Truth be told I miss you, truth be told I'm lying

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Summary

There were two things the world, Captain America and his posse included, knew about Stark but didn’t think much about.

They really should have.

Notes

Civil War fics where Team Cap face consequences are the only thing keeping me sane in this time of academic turbulence, this is my love letter to those fics. Also Tony is wayyy too nice to the Exvengers, I would be taking my heels off to stake them to the doors of my enemies in his place.

There’s this duality in how I want Tony to get his revenge, one the one hand I want him cackling away while they suffer, on the other hand I want him to be like the Mariah Carey gif and essentially say ‘I don’t know her’ with a beautiful grin. Such difficult choices.
The beginning

There were two things the world, Captain America and his posse included, knew about Stark but didn’t think much about.

One, he had been betrayed by many people and suffered a lot of hurt.

Everyone knew that of course, there was too much talk of Obadiah Stane, of Howard Stark’s alcoholism and how it had bled over in his childhood, and they definitely knew of all the women he had loved, who had gone on to talk about him in interviews. They knew that, they just didn’t think anything of it. Tony Stark was rich, of course he had all these leaches surrounding him, it was just one of those things, you know?

Steve Rogers and his camp knew that too. But they had a very different view of it. Yes, bad things have happened to Tony, yes he’s been fucked over by many people, but he’s strong, he’ll get over it.

*(Even if it was us doing the betraying, Stark is generous with everything, he’ll be generous with his forgiveness too.)*

Two, there was nothing that Tony Stark had set out to do that he hadn’t excelled at.

The world knew that too, the academic world knew and resented the same. Fucking Stark coming out with a nerve regenerating serum when he was an engineer and weapons manufacturer. Goddamn Stark getting accredited in Jane Foster’s newest paper on Einstein-Rosen bridges just because he knew a Viking god who had a Bifrost.

Yes, everyone knew that Tony Stark had been betrayed many a time and that he was a genius. They just didn’t see how the combination of these two properties would be their downfall.

See, Tony was a genius who could do anything he put his mind to and what he was going to put his mind to, was revenge, thinly disguised as justice. And Tony was a man who had been betrayed many a time and those many hurts had taught him exactly how to hurt people to maximize impact. Experience was the best teacher after all.
These were two things the world, Captain America and his posse included, knew about Stark but didn’t think much about.

They really should have.

Tony had a list. It went in ascending order of level of hatred and it went like this:

Steve Rogers

Natasha Romanoff

Clint Barton

Sam Wilson

Wanda Maximoff

T’Challa

And that was it. Bucky Barnes was not on the list. Oh, he hated the Winter Soldier but taking his arm off had been enough for Tony. And that Ant guy was completely insignificant. Besides, Hope Van Dyne wanted her pound of flesh and who was Tony to deny her, especially when he didn’t really care about that idiot while she clearly did.

But yes, Tony had his list and he worked his way up to the big kahuna. Starting with T’Challa.
I see T'Challa as hypocritical to a great extent. Barnes was an acceptable target to him when it was his father who had died, but only then. T'Challa discounts the fact that Barnes in his non-Winter Soldier phase injures, possibly kills a lot of people (the motorbike guy and a lot of the law enforcement). It comes off as if he's telling those injured people and their families that only his grief matters, only T'Chaka's death mattered. It's only exacerbated by the 'Let them come' statement which is an arrogant and incredibly self-centered thing to say for a head of state.

Give Tony some scraps and he could build a suit with the firepower of a tank. Give him a computer and he'd take over the world.

Give him the not inconsiderable resources of Stark Industries, his learning AI, and his intellect and the world was not enough. It was just the excellent luck of the world that Tony wasn't interested in ruling it. Too much paperwork.

But it was just the terrible luck of Wakanda that Tony was interested in it. He'd be kind though. Not completely stop them from integration with the world, just make them work for it a bit, starting with their newly crowned king.

Tony remembered the feeling of disappointing his father. It was soul crushing and while now accompanied by more than a hint of bitter anger, he could well imagine that for T'Challa with his loving relationship with his father it would always be soul crushing. And considering that T'Challa had other family members and an entire country that could be disappointed in him...

So he started there. Started with just a few dropped hints.

“I'm sure T'Challa is a great ruler it's just...well, in the heat of the moment after his father died he didn’t really give much regards to the accords even though his father was the one to help create them. I'm sure he's better now though.”

“The Black Panther, an Avenger? That'd be...difficult I’d think. The Avengers are supposed to be protectors of the whole world and Wakanda’s only just coming out of isolation and it’s a monarchy,
who knows how its run and if he’d even be allowed to work for anything other than his own parliament or whatever Wakanda has. I mean, apart from him and his bodyguards, I haven’t even met any other Wakandans.”

Dropping the crumbs was all he had to in person. The wheels had been greased, now they would do the work for him. The rest of it, he did from his lab.

The reporter who was writing the article on the Lagos tragedy with the perspective of the Accords and the Civil War in mind, planned her articles on her laptop with all sorts of notations indicating what she needed to research. She was very overworked and needed to be reminded of things almost constantly especially since the editor dumped all the older topics on her, all the events that had been over for some time and were overshadowed by the latest attack, the latest law, the latest scandal. It had been six months since the Civil War after all. Old news.

Slipping into her notes was easy. Adding ‘Wakandans? T’Challa involvement in CW, check Bucharest damages’ in between ‘Stats on Nigerian casualties and damages’ and ‘Airport casualties and damages’ even easier.

Then his luck really kicked in and he got Rhodes’ leg brace system worked out perfectly and ready for mass production (Tony was never going to dedicate himself to revenge, especially against some two-bit monarch he didn’t even know, he had much better things to do) and it turned out to be a dual blessing. First, he got his best friend up and walking, back to being a coveted asset of the American military and second, the article on the Lagos incident got bumped up to the front page where the news of the newest technological development from Tony Stark that was going to help thousands walk again, flowed beautifully into the article about the rogue Avengers (with more than a small mention of Wakanda and its king).

And little things, you know, they snowball.

Like when the article got all sorts of buzz and was used as a source for the documentary the BBC were doing on Accountability and the Superhuman race. And then Romania demanding reparations since the international world had finally realised it existed. And the UN wanting more than just a signature as a guarantee that T’Challa was actually going to follow the accords.

The guarantee came in the form of contracts that penalised Wakanda pretty severely for breaking the rules the Accords set up. Which meant that T’Challa had to admit, if only to the Accords Council that he was housing the rogue Avengers. He dressed it up all nice and pretty, saying that Wakanda’s isolation from the world meant that the former Avengers would be kept in working condition in case of another global threat and keep the world at large safe from them.
But considering that the council members asked if Wakanda was consequently going to \textit{keep} itself isolated from the world to maintain that and announced that if so the penalties meant nothing, the pretty bow T’Challa had put on his shit was not fooling many people. The flinch that came from T’Challa when the Nigerian delegate said that the honour of his country’s government meant nothing given the former prince wasn’t even willing to honour his King’s decree, made it very difficult for Tony to stifle his smile.

And that was just the tip of the iceberg. Stark Industries earned a new contract that day. One to figure out Wakandan technology and coding so that the UN Accords council could be assured that the security feeds that T’Challa was going to provide of all the former Avengers, wasn’t being faked. And being paid for something Tony was already doing was just the cherry on his sundae. FRIDAY was a learning AI and when she was learning languages he had assigned her the ‘homework’ of learning Wakandan coding ago and she had it all figured out.

Yes, there were many different forms in which Tony had gotten his revenge on T’Challa even if he hadn’t gotten to see it. Of course, then his darling FRIDAY hacked into the palace cameras to show him the video of Princess Shuri saying she was ashamed of her brother to make up for it.

It was beautiful. That satisfaction running through him, even more beautiful. Tony didn’t understand why people preached against revenge.

It really was rather sweet.
In another world he would have hated Wanda with every fibre of his being. Her powers still frighten him, the idea that someone could get to his head terrified him. She probably had used them on him at some point, he was sure of it. Most likely before they knew of her, so around the time he first came into contact with the Mind Gem within the sceptre.

He’s absolutely sure of it for the very same reason that he doesn’t hate her.

She hates him. Irrationally so, but she does. He’s seen it in the way she glares at him, the surveillance he had on Ultron back when the Maximoffs were alive and working with him have them stating their hate often enough and even when she was an ‘Avenger’ she snapped at him often enough. She blames him for once being a legal weapons manufacturer whose products ended up in her vicinity.

He’s pondered that long enough, though. Stark weapons were famous for their effectiveness, the idea that a bomb or missile of Stark make was near her and that it didn’t go off like it was supposed to? Questionable. Probably defective stock that Obie sold off.

But yes, he’s known she hated him.

Hated him so much she joined HYDRA.

