He’s fine. He is safe. No one knows where he is or who he is. He’s never been safer than he was right then. Tony bit his lip and tried to think about anything but the heat of the desert and the loneliness that enveloped him when he finally managed to escape. Going through two near death experiences really sobered Tony’s outlook on life. He was seventeen and had already almost died twice because of his father’s effort in the weapons business.

His free period ended all too quickly, and Tony made his way to AP Chem. He hoped he had a decent lab partner or better yet no lab partner at all. Tony didn’t really play well with others in a working atmosphere. His hatred of being handed things stemmed from experiences in the lab with his father, and people working with him tended to resent his inability to hold things for them or be genuinely helpful. Tony inwardly groaned when there was only one seat left. He threw himself into his seat with a huff. For his part, his partner seemed to be equally distraught at being forced to work with someone else. The boy was adorable and Tony couldn’t help but stare just a little bit.

He had curly chocolate brown hair and big blue eyes. His purple button up hugged his body, and Tony was struck by how good the nerd looked. He was suddenly angry at his own failure to look cute in his nerd get up. He looked like an idiot five-year-old and this kid looked like a genius Adonis. Simply not fair.

“I’m Bruce Banner.” He said pleasantly. Not fair Tony thought bitterly. His voice was smooth and calm radiated off him. He didn’t stick his hand out to shake, and Tony was irrationally grateful for the small gesture that Bruce probably didn’t even notice. Tony had a strange feeling that the two
were going to get along smashingly.

“Tony Scott.” Tony offered up. He couldn’t help but notice the roughness of his own voice and winced inwardly. He was bringing the guy down just by sitting next to him.

Their shaky friendship was solidified by the maniacal glint in both of their eyes as they stared at the chemicals on their desk. Without speaking they began to work in tandem, both purposefully screwing up the ratio of chemicals in order to get a huge explosion. It was an ‘innocent’ enough mistake, and Tony was positive that Bruce had the innocent act down. All he had to do was look down, polish his glasses, and everyone watching was a goner. Tony would have to get him to teach him that trick sometime. He wasn’t adept enough with his glasses to pull it off. He just looked like a confused asshole.

The downside of the explosion was that Bruce didn’t duck quickly enough and was splattered with the bright green chemical. It wasn’t acid or anything so Bruce would be fine, which was information enough for Tony to burst into uncontrollable laughter at this sight of his new friend looking perfectly at home coated in green. Tony had to admit it complemented his purple shirt well. The random thought caused Tony to burst into giggles again. At this point the rest of the class had cleared out and the two teens were the only ones in the room. Bruce wiped his face off with a paper towel and the two exited the room.

“Do you want to sit with me and my friends at lunch?” Bruce asked. He was giving Tony a soft sympathetic smile that made Tony feel slightly violated and uncomfortable. He thought about his answer. Bruce’s friends were probably cool, and it would give him the opportunity to make friends which he promised Pepper he would do. He was about to say yes when he was startled out of his thoughts by a laugh.

“Welcome to Shield, Nerd.” Tony narrowed his eyes at the boy before realizing when he had in his hand. He had nowhere to run when the cup of water went crashing into his face. It was cold, shit. Shit. He was drowning. He couldn’t breathe, help someone help. He was cold and he couldn’t see anything. All he felt was the hand pressing on his neck keeping his face underwater. Help please. Help. He can’t breathe. Water in his lungs and eyes and nose and mouth. Help.

Bruce helped his nearly catatonic friend to the nearest bathroom and began to grab paper towels to clean him off. Tony’s face was deathly pale and Bruce was worried about the way Tony was sucking in breaths. He cleaned his face off and then grabbed Tony’s hand and placed it on his chest.

“Breathe with me, Tony. In and Out. You’re doing so well.” Tony was snapped out of his daze by the other boy’s smooth voice. He was mortified at the fact that his almost new friend had seen him have a panic attack.

“I’m sorry. I-I’ve never had that happen before.” Tony muttered avoiding eye contact with the other genius.

“It’s okay. I freaked out when I got bullied for the first time. I think I cried for a solid three hours.”
Tony stared at the other boy incredulously, but his face seemed sincere. “Classes are starting soon. We should probably get going. Do you want me to walk you to your history class?” Bruce asked.

Tony felt pathetic, but he nodded anyway. Tony followed Bruce out of the bathroom feeling disgusted by the way he wanted to curl into Bruce’s side and skip the rest of the day. He wanted Pepper there to run her fingers through his hair and whisper sarcastic comments in his ear. He wanted Rhodey to pick him up and cradle him in his lap. He didn’t feel safe alone like this.

Bruce gestured towards his class and Tony grinned a bit hysterically, “Thanks, Big Green.”

“No.” Bruce said turning to walk away.

Tony grinned and walked into the history classroom. He spent the entire time thinking up more green nicknames to call Bruce when he next sees him. That class went by pretty quickly. Time flies when you are slacking off. That’s the motto Tony lives by, which is ironic because he works more than most people ever have.

Tony stumbles his way into the math classroom after getting lost and having to ask for directions three times. Unsurprisingly the only table left was in the back and unoccupied. Tony sat his bag down and yawned. He needed a cup of coffee. He was calculating the number of coffee thermoses he could stuff in his backpack when he was interrupted by voices whispering beside him.

“Stevie. This doesn’t make any sense. I’m going to flunk this course, I swear.” Tony glanced over. His eyes widened when he saw who was whispering. Holy Crap. He was done for. Death was coming. He was quite possibly one of the most gorgeous people he had ever laid eyes on. He had kind of long brown hair and Tony got a wonderful view of his muscled arm through his tight shirt. Tony ran his hand over his mouth just to make sure he wasn’t drooling unconsciously.

“Come on Buck. We can do it. How hard can it be?” Tony directed his attention towards the second voice. Holy Shit. He changed his mind. Now he was done for. The boy had bright blue eyes and neat blond hair. He was just as ripped as his counterpart and looked like the epitome of an American sweetheart. Tony wanted a piece of that apple pie. Tony made an internal reminder to stab himself with a fork as soon as one became available. There were limits to how stupid Tony allowed his mind to get and that comment just crossed the line.

Tony weighed the pros and cons of helping the two boys. He was already done with all the problems. They would probably look at him which is a big win, at least until they punch him in the face for looking back. Tony closed his eyes and hoped that maybe life would throw a plot twist in his direction for once and have something good actually happen to him. He wrote out the answer and process of how to get it on a new piece of paper. He folded it into a paper airplane (the perfect paper airplane, he had folded about two hundred with Rhodey to determine it). He pulled his arm back and threw it. He let out a brief sigh of relief when it came to rest right on top of the blond one’s paper.

The two boys turned towards him at the same time with identical raised eyebrows. Tony’s eyes widened and then focused on his shoes. Maybe they wouldn’t kill him if he apologized. He risked another glance and saw the two reading over the paper. They both looked at him again. Tony’s
mouth fell open when the blond one shot him a mouthwatering grin before looking back at the paper. Tony blinked slowly as his entire face began to heat up with a blush. Shit. He locked eyes with the brown haired one who clearly noticed his embarrassing state. He smirked at Tony before looking back at his desk. Alright, not good. The brown haired one was probably going to kill him. But was it worth it to see that smile directed at him? Probably.

As soon as class was over Tony was out of the door. Tony himself wasn’t a fan of looking like he was trying ever, but in this situation, he figured he could make an exception. He moved as fast as his legs could carry him to the parking lot. Tony couldn’t help but think about what Howard would think about him now. He let out a hysterical giggle at what his inevitable reaction would be to his son running as fast as he could, looking like a common high school boy. He threw himself into his car and got the hell out of there. He turned the radio on while he drove and sighed at the familiar sound of ACDC. His breathing slowly calmed down. He couldn’t explain to Rhodey why loud noises scared him and blasting music comforted him. He supposed it was because he was only allowed to blast music when he was alone in his workshop. When he was alone. When he was safe.

Tony pulled into the driveway where Jarvis’s car had been that morning. Tony felt a tightening in his throat and looked away. He was going to be alone. Truly alone, in this strange place. He didn’t have any sort of defense out here. He had his money here, which he wasn’t allowed to use for anything else but like food. So, he couldn’t protect himself with that. He couldn’t protect himself with his name. He couldn’t protect himself by threatening to tell Pepper and Rhodey. These people didn’t even know Pepper and Rhodey. Tony felt sick all of a sudden. He walked into the house and dropped onto his knees so he could address Dummy from his height.

Howard always laughed at him for treating Dummy like a living creature. He called Tony weak and sentimental. Tony always thought that it was ironic that Howard’s drive for his career and nothing else was what weakened him. Tony was getting closer to true AI every day, and Howard couldn’t even dream about that. So, who was the real winner? Tony that’s who.

Dummy was Tony’s kid and it didn’t matter what anyone said to him. He would protect Dummy to the death. One of the main reasons him and Rhodey got along so well was the way that Rhodey treated Dummy. Tony embarrassingly cried out of joy for the second time- the first was when he created Dummy- when he came to his dorm one day and found Rhodey and Dummy together. Rhodey was playing fetch with Dummy, praising him, and treating him like a sentient being. Tony was a goner. He immediately burst into tears and Rhodey and Dummy spent the next half hour working together to fret over Tony until he calmed down.

“You wanna call uncle Rhodey?” Tony asked with a smile. Dummy whirled in excited agreement and rolled forward until his wheels touched Tony’s knees. “Alright kiddo.” He responded with a laugh. He dialed Rhodey’s number.

“Hey! How was your first day of school, Tones?”

“Complicated, but I’ll fill you in. Also, Dummy is here.”
“Dummy! Hey buddy.” Dummy whirled and Rhodey laughed. “Spill, Tony.”

“So, I made a friend and probably two enemies.”

“You made a friend? Tony that’s great!”

“You aren’t worried about the enemies?”

“Nah, you can handle yourself. And if you have a problem you can’t solve, then I’ll come help.”

Tony fell asleep on the phone with Rhodey at about two in the morning. He woke up angrily at six a.m. with his alarm blaring directly in his ear. He let out a ridiculously loud groan and started his morning. After a bit of an internal freak out after looking at himself in the mirror with his button up and glasses, he was fine. He climbed into his car and hit the road. He blared rock and roll and cursed himself when he remembered that he should’ve worked on the holographic video call last night. To make up for it he decided that he would spend the school day developing the plans and then he would build it that night.