**HYDRA**

Yeah, he can’t hate someone who’s so delusional, so lost in her hate, so fucking stupid. Her interactions with Vision only cemented his pity for her, this woman of twenty six years of age who acted like a teenager, whose closest confidant and the person she could socialise with the easiest was an android who had only come into existence a few years ago, whose emotional development was so severely lacking. Tony adored Vision for having a part of JARVIS in him but he was also smart
enough to know that his picking up Mjolnir was more about seeing if the Mind Gem had corrupted him, not about his ‘worthiness’. Any child would be worthy of Mjolnir if only because they lacked the complex emotions and proverbial ‘red in their ledger’ to be specifically unworthy.

And Vision, who was still learning how to be human, was the one person she could relate to the best. What the fuck?

Yes, Wanda was a stupid, stupid person whose hatred of him was the only thing that had made her a person of note and he knew that. There was a reason he always carried a miniature arc reactor in his pockets when going to the Avengers compound. Knowing that the arc reactor negated any effect of the Mind Gem and thus, any effect of the powers the mind gem had bestowed upon Wanda, kept him safe from her. Hell, it was the only reason he had managed to make it out of Siberia, the miniature arc reactor having enough charge in it to let him send out an SOS. In a way, Wanda Maximoff was responsible for his continued existence. Her anger at knowing that might have been the only revenge he would ask for.

But it wasn’t enough. Because Tony wasn’t angry with Wanda for himself. He knew very well, that bitch cray, but Vision hadn’t known that. And what she had done to his last link to JARVIS was cruel to say the least.

Tony would be kind though, and leave enough of her that Vision, if he wanted to, could get a piece of that witch.

Another time and Steve would be outraged at what Tony was doing. See, speak no ill of the dead was something the good Captain very much lived by. He didn’t even speak ill of Red Skull and to know that Tony was dragging Pietro Maximoff’s memory into his revenge...well, let’s just say the captain would disapprove.

Ah freedom, how Tony had missed it.

Even Tony felt a little bit bad, though. Pietro had been fun. He had been a little shit and pain in the ass, but fun. Tony had seen himself working with him again under duress. Pietro Maximoff, yes, Wanda Maximoff, not recommended. A pity that the man had died but that was just the way the cards had fallen.

The thing was, the SHIELD dump had been big and accompanied by a HYDRA dump as well
given the intertwined nature of the two. Steve had thrown a ton of shit Tony’s way to keep him from figuring out that HYDRA had loaned out the Winter Soldier for a hit on his parents, disguising it as keeping SHIELD agents safe by telling him to spend his time keeping the data safe and out of ill hands. And Tony had allowed it because as far as priorities went that was a good thing to do. Focus on saving the good SHIELD agents and keeping them and their families safe. Between keeping the data leak limited, coordinating with the Iron Legion to get SHIELD agent out of sticky situations and coordinating with Stark Industries to get them into legitimate positions, Tony had a full plate. That wasn’t even counting all the missions he had been on to destroy HYDRA bases.

Now his plate was sufficiently cleared and he had the time to go through the HYDRA files better. He found out a lot about Operation Insight but also a lot about the Maximoffs. Like the missions they’d been on.

One of them even included Wanda helping them ‘wipe’ Barnes’ memory, which was just the pot at the end of the rainbow. But he was saving that little tidbit for later, a little piece of dessert at the end of the meal.

Besides, he was fairly sure Wanda didn’t care about it beyond crying a bit and telling the Cap they ‘made’ her do it. Wanda didn’t care about much but her comforts and Steve was too sympathetic to keep her from those. She wouldn’t care about her name being dragged through the mud but Pietro’s name being maligned along with hers would break her a bit.

Her brother’s missions were more varied. A lot of theft given that his speed meant he wasn’t caught on camera. A few assassinations here and there, some stuff accompanying his sister while she intimidated people.

Pretty boring stuff considering they were HYDRA.

So Tony dug a bit deeper and he found that all the interesting stuff had happened long before the twins had been HYDRA. Back when they had been part of a paramilitary ‘protest’ group involved in the blackmail, kidnapping and consequent murder of many an important Sokovian government official, had blown up a couple of places sky high and more. All kinds of stuff that had been pushed far down the rabbit hole by a Sokovian official so high up that most people didn’t know she existed. An official whose cyber security was giving FRIDAY a workout. Not a difficult workout, a little bit of stretching compared to the cardio that had been Wakanda. Many a white hat would be able to break into it, it wouldn’t be impossible, just a bit difficult, maybe require a small team.

The ones currently trying to break into his encryption of the SHIELDRA files would be able to do it well enough. A few breadcrumbs to lead them the right way would work just fine. So Tony added little notes to the HYDRA files on the twins, nothing too obvious, only comments by the handlers about the twin’s ‘improvement’ from prior to their enhancement. The SHIELD personnel were safe
enough now, all the more sensitive data had been rendered useless a long time ago so Tony relaxed the reins on the encryption a little bit. It took them a month but finally they broke into the HYDRA bits of the files, taking the information on the twins with them, putting it up on Wikileaks. Every little bit, from the files of their missions, the notes of their handlers, the videos of their ‘evolution’ into superhumans, was out there for the world and the many news channels of the world, to see.

And then they made their way into the Sokovian official’s computers as well, revealing the official to be HYDRA.

Which Tony had expected.

Along with finding details of how she had worked with HYDRA to incite the rebellions further by shelling places using Stark Industries weapons sold to HYDRA by Obadiah Stane.

Which Tony had not expected.

Oh, he knew that HYDRA had to be involved in the unrest in that country, a SHIELD peacekeeping outfit, entirely made of HYDRA personnel would have taken a while to coordinate, they had clearly been planning it. But as far as plans went, divide and rule was quite a basic strategy, millenia old, and to bother to have it explicitly stated on file? Overkill.

The official’s properties were raided and even more information on the twins and the plans HYDRA had for Sokovia were found out. Turned out the official kept really quite meticulous files.

And it was all out there for everyone to see.

Tony didn’t even need to hack into Wakanda’s security to see the effect those news stories had on her. T’Challa had to give the accords council 24 hour surveillance on the Exvengers and seeing Wanda’s outburst, seeing her cry and rage, her powers leaking red all over the others, leaving them shaking with fear earned quite a few reactions from the council. Tony, of course, had to once again control his smug glee but Wanda had lashed out so badly it had taken the Exvengers a full day to come out of their comas and stop screaming. T’Challa’s people had sedated and collared her and no one, not even Steve, complained. They were all too busy flinching at the sight of her while poor Wanda Maximoff was too busy alternating between crying and talking to ‘Pietro’ about how she’d kill them all, to notice them.

Not even his wildest dreams could conjure this beauty.
Sam Wilson

Chapter Notes

This was difficult to write. Sam is this weird non-person. Anthony Mackie is suuuper charming but the character he plays is lacking in substance. To be honest I feel that way about most of the Captain America movie centered characters, the actors playing them are so lovely, so charming, so writing-smut-worthy type of hot, but the characters themselves are devoid of personality beyond a few mannerisms and a short and tragic backstory. Reality TV stars have more substance written into their scripts than the CA movie ones.

Also, there may be more food mentions/metaphors in this chapter than normal because I wrote while very hungry. Please don’t judge.

Sam Wilson was going to be a difficult one. Tony hadn’t expected it at the time but perhaps he should have.

See, the essence of what Tony wanted to do was make them all feel as betrayed, as hurt as he had. He wanted them to experience true emotional pain. He wanted to burn their world down to the ground and then force them to live in its ruins.

Sam Wilson’s world was Captain America.

His parents were dead, when Captain America came knocking he asked a friend to take up his work with the veterans, his friend Riley was dead and so his only real attachment with the world was with Steve Rogers and the idea of being a contributing member of society.

(It was what Rhodey had admired about Sam. That he had no real reason to try so hard to be a good person but he did so anyway. But Sam Wilson’s definition of a good person seemed to differ from Rhodey’s.)

Which meant that taking Cap down would have the added effect of breaking Sam Wilson’s heart but...that just wasn’t right. Wilson was partly responsible for Rhodey’s injury and Tony couldn’t let that go, couldn’t just lump in his revenge like that. He had bought Ross’ favourite pub, had him
thrown out of it before pulling it down, he couldn’t just let Sam Wilson share his punishment with Steve.

Ideally, he wanted Sam to look at Steve like he was a monster. Like he didn’t know him at all. Like the man he's replaced Riley with was a dick.

But Tony was so far away from him in New York while Steve was right beside him to make all the excuses in the world and he, of all people, was well aware of how convincing Steve could be. It was going to be difficult.

Tony was prepared for that. The last few times, his luck had been excessively wonderful, things just falling into place. Now he would actually have to put his back into it.

Oh, he did the little things, nudging people this way and that, making sure no one forgot Sam Wilson was there when he was, remotely having the EXO-7 self destruct (when Sam was trying to see what had gone wrong with them, of course) but beyond annoying the man it didn’t do much. He still soothed Steve’s ego, still told Clint he’d see his family again, still tried to get Scott to join them when they were together. Hell, he’d probably be trying to counsel Wanda through her breakdown if she wasn’t still sedated in a wing far away from Bucky at Rogers’ request, which…

Actually...was he even qualified to counsel people the way he did?

The thought once said out loud took but a second for FRIDAY to answer.

No, he was not. He was trained to handle panic attacks and de-escalate similar situations but he was most definitely not qualified to dispense advice to people, which he did frequently followed by some variant of ‘Trust me, I know what I’m talking about.’

That information, like all the rest got a hot fifteen minutes of attention before being dropped by the news channels in favour of Kim Kardashian’s daughter’s first day of elementary school which again, was what Tony expected. Oh the chatter in the military circles was still going strong about actions that needed to be taken but Sam Wilson was Captain America’s sidekick who had been replaced by Captain America’s original sidekick. He didn’t stay in the news for long.

He stayed there long enough for him to be terribly upset and mope around Wakanda for a while so there was that. Tony expected that to be the end of it and that he’d have to actually bring Rhodey in to get a few punches in because this was not satisfactory at all.
He let it go for a while though because Thaddeus Ross’ trial was coming up. Hopefully when they talked about his illegal incarceration of the Exvengers in RAFT they’d mention them again which would ideally bring Sam back to forefront. Alas, in comparison to former Avenger Hawkeye, former HYDRA volunteer Wanda Maximoff, former felon Scott, whatever his last name was, former Air force Sam Wilson was chopped liver. Especially since America and its media didn’t like blatantly disrespecting and bad mouthing their veterans.

Pity.

But apparently Tony had gotten too used to being underestimated (when it came to any help the Avengers needed) and overestimated (when it came to some general grievance the Avengers didn’t want to take responsibility for) and had forgotten what it was like to be known well because he was surprised when Rhodey walked into his lab with only the slightest whirr from the exoskeleton brace and just looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

“First T’Challa, then the witch, now Wilson?” Rhodey said in that same tone he used back in MIT when talking about the TAs Tony had seduced, “Who’s next on the list?”

And Tony, who had always been honest with Rhodes (except for that one one time he was dying, in his defense he had palladium poisoning and had to replace his usual blueberries with leafy, chlorophyll greens to combat it. Kale always made Tony weird) answered in utter truth, “Still on Wilson, none of the shit I throw seems to stick.”

“You’re going after them one at a time?” Rhodey asks, surprised. Which makes sense. Tony hasn’t been one for delayed gratification. It’s why he loves having creme brulee, you get the best part right at the beginning. This is a bit more like making the creme brulee and he’s still stuck cracking eggs for the custard.

“I have other important things to do,” Like tracking down a spy and walling up all the holes in the defenses she knew of, building Spiderman a proper bulletproof suit, watching all the movies Peter had put on his netflix queue. Busy, busy, busy.

Rhodey’s eyes flit over the holograms FRIDAY brought down with all the information she had on Sam Wilson with that look in his eye when he was studying for exams and Tony brightens. The plan was always to let Rhodey have a go when he felt up to it and he supposed Rhodey’s convalescence, although not as long as with some of his other injuries, had given him some time to think about what he wanted to do.
Rhodey’s campaign is subtle in ways that confuse Tony, he just...talks to people. Tony would do that too, but he doesn’t have much credibility as a healthy and well adjusted member of society so people always think he’s being bitter. Rhodey though, he knows how to work the system and work it well. John Oliver does a segment on Veterans issue with a shoutout to Sam Wilson’s fraudulent counselling career but it’s a barely there mention. It still manages to get more social media mentions than any of the news pieces though and adds a bit of tension to Wilson’s back but only a little bit. When he asks Rhodes, he says it’s just the beginning.

With the War Machine back in action, Rhodey makes a few appearances. He is asked about Steve, as Tony expected he would be, but instead of saying anything about his injury or Siberia, he talks of Bucky Barnes and how Steve Rogers refused the pardon Tony had wrangled for them.

Tony doesn’t get it until Sam tenses even more and Wakanda’s excellent microphones catch his whisper of ‘Is that true?’ and the consequent quiet but angry argument they had.

From then on, any time Rhodes has a reporter asking him questions about the Exvengers, he answers with Barnes. About his record with the military, his background as a sniper, how sorry he was to know that Barnes had suffered under HYDRA complete with sympathetic noises of how he couldn’t imagine what it must be like to have to rescue a HYDRA volunteer from RAFT on his best friend’s orders. It’s always Sergeant James Barnes this and Sergeant James Barnes, and with every mention Rhodes makes, Steve makes another of Bucky. Wilson grows more tense, looks at Steve with a bit more suspicion and a bit less adoration. Tony doesn't get it until he watches their interactions again and sees how every mention of the accords by Wilson is segued unsubtly into a conversation about Bucky by Steve.

Rhodey wants Wilson to learn the hard way that for Rogers the Civil War was never about the Accords the way it was for him. And Sam Wilson is learning, the same way Tony did, painfully, that Steve Rogers has only one priority and that priority is Bucky Barnes.

The unhappiness, the apprehension grows little by little until finally, Rhodes is outright asked about Sam Wilson and he says how sad he is to know that all of Sam Wilson’s former missions are under review to see if they were undermined by him.

And finally Sam breaks.

It is not a great big explosion like Wanda, nor the humiliation of T’Challa. It is a slow implosion as Sam slowly begins to say less, doesn’t have them make peace all the time, lets the squabbles build up into fights until one fine day he finally stops Steve with a word, just as the good Captain is on his way to go talk to Barnes’ frozen body and says in the softest, most dangerous voice Tony has ever heard from anyone, “Sometimes I wonder if you’re going to make a scapegoat out of us like you did Stark.”
Clint Barton

Fanon Clint from pre-AoU fics was the best, in the movies he’s a side character to the Black Widow show, who is already little more than an opening act for the concert. Bleh. Also, my headcanon of Laura is always going to have her as a badass but one without a tragic backstory and with healthy coping mechanisms. Because I can.

Clint wasn’t really a friend in any way of Tony’s. They joked and ribbed one another but Clint kept his distance from Tony, from the group really, even Cap. Natalia had shrugged anytime Steve brought it up, said Clint was a sniper, he didn’t like getting too close, that he was taking Coulson’s death hard. Steve hadn’t pushed because Natalia got tight lipped about Coulson too.

Tony hadn’t pushed either if only because Clint was away for a very long time recovering after Loki’s invasion and more of a stranger than anything else. Barton’s record was wiped clean, after all there was mind control in play, and that was that. When HYDRA bases were to be raided he suited up once again before retiring after one more near world ending event.

Tony wondered why Clint had sided with Cap. Was it because Natalia had told him to? Was it because Steve had been on a few missions with her and she’d talked him up? Was it because Coulson had been a Captain America fanboy? Was it because Wanda had been mentioned and her brother had died saving his life?

Because Barton was retired and out of it. He had other things to worry about like those children of his. His son, the youngest, must have just turned two or so. Terrible Twos it was called, wasn’t it? Poor Laura, dealing with a toddler and two other children as well, and doing it all alone because Barton had decided retirement wasn’t for him. Not that he had taken responsibility for it, no instead he had thought that blaming Tony for everything was the thing to do.

The Ant guy blamed Tony too, telling many story that Hank Pym had told him and they fed off one another, trading stories of how Tony fucking Stark was such an entitled treacherous douchebag, putting them in RAFT like that. Never mind that Ross had just been put into a high security prison
just a week ago for their illegal incarceration.

Sometimes Tony wondered about that. He thought about Selvig and how the scientist had left a loophole to be used. He thought about how Barton had avoided taking a headshot at Fury. He wondered if that was why Barton blamed him so easily, maybe he’d just gotten into the habit of it after they’d put it all on Loki and the sceptre that one time. Maybe he got used to the convenience of it.

Whatever the reason it had gotten bad enough that the UN accords council had asked to meet with him with the express purpose of warning him of what they had found in their Wakanda security feeds. They were concerned for his safety in case Barton managed to somehow message the still missing Natasha Romanoff to hurt Stark in his stead or perhaps get in touch with one of the SHIELD agents in the wind.

It was cute that they cared, or at least pretended to. It was more than SHIELD had ever done.

It also gave him opportunity to try to hurt Barton. Turned out that the Bartons, the ones left on that farm, were not happy with Clint. Already name change petitions had been filed and been fast forwarded through the system with some assistance from a corner of the world where Nick Fury had last been seen. The now Weston family had also sold their farm and moved to a big house in one of Brooklyn’s more expensive neighbourhood, a house that was previously owned by a certain former SHIELD agent named Lauren Weston who bore an uncanny resemblance to the former Laura Barton.