He left his car and walked awkwardly to the senior hall. Bruce wasn’t there, so he wasn’t sure what to do. He pulled out him notebook and started jotting down some thoughts about his new invention. He was startled out of his inventing daze by a cough. In front of him stood a stunning red head and her equally stunning blond companion. He blinked a couple of times to make sure he wasn’t hallucinating.

“Are you Tony Scott?” The blond boy asked. His arms were crossed and Tony could see his muscles. He really hoped he wasn’t going to get beat up. He nodded and pushed his glasses up on his face. The red head was squinting at him in a way that made him very uncomfortable.

“I’m Clint. This is Natasha. We’re Phil’s friends. He said he told you about us.” Clint’s sentences were clipped, and one of his eyebrows was raised. Tony was very nervous about these two. For some reason, they made his skin crawl. It felt like Natasha was looking right into his soul, and he didn’t like it at all. Clint moved his hand towards him, and Tony flinched. It was minuet but the two caught it easily. Immediately, Tony understood that Clint was just trying to shake his hand. He cursed himself for being so stupid. The two’s demeanor changed as soon as they saw him flinch. Clint’s eyes softened just a little bit, and Natasha offered him a little smile. Maybe they weren’t so bad after all.

“Do you wanna walk with us to English?” Natasha asked. Tony nodded and walked with the two. He noticed them having a silent conversation with their eyes. He assumed it was about him, so he turned his attention towards his feet. He missed his life before his kidnapping. He hated being away from his family. He wanted to be back at MIT blowing shit up while Rhodey yells at him, or trying to do weird gymnastic moves while Pepper videotapes. He wanted to be home.

During his free period, he went and sat out by the field again. He pulled out his notebook and
sketched blueprints for his project. Before he knew it, the period was over and he was on his way to chemistry. Bruce smiled when he saw him and it made him feel good. They spent the period chatting while they wrote their lab reports. They both finished early, so they ended up talking about which branch of science was the coolest. Tony agreed to come to lunch with Bruce but was incredibly awkward as he walked behind him. He was very grateful that Bruce appeared to be heading to one of the tables outside instead of a table in the crowded cafeteria. Tony sat down next to Bruce who had already grabbed food. Tony insisted that he didn’t need anything. He felt too sick with anxiety to eat anything anyway. Meeting new people made him anxious. What if one of them recognized him?

The only other person there at the moment was a ripped guy with flowing blonde hair. He looked like a football player, and Tony was embarrassed to admit that he was more than a little bit scared. “Hi! Are you the new kid? I’m Thor! I was new last year!” His voice was extremely loud, and Tony flinched. Nevertheless, he was glad that the new kid was friendly. He nodded with a small smile. He paled when he saw Clint and Natasha sit down right next to Thor. There was only one way this could get worse… and it happened. The two hot boys in math from the other day sat next to him. Thankfully, the blonde one was next to him and the brown haired one was beside the blonde one. Tony squeaked and shot backwards which put him low-key in Bruce’s lap. “Tony, Jesus. What’s wrong?” Bruce asked. The boys were looking at him strangely.

“P-p-please don’t beat me up. I was just trying to help. I-I I’m sorry,” Tony stuttered trying to get even a little farther away from the blonde boy. The boy cocked his head, “Why would I beat you up? You helped me and Buck with math which we suck at by the way.”

Tony shifted his gaze to the brown haired one who rolled his eyes, “I’m not gonna hurt you, shorty.” Tony scrunched up his nose in response but didn’t say anything. Tony sat there quiet until Bruce addressed him.

“I was trying to tell this idiot that engineering clearly isn’t the best form of science.” Bruce challenged with a smirk.

“How dare you insult my baby? Engineering is the forefront of innovation. How dare you? The things I’ve invented alone would blow your mind!” Tony exclaimed.

“I don’t doubt it. You’re really smart, right? You were able to do that math really easily. Oh shoot. I forgot my manners. I’m Steve and this is Bucky.” Steve said with a slight blush.

“That math is nothing. Math and science are what I’m good at. Everything else… I don’t know I’ve never paid much attention to anything else.” Tony scratched the back of his neck and coughed. He smiled brighter than he had since the incident. “I can certainly kick Bruce’s butt.”

“That is so not true!” Bruce exclaimed. The bantered back and forth for a while before the rest of the group got in on a debate about the best kind of music.

“Did you just say country? Clint, you are dead to me.” Tony deadpanned. They argued for a bit
longer before the conversation died down.

“So, Tony, where do you live?” Thor asked.

“Pretty close to here.” He responded.

“What do your parents do?” Steve asked eager to get into the conversation. Tony knew what he was supposed to say. It didn’t even feel like a lie.

“Oh… my parents they aren’t really around.” He thought about Howard locked in his workshop and Maria always on vacation. They had never really been around even when he was a young child. The only real parental figure he had was Jarvis, and he was gone now too.

“Oh, my gosh, I’m so sorry. That was insensitive.” Steve apologized.

Tony left lunch feeling like he just maybe gained a group of friends. Bucky and Steve walked with him to their math class. They sat on either side of him and Tony felt like he was signing his death warrant. The teacher was explaining something that he had obviously already mastered so he pulled out his notebook and worked more on blueprinting and the logistics of his holographic video chat system. He worked until he felt a tap on his shoulder.

“Could you help me with this math problem?” Steve asked with a slight blush. The slight red cheeks made him look unbelievably cute. Tony felt his own cheeks heating up in response.

“Um… sure.” Tony responded. He sat his notebook on the table without thinking and started explaining the math problem to Steve in a way that he would understand it.

“Holy shit.” Bucky whispered. Both boys turned to face him and he was looking right at Tony’s blueprints. “That’s insane. I keep up with all the new science inventions and that is… whoa.”

“I told you I was a genius.” Tony said with a wink before closing his notebook and continuing to explain the problem to Steve “It probably won’t work outside of theory though. We have a long road before we reach that kind of tech.” he lied. He couldn’t let on to the fact that he only worked in holograms at home and would probably invent a holographic video system in a couple of days. He couldn’t draw any attention to himself beyond ordinary. If he got found out as Tony Stark, he would have to get sent away again.

The rest of the week passed in a blur. He felt elated that he had a group of friends, but every time he hung out with them he felt a pang of longing for Pepper and Rhodey. He hoped they would be able to visit soon. Rhodey was in the military now and Pepper was interning for a big company. Tony was confident she would get a management position within the end of the month. That’s just how Pepper was.

Tony leaned against Bruce and closed his eyes against the brightness of the sun. He fell right in with
the group, and it was magical.

“Hey Tony, how would you feel about coming over this weekend?” Steve looked so earnest that Tony had to take a second to figure out what was going on. Surely Steve wouldn’t ask him out in a group of people. Tony was pretty sure that they had a good repour going, but that couldn’t be right. They snarked back and forth, but Steve hadn’t been flirting with him. Tony would know. He had tons of people flirt with him. Regardless of how confused he was, Tony flushed. Steve was hot, Tony would give him that. And he was super sweet. Plus, he had a deadpan asshole side, and Tony would deny it, but he tended to like assholes. He was one himself.

“We try to have sleepovers every once in a while as a friend group, and we figured since you joined that we should have one.” Steve continued apparently missing Tony’s bright red face and confused expression. Right well. That made much more sense than Steve asking Tony on a date in front of all their friends.

“Yeah come on Tony! You aren’t gonna pass up a chance to sleep with Steve, are you?” Bucky mocked with a smirk. Yeah, Tony knew that Bucky would catch his misunderstanding. Bucky had been subtly and not so subtly making fun of Tony for his attraction to Steve since their first interaction. Tony’s face flared impossibly redder, and Tony could hear the laughter of his new friends. He pretended like it didn’t grate on his insecurities. It almost worked.

“Buck” Steve exclaimed angrily before being interrupted by the man himself.

“He cuddles like a champ” Bucky deadpanned, and the group erupted into laughter once more.
Chapter Two

Chapter Summary

Sleepover. Football game. Rhodey!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Tony was now standing outside of Steve’s house clutching a bag against his shoulder. He was nervous about this group sleepover thing they decided to do. He didn’t want to expose his scars, but it isn’t exactly normal to lounge around in button up shirts at sleepovers. Instead, he layered a nerdy tee shirt over a long-sleeved tee shirt and was wearing a pair of black sweatpants. It felt very 2000s, but he prayed that no one would call him out on it. Hopefully it wouldn’t be too hot inside. He rang the doorbell and waited. Steve opened the door with a wide grin. He was wearing a very tight white tee shirt. Tony did his very best not to drool. He followed Steve into the house and was greeted with an amusing sight. Natasha had her feet propped on top of Clint’s legs and Bruce situated on the ground in front of Clint. Thor was sprawled across the floor with his head in his hands as he watched the movie screen. Bucky had one arm slung over the side of an empty couch where Steve probably was. Tony blinked and looked at Bucky’s arm again. It was metal! Repeat. Not a drill. His arm is metal. His mouth fell open. The group was watching Tony with weary eyes as if they were waiting for him to say something offensive. He swallowed.

“That is the most badass thing I have ever seen.” Tony blurted before covering his mouth horrified. “SHIT. I’m sorry sometimes my mouth just goes without permission and I say stupid things that make people hate me and I’m sorry I just said that about your arm that is so insensitive it’s just like I like robots and mechanics and I’m so sorry gosh I’m the worst.”

“It’s okay, kid. It’s HammerTech. Top of the line.” He punctuated the sentence with a smirk, and Tony tried not to vomit. Maybe one day when Tony wasn’t in hiding anymore he could build Bucky an arm that would 1000% be better than any HammerTech one. He knew he couldn’t comment though because it would bring him dangerously close to territory he isn’t supposed to discuss. God, HammerTech. That was so gross.

“Right.” He managed to make himself say before plastering a very fake smile on his face. Natasha was looking at him knowingly. She couldn’t possibly know. Could she? He narrowed his eyes at her but she just looked away.

“So, we are trying to decide which movie to watch.” Steve said with a grin. Tony smiled for real this time. Debating was something he could definitely do. They ended up watching the new Star Trek movie. During the movie, he felt his phone buzzing and ignored it. It didn’t stop, so he excused himself to take the phone call.

“Rhodey! I told you not to call me I’m at a sleepover” Tony whined.

“I’m sorry Tones. I just got excited. Guess what?”

“What?”
“The army is asking me to go ‘consult’ with one Anthony Stark again, so I am going to get to see you next week.”

“Oh, my God! I can’t believe it! Honey Bear!” Tony squealed forgetting where he was for a moment. He bounced back and forth on his heels. He was really hoping that Rhodey would be able to come and visit soon. Rhodey and Pepper were super busy all the time, but they were the only people allowed to come visit him, so he expected to be abandoned in this town for at least a month before he got to see either of them.