She was also one of the former SHIELD agents who had gone untouched in the SHIELD dump because she was currently a very picky freelancer with a not inconsiderable headcount. Of course, that information was only known to those in the know. It was a good thing Tony hadn’t thrown away the contacts he had made back when he stopped weapons production.

The really interesting thing though, all of this, the name change, the sold farm and the house being bought, it had all been put into motion a good while ago. A couple of months before the Civil War. She must have known something he didn’t, which had Tony’s hackles up.

Laura Barton had been an unduly kind and motherly woman who had offered her home to strangers because they needed it.

Lauren Weston could put a bullet in someone’s head from a few miles away.
Tony needed to figure out which one he’d be meeting when he knocked on their door.

The door opened before he could do anything of the sort and Lila Weston giggled and pulled him into the house with glee, “Mommy’s in the kitchen,” She sang and tugged him through the neat and tidy house with its plain cream walls offset by the bright colours of toys in corners. Tony let himself be pulled along and was soon sitting on a barstool style chair at the kitchen counter as Laura Weston stirred and tasted while Nathaniel sat in a high chair trying to repeat the words Lila cooed at him. Cooper, Tony knew, was at a friend’s place.

“I got so caught up in making contingency plans for us I forgot I should have warned you lot. For that I apologise.” Laura said before Tony could say anything and shot him an apologetic look. She was different here than when she was at the farm. Small things, higher heels, above the knee dresses, less denim, not much of a difference but enough that she fit in into the neighbourhood just fine. Where once he might have believed her a normal woman who’d fallen in love with an Avenger he now saw her as an extraordinary one who’d gotten the Avenger to fall for her.

“You expected this.”

“It was obvious,” She shrugged, “you don’t forget the rush of hitting a target because you have children.”

“You would know.” Tony said, blatantly referring to Lauren Weston and touching his wrists to ready the suit, in case it came to a fight but she just smiled.

“Exactly, I would. And I told Clint that going cold turkey never works but he insisted he could handle it. He was wrong, I was right.” She wobbled her hands in mid air, screwing up her mouth in a charmingly personable way. “It’s nothing new.”

A little huff of laughter was the only way Tony could react.

“But you didn’t come all the way over here to hear that.” She said and brought the conversation back to where it should have been. “What can I do for you Mr Stark?”

“I happen to have a phone that you could use to contact your husband.” He pulled the shitty little flip phone out of his pocket.
It had been Tony’s suggestion to hand over the phone Steve had sent, to the Bartons/Westons. It hadn’t taken much to convince the Accords council that perhaps having his family actually talk to him directly might take the edge off Clint’s threats.

Telling them about the phone and the ‘apology’ as soon as it arrived was one of the better things Tony had done. It had softened the Accords council considerably and been one more thing for them to analyse and put into Steve’s psychological profile. Their staff hadn’t made a diagnosis of course, it would have been incredibly unethical but words like ‘delusions’ and ‘diminished sense of responsibility’ had been thrown around by the SHIELDRA psychologist a while back along with notes on how to use Steve further by playing into it and Steve’s apology had only made the evaluation more convincingly true.

They all knew that the phone was being monitored but it wasn’t mentioned. Laura thanked him, handed him a tupperware full of pasta and then Tony left.

“Hello, Tony?” Steve said, more than a little desperation in his voice as he answered the phone. The hope on his face was offset by the snarl on Clint’s, the blankness of Sam’s and the confusion on Scott’s. When his face dropped they all got curious and so did Tony.

Tony wasn’t listening in on Laura’s side, that would have felt too intrusive. FRIDAY was monitoring the call though, to make sure she didn’t ‘accidentally’ let Clint know they were being watched. He’d learnt from his mistakes to be respectful without being moronically trusting.

He wanted to, though. Clint broke within seconds, all but sobbing soon enough and Tony wanted to learn how to do that.

But he would be respectful and figure out his own way because it wasn’t enough. Standing next to Cooper and convincing him that what he should do was put Clint through twenty floors might be enough but just getting him to sob a bit, eh. Even watching the compilation video FRIDAY had made of Clint sobbing, set to Lily Allen’s Smile, after a while it got old. There was no joy left in it anymore.

Lucky for Tony he had just the thing.

SHIELD wanted to reform itself. It wanted to redeem itself and the Accords gave them the chance to try. Many an ‘Enhanced’ SHIELD agent had signed the Accords, enough that they had gained the
momentum to do so. They would form themselves again, now as SWORD, Sentient World Observation and Response Department under the supervision of the UN.

But they couldn’t go on the way they always had. SHIELD had been a shadowy organisation and in those shadows, rot had taken root. Making itself transparent, having a face associated with it was exactly the way they needed to go.

And what better face than that of Phil Coulson.

Tony kept being surprised by how easy things were to do. All he had to do was make a few sad noises about it being such a pity Phil COulson was dead, he was a good handler, you know? Knew how to be liked even when people disliked what he was saying. It made them listen.

(His curiosity when Skye hadn’t been part of the group digging into the Maximoff mess was the only thing that had let him know of the man’s continued existence, Fury had been keeping that one under really close wraps)

The press conference about the new organisation, SWORD, and its director, Phil Coulson had been wild. The statement he made regarding their deep appreciation for the Accords was still being quoted a month later and that wasn’t even counting the tweets quoting what Phil said condemning the Exvengers’ action. The number of times Tony had watched the clip of Clint going ballistic when he realised Phil was alive, he was working with the Accords, that he hated what Clint had done, what Captain America, his idol, had done while Clint was stuck there in Wakanda unable to do anything about it, not explain himself, not apologise, not even tell the man how glad he was to see him alive…

Yeah, it made him smile.
Chapter Notes

I genuinely did not think the MCU writers could fuck up Natasha this much, the thing with Bruce in AoU was the start of the shittiest character arc I have ever seen. Just, wow.

Joss should have just spent some time focusing on Ultron, Wanda and Pietro.

Seriously though, Loki already had a movie setting him up as an anti-hero/villain whereas Ultron, Wanda and Pietro came out of post-credit scenes. Cutting out the farm and the Bruce/Natasha bullshit would have given him enough time to give them some spotlight. I would rather have an Avengers movie with no Black Widow and Hawkeye than that bull. Also, having some form of mind whammy in both the Avengers movies is a bit much. MCU is filled with villains with varying powers, you don’t need to turn it into a trope with mental influence as the source of all the major world ending problems.

Also, I don’t know much about spies and stuff. I’m sure MCU has a different idea of it all, the only thing I know about any sort of Intelligence agent is that back when my mum was very young there was some guy in their town (they lived near a border) who was found to be a spy decades later. He was just this normal guy that all the parents adored because he tutored the kids in his free time and did it pretty well. That is honestly the extent of my knowledge and I’m very likely misrepresenting something, so feel free to correct me if you know stuff.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Natalie Rushman was a bitch of a corporate spy.

Natasha Romanoff was a neck-stabbing bitch of a SHIELD agent.

Nat was a co-Avenger and a friend.

Natalia Romanova was the Black Widow, a product of the Red Room. Nothing more. She was a tool, an automaton. She was nothing.

She talked about ego a lot. Not just with relation to Tony either, no, she just used ego to relate to everything. It was galling before, coming from a woman evaluating a man on his deathbed, it was enraging coming from the double agent with more ‘loyalties’ than Tony had robots. It was made even more galling when Tony realised he had just...fallen for it, believed her. Fallen for all the crap
she said about his ego.

He had believed the spy who went to court and told people that they wouldn’t convict her because they needed her.

The only thing redeeming him was that, well, Tony needed to actually try to understand people to understand them. His social skills were great considering everything but they needed a fuckton practice to be so.

But the rest of the world had swallowed her shit too, and surely there must have more than one healthy, well adjusted people in that group? They should have caught that even if he didn’t.

Because now that he was thinking about it, what would they need a spy for when an alien invasion was imminent? What was she going to do, infiltrate the chitauri? Run a honeypot mission among them? She was a good close range fighter, that couldn’t be denied but so were most trained agents. Maria Hill came to mind.

Her job was infiltration, what use could the world have for someone like that when a sudden world threat came to them? What good had knowing that Loki had plans for the Hulk down for them when they’d first ‘assembled’?

Nothing.

So then, the question remained, what good was she? She was a useful asset for SHIELD but for the Avengers? Pretty pointless. She could lull the Hulk away and get Bruce back but Tony had yet to understand why that was necessary. The Hulk was fine the way he was, maybe he wouldn’t be so angry all the time if people weren’t trying to get rid of him. The only time he’d been a real problem was when the Witch got to him and giving him a mini arc reactor should take care of that. The Hulk had always liked the ‘pretty light’ in Tony’s armour.

Natalia made him feel stupid. Because he had trusted her to have his back, her of all people. Falling for a ploy was one thing, falling for a ploy when he knew she was the plotting type was just…

His ever so large ego had taken a beating.

(Rhodey called it his heart but Tony preferred his terms)
Nat was dead to him, in her wake only the memory of Natalia remained. He wanted to hurt her in a way he had rarely ever wanted to hurt anyone. Not even Obie.

So, what would hurt the Black Widow?

She kept saying love was for children, perhaps she’d be hurt to know Nathaniel was named only partly for her, mostly for a character in a book Lauren had read when pregnant with Lila? Would it hurt her to know, as Bruce had confided in Tony before he left, that whatever tendresse was between them, it had died when she had forced the Hulk out so soon after Johannesburg? Would Phil Coulson’s words hurt her?

Tony didn’t think so.

Ego, she kept talking about. Maybe it was there that he should strike.

The itsy bitsy spider couldn’t stay hidden for too long, not in this world of cameras and electronics. Tony had never looked for her properly, he’d gone easy on her. When she ‘hacked’ into things he made sure to keep an eye, just in case she needed help and to make sure she hadn’t gotten rusty. He knew her ‘signature’ very well and FRIDAY found a trail of the Widow’s work a mile long.

The Black Widow hiding in Russia. To be fair, the Russians clearly hadn’t thought of that. Then again, it might have been because they had better things to do. They were setting up their own team of Enhanced folk, under the Accords. The Red Room was once their prize but now it was obsolete. Weapons tended to do that, they got outdated. As a former weapons designer and arms manufacturer, he would know.

But it made things easier for Tony.

See, he didn’t know definitely what would hurt Natalia. But he knew what would scare her.

She changed sides constantly because she couldn’t stand to be threatened. Being an Avenger had given her a modicum of safety but she had given that up in favour of saving the good ole Cap. She watched her back constantly because she had betrayed too many people who would want to stick a
knife in it.

What would she do when she thought she had been made, Tony wondered.

He tried to find out.

Once he had his eyes on Natalia, he didn’t let go. Had her tagged constantly. When she slipped into paths that had no cameras FRIDAY marked all the possible routes out of it and waited. Even when she did go underground, she did have to resurface eventually and he had all her identities, all her aliases, all her bank accounts, her contacts, her friends, her codes, tagged. She would be flushed out sooner or later.

The Red Room had trained her, after all, and Russia had done the Accord council the favour of releasing all their information on the Red Room training for a few goodies that were barely worth it, but for the show of ‘trust’.

Tony wondered if Natalia knew how little she was worth. Her strengths, her flaws, every little detail they knew about her, all sold for the equivalent of pocket change.

He started small, with a bit of a haunting.

She was in a cafe, right in the sight of a camera when the family dropped in. They were looking for a restaurant nearby on their drive back from visiting grandparents and FRIDAY had put the cafe high up on the google search they ran. The parents sat down at a table, sinking into the chair while their daughter ran around, hyper. When she tripped over a chair her father jolted to keep her from falling and in a rather stern voice he scolded his daughter, “Natalia, don’t run away like that.”

And the Black Widow’s eyes dilated in fear. She was out of that place faster than a bullet and when she finally stopped a few buildings away she was breathing hard.

And this was just the beginning.

See, there were many ex-SHIELD agents who were not very happy with the Black Widow for blowing their covers and all but ruining their lives. A lot of them worked for him now, at Stark Industries, but they would have loved to get a few jabs in at her, nonetheless.
One of the former SHIELD agents was working for SI as a courier transferring some sensitive documents. He was very discreet, no one passing him by in the street would know he was a former agent. The man was middle aged with a bit of a pot belly, thinning dark blonde hair and a beard. He talked with the local accent, had been by the stores enough that he wasn’t the new guy nor the old timer and he was mellow unless there was some FIFA thing on the TV. He was just kind of there, you know?

And if the route that was mapped out for him on the GPS took him past the neighbourhood where the Black Widow was staying and he passed her by while walking down the street, well, no one looked twice, not even the Black Widow.

He was one of the lucky ones who had gotten a message out to his family in time. He knew a lot of the agents, even ones who didn’t know him and he had helped Stark help them. He continued on his route, delivered the documents and went back home.

He hid it well but he was very angry. He knew others like him and since he wasn’t going to be there long enough to really look into it he called a friend or two. They too had a vested interest in the Black Widow.

Alas, they weren’t quite as inconspicuous as their friend. Perhaps she saw the ashes from the cigarette one of them had smoked while watching her window at night. Perhaps she had seen someone who looked a bit too familiar looking back at her. Perhaps she heard a too familiar voice. Whatever it was Natalia noticed them and moved, shaken to her core. But they managed to follow anyway. They were SHIELD trained agents and they were highly motivated for this ‘mission’.

And through the Stark Tech that equipped them, through the cameras that they left to monitor her with, through the listening devices left where they knew she would be, Tony was made an audience to it all. He saw the wildness in her eyes grow as she kept looking around, her dialed up paranoia leaving her constantly aware and terrified. He heard the pants as she walked fast and scared, to escape the eyes that had latched themselves onto her back.

He saw her ego shatter as she realised there was no place for her to hide. Russia turned to Sokovia turned to China turned to India but the eyes never left her. She walked down a street, her hair dark, eyes dark, the smirk turned into a pursed pair of lips, dry and chapped but the cameras mounted to the walls whirred and turned to look at her following her shuffling and tentative steps.

And Natalia flinched again.
It reminded him of a friend of Rhodey’s who had joined them to watch a movie at dorm at MIT. He hadn’t liked Tony but he did like the huge screen Tony had built from scrap for fun.

They’d watched horror movies and he’d screamed his head off at every jumpscare. Rhodey had to walk him back to his own dorm because he was too scared. One time Tony had snuck up on him, an easy feat given he was about a foot smaller than most of the people there. The guy had screeched and lunged for the wall, clinging to it in a way Tony was sure even Spiderman would never manage to.

Once upon a time, thinking of Nat would put to his mind Pepper, the two fiery, terrifying but amazing redheads he knew.

Now, he thought of that guy clinging to the wall and was hard pressed to control the giggle snort noise that he hadn’t made since puberty had hit him in the middle of his college days.

But when Rhodey came into his lab with the news that the Black Widow turned herself into the authorities telling them to throw her into some cell so the eyes would stop following her, the giggle snort finally escaped.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, my headcanon has Natalia going from kickass surviving anything, to singing ‘I will Survive’ to herself while in prison. And yet, I still haven’t fucked her up as much as the MCU writers.
I adore Chris Evans. I adore Sebastian Stan. I love the fanfics of Captain America, the way they write him as a person, the way they bring his past into the development of his psyche, that they build upon the friendship between the two by exploring his past as a sickly child in times before the war and everything. Fanon Steve is a gift and I was so looking forward to rooting for Bucky’s return in the CW movie and was so fucking disappointed that he just went from being free to having an old friend as his handler to going back to cryosleep. I loathed the sheer lack of Steve’s character development, of his stupidity. This was a movie that hinged on the myth, the legend of Captain America and ended up a really ugly caricature of it all.

I am not even a Tony Stark fan as such because Science fiction is not my thing. I am more likely to watch RDJ in Sherlock Holmes than in Iron Man but I appreciate that he is depicted as a person, that the same people are there in all his movies because it lets them grow and develop, become more complex. Even when I dislike the way they behave and disagree with them vehemently I still get where they come from. When I read fanfics with Tony in them I get a strong feeling of whether or not he is OOC because his character is so explicitly clear. Even in my fic, I feel like my Tony isn’t quite in character because he tends to have strong intense feelings about things even though he hides them, and he doesn’t have them to quite that extent here.

In contrast Steve Rogers is so loosely characterised I cannot argue against any version of him. They’re all entirely possible. He’s the Gary Stu, in that there’s a bajillion versions of Gary Stu’s but you know they’re all Gary Stu’s.

Another thing, my Accords are nice, mainly because the Black Panther thing will have T’Challa etc classified as enhanced individuals and I can’t imagine T’Chaka helping in frame a document that lets his son be used as a personal task force. That shit was on Ross and the Cap.

Tony actually, truly hated Steve. It was somewhat stunning to find that out, but he did. See, Tony didn’t actually hate many people. For the most part he intensely disliked them and the choices they made but hate, that was actually rare for him.

Although, to be fair, he had hated Steve Rogers long before he had known him. Back when he was a child and everything occurred in absolutes anyway, he loved his mother, he loved his father, hated the Steve Rogers who took his father’s attention away from him. It was an unjustified, entirely childish hate. He had hated Steve the way he hated brussel sprouts.
Child Tony’s judgement was impeccable, really, brussel sprouts were truly the worst.