“I just wanted to tell you. Get back to your sleepover, you crazy kid.”

“I love you, Platypus. Bye.” He pushed his pone back in his pocket and walked back to the living room. The movie was paused and they were all looking at him. Whelp… that was embarrassing.

“You seemed mighty happy in there.” Clint said with a smirk. He waggled his eyebrows suggestively.

“My best friend is in the army; he’s coming to see me next week.” Tony said awkwardly. He scratched the back of his head. He wasn’t quite sure what to do. He’d only ever had two friends before, and they were friends with each other. What was the protocol for this?

“That’s so awesome Tony. I’m so happy for you.” Steve said, but it looked a bit like he was sucking on a lemon. Tony tried to figure out the reasoning behind the look, but he couldn’t. He tapped his fingers against his collarbone anxiously.

The movie was abandoned in favor of a good old fashion card game. Clint pulled out an Uno deck from under the coach cushion, and Steve sputtered. It was clear that he didn’t know there was a deck of cards underneath his couch. Clint was passing the cards around and Tony was debating whether or not to tell them that he had never played before. Apparently, the confusion showed in his eyes because Natasha gave him a sad knowing look. Tony learned how by going last in the circle and was quick to catch on. Friendships meant nothing in this game, and he was happy to oblige.

“Son of a bitch!” watching Steve swear at Bucky was probably the funniest thing Tony had ever seen.

It only got funnier when everyone in the circle, but Tony shouted “Language” back at him. Tony wondered what the story was for that. He tried not to let the inside joke bother him. It was only natural that a friend group like theirs would have jokes from before he came around. He just needed to not get insecure. Sure, he was great at that.

He watched his friends joking around for a bit before excusing himself to the bathroom. He was getting hot in all his layers, and he was slightly uncomfortable because he didn’t really know what they were referencing. Steve clearly liked it very warm in his house.

As soon as he got to the bathroom he flung his shirt off and held his head in his hands. His friends were going to find out the truth sooner or later. He was a celebrity. Someone was going to recognize him. He was shocked no one had already. He needed to stop getting so attached to people that were just going to leave when they found out who he was. The door opened, and Tony cursed himself for not locking it. It was Natasha in the doorway. She closed the door behind her and knelt down next to him. Her eyes flicked down to the large network of scars covering his chest and then back up to his face.

“I know who you are.” She said. She didn’t seem angry. She regarded him with sympathetic eyes.
“Yeah, what are you going to do about it?”

“Nothing. But, no one here would care about who you are.”

“Sure. I’m related to one of the biggest mass murderers in America. That certainly endears me to a lot of people.” Tony rolled his eyes and pressed his back against the wall. His heart throbbed, and he was once again hit with the desire of wanting to be home. He wanted to go back to MIT so bad. He wanted his brother, and he definitely did not want to be talking about Howard and his weapons business.

Natasha pointedly looked at his scars, “I have a feeling that you can qualify as one of the victims of that mass murderer.”

“It’s not what you think,” Tony scratched at his hair, “Does Clint know? Who I am.”

“He knows that you aren’t who you say you are. He thinks you’re an abused kid on the run. I just had a feeling that there was something more. Don’t worry Tony. You’re one of us now. We won’t abandon you.” Natasha smiled and Tony tried to make himself believe it. He knew better though. Everyone abandoned him but Rhodey and Pepper. He highly doubted that he’d get to keep an entire group of people.

They spent the rest of the night cracking jokes, and Tony forgot about all of the shit weighing him down.

Tony was perched awkwardly on the couch between Natasha and Steve when Natasha grabbed his head and shoved it into her lap.

“What the hell?” He exclaimed.

“Shush. I am going to pet your hair, and you are going to fall asleep.” Natasha demanded.

Tony would have protested, but Natasha’s hands were running through his hair. She was a master at this. Tony muttered a little but settled in. Every time she played with one of his curls he felt his heart squeeze. She knew the truth about him, and she still cared enough to make sure that he was comfortable in this new environment. She hadn’t mentioned his scars even though he knew that she must have wanted to. She was going to keep his secret. She was somebody safe just like Pepper. His whole frame relaxed, and he melted onto the couch.

He woke up with Natasha’s hands in his hair and his feet on Steve’s lap. Tony blinked his eyes open and saw Steve watching him with a fond expression. He felt his face heat up and hid his face in Natasha’s lap. That was so embarrassing. He could not have a crush on the most popular boy in school. Rhodey was going to have a fit.

“Awe Tony. You slept with Steve and didn’t even take advantage of his amazing cuddling skills?” Bucky’s voice sounded innocent, but they all knew better than that. Bucky was a little shit through and through.

Despite Bucky’s ribbing, Tony was ecstatic that he had a group of friends to hang out with. He had at least one of them in almost all of his classes. It was amazing. He felt like they really liked him for him. He certainly had been taken advantage of before, but all of his friends were so genuine. He felt happier than he’d been in a long time.

He and Bruce would work quietly but efficiently during science. Everyone once in a while, Bruce would bump their shoulders together. Tony had never felt more cared for. It was so stupid, but having someone respect his intelligence and silently care for him was making him embarrassingly
happy. Bruce would always cover for Tony whenever Tony showed any signs of panicking at seemingly normal things. He never asked any questions, just gave Tony a small smile before making a science joke under his breath that never failed to distract him.

Thor was always around with a smile or well-placed comment. He had a habit of throwing his arm around Tony’s shoulders during lunch or when they were walking around the school. He seemed to have a radar for when Tony was upset. He always appeared when Tony was freaking out to either glare at whatever was upsetting Tony or wrap Tony up in a warm hug. Tony would never admit that being lifted up into a hug was actually kind of fun and comforting. He wasn’t short; Thor was just ridiculously tall.

Natasha was rapidly becoming one of Tony’s best friends. The last thing Tony thought he wanted was another deadly red head in his life, but apparently, he did. Natasha was deceptively graceful, but there was a certain glint in her eye that revealed her true nature. While she was certainly tough on the outside, she was very sweet with Tony. Tony hadn’t told her anything specifically about why he was in hiding, but he got the feeling that she had a pretty good idea. She had even given him some pointers on making sure that his cover wasn’t broken. It was nice having someone on his side despite who he was.

Clint was Natasha’s right hand man and was basically the funniest person Tony had ever met. Tony was pretty sure that Clint could patent his eye roll as a weapon of mass destruction. That man was even snarkier than Thor himself. He often found himself engaged in heated banter battles with the other boy, and both of them would leave the conversations flushed and grinning. He also did his very best to distract the teacher when Tony was doing inventing work during class. That was much appreciated.

Then it came to Tony’s favorite Wonder Twins. Bucky and Steve. Bucky was cocky for sure and would often compliment Tony just to watch his face turn bright red. His favorite activity seemed to be ruffling Tony’s hair in affection. It kind of reminded him of Rhodey. That kind of brotherly affection. Bucky would smirk at Tony and Steve every once in a while, and Tony absolutely hated it. Bucky was very perceptive. There was no way he missed Tony’s burgeoning obnoxious baby crush on Steve. Sure, he had been attracted to the man from the beginning, but now there were emotions involved. The two were practically brothers. Tony spent a lot of time worrying about whether or not Bucky would mention anything to Steve.

Steve was a whole different story. Tony was besotted. In math when he tried to focus on his inventions, he could always feel Steve’s eyes burning into him. The first-time Steve handed Tony a drawing he’d done of him, Tony thought he was going to die. He knew his face had lit up with a blush just as bright as Steve’s. Steve was just so genuinely sweet. He was earnest with everything he said, and he frequently gave comforting touches without even thinking about it. The part of his personality that really got Tony wasn’t his sweetness though. Steve was a spitfire. Bucky said it was because Steve used to be small and got picked on. As dorky and awkward as Steve was, he was always ready to fight any kind of injustice. Anytime Tony snarked at him, Steve would give a little grin before delivering an equally funny line with a deadpan tone of voice. He just always made Tony laugh. He was totally cool though. Didn’t like Steve at all. He was just a good ol’ friendly friend-o.

The next time they hung out outside of school, it was Friday night and for the first time ever Tony found himself at a high school football game. Natasha was sitting to his right waving a sign with Clint’s name on it. If Tony wasn’t staring right at it, he wouldn’t believe it was real. Natasha had one of Clint’s jerseys tied around her head like a bandana, and the sign was covered in sparkles. It even had a big picture of Clint printed out and pasted next to his name. He wondered whether Clint or Natasha made it. He suspected a collaboration.
“Natasha. That sign is an abomination.” Tony proclaimed.

Natasha smirked at him, “Everyone always cheers super obnoxiously at football games, right?”

“Yes?”

“Well, Clint can’t hear any of that because he always takes his hearing aids out right before the match. He doesn’t want them to get smashed or damaged while he plays, but that means he misses out on the complete and utter ridiculous chants that people come up with in the crowds to support players. So, we came up with an ingenious solution. We made the most obnoxious sign in human history and anytime people were cheering, I held it up.”

That was shockingly sweeter than Tony had expected it to be.

Natasha informed him that Clint hated football and was only on the team because it was populated with his friends. Clint’s true sports passion was the archery team which amused Tony to no end. Of course, Clint would be an archer. He wondered if Clint could do any tricks or if he could convince him to shoot an apple off Tony’s head. When Tony found out that Clint was the only member of their award-winning archery team, Tony almost died laughing. That was such a Clint thing to do.

When Natasha stopped talking and went back to screaming at the opposing team, Tony was forced to confront what had been weighing on him since he arrived. Literally. Tony was completely consumed by one of Steve’s jerseys.

He thought back to the conversation that led to this complete embarrassing disgrace.

“Tony. I was wondering if you would wear my jersey for the big game.” Steve’s face was light pink. Tony’s brain flashed with images of Steve kissing him while he was wearing his jersey. This was a romantic gesture, right? This could not be misconstrued.

“It’s for good luck! Bucky is even gonna ask Bruce to wear his.” Steve quickly followed up. Well that answered that. If Bucky and Bruce were romantically interested in each other, then Tony would give up tech for good. That was fine. It was probably better that Steve wasn’t interested in him anyway. It wasn’t fair to date somebody who could never know the truth about who he was. That’s super terrible.

Steve could see Tony hesitating and followed it up with a soft, “please.”

Tony agreed without a second thought. Damn, Steve. At least the two of them were alone. If Bucky was there he would have died laughing. Tony had absolutely no resolve to resist Steve when he broke out the big eyes and the please. Damn, him.

Because Tony couldn’t resist Steve’s puppy eyes, there he was wearing a jersey about three sizes too big for him. He tugged on it a bit with his fingers. It was kind of comforting even if it slipped off his shoulder every once in a while, and he was wearing Steve’s clothes which was a dream he never thought he’d get to experience. He wondered if anyone thought he and Steve were dating. He blushed but couldn’t banish the small smile that appeared at the thought. It was a pleasant fantasy. If he and Steve were dating, Steve would probably tell him how good he looked in his jersey and then sweep him off his feet. Ugh, he had no chill. Steve just wanted to be friends, and he needed to respect that.

Bruce was sitting to the right of Tony in Bucky’s jersey. Bruce had rolled his eyes when he took it and asked Bucky if he wanted to go steady. Bucky had growled back about Steve making the team give their jerseys to people, and he didn’t want to lose another hand by asking Natasha. Bruce was a
similar size to Tony, but he’d chosen to wear a hoodie on the outside of the jersey that kept it from slipping off his shoulders. Tony debated doing that, but he liked the idea of Steve’s last name and number being legible on his back. Sue him.

Their football team had won. Tony wasn’t entirely sure about the rules of football considering he’d never seen the game be played before, but Bruce informed him that Thor, Steve, and Bucky had managed to secure the win for the whole team. Tony was mostly focused on absolutely not watching the way Steve ran around. He was the captain for goodness sake! Tony could not be more cliché. He was literally crushing on the captain of the football team. Rhodey was going to lose it.

When they had their halftime, and Steve pulled his helmet off, Tony almost gasped at how gorgeous Steve looked. Seriously, no one was allowed to look that good while sweaty. His blonde hair was plastered to his forehead, and his face was red with exertion. The smile he shot at the stands was as devastating as ever. Tony was a goner. Rip, Tony Edward Stark because he died after being too attracted to his friend. After the game, they met up with their boys outside of the locker room. Steve enveloped Tony in a hug that made Tony both wrinkle his nose and light up bright red. He smelled like sweat, but Tony didn’t really care. His arms felt great around him.

“You’re my good luck charm, Tony.” Steve said with such an endearing smile that Tony couldn’t help but feel warm inside. He shot Steve a shy smile. He wished that he could grab Steve’s hand and hold it. Steve was probably a great hand holder.

They made their way to their parking lot when Tony spotted someone sitting on the hood of his car. They were dressed in a military uniform. No Way. His brother was such an asshole. It was not cool to surprise him like this.

“Rhodey!” Tony screamed before ducking out from under Steve’s arm and running to his best friend. Rhodey lifted him and spun him in a circle before putting him back down.

“I’ve missed you so much oh my god. You would not believe how lonely it is in the bed without you.” He wasn’t lying either. At MIT, they used to sleep in the same bed to try and keep Tony’s nightmares away. Tony had a lot more nightmare fuel now, and he missed his bed mate very much. It was horrible trying to go to sleep all by himself. Dummy tried to cuddle him as best he could, but there is only so much a robot can do. Tony (as much as he’d never admit it) was a cuddler, and he really needed human contact to be comfortable. He would manage though. He managed for all the years before he’d met Rhodey, and he’ll manage for however long he has to after.

“You’re an idiot, Tones. And I missed you too. Not as much as I missed Dummy though.” He returned with a cheeky wink.

“This is blasphemy. I thought we had something special. Steve! Rhodey’s being mean to me.” Tony pouted and looked back to his group of friends that were regarding him with amusement.

Steve responded with a poetic, “Dummy?”

“Oh yeah. He’s my… cat. Rhodey loves him more than me.” Tony said rocking back on his heels. Tony introduced everyone to Rhodey and vice versa. Rhodey tried to convince them to call him Jim, but it didn’t stick. It never does. Rhodey shot Tony a glare, but Tony just shrugged happily. He couldn’t believe that his best friend was here. His best friend was here! He grinned.

“So, do you have any baby pictures of Tony?” Clint asked with a devious smile.

“Hell, yeah I do.” Rhodey responded with a grin, “I probably have some in my wallet actually.”
He pulled his wallet out of his back pocket and plucked a small picture out. He flashed it at Tony’s friends. The photo was rather adorable. It was a picture of Tony as a toddler. His hair was curling in every direction, and his wide smile exposed his missing teeth. Steve’s cheeks lit up pink. Tony tried to ignore what that meant. He was a master at over reading into things.

“This isn’t fair. My friends can’t team up against me. Steve tell them to stop.” Tony pouted once again.

“I don’t know… I kind of want to see more of these baby pictures.” Steve responded with a small smirk.

“Wait I’ve got an even better one” Rhodey exclaimed before pulling another picture out of his wallet. Tony was probably about fourteen in the photo. His hair was sticking up in all directions from grease and the safety goggles that he had pushed onto his forehead. His face was covered in soot, and his expression was a perfect mix of shocked and fear. Tony knew that the fear came from the fact that Dummy was off camera holding a fire extinguisher at him. His baby bot loved that stupid fire extinguisher.

“This is the funniest thing I’ve ever seen.” Clint laughed and smacked Tony in the arm, “you really were a baby genius”

“This is betrayal.” Tony held his hand to his heart and collapsed dramatically. He closed his eyes and laid deadly still. No one could say he wasn’t a drama king. He was surprised when Rhodey scooped him up and fixed him with a serious expression. He hated that expression. The problem wasn’t that Rhodey was disappointed in him because Rhodey was disappointed by approximately seventy five percent of Tony’s decisions, but Rhodey just looked so hurt. This was also the expression that usually preceded a feelings talk. Tony hated those.

“I’m fine. God, I’m an idiot. Sorry, I didn’t realize you would think that something was wrong.” He gripped Rhodey’s shirt to try and reassure him that he was fine.

“You’re an asshole” Rhodey shot back. He still didn’t put Tony down. Tony gripped Rhodey’s arms just a little bit tighter. He buried his face in Rhodey’s shoulder. He missed how easy their friendship had been before his kidnapping. Now, they were both walking on landmines. Spending two months searching for his missing best friend had left Rhodey scarred as well. The two of them were still working on how to find healthy and normal interactions again. They’d both lived through traumatic experiences, and naturally they had changed a little bit.

“What just happened?” Bucky asked with a raised eyebrow. Tony glared at Rhodey, but he just sighed.

“Tony has a… heart condition. He’s an idiot, but I would like him to remain alive.” Rhodey responded with a withering glare at said idiot.

“You have a heart condition!” Steve growled. Tony shrunk into Rhodey’s arms. Steve seemed to soften a little bit at the sight. “Tony what if something happened?”

“S’not a big deal.” Tony mumbled. Rhodey rolled his eyes but didn’t comment. Considering his heart had been near shredded by shrapnel leaving his heart weak, it kind of was a big deal. Tony didn’t care what his brother thought. If his heart gave out than there would be nothing anyone could do for him. The doctor had basically told him as much when he got back from being kidnapped.

“I’m taking my baby genius home. It was nice to meet you.” Rhodey said with a smile before hurling Tony into the passenger’s seat of the car.
“Wait!” Tony called before scrambling out of the vehicle. He gave all of his friends quick hugs before lingering on the last one with Steve. “Thank you so much for this. I had a lot of fun.”

He pressed his lips to Steve’s cheek for half a second before pulling away. The blonde’s face was bright red, and Tony smiled brightly.

He turned around and quickly gave Rhodey a kiss on the cheek before climbing back into the car. The car sped away and the group of friends looked at each other.

“Tony is going to be a thousand times worse with him here.” Bucky drawled. Bruce nodded in exasperated agreement.

They didn’t see Tony all weekend presumably because he was spending time with his best friend before he deployed again. When they saw Tony at school, he was wearing a large dark hoodie.

“Anthony. We have missed you!” Thor declared loudly.

“Shhhh! You’re so loud. Ugh.” Tony held his head in his hands.

“Are you hungover?” Steve demanded angrily.

“What the heck? You got drunk without me?” Clint demanded in mock anger.

“Yeah. Rhodey had to leave. Deployed to Afghanistan.” Tony mumbled.

“Oh kotenok … I’m so sorry” Natasha said slinging an arm around his shoulder.

“S’no big deal. Dealt with it before and I can deal with it again.” He mumbled. Of course, he hadn’t dealt with his best friend being deployed to the same place he was kidnapped. That was making him a little more stressed out.

He spent the rest of the day in a glum hungover silence. He knew that his friends were sending each other concerned glances, but he couldn’t muster enough energy to care. Rhodey was gone again. He could be dead for all Tony knew. He hated the not knowing so much. It was unbearable. He knew that this was how Rhodey must have felt when he got kidnapped. His heart ached. Natasha gripped his hand under the table.

It took a couple of days for Tony to start acting like himself again.

“Good to see you again man.” Clint said with a shoulder bump. Tony looked at him confused before focusing back on his notebook. He didn’t have time to worry about Clint being weird. He had stuff to invent. Lots of stuff.

“It is truly delightful to see you being yourself again, Tony” Thor said with a big smile.

For the most part, his friends bantered back and forth while leaving him out of it. They could tell that he was invested in whatever he was working on. Tony pulled a thermos out of his backpack and chugged it. Bruce glanced down to see the whole bag was filled with them.

“Tony, what are you drinking?” He asked cautiously. He really hoped Tony wasn’t drinking alcohol during the school day. That would be a serious backslide.

“Don’t worry about it.” Tony responded absentmindedly. He was scribbling with his right hand and taking desperate sips from the bottle ever couple of seconds.

Bucky snatched it and sniffed, “well, it’s not alcohol.”
“Hey-” Tony yelled, but Bucky had already tossed the thermos to Bruce who didn’t hesitate before taking a sip.

“Is this… coffee mixed with an energy drink?” Bruce asked incredulously after spitting the drink out in the grass beside him.

“Yeah. So?” Tony rolled his eyes before pulling a different thermos out of his bag and drinking some more.

Steve grabbed both the drink and his bookbag, “Tony that is so unhealthy! And don’t you have a heart condition?”

“Yeah, but my heart’s gonna give out at some point anyway so who cares? I didn’t sleep last night, and I really need to stay awake to get this done, so can you give that back to me?” Tony rubbed his eyes like the lack of constantly consuming the gross liquid was already making him tired.

“Yeah… no.” Steve responded before tossing Tony’s things at Bucky. He grabbed Tony by the shoulders and pushing him into a horizontal position with his head in Steve’s lap. He started to protest, but Steve shushed him. “You lost your speaking privileges by being stupid.”