As was Steve Rogers.

Even when he’d grown up a bit he’d still hated Captain America. His father thought he was the pinnacle of goodness and Howard had always been shit with people, great with circuit boards, so Tony had decided, Captain America stunk.

Young Tony would be smug to know he was right. Oh, he’d hate what he had to go through to be proven right but that vindictive little shit would still lord it over Grown up Tony. If Tony invented a time machine, there would be so many ‘I knew it!’s and ‘I told you so!’s.

The thing was, Tony understood wanting to save his best friend desperately. He’d do anything for Rhodey, although he wouldn’t tell Rhodey that, because knowing how much of Tony’s moral compass was guided by ‘Platypus won’t like that’ would make him uncomfortable and emotional. But Tony also knew Rhodey and for all that he would do anything for him, he wouldn’t actually let himself do it because if he hurt anyone while trying to save him then Rhodey was the one who would take the blame and the guilt for it.

But still, he understood wanting to save his best friend.

What he didn’t understand was not recognising his friend’s autonomy and respecting it. What he didn’t understand was dragging his friend into a fight that he had never wanted to be a part of. What he didn’t understand was depending on another man’s fortune entirely and deciding not to tell that man something as important as ‘Hey btw your parents were murdered, it wasn’t your fault, you can stop feeling guilty now.’

Like Tony wouldn’t have understood that Barnes was the tool used by HYDRA. He was a weapons developer, he knew a weapon when he saw one.

But what he saw was the weapon fire off at his mother and father in front of his eyes.

He shot off the arm that choked his mother to death instead of firing a missile into Barnes’ head. But then, Steve had always been unable to see anything if it didn’t fit in with his agenda.
Knowing him through these new eyes, this new perspective, it changed so many memories he had of him, so many good memories. Back when people had been lauding him for taking that nuclear missile into the wormhole Tony had been uncomfortable. It was an entirely selfish thing see, there was at least a chance that he would be able to make it out of the wormhole in time to survive. But if the Chitauri fleet Stark saw came through the portal, they would have been crushed. And then, once they had fallen the Chitauri would go out into the world and destroy the rest of what he cared for. Pepper, Rhodey, his lovely toys, JARVIS.

He hadn’t felt like a hero, see? And when Steve had pursed his lips when the praise was heaped onto him, Tony thought he did so because he understood. That he too was used to getting praise he didn’t deserve and understood the toll it took, living up to a legend that had been created by someone else.

Now he was fairly sure Steve was scowling because the press had not focused on ‘The Team’. Because his self-concept as a true and good hero was in question. Because someone had made themselves into a hero of their own means instead of giving themselves over to a lab for human testing. Because Tony was an arrogant asshole and still adored by the public.

Oh, Steve was a complete asshole too but he didn't show it to the media. Set a wrong example, he said.

Fucker.

Yes, Tony hated Steve.

Steve needed to feel needed. But here’s the thing, Captain America was the only one he was ever needed. Steve Rogers was just some kid who picked fights for no reason in a time when everyone was tense because they either knew someone on the frontlines or would soon be there. The art nerd who just really wanted to be a jock. So yes, Steve needed to be needed, that was the real point of his ‘apology’, after all.

Tony started small. The bit about Wanda having a part in wiping Barnes’ mind had been there in the rest of her files but it hadn’t been used much because people had prioritised reporting on the Nigerian, South African and Sokovians’ deaths rather than one single man’s memory. Tony had also tried to do his best to keep people from releasing that information. Initially he had done it because he was saving that information for Steve’s special revenge but now he wondered if releasing that information would be the right thing to do. See, Steve would be ‘disappointed’ in Wanda of course but Tony was worried he would decide it meant that Wanda could bring back Bucky’s memories as well. Once upon a time Tony would have thought Steve wasn’t as much of an idiot to do so but in
the last few months as his team members had distanced themselves from him and Steve began spending more and more of his time watching Sergeant Barnes in cryosleep and talking to him about how everything was going wrong for them, he wasn’t sure anymore.

No, not yet anyway. Tony would start with his reputation. Start with the legend of Captain America. Started by going on his first tv appearance since Civil War and doing so live.

When Pepper first heard that he’d be willing to do an interview type of thing, her eyes grew wide and her smile even more so. Tony didn’t understand why until he actually met up with the producers a bit before the show and they showed him the huge set up they had waiting for his first proper public appearance in years.

Apparently it had been years. He’d always been doing Avengers stuff for ages and the producers were fucking glad to have Tony Stark there.

You know, for a moment Tony had forgotten what it was like before, back when Iron Man was the only superhero out there, well the only one with his name and face in the open at least. It was a big fucking deal then and this was like those days all over again. The show had a Reddit AMA going on, a youtube livestream and twitter was open for questions with hashtags already circulated in the week prior. They had a proper agenda of what they wanted to discuss and time slots for them, a huge part dedicated to the inventions of the last few years which was a bit of a surprise, but a pleasant one. It was a good show. They spent a solid two hours talking about Stark tech and Stark industries, twitter questions about patents etc were answered, even stuff about how to apply for a job at Stark Industries.

It was enough to almost make Tony forget that he was there with the specific intention of dragging Captain America through the mud, albeit in the nicest way possible.

Almost.

The final part came with questions about the civil war and the accords and the question ‘Why did Bucharest and Leipzig happen? What is up with the Accords?’, This is a recurring question being asked, what were the motives of the group currently being called Exvengers during the so-called civil war? As a former teammate, do you have any insight?.

“I have no insight, I don’t anyone does and maybe that’s the issue. The Cap feels alone and he did whatever he could to get Sergeant Barnes...back, so to speak.”
“Could you explain?”

“I have no idea what his motivations are besides the obvious, 'Save Bucky' one. I can make excuses of course. I can say that, ‘Oh, we’ve all grown up with certain things in mind, like Gandhi and Mandela and the non-violent movements, we knew civil disobedience from MLK. We’ve grown up with these options of ways of protesting which we know work. Steve Rogers didn’t.’ But it’s still an excuse. He said when talking about the Accords that he couldn’t ignore a situation if it was going south. That’s stupid, a lie and not what the Accords are about in the first place.

The situation has been going south in Israel and Palestine for ages. He ignored that. The Middle east right now, I’d say 'going south' is a fair descriptor. He ignored that. North Korea-South Korea relations, pretty ‘south’. Ignored. So, that’s a lie about himself that he said. But ignoring those things was the right thing to do because that’s politics and having Captain America there throwing a shield around is not going to solve political and social issues that are decades in the making.

And then it comes to the Accords. They're not about ignoring situations. The Accords define situations where superhumans or enhanced private individuals such as Iron Man are needed and can actually be of use. They are a framework of how ‘saving the world’ should be done to minimise losses. Like in Lagos, if we had the Accords signed and working, the Avengers would have informed the government of what was going on, why an enhanced soldier was needed, they would coordinate with the police to evacuate areas so that less people were likely to be hurt, cut off certain escape routes to contain things. Instead that chaotic tragedy was what happened. One of the reasons why the death count in Romania and in Leipzig was so low was because I managed to get a message to authorities in time and they could evacuate areas.”

“It has been suggested that Captain America wasn’t aware of the Accords at all until General Ross presented them.”

“That’s very probably true and again, does not reflect well on him. The Accords have been in the making for years, most people have heard about them. Hell, I had Thor ask me about it before he went to Asgard because even though he’s not the most tech savvy person in the world he still has people around him who kept him informed, who keep him a part of the conversation. Rogers was a part of an actual intelligence organisation who was fairly regularly sent on missions and despite being enhanced, is still human. When an Asgardian prince who drops in on our world once every few months, sometimes years, is more informed than Captain America, that’s a serious problem. All I know about his motivations is that Steve said to me that ‘the safest hands are our own.’”

Even the host looked confused, “When it comes to fighting aliens and HYDRA or something else?”

“I may be a genius but playing interpreter to Steve Rogers’ words is not something I’m ever going to be capable of.” Tony turned to the camera, “If one of you can figure it out, tell me because I would
love to know.”

Whatever the host heard from his producers in his earpiece had him clearing his throat and getting the topic off of Steve, “Speaking of the Accords—” He said and swiftly moved the conversation towards the legal points of the Accords, who was eligible to sign it etc., which was good because talking about Steve made Tony angry which got his heart beating faster which combined with the arc reactor, was not fun.

Besides he’d said all he wanted and laid the groundwork for the next part.

The internet and the public was already having a ball with what Tony had said. The Steve supporters using the very arguments that Tony had said would be an excuse, to shield him. That lasted for a while, until the footage of the meeting the Avenger had to sign the Accords was ‘leaked’ from the Accords council office where it had been submitted by Tony to help ‘profile’ the Exvengers and their willingness to help in case of a fight.