Tony rolled his eyes but didn’t try to say anything else. Steve ran his fingers through Tony’s hair, and glared at the rest of his friends to make sure they stayed quiet. Even Bucky was dutifully silent, realizing that Tony really needed to sleep. After only a few minutes of Steve playing with his hair, Tony fell asleep. His breathing deepened, and he nuzzled his cheek into Steve’s thigh. Steve sighed longingly. He really needed to talk to Tony soon.

Chapter End Notes

As always thanks for reading, and if you have any ideas just put them in the comments!
Chapter Three

Chapter Summary

gay shenanigans <3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You’re going to give me a ride on that?” Tony asked incredulously. Tony’s car had broken down that morning, and he didn’t have enough time to fix it. He lived close to school, so he could walk, but his friends were going to a diner after a school. Steve had offered him a ride, and Tony accepted immediately. Somehow, he didn’t connect the dots that Steve had a motorcycle, and he had agreed to go on a ride with him. Well, he was connecting the dots now.

The bike itself was gorgeous. Tony could tell that Steve took great care of it. The sides were painted meticulously. Tony wondered if Steve painted it himself. He was talented enough to do it. Tony’s hands twitched. He’d really like to get his hands on that beauty. He could make it run so much better. Steve would probably like that. Maybe he’d offer to fix it up for Steve’s birthday. But as much as Tony appreciated the mechanics of Steve’s bike, he had never ridden a motorcycle before and was pretty convinced that it was a walking death trap.

“Yeah? Do you have a problem with that?” Steve was leaning against the bike and smirking at him. Steve was teasing him! That was so not cool.

“No.” Tony responded with a pout before thrusting his hand out to grab one of the helmets that Steve was holding. He secured it to his head without a second thought. This was a great idea.

Tony watched as Steve pulled on leather jacket. Tony thought that Steve couldn’t get any hotter than he was, but he was wrong. In a leather jacket, aviators, and a helmet, Steve was stunning. Then Steve was straddling the bike, and Tony’s brain whitened out. Steve had really nice thighs. He blinked once and then twice. He registered that Steve was waiting for him to climb on the bike, but he couldn’t get his brain to work. After a couple of seconds, he stumbled over to the motorcycle and mounted it. He saw Steve’s smug expression but didn’t comment on it.

Tony resolved to keep his hands to himself during the ride. That worked for the minute they were going slowly, but as soon as they hit the road, Tony’s arms wrapped around Steve’s waist in a death grip. Though Tony couldn’t hear anything over the sound of the wind, he could feel Steve laughing. He just wrapped his arms tighter in retaliation. The first thing Tony registered was that fact that Steve had really nice abs. He could feel them under his thin shirt, and wowie. To be fair, Tony thought every part of Steve was attractive but being this close to him was especially nice.

He hid his face in Steve’s back. The wind stung his face when he looked up, so he just breathed into Steve’s jacket. He could smell Steve’s cologne, and his eyes closed. If he wasn’t on an accident disguised as a bike, then he’d probably be in heaven. Steve was just so comforting. Tony was ridiculously infatuated that was for sure.

“Tony? Are you ok?” That was Steve? Oh, they had stopped. That made sense. He wondered how long Steve had been talking to him. He’d gotten a little lost in his own world.
“Yeah, I’m fine.” Tony let go of Steve reluctantly. The man got off the bike quickly and turned back to Tony. His eyebrows were pulled up, and his huge blue eyes were wide with concern. Tony didn’t say anything else, but he did grab Steve to help stabilize him while he was climbing off of the motorcycle.

Steve linked their arms together as they walked into the store. It wasn’t hand holding, but Tony would take it. It felt a bit like they were going to a formal dance. Tony thought about what it would be like to dance with Steve. Was Steve a good dancer? Would he spin Tony around until he was dizzy and then dip him so he was helpless in Steve’s arms? Or would he step on Tony’s toes every couple of minutes with a red face and an apologetic expression? Tony wouldn’t care either way. He just wanted to know. He was a scientist. It wasn’t his fault that he wanted to know stuff. Tony hoped that he’d still be there when it came time for prom. It wasn’t likely that Steve and Tony would go together, but Tony would still get to see Steve in a tux which was an ever-present desire.

The rest of their friends were already situated at a corner booth. They slid in the end, and Tony grabbed a French fry and shoved it in his mouth. He couldn’t say anything embarrassing about how much he wished Steve would go dancing with him if his mouth was full.

“So, Tony, how was your ride? I know Steve can be a little wild. Did he treat you right?” Bucky was smirking, and Tony couldn’t help but choke on the fry he was eating. Steve grabbed his shoulder and started lecturing Bucky about being an asshole.

“I hate you, Bucky” Tony said as soon as he could breathe again.

“What? I’m just worried about you. It was your first time, right?” Bucky’s eyes were opened unnaturally wide, and Tony’s squinted in response.

“What is that even supposed to mean?” Tony asked. That was just a blatant innuendo.

“That was your first time on a motorcycle. Steve is kind of a crazy driver. I just wanted to know how it went.” Bucky defended himself. Dammit that worked. Fuck Bucky’s ability to make his innuendo filled questions sound rational. Tony wasn’t insane. He was doing it on purpose!

Clint was dying in the corner. Natasha was patting him on the back because he was quickly becoming his own choking hazard. Bruce had his head in his hands, and Thor was consoling him. Let it be said that Tony never found any normal people to be friends with.

“I hate all of you” Steve said.

Tony really liked snarking back and forth with Clint, so at first, he didn’t hear the side conversation going on between Steve, Bucky, and Thor. He tuned in when he heard the word pool exclaimed loudly.

“Tony, are you even paying attention to me?” Clint asked.

“Not even a little bit.” Tony shot back with a smile. Clint sputtered, and then stuck his tongue out.

Tony ignored him in favor of turning towards Steve. Steve noticed that he was watching him almost instantly.

“Would you want to have a party at Thor’s house?” He asked.

Tony thought about it. A high school party involved a lot of people, didn’t it? Tony really didn’t do well with lots of people. Even though interacting with his new friends were helping distract him from his trauma, it was very much still there. He woke up every night from nightmares, he couldn’t stand
crowds, and water was a definite no. He had heard them say pool though, and if the options were
day at the pool or party, he would prefer a party without question.

“Who all would be coming?” Tony asked cautiously.

“Just us” Steve responded instantly, “The friend group, I mean, not like just the two of us.”

Bucky snorted into his milkshake but didn’t say anything.

“That sounds fun” Tony said. He would enjoy seeing Thor’s house. Apparently, his parents were
loaded and were frequently out of town. Thor had described his house as super modern which meant
it probably wouldn’t even remind Tony of his childhood mansion. All in all, it sounded super fun.
Tony had never been to any parties that weren’t based around the desire to consume as much alcohol
as possible. College was fun that way. And it was probably good that it wasn’t a big party, despite
his hatred of crowds, he’d hated parties for a while. Tiberius had enjoyed them a little too much, and
he preferred not to be reminded about his past relationships.

The whole table was paying attention to the conversation now, and Bruce was looking kind of
freaked out. Tony made eye contact with him and was instantly confused. Bruce was trying to mime
something to Tony without it seeming too obvious to the rest of the table. Tony really didn’t know
what he was trying to say.

“Awesome! I’ve missed having pool parties” Clint chimed in.

And… now he knew what Bruce was trying to mime. Tony’s entire body grew stiff. He instantly
pictured a pool in his mind. That was a lot of standing water. It would be so easy for someone to
just… push him under. He sucked in a breath. He wasn’t even looking at water. This was ridiculous,
but none the less he felt his airway start to tighten up. Pool parties required bathing suits and that
meant all of Tony’s gross scars on display. He’d been able to avoid it up until now by wearing long
sleeves and avoiding mirrors, but he’d at least have to wear short sleeves by a pool. He thought about
the jagged scars that ran from his arms up to the completely destroyed skin on the center of his chest.
They were recent too which meant they were an angry pink. No no no. He could not let this happen.
All it would take was one wrong joke from Clint, and he’d be pushed into the pool. He could swim,
but he wasn’t confident that he’d be able to in the middle of a panic attack. Even worse, if he did
freak out at Thor’s house, then he’d have to have a conversation about why he couldn’t even think
about large bodies of water without breaking into a cold sweat.

Bruce could see that Tony was freaking out and quickly intervened, “I don’t think that’s a great
idea.”

“Why? You love hanging out at Thor’s. You’re there much more than the rest of us.” Bucky pointed
out with a confused look on his face.

Bruce didn’t seem to be able to come up with an excuse. He did spend most of his time with Thor.
The two of them just got along like a house on fire. His face was pained, and he was looking at Tony
apologetically.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea either. I mean… we do want Tony to keep hanging out with us. If he
sees Clint half naked, then he’ll be out the door.” Natasha drawled. Her face was light, but Tony
could see in her eyes that she knew the significance of the conversation they were having. Tony
wondered if he would ever be able to keep something from Natasha. Probably not. She was a wizard
with knowing stuff she wasn’t supposed to.

Natasha’s comment did exactly what it was supposed to do. Clint started screeching in protest, and
Bucky immediately started defending Natasha and picking on Clint. Thor was laughing and seemed unable to form coherent sentences. Natasha slipped her arm around Bruce’s shoulders. At the touch, Bruce seemed to calm a little from his panicked state. Tony felt terrible for putting Bruce on the spot like that, but Tony definitely wouldn’t have been able to respond to Steve coherently. The only person that wasn’t reassured or distracted by Natasha’s remark was Steve who was staring at Tony with a furrow between his eyebrows.

“I should probably go soon. I have to feed my cat.” Not his best excuse, but Tony was still shaky from imagining the pool. He couldn’t really afford to be in public for much longer. He was pretty close to freaking out.

“I can give you a ride” Steve said automatically. He slid out of the booth to let Tony stand.

“Actually, I don’t know if that’s a great idea. I should probably get a ride from someone with a car. Natasha?” Tony asked desperately. The redhead nodded and climbed over the boys to get out of the booth.

The rest of the table was all watching them now. They seemed to be realizing that Tony wasn’t being normal. Tony crossed his arms. He really wasn’t in the mood to talk about things. He wanted to go home. He turned to follow Natasha out of the restaurant when Steve grabbed his wrist.

“Did I do something?” Steve’s eyes were desperate. His expression was terrible and Tony felt so guilty that he put it there.

“No. No, Steve. It’s not you.” He really didn’t want Steve to feel bad, but he didn’t know if he had it in him to comfort the other boy right now. Thinking about his scars had also brought up some uncomfortable thoughts of inadequacy. Tony imagined Steve in his swimsuit: golden blonde hair stuck to his face, his abs and perfect skin glistening in the sunlight, his blue eyes scrunched up in one of his fully body laughs. Tony then thought about himself: unruly curly hair sticking out everywhere, scarred chest heaving as he tried to take breaths, his eyes haunted and staring at something that wasn’t there. They didn’t belong together. Steve didn’t deserve to get saddled with someone as fucked up as he was.

“Tony, you can tell me anything. You know that, right?” Steve’s voice was so soft. Tony wanted to cry. All he really wanted was for Steve to hug him, and he knew if he asked that Steve’s arms would be around him without question.

“Yeah.” Tony didn’t look at Steve as he darted out of the diner.

Natasha didn’t try to talk to him on the ride to his apartment. She seemed to understand that he was having a hard time keeping it together. He just tapped his fingers against her dashboard nervously. He didn’t have it in him to try and start any sort of conversation. When he was getting out of her car, she seemed to falter. Her face twisted with an emotion that Tony had no chance trying to identify.

“I’m here for you, Tony. No matter what.” Tony had a hard time believing that people were ever going to be in his corner. He’d been betrayed one too many times, he guessed. But when he looked at Natasha, he knew she was telling the truth. Something in her eyes. Like she was seeing something that wasn’t there. He knew that she was a kindred spirit. Tony weighed his options and ended up grabbing Natasha in a quick hug. Her arms wound around his shoulders and squeezed. They stood their breathing together for a couple seconds before he pulled back.

“I know. I trust you.” He responded. Her face looked stunned like he’d given her a gift. Maybe she knew how he had a hard time trusting people. Maybe he knew that Tony was just as shocked at his words as she was. Tony imagined his face looked similar to hers. The fact that she was showing this
much genuine emotion on her face was rare. She was trusting him just as much as he was trusting her.

When she pulled out of his driveway, he didn’t feel alone like he normally did.

His friends had gotten over his weird behavior in the diner pretty easily. They knew about having bad days, so they didn’t judge Tony for one of his. Bucky didn’t even comment on it which Tony was shocked about. Bucky poked fun at everything, but he should have known that Bucky liked him enough not to push too hard. As much as he was an asshole, he was also sweet.

Steve however still looked conflicted when he looked at Tony. Tony for his part really liked Steve, but he wasn’t going to initiate anything. He was having a hard time thinking about dating Steve while lying to him. Steve didn’t even know what he looked like without layers and layers of clothes covering him. It wasn’t fair to get his hopes up. Tony was a mess. He was also fully aware that if Steve knew who he was their relationship would end. Tony was related to one of the people Steve hated most in the world. He wouldn’t take advantage of Steve when he didn’t know what he was getting into. He wouldn’t.

So, he tried not to enjoy riding on the back of Steve’s motorcycle too much. He tried not to read into their study sessions. He tried to ignore Steve’s soft eyes watching him during math class. He tried to ignore the pull in his stomach when Steve threw him over his shoulder to stop Tony from studying for another second. He tried to ignore how nice it felt to be wedged in between Steve and Bucky with Steve’s arm around his shoulder. He was okay really. He really was.

It all came to a head on a Monday. Tony had a free period and was laying underneath a big tree under the quad. He hummed to himself softly with his eyes closed. It wasn’t often he could turn his brain off like this. He loved it. All he was thinking about was the air brushing against his face, and the grass tickling his legs. He heard someone sit down next to him. He sat up wearily before realizing it was Steve.

“I didn’t realize you had this free period.” Tony remarked. The sun was shining through Steve’s blonde hair. He was having a little bit of a hard time focusing. Tony wondered why.

“I’m usually in gym. I took a study hall.” Steve said softly.

“That’s cool.” Tony kept his voice even.

They sat in silence for a few minutes. Tony took that time to observe his companion. Steve was wearing a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up. His muscles were on full display. His jeans were close to threadbare, and there was a rip over his knee. He didn’t know why the little piece of skin showing was so appealing. Maybe it was just because it was Steve. Tony thought everything about him was endearing. Steve was biting his bottom lip and staring at the sky.

“Have you ever cloud gazed before?” He asked.

Tony glanced over at him, “Not really. Why?”

Steve shrugged, “I dunno. I just thought that cloud kind of looked like our principle.” He gestured towards a cloud directly above them.

Tony could totally see it. A face with an eyepatch. He searched the clouds for another recognizable shape. If Steve wanted to look at clouds then Tony would be the best damn cloud watcher the man had ever seen.
“You’re really pretty.” Steve blurted before covering his face with his hand. He groaned.

Tony on the other hand felt like his brain was short circuiting. Steve thought he was pretty. No way. He looked over at the boy to see if he could spot any signs of deception. Steve looked like he’d rather be jumping out of an airplane than having this conversation. His face was a bright red the spread to his ears and down his neck. People didn’t get this embarrassed when they were joking. Tony was shocked.

“I, that came out wrong. You’re a really amazing person. I… like you. A lot. I know you have Rhodey, but—”

“Rhodey’s my brother. Nothing else.” Tony interjected quickly, wondering if that was why Steve looked like someone stole his pencil whenever Rhodey was brought up. He watched as Steve’s face relaxed.

“Oh… I thought you two were…”

“Ew. Gross. No.” Tony’s nose wrinkled in disgust. It wasn’t like Steve was the first person to assume that he and Rhodey were together. Tony spent most of their interactions in Rhodey’s lap, they gave each other physical affection like breathing, and they called each other the gooiest nicknames they could think of. Tony thought it was kind of sad that everyone always came to that conclusion. Tony had been starved of affection for most of his life, and Rhodey had been told that men weren’t supposed to be close with other men since he hit puberty. By all accounts, they shouldn’t have clicked together to have the relationship they did, but when all the outside factors were removed they were both touchy people. They could cuddle each other and be honest and know that the other boy would never judge them. It was a relationship that both of them desperately needed. Regardless of the truth, everyone always assumed that he and Rhodey were secretly dating no matter what the two said on the matter.

“That’s. Good.” Steve commented awkwardly. “I just. I don’t want to regret anything.” At that declaration, Steve made direct eye contact with Tony. He bumped his hand against Tony’s before intertwining their fingers together.

They were finally holding hands! It was so much better than Tony had imagined. Steve’s hands were huge. Tony’s hand fit with his perfectly, and Steve rubbed small circles on his hand with his thumb. It was magical. Tony’s whole body felt warm.

Steve shifted his whole body, so he was facing Tony directly. He brought their joined hands to his chest, and Tony could feel Steve’s heartbeat racing. Was Steve… going to ask him out? What if he kissed him?

Tony made a strangled noise at the thought before using his free hand to run through Steve’s hair. He’d always wanted to touch it but never got the opportunity. It was even softer than he’d thought it’d be. It was thin but soft. Steve grinned at him. It was so boyish and innocent. Tony felt like he’d been punched in the stomach. He gripped the other boy’s neck for support. This was more than he could have ever imagined. Steve pressed their foreheads together.

Tony looked at Steve’s eyes which were so much closer then they’d ever been before. God, he was so gorgeous.

“Is this okay?” Steve whispered like he was afraid that talking too loud would shatter the connection that they’d created.

Tony felt like he was flying. Sunset had never asked him if it was okay to kiss him. She’d always
smirked and used her long nails to position Tony however she wanted him. She’d been sharp edges. She took and took from him. He’d had given her anything she asked for, but she never did. She’d just smiled with too many teeth, held him with one hand, and stolen with the other. Tiberius had never asked him if it was okay to kiss him either. Tiberius had been under the popular impression that Tony was a slut. He’d groped Tony’s pockets for his wallet and never cared whether Tony wanted him to touch. He’d held Tony down and breathed smoke down his throat without a second thought. Tony would have given him anything, and Tiberius loved that. He’d taken Tony’s gifts one second, and torn apart his self-esteem the next.

Steve wasn’t like that. He wasn’t sharp edges or wandering hands. He wasn’t assumptions, and secret nights, and alcohol he never wanted to drink, and getting pushed into hundreds of surfaces that were never beds. Steve was the sun beating down at them. Steve was finding random things in the clouds, and smirking in front of his motorcycle, and laughing at Tony’s dumb jokes. Steve was warm blue eyes, and concerned expressions, and care. Steve was asking Tony if it was okay to do something as simple as kiss him. Steve was ASKING Tony if it was okay to KISS him!

“Yes” Tony breathed out.

Steve kept their hands intertwined, but used his free one to caress Tony’s cheek. His eyes were so fond. He looked like Tony was a gift for him. He looked like Tony was all he ever wanted. Tony could feel himself getting teary, and they hadn’t kissed yet. Steve searched Tony for sincerity before smiling. With Steve’s fingers just barely touching his jaw, their lips touched for the first time. It wasn’t magical or life changing or all that different from the kisses he’d had before. Steve’s lips were slightly chapped, and the angle was a little weird because of how much taller Steve was, and his glasses were in the way but Tony didn’t care. He didn’t want it to be perfect or otherworldly. It was real. It was Steve’s hand tight around his own, and it was Steve’s fingers winding through his untamable hair, and it was Steve’s lips pressing against his. They broke apart to breathe, and Tony let out a stunned laugh.

Steve looked completely dumbstruck, and it was the most beautiful thing Tony had ever seen. Tony didn’t care that Steve shouldn’t like him. He didn’t care about all the things that made him not worth loving. All he cared about was that Steve was looking at him like he was the best thing he’d ever seen. He was looking at Tony’s dumb brown eyes like they held the secrets of the universe.

“Wow. That was so much better than I ever imagined.” Steve managed to say.

“That’s probably because this was real, sunshine” Tony was beaming now.

“Yeah, it was” Steve still looked like he was struggling to believe it.

Tony laughed again this time not the product of surprise but of joy. Steve joined him in laughing. He tucked his head into Tony’s shoulder.

“Doyouwanngoonadatewithmesometimemaybe?” He mumbled into the fabric of Tony’s shirt.

“What?” Tony asked.

“Do you wanna go on a date with me?” Steve still looked nervous. They’d just had an awesome kiss, and he was still nervous about asking him. Tony felt a rush of affection for the other boy.

“Yes.”

They looked at each other in awe like neither of them could believe that this was more than a dream.

Tony ended up breaking the silence, “Dibs on not telling Bucky.”
Steve burst in laughter, “Oh my god, he’s going to be the worst. I wonder if he’ll make more or less innuendos when we’re actually together.”

“Definitely more. He loves any opportunity to be a snot.” Tony said with an eyeroll.