Like gasoline on fire.

It was only made bigger when Charles Spencer’s mother came out with a statement thanking Tony for seeing her son as ‘a person, with ambitions and dreams and a name, instead of a statistic meant to be ignored because it was inconvenient’.

Tony let it be, he didn’t need to do anything more. Captain America’s reputation was going to fall apart without much goading on his part. Rhodey had been wondering out loud in the presence of some higher ups if Steve Rogers was going to get a dishonourable discharge like Sam Wilson and found out that couldn’t happen since he was an SSR operative, not an army officer. When Zemo’s timed release of the videos of the Winter Soldier killing his parents and the two super soldiers fighting him happened, the American Army finally released their statement disowning Steve Rogers.

When the t-shirts with a old WWII era pic of ‘dancing monkey version of Steve winking with the caption ‘Support Overlord Rogers, because the safest hands are his own’ started outselling the Captain America ones, Tony knew his work was done and turned his attention to the rest of his plan.

See, Tony had been tapped in by the Accords council to create a team and work with Wakanda to figure out the best way to counter a super soldier made from HYDRA’s version of the serum. The Accords council still didn’t trust Wakanda to work with them, something that the scientists Tony
interacted with were very angry about. They did not like being painted with the same brush as T’Challa and the way they praised Princess Shuri and remembered T’Chaka’s diplomatic skills and kindness while making only a brief mention of T’Challa being a good fighter, said it all. The Accords council wasn’t the only one with a lack of faith T’Challa.

But it got Tony thinking. Steve hadn’t trusted Tony with the information about his parents’ death, no, their murder, but he was stunningly dependent upon Tony for pretty much everything else. Money, food shelter and more importantly, healthcare.

Tony had a looot of samples of Steve’s blood. Enough that between it and the information he had on the HYDRA version, not to mention the one that had created the Hulk, he could very likely reverse engineer the serum.

But he didn’t want to. No one needed the super soldier serum Steve had. Now, the one Barnes was shot up with, that didn’t enhance the strength quite as much but definitely upped the healing factor, that was much better.

Tony suspected the reason the serum worked on Steve was because he was such a sickly person that it’s effect was mostly spent on correcting and healing those issues, the asthma, the weak heart etc, and then it enhanced him. A healthy person would have just started becoming enhanced in various parts of their bodies until barely resembling a human and imploding.

So Tony brought in Helen Cho on this. She had wanted to stay far away from the Avengers after Sokovia, not only because of Ultron but also because they had accepted Wanda as one their own and Helen remembered the witch a bit too clearly. Helen understood.

And as the Wakandan scientists said, Barnes should have a choice too. While the man had gone into cryosleep in Rogers’ presence and not said much to anyone, he had talked to them extensively before all of that about containing him and that if necessary, they should kill him. He hadn’t wanted to be HYDRA’s weapon, hadn’t wanted to hurt all those people in Romania. Hell, he hadn’t even wanted to be a soldier, he hadn’t volunteered, he was drafted.

The scientists also confirmed that the healing factor was accelerated when in cryosleep, enough that the stub of his arm was growing. The HYDRA files hadn’t said anything of the type but they had mentioned that he needed to be wiped after coming out of cryosleep. It seemed the cryosleep helped to heal the Winter Soldier from his wounds and fix all the brain damage from when they wiped him. The applications it had to help those with neurological disorders was huge, it could be groundbreaking if they managed to isolate its effects.
HYDRA’s serum might end up fuelling one of the greatest medical breakthroughs in the last century. It was an amazing find. But it would take research, a lot of it.

And Tony turned his attention to it.

See, if he could find a way to counter Barnes’ serum, maybe he could find a way to counter Rogers. That would be interesting to say the least. Rogers, all tiny and useless.

Besides, there wasn’t much for him to do on the publicity front. The media was ripping him to shreds of course but now the copyrights for the Captain America merchandise were being pulled into a dispute as well, as people tried to find who the beneficiary was. Logic said SHIELD must have inherited them from the SSR but SHIELD was dead, the military claimed they weren’t benefiting from it either and the current fear was that HYDRA was getting the money. Captain America merchandise in all its avatars was being pulled from shelves. People hesitated form even using the word Captain America, it was always ‘Cap’ or more often ‘Steve Rogers’.

After a while Captain America would be wiped from the public’s small memory entirely. Those who would remember him would do so as a cautionary tale, as they should. There were so many things going on in the world and most of Steve’s missions were with SHIELDRA, covert operations, even if the covert part went badly and needed a lot of covering up. Soon the arguments would start up, of whether Captain America had ever even existed. Those conspiracies had been flying around for ages since the Chitauri invasion, that they just found somebody who fit into the Captain America costume the same when the aliens came around, it was never the same Steve Rogers from WWII.

The public was well on its way to forgetting him entirely and Tony was going to make sure of that. But he wanted Steve Rogers to forget Captain America too.

Or maybe Steve could always remember and just not be capable of being him, hate how useless she’d become, long for the glory days.

Tony was fine with it either way. As long as Steve suffered.

But the serum was giving him problems. It did not want to cooperate. Extremis was easier to work with than the serum. It was beyond frustrating and making Tony very angry. He supposed he would have it happy with things as they were. That Captain America would be erased from history and Steve would just have to fucking deal with it.
It wasn’t enough. It really, truly wasn’t enough.

Tony didn’t want to involve Barnes in this at all. Even if he was still angry about Barnes being the one to kill his parents he still wouldn’t want to involve him because Tony understood. He still woke from nightmares of water in his nose, in his lungs. He knew torture and he knew that if he had been put through what Barnes was put through, he’d have broken too. Probably broken way earlier.

He needed to look deep and figure out if this sympathy for Barnes was larger than his hate for Steve, but he already knew really. Afghanistan was his crucible in a way nothing else was, nothing. Not the Chitauri, not Extremis, not Ultron, not even Siberia. This was the line drawn in the desert that was his mind.

Tony would have to learn to let it go.

Maybe there would be occasions later. For now he let his rage fuel his creativity. It doesn’t take long for his team to work with the Wakandan scientists and come up with a counter to Barnes’ serum. They isolated parts of it that accelerate healing and a paper announcing these discoveries was going to be published soon as well. It was a far better way of bringing Wakanda into the world at large, especially in comparison to T’Challa’s shitshow.

Removing the triggers was the only tricky part and it was the one thing that would need Tony’s active involvement. The B.A.R.F. was coded to his DNA and while someone else would be able to benefit from it, it would require Tony to be there and stay in control. It was completely keyed to him and in lieu of passwords, he needed to provide a few key memories to indicate that he wasn’t being controlled by another, nor being coerced.

Everyone had agreed this was essential and that no one else should have control of B.A.R.F. It was of great help to PTSD survivors, helping them gain distance from traumatic memories but the fact was that the distance could very easily turn into brainwashing. They needed very strict protocols to be in place and having Tony be the only person who could use it on himself or on others was ideal.

It also meant that getting rid of the triggers needed Tony to be there in Wakanda.

It would take a lot to do that. Tony would be coordinating between Wakanda and the Accords council to get there and that wasn’t even counting the fact that it had to be kept a secret, he couldn’t just walk into Wakanda in the Iron Man suit. Pepper wasn’t likely to let him go alone, and even though Rhodey was well on his way to a complete recovery, using the War Machine took too much out of him right now, Vision could help but he was shaken at the idea of being so close to Wanda and Tony already regretted bringing Peter to one fight, he wouldn’t bring him to another, the boy
was far too selfless and would very likely put himself in harm’s way if it meant there was a miniscule chance of keeping Tony from getting hurt. SHIELD had offered their Inhumans only to be laughed away by Pepper who told them to focus on their legal issues before poking their noses in other people’s businesses.

But the RESCUE suit was ready and Pepper would only let Tony go if she accompanied him with it at the ready and if all the Wakandan security personnel and both their suits were equipped with darts laced with the serum antidote. T’Challa had protested vociferously of course, saying that it went against what he had promised Barnes and that he would be there as well, giving them his word to guarantee Tony’s safety.

Okay, Tony would admit all the paperwork and the rest of the hoopla was worth it just to see the look on T’Challa’s face as Pepper replied with a deadpan so immaculate Maria Hill’s adoration of her increased twofold, “Imagine what your word means to me.” and then tear T’Challa’s false platitudes down by offering to acquiesce to his request if he agreed to sign legal documents designating a metric tonne of vibranium as compensation in case Anthony Stark was injured or hurt in any way during his stay in Wakanda.

He shut up pretty quickly after that.

Well, at least there was something fun in all the bullshit. Tony still wasn’t happy to have his revenge on Steve curtailed like that. Oh, he was going to keep working on it of course. It wasn’t the end by any means but it was still indefinitely delayed. And now he had to go so close to Steve, just a few hallways away and know that he couldn’t just set a missile on him the way he wanted it. Frustrating.