“A snot?” Steve asked with an eyebrow raised.

“Snot is a perfectly respectable insult thank you very much.” Tony put his nose in the air and made a face.

“Can I kiss you again?” Steve asked.

“Why? Did you get too overwhelmed with my ability to insult your best friend? Because if so, then yes.” Tony joked before Steve was giggling and leaning in again.

Their second kiss was just as awesome as the first one. Except this time, they weren’t holding hands, so Tony was free to grip Steve’s shoulders for stability. Steve’s hands had found their way to Tony’s cheeks, and he was cradling his face like he was something precious. Tony couldn’t get over how gently Steve touched him. When they broke apart this time, Tony threw his arms around Steve and hugged him.

Tony was completely relaxed and simultaneously so excited that his stomach was trying to turn inside out. He opened his mouth to say something when his butt started vibrating. That was quickly followed up by Rhodey’s ringtone. Tony and Steve scrambled to their feet, and Tony looked at him apologetically.

“My phone wouldn’t be making sound unless it was an emergency. Rhodey knows not to call during the school day unless something is wrong.” Tony explained. Tony watched as people rushed onto the quad. Shit. Class was over.

“I can stay with you.” Steve offered seeing Tony’s panicked expression.

“No. Go to class. It’s probably nothing. I’ll come and get all of you guys if it’s something important.” Tony reassured him.

Tony watched Steve skip off to class. He turned back towards Tony and winked. Tony’s face lit up red. Tony loved how blissfully happy Steve looked, but he needed to deal with Rhodey.

He took a deep breath and picked up the phone.

Chapter End Notes

They finally kissed! I think this story will have another chapter or two before it's finished.
Feel free to leave comments!
Thanks for reading :)
The Ending

Chapter Summary

When Tony gets a call from Rhodey about the progress of the investigation, Tony has to make a decision about whether or not to tell his friends. Their reaction may not be the one he was expecting.

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much to all the people who left comments, they really helped keep me going with this story! Life got completely crazy, but here is the last chapter. I hope you enjoy and leave a comment. Thanks!

“Hey Rhodey, what’s wrong?”

“It’s bad, Tony. I’m sorry.” He said. His voice was soft. Something was very wrong.

“What is happening? Tell me.” He whispered.

“We found out who hired the terrorists. God, Tony, I’m so sorry.” Rhodey sounded like he was close to tears.

“Who was it?” Rhodey didn’t say anything, “Who was it? Tell me.”

“Obadiah”

“U-Uncle Obie” Tony choked out. His head was spinning. His uncle was the one that ordered the hit on him. His uncle… was responsible for him being tortured. It didn’t make sense. He couldn’t believe it.

“We found a ransom video in his server. It was of you. The terrorists were saying that they were going to keep you to make weapons instead of killing you. I’m so sorry, Tony.” Rhodey’s voice broke while he was talking. Tony felt terrible. Rhodey never got emotional like this.

“Right. So, what does this mean? For me.” If they found the culprit, that mean Tony got to go home, right? But, did he really want to leave? He didn’t know. He thought he was going to have more time.

“It’s still going to take a while to get everything worked out. We haven’t confronted him yet because we’re worried that he’ll retaliate by ordering another hit on you. Even if we get him arrested, he still might have already paid someone to come after you. We’re going to go to law enforcement and try to get him arrested as quietly as possible. We don’t want to have what you went through on the record. Then, we need to do everything we can to make sure that no one is coming after you on his orders. I’m sorry, Tony, but you’re going to need to stay longer.” Tony felt his stomach fall. He wanted to stay with his friends, but he also really wanted to be safe. The idea that people were still after him was terrifying. If they found him before Rhodey found them, then Tony could end up kidnapped.
again. Or shot on sight. He wasn’t sure which one was worse.

“Ok. I’m gonna go.” Tony said. His voice was carefully regulated. He didn’t want to let Rhodey on to how much he was panicking. Unfortunately, it came out sounding emotionless which immediately tipped Rhodey off.

“Wait. Tony” He started, but Tony interrupted him.

“Bye, Honey Bear” Tony hit the end call button and tried to stay calm. He was still in public after all. He needed to get somewhere else. He couldn’t afford to lose it on the quad in front of the other students. He was supposed to be in class, but there was no way that was happening now. He tucked his pocket and walked to the bathroom on autopilot. He slammed the stall door closed and lowered himself onto the ground. A couple of tears were slipping out, but mostly, he just felt numb.

His uncle was the one that betrayed him. The man that comforted him after Howard yelled. The man who told Tony that he wasn’t worthless. That was the person responsible for his kidnapping. He tried to imagine it, but he couldn’t. His fear of water, his heart problems, his sleepless nights, his scars, they were all his uncle’s fault.

His uncle was still out there. He could have already paid people to finish the job. If the wrong people heard about where he was hiding, then he’d end up with a bullet in his head. He wasn’t stupid. He was supposed to die during his kidnapping. His uncle wanted him to die, but he survived, and he knew that most likely Obadiah there was doing his very best to change that.

He sat there for God knows how long before his phone buzzed with a text message. His fingers were shaking, but he managed to open it.

Steve <3: how was ur call with Rhodey? R u ok? The friend group is out by our tree in case u wanna come see us.

Me: I’ll be there in a minute.

Tony sighed and stood up. He needed to confront his friends soon. Natasha had been telling him from the beginning that Tony should tell them. The addition of an active threat, and the fact that he could be leaving at any time meant that he needed to do it sooner rather than later. It wasn’t fair to lead Steve on without telling him. He needed to do it today, and besides… as much as he hated to admit it, he really needed to be comforted. His uncle tried to murder him. That wasn’t something that he wanted to deal with on his own.

He held his breath when he saw all his friends were all gathered around underneath the tree outside where they normally met afterschool. They were smiling and laughing, but Steve’s posture was rigid. Tony knew he probably looked pale. He could feel that his eyes were huge, and he knew that they were red and swollen from glancing in the bathroom mirror. His face was slack and emotionless, but he couldn’t help the shivers that ran through him every couple of seconds. The conversation stopped immediately when he approached. He locked eyes with Natasha.

“Tony, where have you been? Are you okay?” Steve asked taking a hesitant step towards him. He was the only one who knew he’d gotten a call from Rhodey after all.

Tony tried to say something, but he couldn’t. Oh god, his uncle ordered a hit on him, and he was in danger, and by proxy all of his friends were in danger. He needed to tell them who he was, but he couldn’t do it out in the open. They needed to be somewhere secure where Tony could make sure no one was listening.
He looked at Natasha again. He wasn’t nearly put together enough to create an excuse to get everyone to his house. He needed her to do something. After getting to know her better, he’d ended up disclosing exactly why he was in this small town. She ended up becoming one of his best friends. Saying that she was going to murder whoever was targeting him was basically her catchphrase.

“It was my uncle.” Tony managed to say. His other friends were asking questions and looked extremely confused, but Natasha got it. Her face darkened dangerously.

“We can’t talk about this here. Tony, can we go to your house? I imagine you’ll be safest there.” Natasha’s voice was barely concealing rage.

Tony nodded, and Natasha turned towards the rest of their friend group.

“Please stop freaking out. Tony and I will explain when we get somewhere that isn’t public. Asking a ton of questions is only going to upset Tony more” Tony felt a little bit awkward that she was talking about him like he wasn’t there, but he let it go.

Natasha led everyone to her minivan, and they all crammed in. Steve sat next to him, and he was worried that Steve was going to be mad, but he just held his hand. He clearly wanted to say something; he kept worrying at his bottom lip. Tony appreciated the silence.

When they arrived, Tony unlocked the door and only prefaced with the words “it’s not very clean.”

The inside of the apartment was scattered with technological marvels as well as random tools. It didn’t look like a typical teenager’s space. Dummy rushed out from behind the kitchen island to check on Tony. He pressed his claw to Tony’s chest lightly.

“It’s okay, Dummy. It’s okay, buddy. I’m okay. These are my friends. They’re not going to hurt you.” Tony ran a soft affectionate hand down the arm of his robot.

“That is not a cat” Clint deadpanned before catching an elbow to the chest from Bucky.

“Okay, Tony, do you think you can explain what’s going on now?” Steve asked.

Tony flinched a little bit before nodding. He led the group to his living room where everyone sat down.

“I’m Anthony Stark.” He closed his eyes at the loud exclamations that got him.

“Shut up. Are you in active danger?” Natasha questioned.

Tony let out a strangled noise and pushed his hands through his hair, “no more than I was before. The fact that someone probably has a hit out on me isn’t new information.”

“Holy shit a hit? Like someone is trying to murder you? What?” Bucky exclaimed.

“Surely you’re joking?” Thor asked before looking around at the other inhabitants of the room. Tony looked like death, Natasha looked homicidal, and Bruce looked close to vomiting. The rest of the group just looked confused.

“Tony, what is going on?” Steve’s voice was soft in between everyone’s screeches. His eyes were huge, and they kept flicking around the apartment like any second he would wake up from this nightmare.

“Yeah, what the hell is Anthony Stark doing in a town like this?” Clint asked. Tony saw the hurt in
his eyes. Fuck, his relationships were all going down in flames after this. Maybe Natasha would still
talk to him.

“I was kidnapped in order to make weapons for a terrorist cell in Afghanistan. The problem is me
and my family believe that it was orchestrated by an inside man whose attempt was to murder me.
So, they stuck me here until they could figure out who was trying to kill me.” Tony wrapped his
arms around himself. He knew he was shaking slightly. He hated talking about this.

“You were kidnapped?” Thor asked with a devastated expression.

Tony nodded slightly. He felt a shiver run down his body. He could feel the phantom rope burns
against his wrists and almost let out a chocked sob. He was never going to be free from this. He’d
known that his kidnapping was personal from the minute the terrorist leader said his name, but being
targeted by the one member of his family that he trusted was… he didn’t know if he could ever come
back from that. He couldn’t stop thinking about all the nice things his uncle did for him. He just
wanted to be held in Rhodey’s arms, but with the recent developments Rhodey probably wouldn’t be
free until well after Tony returned home.

“Rhodey and I met at MIT. I’ve already graduated college by the way. After I got to know him,
Rhodey ended up becoming the consultant between Stark Industries and the Army. Something about
preserving the new generation, but he never told the Army anything I didn’t want him to. We were
together in Afghanistan to give a weapons demonstration when I was kidnapped.” Tony stopped for
a minute. He wondered how much he should tell them.

“How did no one know about this? No offense, but your time at MIT was highly publicized down to
every gross detail.” Clint asked with a sheepish expression.

Tony rolled his eyes, “Oh you mean my many sexploits” Steve made a choked noise, “all of those
were lies. I’ve only ever dated two people. They weren’t… great people so my parents worked pretty
hard to make sure those scandals never got out. As for the kidnapping, it was reported that I was in
Japan. I’m not sure what their plan was if they never found me. They didn’t want to public to freak
out and the stock to drop.”

“I don’t want to make you uncomfortable, but we need to know what happened. I think it would be
good for you to talk about” Natasha said placing a gentle hand on his arm.

Tony risked a desperate glance at Steve and Bucky. Bucky still looked upset. Steve was staring at
Tony unflinchingly. Tony swallowed and then nodded.

“Rhodey mentioned my heart problems. I got that while I was being kidnapped. A bomb exploded
near me, and my heart nearly got shredded by shrapnel. I was given heart surgery while awake with
no anesthesia. It’s one of the worst things that’s ever happened to me. I don’t. I don’t think there’s
any true way to describe the pain. After that, they wanted me to build them weapons. I told them to
fuck off, and they didn’t like that very much. They waterboarded me. Over and over and over. I was
there for three months before I was able to escape with some homemade explosives. Rhodey found
me in the desert. I would have died if not for him.” Tony was shaking.

Dummy rolled over and pushing his claw into Tony’s lap. Tony patted his bot, and Dummy beeped
happily.

“Holy shit, Tony” Bucky breathed out. All of a sudden, Tony had arms wrapped around him. He
buried his face in Bucky’s shoulder and let out a couple of the tears he’d been restraining. Bucky still
liked him. The relief hit him like a punch to the jaw.
As soon as Bucky pulled away, Steve was hugging him. Steve pressed a kiss to his forehead and promised in whispers that they would figure this out. Steve didn’t care that he was Tony Stark. Steve didn’t care that he was fucked up.

“So, what was the breaking point? Why tell us now? What happened?” Clint asked.

“You got a call from Rhodey” It was a statement, but it was clear that Steve wanted clarification.

“Y-yeah. They figured out who it was. That ordered the hit.” Tony tried to go on but couldn’t. His voice caught in his throat. Natasha grabbed his hand, and Bruce bumped their shoulders together affectionately. Even though Bruce and he had never talked about it, he knew that Bruce knew his identity long before the others. After the water incident, Bruce was bound to be suspicious, and Bruce was a genius. A science genius. Even though normal people weren’t usually able to identify the Stark kid, someone who read scientific journals would. Tony knew from the way that Bruce barely contained laughs when Bucky ranted about his awesome HammerTech arm that Bruce was well aware of who his chemistry lab partner was. It was nice to have a silent partner.

“So, does that mean you’re leaving?” Steve asked looking heartbroken. Tony wanted to reassure him and tell him he’d drawn the wrong conclusion, but he still couldn’t figure out how to move his mouth.

“No. He’ll probably be here for a while longer until they’re completely sure the threat is neutralized.” Natasha answered.

“It was my uncle. God. It was my fucking uncle. He told me he loved me. He held me when I couldn’t stop crying because my dad was being a dick. He took me to get ice cream when the house was empty. He told me that I was going to have a future. That I didn’t have to build weapons. I trusted him. I trusted him, and he turned around and sold me to terrorists. He wanted me to die. He probably still does. That’s why I can’t go home to the only three people who have ever loved me like a family. He could have paid someone that would actually put a bullet in my head on command. I miss Rhodey, and my best friend Pepper, and Jarvis, and being able to go outside without being terrified, and being able to swim in a fucking pool without getting panic attacks, and not having gruesome scars all over my body. I miss not having to hide. But I can’t have any of those things because my own uncle betrayed me. My own fucking uncle.” Tony grabbed a wrench from the table and threw it as hard as he could. It smashed into the wall, but he didn’t feel better. He let out a strangled scream.

He heard retching noises beside him. He couldn’t really see Bruce because Thor was rubbing his back, but he knew who the culprit was. He didn’t even want to look at Bucky and Steve.

“What is it about me that makes everyone fucking hate me? I don’t understand what I did. I have a group of friends for the first time in my life, and I don’t even get to enjoy it because I might die. What’s wrong with me?” Tony’s voice faded out. A couple tears slipped from his big brown eyes.

Steve moved in front of him to speak, but Bucky shoved him out of the way.

“Look at me, Stark. You are not at fault here. Shitty things happened to you. I have no idea how it feels to be betrayed by your own family, okay? I’m going to guess that none of us here do. But, I’ve lost an arm. I was a kid with a bright athletic future, and I woke up in the hospital with one less arm than I had the previous day. I couldn’t do anything I used to be able to do, and I missed it like hell, but I could never get that back. But that wasn’t my fault. A drunk asshole did that to me just like your uncle did this to you. I didn’t deserve it and neither do you. Terrible things happen to great people all the time, Tony. This isn’t your fault. And I survived even after all that shit. I can play football again. I got some of those things back that I longed for, and it was hard work, and I hated
every god damn second, but I did it, and so will you. You’re going to go to therapy and struggle and
overcome and one day you’re going to be able to swim or be free of constant nightmares or take your
shirt off without being ashamed. Because you are strong as hell, Tony. You are a survivor, so don’t
you dare berate yourself for surviving when the world tries to kick you down. It isn’t fair. Life never
is. So, stop talking shit about my favorite coffee addicted genius, okay? I love him. We all do. And
I’ll kick anyone’s ass that tries to hurt him.” Bucky’s jaw was tight, and his eyes were suspiciously
wet.

Tony couldn’t believe it. The same Bucky that he’d always been worried about secretly making fun
of him had just given him the best speech he’d ever heard. He thought that was Steve’s job. He
reached out and clung to Bucky’s worn leather jacket like it was the only thing keeping him from
falling apart.

“Hammertech sucks” Tony mumbled.

“How long have you been holding that in?” Bucky asked with a laugh.

“Since I met you, douchebag”

“Well beggars can’t be choosers” Bucky tried to shrug but Tony was clutching him too tightly to
move.

“Yeah, well, I already made you a better arm so ha” Tony snarked like he was winning an argument.

“You-you made me an arm?” Bucky asked. He looked stunned.

“Of course, I did, idiot. I like my innuendo filled one armed jock too, okay? Walking around with
Hammertech on your body is basically the equivalent of someone hurting you, and I couldn’t let that
slide.” Tony joked.

Bucky pulled Tony in closer. They felt arms around them and laughed when they saw it was Steve
practically bawling into their shoulders.

“Awe, honey.” Tony soothed.

The rest of their best friends gathered around and joined the group hug.

A couple months later, Tony was buttoning up his shirt in the mirror with a smile. Natasha was
attempting to tame Bruce’s curls with a brush and a prayer. Bruce was dressed in a stunning black
suit with a dark green button up. He was still slouching a little because Bruce didn’t love attention,
but it was clear the formal wear was helping his self-esteem at least a little bit.

Natasha was dressed in a stunning black dress, and her red hair was pulled up with only a few curls
escaping. Tony was pretty sure that her red high heels had knives in them. Even if they didn’t, they
were pointy enough to be considered weapons by themselves.

Tony’s suit was a deep maroon with a black button up and bowtie. He couldn’t believe that Natasha
got him to agree to such a bold choice. She said it looked good with his tan skin tone and brown
eyes. He’d prayed for patience loudly, but he trusted her opinion, so he bought it instantly. He still
wasn’t even sure this was happening. He was going to prom. He was going to prom with Steve as
his date. With Steve as his boyfriend!

Tony remembered how Steve promposed with startling accuracy. Bucky had herded Tony into the
art room where Steve was waiting in a paint covered apron that made Tony’s heart do all sorts of crazy things. Steve pulled with tarp off of his easel with a bright red face. It was a painting of Tony the day they first kissed. His eyes were closed, and his dark hair looked almost ethereal in the sunlight that Steve had created. Tony couldn’t process that this was how Steve saw him. It took him a moment before he realized that the word prom was painted on the bottom with a question mark. Steve looked anxious because of course the idiot would still be nervous that his boyfriend would turn him down.

“Yes, Steve, oh my gosh, yes” Tony threw himself into the other boy’s arms causing him to stumble back into the wall. He heard Bucky snorting in the background, but he didn’t care. It was gorgeous.

He had the painting hung up in his little apartment the minute he found the strength to exit Steve’s arms.

Natasha glanced at her phone and laughed.

“What’s up?” Tony asked.

“Apparently the boys are having technical difficulties with getting Bucky’s hair to behave.” Natasha snorted again, and showed the boys a photo of a grumpy looking Bucky with multiple clips sticking out of his tangled hair.

“I told you we should have all gotten ready together” Bruce pointed out with a barely concealed laugh.

“No. The boys will weep when they see us. Anything less is unacceptable.” Natasha counted with a smirk.

“Thor and I are going as best friends. Bucky is going with you because he was afraid you’d murder him if you said no. Clint is literally going with that junior named Phil who is meeting us at prom. And, Steve stares at Tony so much that I doubt Tony in any way could surprise him.” Bruce snarked back.

Natasha scoffed but didn’t respond.

They spent about another thirty minutes hanging out before driving over to Thor’s house. They knocked on the door and weren’t surprised when it was opened by a frantic Clint Barton. He was wearing a royal purple suit with a light purple button up and no tie. Tony rolled his eyes.

“Why are you like this?” Tony laughed.

“Purple is a fantastic color.” Clint sniffed before pulling the door open.

Thor sprinted down the stairs with a huge grin on his face. He was wearing a normal black tux, but his tie looked like it was literally made of gold. He ran directly to Bruce and swung to poor genius around.

Bucky slid down the banister like an idiot before stopping in front of Natasha. He looked like he was going to go for a cheek kiss but then thought better of it. He stuck his hand out for an awkward handshake, and Tony thought he was going to die laughing. He was practically on the floor giggling before he realized someone was standing in front of him.

Steve’s suit was grey, and his jacket was swung over his shoulders revealing dark suspenders. Tony thought his brain was short circuiting, but due to the blush on the blonde’s face, he seemed to be feeling the same way.
He got on the tips of his toes and pulled the blonde in for a passionate kiss.

“Are you ready?” Steve asked with a smile.

He thought about it. So many things were happening. His uncle had been caught, and the search for threats was coming to a close. He would be returning home soon. His friends would be graduating high school in a month. He was about to go to prom with the love of his life. He blinked.

“Yeah. I think I am”

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End Notes

I love comments, and would love to hear any ideas about future chapters! Thanks for reading :) 

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