But Tony was growing as a person. He would learn patience, he would not just fly off the handle. He would deal.

Pepper in the RESCUE suit beside him, Tony set about setting up the B.A.R.F. as the Wakandan scientists got Barnes ready. Pepper’s first instinct when Barnes had opened his eyes was to aim the repulsors at him but when Barnes first reaction to Tony standing there, was to ask “You made it out of there okay?” Pepper relaxed, switching over to the serum antidote darts instead.

The consideration Barnes had shown him was more than Rogers ever had.

The more Barnes talked the more Tony and Pepper softened. This was a true legend. One who talked of responsibility, apologize sincerely for his actions went so far as it tell them to shoot him in the head if he got triggered again.
The relief on his face when told about the serum antidote, that was what made Tony really believe they were doing the right thing. Barnes didn’t even care to wait until his arm grew out, the way they all planned it. “Without the arm and the serum enhancing me, I’m useless to HYDRA. They wouldn’t even bother triggering me.” That conviction lasted only so long before a mention of Steve and the fact that his reaction to a triggered Barnes was more dangerous than the rest. It had Barnes twisting his mouth unhappily.

Ah, well, Tony had always liked Bucky from the Captain America comics Howard had thrown at him. Again, child Tony had immaculate taste, it was confirmed.

They only got halfway through talking Bucky through the process of how they’d be using B.A.R.F. before a commotion had them all tense. It wasn’t long before Steve barreled into the room, and when he saw Bucky awake he roared, “Stark!”

Tony wasn’t too worried of course. This time around he was prepared albeit differently.

Did he want to trigger Barnes?

No.

Would he do it anyway to stop Steve Rogers?

Yes.

Besides, all he really needed to do was give Steve the impression that he could trigger Barnes and turn him into the Winter Soldier. Leverage, even just the illusion of it was enough, especially when it came to Steve’s precious Bucky.

He didn’t get to do any of that.
See, Tony was only thinking of what it had been like to be hurt by Steve but he’d forgotten he wasn’t alone in it. Pepper had been hurt too, if only to see the state Tony in which had been carted in. The Wakandan guards and scientists had been hurt too, Tony knew from his talks with them that they had family and friends who were part of the Wakandan envoy that died in the Lagos tragedy.

And while Tony stepped closer to Barnes readying himself to say the trigger words, Pepper and a few of the others had reacted to Steve’s shout by letting loose the darts on him.

Being hit by all of six darts slowed Steve down but Tony knew it wouldn’t last. The counter wasn’t designed to work against Steve’s version of the serum, HYDRA’s was different even from a watered down version of it. Barnes stepped closer to Tony and all but shoved him behind him. It wasn’t necessary but a nice gesture Tony thought. Steve clearly thought differently because he roared again and stepped closer, his fist making contact with the armoured vest of one of the security guards. The guard was thrown back but unhurt, protected by his armour, but the oddest thing happened.

As soon as Steve tried to take another step he stopped, face turning blue. He clutched at his throat, his breath coming out in reedy gasps. It didn’t take more than a few seconds before he keeled over but they approached his still figure carefully. Barnes went closer while the rest stayed back and checked Steve’s pulse.

“It’s really slow, I think there’s something wrong with him.”

Steve was strapped into an enforced gurney originally designed to hold Barnes and the tests showed the most astonishing result. The counter to Barnes’ serum hadn’t made much change in Steve’s super strength, his metabolism or his height and weight but the asthma, the weak heart, they were all back. What had been healed had been reversed.

The counter to HYDRA’s serum worked in the most peculiar way. The medication that could be used to treat asthma would be broken down too quickly by Steve’s body to have any proper effect on him and the heart issues were the same, usually treatable by medication which wouldn’t work on Steve.

All that time spent on Steve’s version of the serum and the answer was right in front of him. Okay, so Steve wasn’t back to being the shrimp he was before but this was almost better. Any time he’d use his super strength could trigger an attack bad enough that he might wind up dead. A good looking face and body but not a particularly functional one.

Steve Rogers, the super soldier, was all but dead.
Unfortunately for Barnes, Steve Rogers—the shitty, controlling friend and the aggressive idiot, was
very much alive.

Barnes' therapy both on the medical and metal side was going well. He really wanted to get better,
that was the crux of the matter. When his doctors suggested he do something he complied, he asked
questions about anything confused him but he was willing to listen and that made all the difference.

Steve however, had nothing to do with any of this and was still reluctant to try. More than once
Barnes had come into a session of B.A.R.F. with something Steve specific that he needed to deal
with, something that had happened in the last few days until Tony finally lost his patience.

“At this rate, we’re never going to even get to HYDRA’s triggers. Anytime we make any progress,
Steve causes another problem, says something else to upset you to the point of the Soldier returning.”

“I don’t know what to do.” Barnes pinched the bridge of his nose. “He’s my best friend I can’t just
let him suffer like this.”

“You can when he’s doing this to himself to get your attention.”

Tony and the doctors had discussed this, especially given the evidence they were in possession of.
Steve Rogers was his greatest link to Bucky but he was manipulating it for his own good. A little
request to FRIDAY and the clip played out on holograms in front of them.

“Stark can take his machines and go to hell,” Steve scowled at Sam who was clearly frustrated with
him beyond belief. The video was taken only a day ago and it was worrying, “Bucky looked at me
and knew I was important all the way back when HYDRA was still messing with him. This is going
to work, Bucky always took care of me back in the old days before the war and the serum. You’ll
see.”

“We’ve been working with Mr Rogers, teaching him breathing exercises and lifestyle changes that
should lower the chances of him having another attack like that day in the lab but Mr Rogers hasn’t
been listening.” The Wakandan scientist said, gently, in consideration of Barnes' now heavy
breathing and clearly angry countenance.
“He’s been going about punching things and a lot of runs. There’s a possibility that now that he knows you’re awake he’s been triggering his body to have more attacks to force you to interact with him.” Tony explained.

Barnes was angry, and it showed, “I guess we know what I’ll be working on with B.A.R.F. today.” He grinned but it was more a snarl.

“You’re not his mother and even if you were, he’s grown enough that you can let him go.”

Barnes laughed, a bitter sound. “Where would I go, what would I do? I don’t have a lot of options except for being his nanny. Always was the best qualification on my resume.” Barnes snorted. “Used to get a lot of babysitting gigs out of it. They said I handled the Rogers kid so beautifully it was safe letting their children with me.”

“If you don’t see an option, create one.” Tony shrugged.

What he really meant was, take the one I’m creating for you. Barnes was a smart cookie though, he’d see what was on the table. During their next session he asked, “What happens if I sign the Accords?”

“You undergo a psych evaluation, there’s a private trial to be held regarding your actions but there’s an incredibly strong argument for diminished capacity. Your portion of the damages from Bucharest and Leipzig and the rest have been paid for by T’Challa but you will be required to do some community service for the same. It might be providing support for any Avengers mission but most likely any information you might give on any HYDRA information that’s not in the data dump will count too. The counter serum won’t be available to you because you’re more useful like this but as long as you demonstrate genuine remorse and a willingness to cooperate with the authorities, you’ll be fine.”

“And away from here.”

“The UN and the Accords council don’t have a headquarters in Wakanda, so, yes. Away from here.”

“And if Steve signs the Accords?”

“He doesn’t fit the criteria.” He couldn’t so much as throw a punch before collapsing, that combined
with the fact that Steve would definitely not show remorse, had not cooperated with any authorities assured Tony that Steve had no chances of signing the Accords.

“I’ll have to read them first.”

The day the quinjet carrying Bucky to the United States took off was difficult day for many people. Steve, of course, his issues only compounded by the fact that Sam and Scott were on the quinjet as well having signed the Accords. Then there was T’Challa who had to deal with Steve who alternated between threatening him and wheezing dangerously. There was Bucky and Sam, both of whom were glad to be out of there but hurt and disappointed nonetheless.

Tony, on the other hand, was having a fantastic day. He was having a party.

Champagne flowed for him, Rhodey and Pepper, a chocolate fountain for Spidey who was trying to explain moral ambiguity to Vision, all the departments in SI had been sent cupcakes in celebration as well. Black Sabbath played over the speakers to drown out Peter’s request for songs that weren’t older than him and Hope and Lauren were planning to drop by as well.

The ringing of the phone was almost impossible to hear against the revelry but Tony managed. He followed the tinny noise to the flip phone and picked up the call with a grin on his face so wide it must have been heard when he answered it with a “Hello?”

“**You did this, you ruined everything.**” Steve Rogers all but sobbed and Tony hadn’t even known that the smile could get as big as it was.

“You have reached the life model decoy of Tony Stark, please leave a message.”

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